

CFinney The Oberlin Evangelist

Charles Finney

The Oberlin Evangelist

From 1839 to 1862

By Charles G. Finney

The Oberlin Evangelist Was the Official Publication of Oberlin College Oberlin, Ohio 1839-1862.

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1839](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1840](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1841](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1842](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1843](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1844](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1845](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1846](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1847](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1848](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1849](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1850](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1851](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1852](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1853](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1854](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1855](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1856](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1857](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1858](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1859](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1860](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1861](#)

[The Oberlin Evangelist 1862](#)

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1839
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Professor Finney's Letter of January 1, 1839](#)

Lecture I. [Eternal Life](#)

Lecture II. [Faith](#)

[Professor Finney's Letter of January 30, 1839](#)

Lecture III. [Devotion](#)

[Professor Finney's Letter of February 13, 1839](#)

Lecture IV. [True and False Religion](#)

Lecture V. [The Law of God 1](#)

Lecture VI. [The Law of God 2](#)

Lecture VII. [Glorifying God](#)

[Professor Finney's Letter of April 10, 1839](#)

Lecture VIII. [True and False Peace](#)

Lecture IX. [Dominion Over Sin](#)

Lecture X. [Carefulness A Sin](#)

Lecture XI. & XII [The Promises- No.'s 1 - 5](#)

Lecture XIII. [Being In Debt](#)

Lecture XIV. [The Holy Spirit of Promise](#)

Lecture XV. [The Covenants](#)

Lecture XVI. & XVII. [The Rest of Faith- No.'s 1 & 2](#)

Lecture XVIII. [Affections and Emotions of God](#)

Lecture XIX. [Legal and Gospel Experience](#)

Lecture XX. [How to Prevent Our Employments from Injuring Our Souls](#)

Lecture XXI. & XXII. [Grieving the Holy Spirit- No.'s 1 & 2](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Professor Finney's Letter

of January 1, 1839

from "The Oberlin Evangelist" Publication of Oberlin College

Public Domain Text

Reformatted by Katie Stewart

TO THE YOUNG CHRISTIANS WHO HAVE BEEN CONVERTED IN THE
GREAT REVIVALS OF THE FEW PAST YEARS, SCATTERED UP AND
DOWN IN THE LAND, WHEREVER THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD MAY
HAVE CAST YOUR LOT:

Beloved in the Lord:

My body is so far worn and especially my organs of speech so far exhausted that I cannot visit and preach to you orally the word of life. I therefore address you through the press, as the most direct and effectual medium through which I can communicate my thoughts.

I propose, the Lord willing, to address to you through the columns of "The Oberlin Evangelist" from time to time a series of short sermons.

I. *On those practical subjects that I deem most important to you and to the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.* When I shall have said what I desire on those more immediately and highly practical topics, if the Lord permit, I design

II. *To give you a series of sermons on some doctrinal topics, especially the moral government of God, including the atonement, and the influences of the Holy Ghost in the administration of that government.*

A great many of you I know personally, and many more of you know me with whom I have not the honor of a personal acquaintance. You do me the honor to call me your spiritual father, and I have the unspeakable happiness of believing that God has made me instrumental in doing you good. Such of you as know me personally *know* that it is my manner to deal with great plainness of speech and directness of address to the souls and consciences of men. You remember that this was my manner when I was with you. That this is still the only way to do you good I have the greatest confidence.

Now the thing that I desire to do is, so far as in me lies, to lay open before you the very secrets of your hearts, and also to lead you to an entire renunciation of everything that grieves the Spirit of God, to a relinquishment of selfishness, under every form and in every degree, and to hold out before you those "exceeding great and precious promises" whereby you may be made "partakers of the divine nature." The conductors of this paper are willing that I should make it the medium of spreading before you my thoughts, as the providence and Spirit of God shall enable me. I shall give you a sermon as often as my health and other duties will permit; and whenever you receive this paper containing one of my lectures, I wish you to consider yourself as personally addressed by me. I wish you to read for *yourself* and feel that I mean *you*, as much as though it were a private communication made to you from my own pen, or as if I had a personal interview and addressed you "face to face." If I probe you to the quick, I beg of

you not to be offended and throw the paper aside and refuse to hear me. "I beseech you by the mercies of God," nay, I conjure you by our Lord Jesus Christ to hear me patiently and with candor. Nay, beloved, I expect candor from *you*; and many of you, I doubt not, will not only hear me with *candor* but with *joy*. I will try to write as if I had you all before me in one great congregation, as if I beheld your countenances and were addressing you "face to face." Nay, I will consider you, and I desire you to consider yourselves, as in such a sense members of my congregation as to attend steadily on my preaching. I shall take it for granted that you read every lecture, and of course address you from time to time as if you had candidly read and attentively considered what I had already said.

Unless I can engage you to grant me one request, I have little hope of doing you good. And that is, as soon as you receive this communication you will make me, yourselves and the subject of the proposed lectures subjects of earnest and constant prayer; and that whenever you receive a paper containing one of the proposed lectures, you go upon your knees before you read it and lay open your heart in solemn prayer before God and to the influence of truth, and implore the aid of the Holy Spirit to make the word to you quick and powerful. We shall all soon meet at the bar of God. I earnestly desire to do you all the good I can while I am in the flesh; and as I do not intend to write for your amusement but solely for your spiritual edification, will you pledge yourselves on your knees before God to examine the truth candidly-- make a personal, faithful and full application of it to your own hearts and lives-- and to improve it as you will answer to God in the solemn judgment? If these are your resolutions and purposes, I am confident the Lord will bless you. I shall not cease to pray for you and intend to make such of you as I can remember special and particular subjects of prayer; and I entreat you to do the same by me.

C. G. FINNEY

A Servant of the Lord Jesus Christ

Eternal Life
Lecture I

January 1, 1839

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--I John 5:10,11: "He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, Because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."

In discoursing upon this subject, the following is the order in which I intend to direct your thoughts:

I. Show what we are to understand by eternal life.

II. That Jesus Christ is the eternal life of the soul.

III. That God has given eternal life to all mankind, entirely irrespective of their knowledge or consent.

IV. That this gift may be rejected by unbelief, or received by faith.

V. Whosoever believes on the Son of God, or receives this gift, has the witness in himself, or knows that he has eternal life by his own consciousness.

I. I am to show what we are to understand by eternal life.

1. Not merely eternal existence. This is implied in eternal life, but does not constitute it. Death, as used in the scriptures, or in common language, does not mean annihilation. Nor does life mean mere existence.

2. Not merely exemption from eternal death or punishment. This, also, is implied in, but does not constitute eternal life.

3. Not merely eternal happiness. All these are implied, and included in eternal life, but are not the principal thing intended by it.

4. But this life is the contrast, or opposite of that death in "trespasses and sins," in which mankind are said to be, by nature. Life is the opposite of

death. If we can, therefore, understand what the Scriptures mean by death, as applied to the mind, we can ascertain what that life is which is brought to light in the gospel. Death, as applied to the mind, in the Scriptures, is a state of entire sinfulness--of total depravity, and alienation from God. Eph. 2:1, the Apostle addressing those who had been converted, says; "And you HATH HE QUICKENED, who were dead in trespasses and sins." And in the fifth verse again, he says: "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved.)" In Col. 2:13, he says, "And you being dead in your sins, and in the uncircumcision of your flesh hath he quickened, together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses." And in Eph. 5:14, he says, "Wherefore he saith, Awake thou, that sleepest, and rise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." These, and other similar passages, show what is meant by the death which is the contrast of that life, which in the text, is said to be given in Christ. This life includes exemption from eternal punishment, together with eternal happiness. But the great and leading thing implied, is salvation from sin, or perfect and eternal holiness. Hence it is said in the very beginning of the gospel, Matt. 1:21, "Thou shalt call his name JESUS, for he shall save his people from their sins." And He is everywhere in the gospel represented as a Savior from sin.

II. I am to show that Jesus Christ is the eternal life of the soul.

1. This is shown by the text.

2. By John 11:25: "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the LIFE, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he LIVE." This text establishes the same point. In Col. 3:4, it is directly asserted, "When Christ, who is our LIFE, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." In 1 John 1:1 he is called the "Word of LIFE." And in 1 John 5:12, it is said, "He that hath the Son, hath LIFE, and he that hath not the Son, hath not LIFE." That He is the eternal life of the soul, is evident from John 5:40; "And ye will not come to me that ye might have LIFE." And also from John 6:33, and onward, "For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth LIFE unto the world." "Then said they unto him, Lord evermore give us this bread."--"And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of LIFE; he that cometh to me, shall never hunger, and he that believeth in me shall never thirst." Again, in the 48th verse and onward, He says, "I am that

bread of LIFE." "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead." "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die." "I am the LIVING bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall LIVE forever, and the bread that I will give him is my flesh, that I will give for the LIFE of the world."

"The Jews, therefore, strove among themselves, saying, how can this man give us his flesh to eat?" "Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no LIFE in you.--"Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, HATH ETERNAL LIFE; and I will raise him up at the last day." "For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him."

"As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, even he shall LIVE by me." "This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead; he that eateth of this bread shall LIVE for ever."

At these words His disciples murmured, saying, verse 60 and onward, "This is an hard saying, who can hear it?" "When Jesus knew in himself, that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you?" "What, and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?"

"It is the Spirit that QUICKENETH; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are LIFE." His disciples supposed Him to speak of His material body, and blood--but in these verses he informs them that it was His divine nature which came down from heaven, and that constituted the bread and blood of which He spake, and of which, if they ate and drank, they should have eternal life. I need not multiply passages of scripture. You who read your Bibles, know that Christ is everywhere represented as "the resurrection and the LIFE," as "the way, the truth, and the LIFE," as "the bread and water of eternal LIFE," as the "fountain of LIVING waters," and in a vast variety of ways, this truth is taught throughout the Scripture.

III. I am to show that God has given eternal life to all mankind, entirely irrespective of their knowledge or consent.

By this, I do not mean that they have received, or are actually put in possession of eternal life, or if they remain in unbelief, that they ever will be put in possession of it, but that an act is passed conferring on them pardon, and eternal life. In proof that this gift must be irrespective of our believing it, I remark, that whatever is to be believed, must be true, independent of our belief. If the truth of a proposition depended upon our believing it, then we should be under the necessity of believing it before it was true, which would be an absurdity. Every truth of the gospel which is an object of faith, is true, whether we believe it or not. Were it not so, we could not be required to believe it. It must, therefore, be true that God has given eternal life to all who are under any obligation to believe the gospel. The text represents the unbeliever as making God a liar, "because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son." "And this is the record that God hath given to us eternal LIFE, and this life is in his Son." Now, is the unbeliever to believe that God has given to others, eternal life, and exclude himself, or is he to believe himself to be included in the gift of eternal life. If by us,"he is to include himself with the rest of mankind, then it must be true that eternal life was given him before he believed or received it. Did the gift belong only to those that believe, and that, too, after they believe? How, then, should our unbelief make God a liar? This gift must extend to all for whom Christ died. In John 1:29, he is called the "Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." In John 3:16,17, it is said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." In John 4:42, he is again called the "Saviour of the world." In John 6:33, he is represented as "giving life to the world," and in the 51st verse, the same fact is declared, "and the bread which I will give, is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world." In Heb. 2:9, it is said, "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he, by the grace of God, should taste death for EVERY man." These, and many other passages that might be quoted, show that this gift respects all mankind.

IV. I am to show that this gift may be rejected by unbelief, or received by faith.

The gift is absolute, without any other conditions than those necessarily implied in the bequest. If I give a man anything, the condition is always implied, that he receive it. The gift on my part may be absolute, and the condition, if not

expressed, is always implied in the very nature of the case. A father may make a will, and bequeath his estate to an heir; but in this bequest, this condition is implied, that he receive it. The gift is an absolute gift, which may be received or rejected, at the pleasure of the heir. Now, faith is a necessary condition of the Gospel. It is naturally impossible that an unbelieving mind should accept, or receive the gift of eternal life. The gift is holiness. Holiness is love and active obedience. Unbelief is distrust. Faith is trust or confidence--that confidence of the heart that works by love. Faith is the yielding up the soul to the influence and truth of Christ. And thus Christ is represented as being our sanctification. Not our sanctifier, as if he made us holy in ourselves, and left us to obey, in the exercise of our uninfluenced and unaided powers. When he is said to be our life--"our sanctification," the "bread of life," --the "vine of which we are branches"--I suppose these, and such like expressions, all mean the same thing, viz: that Christ is the perpetual author of all our holy feelings and actions. Faith is that act of the mind that submits to the control of Christ and of the truth. It is the receiving of Christ as an indwelling Savior--it is that opening of the door of the heart spoken of in the Scripture, and receiving Christ as an indwelling and reigning king. Thus in Eph. 3:17, Christ is represented as "dwelling in the heart by faith," and in many other passages, he is represented as dwelling in the heart, and faith is represented as the door by which he enters. It is, as I have already said, the voluntary receiving of the divine influence of Christ, and of his truth into the mind. It is the yielding of our voluntary powers to his divine control. Hence he is represented as dwelling in us--which I suppose to be really and literally true--that by his Spirit he is personally present with the mind, and by his truth and persuasive influences, controlling, guiding, and directing it. Now distrust or unbelief rejects His teaching--refuses to receive, and be guided, and molded by truth; while faith receiving the divine communication, surrenders the will, and all the powers to his entire control. So that he is our sanctification, i.e. he does not change our nature, so that we become good in ourselves--so that we have life in ourselves, apart from him. But as it is said in Colossians, [3:3-4,] "Our life is hid with Christ in God, and when he who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory." He is the life, or the holiness of the soul; it is his presence and agency that produces holiness in us; and this holiness continues no longer, and extends no farther, than the divine agency that produces it. By this, I do not mean that we are passive in holiness, or that we receive his holiness or righteousness by imputation; but that we actually become partakers of his holiness, and of his life, by the voluntary surrender of our powers to his

control. Nor by controlling our powers, do I mean that our own agency is, in any sense, suspended. Our own agency is never more freely and fully exercised, than when under the divine influence of Christ. His influences are moral, i.e. persuasive only, else they could not be received by faith. It were absurd to speak of receiving a physical or compulsory influence by faith. Nor, in the nature of the case, can eternal life, although absolutely given, and left at the option of every man, be received in any other way, than by simple faith. This gift is entirely irrespective of works of any kind on our own part. Nor do works of law, or any other kind of works, bring us any nearer the reception of it. Faith alone receives it. Unbelief alone rejects it.

V. I am to show that, whosoever believes on the Son of God, or receives this gift, has the witness within HIMSELF, or knows that he has eternal life by his own consciousness.

This is expressly affirmed in the text. And I might quote various other passages to the same effect--but would observe, that as eternal life consists in holiness, it must be a subject of consciousness. Holiness is supreme love. Now of what can we be conscious, if not of the supreme affection of the mind? Is it possible that any of you should love God supremely, and not be conscious of it? Many persons hope that they love God, and hope that they have eternal life; but if they would consider that eternal life is holiness, and that nothing short of supreme love is holiness, they would know at once that if any man believes, he has the witness in himself--the testimony of his own consciousness, which is the highest and best possible evidence. Now if any of you have not this evidence, the witness of your own consciousness, I beg of you to put away your hope and your talk about eternal life. For what is a life worth which is not a matter of consciousness?

REMARKS.

1. From what has been said, every one of you must know whether you have eternal life. Can you say with Paul "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me?" "And the life which I now live, I live by faith on the Son of God?" Do you know that you live in love, and walk in love?
2. You who do not believe, and thus receive eternal life, are making God a liar. How horrible it would sound were the language of your unbelief put into words!

3. You see, from this subject the great mistake of those who suppose if persons were wholly sanctified they would have no further need of Christ. You who think thus, overlook the fact that Christ is the eternal life of the soul. The difference between those who are wholly, and those who are partially sanctified, is, that the former are made to feel, continually, their entire dependence upon God--that "in him they live, and move, and have their being" that without him they are absolutely dead in "trespasses and sins"--that every spiritual breath they breathe, and pulse they tell, is from his influence. They know they have not, and never expect to have any life but in him, any more than the vine has life when severed from the branch. Constant faith receives the tide of eternal life as it flows continually from Christ; in other words, it receives a continual influence, and the constant leadings and guidings of the Spirit of Christ. Whereas, they that are but partially sanctified, have so illy learned their dependence, as sometimes to look to Christ, and at other times to turn away and depend upon the exercise of their own unaided powers.

4. If God has given to us eternal life, why should we not enter into, and take possession of it? The gift is absolute; our elder brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, has it in possession, and holds it as a trustee, or surety, or guardian, and invites and continually urges us to accept it. And why, with such an inheritance as this, should we go about like swine, and wallow in the filth of sin, instead of at once entering upon our inheritance, and taking hold of the fulness of gospel salvation? Take hold, at once. Christ, your elder brother, has in possession, this eternal life. Believe in Him--believe now, at once, without any preparatory process whatever. Believe the record "that God hath given to us, eternal life, and this life is in his Son," and you shall now enter into the rest of faith.

5. From this subject, you see also the infinite guilt of those who reject the gospel. The gift is absolute--it is tendered to their acceptance, with all the sincerity of God--it was purchased by the blood, and treasured up in the life of Christ. There is an infinite excellence, and power, and glory in it--and if "he that despised Moses' law, died without mercy, under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing."

6. Lastly. Let it be remembered, understood, realized and felt by every one of you, that this bequest is made. The testator has died and sealed it with his blood.

The infinite treasure--the pearl of great price lies before you, waiting for your acceptance. Take it--receive it--hold fast to it by faith.

[Back to Top](#)

Faith

Lecture II

January 16, 1839

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--John 6:28,29: "Then said they unto him, what shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."

The following is the train of thought I shall pursue:

I. Notice several erroneous answers, commonly given to the question proposed in the text, viz: What shall we do that we may work the works of God?

II. Show that Christ gave the only proper answer, under the circumstances in which the question was asked.

III. Show that, under other circumstances, another answer might, with propriety, be given.

I. I am to notice several erroneous answers commonly given to the question proposed in the text.

1. Should the question be proposed to a Jew, "What shall I do that I may work the works of God?" he would answer, keep the law, both moral and ceremonial, i.e. keep the commandments.

2. To the same inquiry, an Arminian would answer, improve common grace, and you will obtain converting grace, i.e. use the means of grace, according

to the best light you have, and you will obtain the grace of salvation. In this answer, it is not supposed, that the inquirer already has faith, and is using the means of grace in faith; but that he is in a state of impenitency, and is inquiring after converting grace. The answer, therefore, amounts to this: you must get converting grace by your impenitent works; you must become holy by your hypocrisy; you must work out sanctification by sin.

3. To this question, most professed Calvinists would make, in substance, the same reply. They would reject the language, while they retained the idea. Their direction would imply, either that the inquirer already has faith, or that he must perform works to obtain it, i.e. to obtain grace by works.

Neither an Arminian nor a Calvinist, would formally direct the inquirer to the law, as the ground of justification. But nearly the whole Church would give directions that would amount to the same thing. Their answer would be a legal, and not a gospel answer. For whatever answer is given to this question, that does not distinctly recognize faith, as the foundation of all virtue in sinners, is legal. Unless the inquirer is made to understand that this is the first grand fundamental duty, without the performance of which all virtue, all giving up of sin, all acceptable obedience, is impossible, he is misdirected. He is led to believe, that it is possible to please God without faith; and to obtain grace by works of law. There are but two kinds of works--works of law, and works of faith. Now if the inquirer has not the "faith that works by love," to set him upon any course of works to get it, is certainly to direct him to get faith by works of law. Whatever is said to him that does not clearly convey the truth, that both justification and sanctification are by faith, without works of law, is law, and not gospel. Nothing before, or without faith, can possibly be done by the unbeliever, but works of law. His first duty, therefore, is faith; and every attempt to obtain faith by unbelieving works, is to lay works at the foundation, and make grace a result. It is the direct opposite of gospel truth.

Take facts as they arise in every day's history, to show that what I have stated is the experience of almost all, professors and non-professors. Whenever a sinner begins in good earnest to agitate the question, "What shall I do to be saved?" he resolves, as a first duty, to break off from his sins, i.e. in unbelief. Of course his reformation is only outward, he determines to do better--to reform in this, that, and the other thing, and thus prepare himself to be converted. He does not expect to be saved without grace and faith, but he attempts to get grace by works of law.

The same is true of multitudes of anxious Christians, who are inquiring what they shall do to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil. They overlook the fact that "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith," that it is with "the shield of faith" that they are "to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." They ask, why am I overcome by sin? Why can I not get above its power? Why am I thus the slave of my appetites and passions, and the sport of the devil? They cast about for the cause of all this spiritual wretchedness and death. At one time they think they have discovered it in the neglect of one duty; and at another time, in the neglect of another. Sometimes they imagine they have found the cause to lie in yielding to one sin, and sometimes in yielding to another. They put forth efforts in this direction, and in that direction, and patch up their righteousness on one side, while they make a rent in the other. Thus they spend years in running around in a circle, and making dams of sand across the current of their own corruptions. Instead of at once purifying their hearts by faith, they are engaged in trying to arrest the overflowing of its bitter waters. Why do I sin? they inquire; and casting about for the cause, they come to the sage conclusion, it is because I neglect such a duty, i.e. because I do sin. But how shall I get rid of sin? Answer: by doing my duty, i.e. by ceasing from sin. Now the real inquiry is, why do they neglect their duty? Why do they commit sin at all? Where is the foundation of all this mischief? Will it be replied, the foundation of all this wickedness is in the corruption of our nature--in the wickedness of the heart--in the strength of our evil propensities and habits? But all this only brings us back to the real inquiry, again: How are this corrupt nature, this wicked[ness], and these sinful habits to be overcome? I answer, by faith alone. No works of law have the least tendency to overcome our sins; but rather confirm the soul in self-righteousness and unbelief.

The great and fundamental sin, which is at the foundation of all other sin, is unbelief. The first thing, is to give up that--to believe the word of God. There is no breaking off from one sin without this. "Whatever is not faith is sin," "Without faith, it is impossible to please God." Thus we see that the backslider and convicted Christian, when agonizing to overcome sin, will, almost always, betake themselves to works of law to obtain faith. They will fast, and pray, and read, and struggle, and outwardly reform, and thus endeavor to obtain grace. Now all this is in vain and wrong. Do you ask, shall we not fast, and pray, and read, and struggle? Shall we do nothing, but sit down in Antinomian security and inaction? I answer, you must do all that God commands you to do; but begin

where He tells you to begin, and do it in the manner in which he commands you to do it, i.e. in the exercise of that faith that works by love. Purify your hearts by faith. Believe in the Son of God. And say not in your heart, "who shall ascend into heaven i.e. to bring Christ down from above; or who shall descend into the deep, i.e. to bring up Christ again from the dead. But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith which we preach."

Now these facts show that even under the gospel almost all professors of religion, while they reject the Jewish notion of justification by works of the law, have, after all, adopted a ruinous substitute for it, and suppose that in some way they are to obtain grace by their works.

II. I am to show, that Christ gave the only proper answer, under the circumstances in which the question was asked.

In order to understand the propriety of the answer, we must understand the meaning of the question. The context shows that the question was asked by certain unbelieving Jews, who inquired what they could do, to work the works of God?--in other words, to obtain the favor of God? Christ understood them as inquiring what works would be acceptable without faith. He therefore answers: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." As if He had said, nothing is a work of God which you would recognize as such. Faith is the first great work of God, without which it is impossible to please Him. To a Jew, this answer would imply, that he believed Him to be the Messiah foretold in the scriptures. And to all persons the answer implies not only a general confidence in the character of God, but a trust in his atonement and saving grace, in opposition to all works of law for justification.

To show that this is the only proper answer to be given to a person in a state of unbelief, I will state,

1. What I DO NOT mean by the proposition; and

2. What I DO mean by it.

1. I do not mean that it is the only proper answer, because there is no good and acceptable work but faith.

2. Nor do I mean that faith without works is acceptable to God.

3. Nor do I mean that faith makes void the law, and sets aside the obligation and necessity of good works. The Apostle, in James 2:17-26, sets the necessity of works, as the result of faith, in a strong light. "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew you my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham, our father, justified by works, when he had offered Isaac, his son, upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the son[friend], of God. Ye see, how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise, also, was not Rahab, the harlot, justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

4. Nor do I mean that there are no other directions that may be given to an inquiring sinner or Christian that, if followed, would not in the end amount to the same thing as the direction in the text. In number eighteen of my "Revival Lectures," I said, "You may give the sinner any direction, or tell him to do anything, that includes a right heart." To repent--to submit--to give the heart to God; and all the directions there specified imply faith. Were I to preach that sermon again, I should give a greater prominence to faith, and show that the exercise of faith is the first thing to be done; and that upon the exercise of this, repentance, submission, love and every other grace depend.

5. But, by the above proposition, I do mean, that no works are good works, or are in any sense acceptable to God, only as they proceed from faith. Let it be forever remembered, that "without faith, it is impossible to please God," and "whatsoever is not of faith, is sin."

6. It is the proper answer, because both justification and sanctification are by faith alone. Rom. 3:30: "Seeing it is one God who shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith;" and 5:1: "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Also, 9:30, 31: "What shall we say then? that the

Gentiles, who followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, who followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law." But perhaps you will not clearly see the truth of this, unless I make a remark or two upon the nature of faith.

The first element of saving faith is a realizing sense of the truth of the Bible. But this is not alone saving faith, for Satan has this realizing sense of truth, which makes him tremble.

But a second element in saving faith is the consent of the heart or will to the truth perceived by the intellect. It is a cordial trust or resting of the mind in those truths, and a yielding up of the whole being to their influence. Now it is easy to see, that without the consent of the will, there can be nothing but an outward obedience to God. A wife, without confidence in her husband, can do nothing more than perform outwardly her duty to him. It is a contradiction to say that without confidence, she can perform her duty from the heart. The same is true of parental and all other governments. Works of law may be performed without faith; i.e. we may serve from fear or hope, or some selfish consideration; but without the confidence that works by love, obedience from the heart is naturally impossible. Nay, the very terms, obedience from the heart without love, are a contradiction.

7. By the above, I mean that to seek the grace of faith by works of law, is an utter abomination. It is as abominable as to attempt to purchase the Holy Ghost with money. It is to set aside the testimony of God with respect to our utter depravity, and attempt to palm off our unbelieving, heartless works upon an infinitely holy God. It is an attempt to purchase his favor, instead of accepting grace as a sovereign gift.

8. It is as preposterous as it is wicked. It is seeking to please God by our sins--to purchase the grace of faith by making God a liar.

9. To give any other answer to one in unbelief, and to set him to perform any work, with the expectation that by it he shall obtain faith, is to confirm him in self-righteousness--to prolong his rebellion--to lead him either to settle down in a self-righteous hope, or to produce, in the end, discouragement and blasphemy.

10. Because that repentance, faith, love, and every other holy exercise, both imply and proceed from faith. Without confidence in the character and requirements of God, it is impossible to repent. For what is repentance but heartily to justify God, and condemn ourselves. So it is equally impossible to exercise a complacent love to God, without faith. Submission to God also implies and presupposes the exercise of confidence in God, and in His requirements.

11. This is a proper answer, because all right affection, and all good works will necessarily proceed from faith. Christ was not afraid of begetting an Antinomian spirit, by laying so much stress upon faith. He knew full well, that true faith as naturally and necessarily begets every other inward grace, and all outward good works, as a cause produces its effects.

12. It is the only proper answer, because faith is the only exercise that receives Christ with all His powerfully sanctifying influences into the heart. The Bible every where represents the sanctified soul, as being under the influence of an indwelling Christ. Now the exercise of faith is that opening of the door by which Christ is received to reign in the heart. Who will pretend that any works are properly good, or that any true faith exists in the mind, except as the result of the operation or influence of Christ in the mind. Now if this is so, the proper direction plainly is, to do that which receives Christ. If this is done, all else will be done. If this is neglected, all else will be neglected, of course.

III. I am to show, that under other circumstances another answer might, with propriety, have been given.

1. The careless, unawakened sinner, who knows nothing of his depravity, or helplessness, it might be important and proper to direct to the law of God as the rule of his duty. Not with the expectation of directly promoting holiness thereby, but of convicting him of sin. Thus we find Christ requiring the young man who was wrapped up in self-righteousness, "to keep the commandments," and taking such a course as to bring out before his mind his supreme love of the world. This produced regret and discouragement in him; and when required to "part with all that he had," and follow Christ, he "went away sorrowful."

2. To the anxious sinner, who makes this inquiry, Christ, as I have shown,

gave the only appropriate answer. Also, to the Christian, inquiring after sanctification, this is the only appropriate answer. In short, to anyone who is convinced of his real character, this is the proper, and the only proper answer.

3. But to one already full of faith and love, and of the Holy Spirit, another answer may be given; simply because, by the inquiry he means a different thing. When he asks, "what shall I do to work the works of God," his heart breaks forth with the inquiry, "what shall I do to honor and glorify God?" -- not "what shall I do to be saved?" Let such an one be directed to the whole preceptive part of the Bible. Do this, and avoid that, is just the instruction which he needs, and upon which he will eagerly seize, to glorify God with all his heart. Such a mind needs instruction, not command and threatening. To him the preceptive part of the Bible is just what his circumstances and state of feeling demand. The commands of the Bible will not beget in him, a legal spirit, and thus prove a stumbling block to his soul. He will not set himself self-righteously to perform the duties enjoined; but his heart goes forth to meet his responsibilities, and perform the requirements of God.

REMARKS.

1. You see, from this subject, how to understand Rom. 9:20-32, which I have before quoted, "What shall we say, then," &c. The Jews sought by their own doings to please God, without faith; but all their righteousness was as filthy rags.--While the Gentiles, who had lived in open rebellion, when they heard the gospel, believed it at once, instead of betaking themselves to works of law; and thus exercising faith that works by love, they attained to the righteousness which is of God, by faith.

2. You see why the church is not sanctified.--They overlook the office and necessity of faith, as that which alone can produce acceptable obedience to God. They are engaged in efforts to obtain faith by works, instead of first exercising that faith which will beget within them a clean heart. In this way they seek in vain for sanctification. How common is it to see persons full of bustle and outward efforts and works--fasting and praying, giving and doing, and struggling; and after all, they have not the fruits of the Spirit--love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against which there is no law. They have not, after all, crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts. They do not live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit. They do not, in their

own experience, realize the truth of that saying, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is staid[stayed] on thee: because he trusteth in thee." Without that trust they cannot have peace; cannot be sanctified.

Others endeavor to force themselves to exercise the various Christian graces, of love, submission, &c., without faith, overlooking the fact that it is faith that works by love, and that repentance and submission imply faith, and are the results of faith. They are the surrendering of our wills to the will of God. But this certainly cannot be, without confidence in the character of God. In short, every Christian grace implies the exercise of faith as its foundation.

3. You see why the Bible lays so much stress upon faith.

4. You see what is the difficulty with those who are constantly in a complaining state, on the subject of religion. They seem to know they are wrong; but do not understand wherein the foundation of their wrong consists. They sometimes think that a neglect of this duty is the grand difficulty, and sometimes something else is that upon which their minds fasten, as the prime difficulty in the case. They set themselves to break off from one sin and another, and practice this self-denial, and that duty, and all without that faith that fills the heart with love. Thus they go round and round in a circle, and do not see that unbelief is their great, their damning sin; without the removal of which no other sin can be repented of or forgiven. All their efforts are entirely legal, hypocritical, and vain till they exercise faith.

5. You see the mistake of Antinomian Perfectionists, in setting aside all preceptive religion, and understanding obedience to the commands of God as legality. They do not make the discrimination here made. If persons without faith, in an unsanctified state, set themselves to obey the commandments of God, their efforts must necessarily be legal, self-righteous and ruinous. To them the precepts of the Gospel, as well as the commandments of the law, are a horrible pit of miry clay. You cast a man into a horrible pit of miry clay, and the more he struggles, the deeper he sinks. Now to a man without faith, the precepts of the law and gospel are fitly compared to miry clay. Every effort at obedience without faith is sin; and as it confirms self-righteousness, is sinking him farther and farther from God, and rational hope. And the more vehemently he struggles, the more desperate and alarming his case becomes. The clay surrounds him, and cleaves to him, suffocates and kills him. Just so the commands of God to an unbelieving heart, are a snare and a pit. They are miry and suffocating clay.

Without faith, there is ruin and damnation in them.

6. You see how to the Jews, and to all unbelievers, the commandments of God are a stumbling block. All outward conformity to them is useless, yea, ruinous. Love without faith is impossible. And consequently, the merciful direction and instructions contained in the preceptive parts of the Gospel, are made the food of self-righteousness, and the snare of death. But to those whose souls are full of faith and love, the commandments of God are just the instruction which they need, when, in their ignorance, they earnestly inquire, what they shall do to glorify God. Do this, and avoid that, and the like, are just the things upon which hearts of love will seize, as the needed directions of their heavenly Father.

7. But someone may inquire, do not men learn to exercise faith, by what you call legal efforts, and in obedience to legal directions? No. They only learn by experience, that all such directions are vain, and that they are totally depraved and dependent, which they ought to have believed before. They set themselves to pray, and read, and struggle, expecting at every meeting they attend, every prayer they make, to obtain grace and faith. But they never do until they are completely discouraged, and despair of obtaining help in this way. And the history of every self-righteous sinner's conversion, and every anxious Christian's sanctification would develop this truth--that deliverance cometh not until their self-righteous efforts were proved, by their own experience, to be utterly vain, and abandoned as useless, and the whole subject thrown upon the sovereign mercy of God. This submitting a subject to the sovereign mercy of God is that very act of faith, which they should have put forth long before, but which they would not exercise until every other means had been tried in vain.

8. But perhaps you will say, if by this self-righteous struggle they learn their depravity and dependence, and in this manner come to prove, by their own experience, the truth of God, why not encourage them to make these efforts, as, at least, an indirect way of obtaining faith? Answer: Blasphemy and drunkenness, and any of the most shocking sins, may be, and often have been the means of working conviction, which has resulted in conversion. Why not encourage these things, as such is sometimes their indirect effect? The truth is, when a sinner's attention is awakened, and he is convicted, and puts forth the inquiry, "what shall I do?" and when a Christian, struggling with his remaining corruption, puts forth the same inquiry, why should they be thrown into the horrible pit of which I have spoken? Why not tell them at once, in the language

of the text, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent"?

9. Let me say to you who would make the inquiry in the text, don't wait to fast, read, pray or any thing else; don't expect to break off from any sin in your unbelief. You may break off from the outward commission--you may substitute praying for swearing, reading your Bible for reading novels, outward industry and honesty for theft and idleness, sobriety for drunkenness, and any thing you please; and it is, after all, only exchanging one form of sin for another. It is only varying the mode of your warfare. But remember that in unbelief, whatever your conduct is, you are in high-handed rebellion against God. Faith would instantly sanctify your heart, sanctify all your doings, and render them, in Christ Jesus, acceptable to God. Unbelief is your great, your crying, your damning sin--against which the heaviest thunderbolts of Jehovah are hurled.

10. Don't wait for any particular view of Christ before you believe. When persons in the state of mind of which I have been speaking hear those who live in faith describe their views of Christ, they say, "O, if I had such views, I could believe; I must have these before I can believe." Now you should understand that these views are the result and effect of faith. These views of which you speak are that which faith discovers in those passages of Scripture which describe Christ. Faith apprehends the meaning of those passages, and sees in them these very things which you expect to see, before you exercise faith, and which you imagine would produce it. Take hold, then, on the simple promise of God. Take God at his word. Believe that he means just what he says. And this will at once bring you into the state of mind after which you inquire.

11. Let what has been said be an answer to that sister in New York, who inquired, by letter, what she should do to obtain the blessing of sanctification. My dear child, you inquire whether you shall obtain by reading the Bible, or by prayer, fasting, or by all these together. Now let this sermon answer you, and know that by neither, nor by all these, in the absence of faith, are you to grow any better, or find any relief. You speak of being in darkness, and of being discouraged. No wonder you are so, since you have plainly been seeking sanctification by works of law. You have "stumbled at this stumbling stone." You are in the horrible pit and miry clay of which I have just spoken. Immediately exercise faith upon the Son of God. It is the first--the only thing you can do to rest your feet upon the rock, and it will immediately put a new song into your mouth.

[Back to Top](#)

Professor Finney's Letter

of January 30, 1839

from "The Oberlin Evangelist" Publication of Oberlin College

Public Domain Text

Reformatted by Katie Stewart

TO THE CHRISTIAN READERS OF "THE OBERLIN EVANGELIST"

Beloved:

You perceive that I have already commenced one of the promised courses of lectures. Before I proceed any farther, permit me to bring distinctly before your minds the main object I have in view and the reasons for the course I intend to pursue.

My object is the sanctification of "your whole spirit and soul and body."

My reasons are the following:

When I was first converted and entered the ministry, my mind was powerfully drawn, as I then thought and now think, to labor for the conversion of sinners. Upon that one grand object my heart was set, and to the accomplishment of it many of you can bear witness that all my powers were devoted. My study, preaching, prayers, visiting and conversation were devoted to that end. My mind was, of course, occupied almost exclusively with that class of truths that were calculated to work the conviction and conversion of the impenitent.

I generally spent but a few months in a place, and during that time my preaching and influence were directed, as I have said, almost exclusively to the conversion of the ungodly. I only spent so much time in preaching to the church as was indispensable to arouse them and get them out of the way of sinners.

About the same time, and subsequently to my laboring as an evangelist, a number of other evangelists were and have been called forward by the Spirit of

God, who have labored many for the same object. The attention and labor of pastors have also been directed mainly to the same end during the extensive revivals of the few past years.

To my own mind it appears that this unity of design and effort were, to say the least, to a great extent indispensable to the accomplishment of the great work that has been undeniably achieved. That hundreds of thousands of sinners have been converted to God by these instrumentalities I have no doubt. And I think I can see very clearly the wisdom of God in calling up the attention of so many evangelists, pastors and churches to the immediate conversion of the ungodly.

It has been represented, as perhaps some of you know, that I wholly disapprove of my own course as an evangelist and that I wholly disapprove of the course of other evangelists and pastors in this great work. Now this is by no means true. I do not by any means pretend to justify all that I have done, nor suppose that my course was faultless. Nor do I pretend to justify all that other evangelists and pastors have done to promote this work. Nor do I pretend that in everything our views of what was best to be done have been exactly alike. But with respect to myself, I feel bound to say that the more I have looked over the course in which I was led, the class of truths I preached and the means that I adopted, the more deeply have I been impressed with the conviction, that, considering the object I had in view, namely, the conversion of sinners, the course in which God led me was upon the whole wise, and such an one in almost all respects as I should pursue again, with my present experience, had I the same object in view.

I am also convinced that God has been wise in leading other evangelists and pastors in their preaching and measures. And although much of human infirmity may have and doubtless has appeared in what we have done, yet upon the whole I do not see what better could have been expected or done, under the circumstances of the case, for the accomplishment of so great and good a work.

In the midst of my efforts, however, for the conversion of sinners (and as far as my knowledge extends, it has been so with other evangelists and pastors) we have overlooked in a great measure the fact that converts would not make one step of progress only as they were constantly plied with means as well adapted to their sanctification and growth in grace, as were the means of their conversion. Believing and feeling as I did then and do now that if persons were once converted God in faithfulness would save them, I overlooked the necessity of the constant and vigorous and pointed use of means to effect this end. By this I do

not mean that I did not at all feel this necessity. But it was not so fully before my mind as the necessity of the use of vigorous means for the conversion of the ungodly.

It is true that had I been impressed with this necessity, my stay in every place was too short to accomplish much in the work of leading converts to manhood in religion. The same has been true of my brethren who have been and are evangelists. And I have reason to believe that the great desire of pastors for the conversion of sinners in those congregations where revivals have prevailed and the great success that under God has attended the use of means for their conversion, has led them in a great measure to neglect the church-- to leave out of view the more spiritual truths of the gospel that constitute the food of Christians and are essential to their sanctification.

In revisiting some of the churches in which I had formerly labored, my mind was some years since from time to time deeply impressed with the necessity of doing something for the sanctification of Christians. And after I had been settled two or three years in the city of New York and had labored almost exclusively for the conversion of sinners, I was fully convinced that converts would die, that the standard of piety would never be elevated, that revivals would become more and more superficial and finally cease, unless something effectual was done to elevate the standard of holiness in the church. And in attempting to present to the church the high and pure doctrines of grace and all that class of truths which are the food and life of the Christian soul, I found to my sorrow that I had been so long in pursuit of sinners with the law, to convict them, and only enough of the gospel just to convert them, that my mind had, as it were, run down. And those high and spiritual truths had not that place in my own heart which is indispensable to the effectual exhibition of them to others. I found that I knew comparatively little about Christ, and that a multitude of things were said about Him in the gospel of which I had no spiritual view and of which I knew little or nothing.

What I did know of Christ was almost exclusively as an atoning and justifying Savior. But as a JESUS to save men from sin, or as a sanctifying Savior, I knew very little about Him. This was made by the Spirit of God very clear to my mind. And it deeply convinced me that I must know more of the gospel in my own experience and have more of Christ in my own heart, or I could never expect to benefit the church. In that state of mind, I used often to tell the Lord Jesus Christ

that I was sensible that I knew very little about Him; and I besought Him to reveal himself to me that I might be instrumental in revealing Him to others. I used especially to pray over particular passages and classes of passages in the gospel that speaketh Christ, that I might apprehend their *meaning* and feel their *power* in my own heart. And I was often strongly convinced that I desired this for the great purpose of making Christ known to others.

I will not enter into detail with regard to the way in which Christ led me. Suffice it to say, and alone to the honor of His grace do I say it, He has taught me some things that I asked Him to show me. Since my own mind became impressed in the manner in which I have spoken, I have felt as strongly and unequivocally pressed by the Spirit of God to labor for the sanctification of the church as I once did for the conversion of sinners. By multitudes of letters and from various other sources of information I have learned, to my great joy, that God has been and is awakening a spirit of inquiry on the subject of holiness throughout the church, both in this country and in Europe.

You who read my lectures in the *N.Y. Evangelist* while I was in the city of New York may remember the manner in which God was leading my own mind--through what a process of conviction and to what results He brought me previously to my leaving there. Since then God has been continually dealing with me in mercy. And oh how often I have longed to unburden myself and pour out my whole heart to the dear souls that were converted in those powerful revivals.

And now, dearly beloved, I have commenced this course of lectures in the hope that, should God spare my life, He will make them the instrument of doing you good. You need searching and trying and purifying and comforting. You need to be humbled, edified, sanctified. I think I know, very nearly, where great multitudes of you are in religion and will endeavor, God helping me from time to time, to adapt truth to what I suppose to be your circumstances and state of mind. As I said in my former letter January 1, 1839 -- I cannot visit you and preach to you orally, on account of the state of my health. And besides, I think the Spirit of God calls me for the present to remain here. But through the press, I can hold communion with you and preach to you the gospel of Christ.

In addition to the sermons which I design to preach to you, I shall probably from time to time address letters to you when I have anything particular to say that cannot well be said in a sermon. If any spiritual advise is asked by letter, as is

often the case, upon any subject that can be answered in a sermon, you may generally expect to find my answer in some of my lectures-- concealing, of course, the fact that I have a particular case under my eye. If, in any case, the answer cannot well be given in a sermon, should providence permit you may expect an answer, either privately to the individual who makes the request or in a letter in the *Evangelist*, which may not only assist the inquirer but that class of persons who are in a similar state of mind. In this case also, of course, I shall not disclose the names of the particular inquirers.

And now, dearly beloved, do not suppose that I do this because I suppose that I am the only man who can give you spiritual advice but because I am willing to do what I can. And as I have freely received, I wish freely to impart whatever of the gospel the blessed God has taught me.

One word more. I have noticed in several papers a garbled extract from a remark that I made in one of my lectures published in the *N.Y. Evangelist*, which I here mention simply because it is dishonorable to God and injurious to you. In that lecture I said

"that those converted in the great revivals in the land, although real Christians, as I believed, and the best Christians in the church at the present day, were nevertheless a disgrace to religion on account of the low standard of their piety; and if I had health again to be an evangelist, I would labor for a revival in the churches and for the elevation of the standard of piety among Christians."

Now you perceive that I have here asserted my full conviction that those revivals were genuine works of God, "that the converts were real Christians," that "they are the best Christians in the church," and yet that on many accounts they are a disgrace to religion. Now this I fully believe and reassert. And it is to win you away, if possible, from the last remains of sin that I have undertaken this work. The papers to which I allude have injuriously presented me as admitting that those revivals were spurious and the converts not Christians. I do not complain of this on my own account nor speak of it if I know my own heart, because I have any regard to its bearing upon myself, but because it is a slander upon those precious revivals, and injurious to you, as in substance denying that the grace of God ever converted you.

And now, dearly beloved, I must close this letter, beseeching you to make me a

subject of earnest prayer that God will enlighten and sanctify me, fill me with the spirit of the gospel of His Son and help me to impart to you the true bread and water of life, rightly dividing truth and giving to everyone a portion in due season.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you forever.

C. G. FINNEY

A Servant of the Lord Jesus Christ

[Back to Top](#)

Devotion

Lecture III

January 30, 1839

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Texts.--I Cor. 10:31: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

Col. 3:17, 23: "And whatsoever ye do, in word, or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him; and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men."

Rom. 6:13: "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."

Rom. 14:7, 8: "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself, for whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

These texts teach the nature and duty of Devotion to God.

In discussing this subject, I design to show,

I. What is not true devotion to God.

II. What is true devotion.

III. That devotion, and nothing short of devotion is true religion.

IV. Notice several mistakes commonly made upon this subject.

I. I am to show what is not true devotion.

1. Devotion does not consist in reading the Bible, nor in praying, nor in attending meetings. These may be, or may not be instances of particular acts of devotion, but are not to be regarded as devotion itself.
2. Devotion does not consist in closet, public, or social consecration of ourselves to God. These are to be regarded as special acts of devotion, and pledges or promises on our part of devotion, rather than as constituting devotion.
3. Devotion does not consist in individual acts or exercises of any kind. Acts or exercises may be devotional acts, i.e. acts of devotion, but let it be remembered that no acts or exercises constitute devotion.

II. I am to show what is true devotion.

It is a state of the mind or of the heart. It is that state of the will in which every thing--our whole life, and being, and possessions, are a continual offering to God; i.e. are continually devoted to God. True devotion, so far from consisting in any individual act, or feelings, must, of necessity, be the supreme devotion of the will, extending to all we have and are--to all times, places, employments, thoughts, and feelings.

Let your own ideas of what a minister ought to be illustrate my meaning. You feel that a minister, in preaching the gospel, should have but one design, and that should be to glorify God, in the sanctification and salvation of sinners. You know that he is professedly a servant of God. You feel that he ought to study, and preach, and perform all his ministerial duties--not for himself--not for his salary--not to increase his popularity--but to glorify God. Now you can easily see if a

minister has not this singleness of eye, his service cannot be acceptable to God. It is not an offering to God, it is not a devotion to God, but a devotion to himself.

Devotion, then, in a minister, is that state of mind in which all his ministerial duties are performed with a single eye to the glory of God, and where his whole life is a continual offering to God.

Again, you feel that a minister ought to be as devoted in every thing else as he is in praying and preaching, and in this you are right; for he not only ought to be, but really is as devoted out of the pulpit as he is in the pulpit. If he is influenced by selfish and worldly motives during the week, he is influenced by the same motives on the Sabbath. If during the week he is studying his own interests, and endeavoring to promote his own ends, it must be that he is so on the Sabbath.

You feel, also, that if a minister is not truly devoted he will go to hell. Should you know that a minister preached, prayed, visited, and performed his ministerial duties mainly for the purpose of supporting his family, or in any way honoring or benefiting himself, whatever zeal he might manifest, you would say he was a wicked man, and unless he is converted he must inevitably lose his soul. If these are your views on the subject, they are undoubtedly correct. Here, where you have no personal interest, you form a right judgment, and decide correctly concerning the character and destiny of such a man.

Now remember that nothing short of this is devotion in you. Bear it in mind that no particular acts, or fervor, or gushings of emotion, or resolutions, or purposes of amendment, or of future obedience, are devotion.

But devotion is that state of the will in which the mind is swallowed up in God, as the object of supreme affection, in which we not only live and move in God, but for God. In other words, devotion is that state of mind in which the attention is diverted from self, and self-seeking, and is directed to God; the thoughts, and purposes, and desires, and affections, and emotions, all hanging upon, and devoted to Him.

III. I am to show that devotion, and nothing short of devotion, is true religion.

Devotion and true religion are identical.

1. Because devotion implies and includes supreme love to God. It is

impossible that we should be devoted to an object, unless it be the object of our supreme affection.

2. It is impossible that we should not be devoted to an object of supreme affection. If we love God supremely, he will be the end for which we live; for that which we love supremely is always necessarily the end and object for which we live. If an individual loves God supremely, he will be as conscious that he lives for God, as that he lives at all.

3. Nothing short of this state of mind which I have described is consistent with true religion. Supreme love to an object is a state, and not a mere act of the mind. By state, I mean a voluntary state of mind. Where, therefore, there is a supreme love, devotion, or consecration to God, must be a state--a voluntary state of mind--in opposition to individual acts of mind.

4. Nothing short of this can be acceptable to God. Unless devotion be a habit, or state of mind, unless the whole being be an offering to God, he must have a rival in our hearts. This He will not endure; and to attempt to please Him by isolated acts of devotion, when it is not the habit, and state of our minds, is infinitely more abominable than for a wife to attempt to please her husband with an occasional smile, when she lives only to please and gain the affections of another man.

5. Nothing short of this can be the result of evangelical faith. Evangelical faith is that state of mind in which eternal things are apprehended as realities. The things of time and of eternity--God's interests and our own interests--his character, and claims, and loving kindness are apprehended by the mind as facts, and as they are.

Now a mind in the exercise of this faith will as naturally live for eternity, and not for time--for God, and not for self--as an unbeliever who apprehends none of these things as they are, would live for time and self, and not for God.

6. A departure from this state is heart apostasy. Whatever a man's outward deportment may be, the moment he turns aside in heart from sincere devotion to God--from a supreme consecration of his whole being to the service of God--he has in heart apostatized from true religion. He is no longer in the service of God, but is serving the object upon which his heart

is set, and that is the object of his devotion, i.e. it is his God.

IV. I am to notice several mistakes commonly made upon this subject.

1. Many imagine that there is a real distinction between devotion and other duties, as if a man could be doing his duty in that which is not devotion to God, the duties of devotion are generally supposed to be closet and family prayer, reading the scriptures, together with singing and praying in the public exercises of God's house. These are called the devotional parts of worship, while the preaching and hearing are called less devotional. On the Sabbath men imagine themselves to be devotional, while on the weekdays, excepting in those few acts which they call religious duties, they are serving themselves, and are supremely devoted to their own interests. Now all such ideas as these arise out of the total absence of true devotion; and individuals who entertain such views have not yet understood what true religion is.-- Nothing is duty that is not performed for God. A man that is truly religious is as truly devotional in his daily business, as on the Sabbath. The business of the world is performed by him in the same spirit, and with the same design as he prays and reads his Bible, and attends the worship of God on the Sabbath. If this is not the case, he has no true religion.

2. Some, who seem to do all for God, and are manifestly in a devotional state of mind, do not, after all, seem to realize that every act devoted to God is as acceptable as prayer or praise. If, by necessary duties, they are kept from spending much time in their closets, and going a great deal to meeting, Satan takes advantage of their ignorance, and brings them into bondage, he endeavors to persuade them that they are neglecting their duties to God, and attending to other things. Now you who are devoted to God should understand that if the providence of God confine you at home to nurse the sick, or prevent you from observing those hours of secret prayer which you are wont to observe, you are not to be brought into bondage on this account, if you are conscious that these other duties are performed for God.

3. Others think that devotion may be sincere, and yet extend only to certain duties, i.e. that a man may pray sincerely, and from right motives, and yet be worldly in the transaction of business. Now a little reflection will convince any honest mind that it is naturally impossible. Devotion to God cannot be sincere any further than it annihilates selfishness. Devotion and selfishness are eternal opposites.

4. It is a very common idea that we are to be more devotional, i.e. more religious, on the Sabbath, and in secret and social prayer, than at other times and in other things. But the text shows that whatever we do--whether we eat or drink--at all times--in all places--and in all things--we are to do all for the glory of God.

5. Many mistake the religion of emotion for that of the will or heart. This is manifest from their lives. You will often witness the gushings forth of their emotions. They weep, and appear to melt and break down. They promise reformation, and entire consecration to God; but attempt to trade with them the very next day, and you will find them supremely selfish--that they are not devoted to God, but to their own interest, and are ready to take any advantage, even of their brethren, to benefit themselves.

Now in this case it is manifest that their melting and breaking down was merely a gushing of the emotions, and not a will subdued and devoted to God. Devotion belongs to the will, and there may be many paroxysms of emotion, where the consecration of the will to self remains supreme.

6. Many mistake the consecration and devotion of the imagination for that of the heart. They can write poems, or sermons, or religious articles for the paper--they can talk, and pray, and preach, and exercise any degree of zeal in the cause of religion, and yet meet them on any ground where the deep foundations of their hearts are developed, and you find they will be supremely selfish.

7. Many expect devotion without faith. This is naturally impossible. The mind cannot be devoted to God without confiding in Him.

8. This shows that they confound faith with hope, or the expectation of salvation. A man may be devoted without a hope, and may consecrate his whole being to God, while he thinks nothing of his own salvation.

9. Many do not distinguish between that naked faith in the simple truth, which invariably begets devotion, and their ever varying states of emotion, which they are prone to call religion. Simple faith in the character of God, as revealed in the Bible, naturally and necessarily begets a spirit of consecration to God. But there may be any amount of emotion, without any true devotion.

REMARKS.

1. A spirit of devotion will make the most constant cares and the most pressing labors the means of the deepest and most constant communion with God. The more constant and pressing our duties are, if they are performed for God, the deeper and more incessant is our communion with him; for whatever is done in a spirit of devotion is communion with God.

2. They are not Christians who do not hold communion with God in their ordinary employments. If you do not hold conscious communion with God in your ordinary business, it is because it is not performed with a spirit of devotion. If not performed in a spirit of devotion, it is sin. But if your ordinary employments are sin, then certainly you have no religion, unless a man can be truly religious, and yet ordinarily a servant of the Devil.

3. They are certainly not in a sanctified state who cannot attend to the ordinary and lawful business of life, without being drawn away from God.

4. That is unlawful which cannot be done in a spirit of devotion. If you feel the incongruity of performing it, as an act of devotion to God, it is unlawful, yourself being judge.

5. That is unlawful which is not so done; i.e. whatever the act may be in itself, if it is not actually performed as an act of devotion to God, it is sin. Hence "the plowing of the wicked is sin." Eating and drinking, and the most common acts of life, if not done in a spirit of devotion, are sin.

6. Any thing not right or wrong in itself, may be either right or wrong, as it is or is not done in a spirit of devotion. Hence:

7. A selfish mind may condemn a sanctified mind for what is no sin in that particular individual; for the selfish man might naturally enough suppose the other to be actuated by the same motives by which he knows himself to be actuated.

So, again, a sanctified mind might give credit to a selfish mind where in is not due, taking it for granted that when the act is right the motive is right. So the sinner may sin in copying the example of a Christian--I mean the example of the Christian when he does not sin--Christian example may influence him to go to meeting, but still, if his motives are not right, it is sin.

8. Sinners may, and often do give themselves credit for outwardly imitating the example of Christians, when, in reality, the very thing for which they give themselves credit is among their greatest sins.

9. There is no peace of mind but in a state of devotion. No other state of mind is reasonable. In no other state will the powers of the mind harmonize. In any other state than that of devotion to God, there is an inward struggle, and mutiny, and strife in the mind itself. The conscience upbraids the heart for selfishness. Hence "there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

10. They have "perfect peace whose minds are thus stayed upon God" in an attitude of constant devotion. It is impossible that they should not have peace; for devotion implies and includes peace.

And now, beloved, have you the spirit of true devotion? Do not reply, I hope so; for nothing but consciousness should satisfy you for a moment. If you are devoted to God, you are conscious of it; and if you are not conscious of being devoted to God, it is because you are not so devoted. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap; for he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, and he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

[Back to Top](#)

Professor Finney's Letter

of February 13, 1839

from "The Oberlin Evangelist" Publication of Oberlin College

Public Domain Text

Reformatted by Katie Stewart

TO THE CONVERTS OF THE GREAT REVIVALS
THAT HAVE PREVAILED IN THE UNITED STATES
WITHIN THE FEW LAST YEARS.

Beloved:

I closed my last letter by adverting to the fact that several professedly religious periodicals have so referred to what I had said in regard to your being "a disgrace to religion" as virtually to represent me as denying the reality, genuineness and power of those glorious revivals in which you were converted. I denied having said anything in that connection to that effect. But I did assert in my lecture and reassert in my last letter that I believed many of you were by your lives a disgrace to the religion of Christ. Now, beloved, I said not this nor do I now say it to bring a railing accusation against you, but for the purpose of preparing the way to put some questions to you conscience, with the design to turn your eyes fully upon your own life and spirit as exhibited before the world.

And here let me say that when you receive this number I desire each of you to consider this letter as directed to you individually, as a private letter to you, although communicated through this public channel.

I will write upon my knees, and I beg you to read it upon your knees. And when you have read it as written to *yourself* and received, as I conjure you to do as a private communication to *you from me*, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I entreat you to hand it to all your Christian friends in your neighborhood and within your reach, beseeching them to receive it and consider it as a private letter to *them*, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hereafter, should the providence of God permit, I may more particularly address different classes of individuals than I can in this letter. I intend to address fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, children, ministers, church officers, editors of religious papers, young men and young women, as so many distinct classes of individuals to whom particular truths may be applicable. In this I address you without reference to your age or sex or station or calling, simply as a professor of the religion of Jesus Christ.

I have said that I fear and believe that many of you, at least, are a disgrace to the religion you profess. By this I mean that instead of fairly and truly representing the religion of Christ in your life and spirit, you and many respects grossly misrepresent it. Do not hear suffer your temper to rise and turn upon me and say "Physician, heal thyself," I might, to be sure, confess my own sins; but my business now as "an ambassador of Jesus Christ" is with your own conscience.

And now, dearly beloved, bear with me while I put the questions home to you, as by name.

Are not your life and spirit and habits a miserable *misrepresentation* of the religion you profess?

You are a professor of the religion of Jesus Christ. Your profession of religion has placed you on high, as "a city that cannot be hid." You are not hid. The eyes of God, of Christians, of the world, of hell are upon you.

And now, precious soul, do you sincerely believe that you *feel* and *act* and *live* and *do* as the Lord Jesus Christ would under similar circumstances?

Are those around you forced by your *life* and *spirit* to recognize the lineaments divine of the character of Christ in you?

Would those that know nothing of Christ be able to catch and *understand* the true *spirit* and *meaning* of the religion of Jesus by an acquaintance with you?

Would they obtain from your *life* and *example* such an idea of the *nature*, *design* and *tendency* of the gospel as would lead them to value it, to understand its necessity and importance?

Are your spirit and temper and conversation so *unearthly*, so *heavenly*, so *divine*, so much like *Christ*, as fairly to represent Him? Or do you miss represent Him?

Is not the *temper* that you manifest, the *life* that you lead, your *conversation*, your *pursuits*-- are not all these in many respects the very opposite and contrast of the spirit of the religion of Christ?

My beloved brother, sister, father, mother, whoever you are, *remember* that while you read these questions God's eye is pouring its *searching blaze* into your *inmost soul*.

What is your temper in your *family*, among your *friends*, in your *private* life, in your *domestic* relations and in your *public* walks?

Is your conversation in heaven or is it "earthly, sensual, devilish"?

What is the testimony of your *closet*? Can it bear witness to your sighs and groans and tears over the wickedness and desolations of the world?

Are men by beholding your good works constrained to "glorify your Father who is in heaven"? Or is the name of God blasphemed on account of your earthly and unchristian life and spirit?

Can those that remain unconverted in the place where you live bear witness that a great and divine change was wrought in you by the Spirit of God?

I beseech you in the name of Christ to inquire, are your impenitent acquaintances *constrained* to confess that that *must* have been a work of God that could have wrought so great a change in you, as they daily witness?

Do you think that the interests of religion are *really advanced* by your life and that you are continually making an impression in favor of holiness on those around you?

Do they witness in you the "*peace* of God that passeth understanding"?

Do they behold in you that *sweet* and *divine complacency* in the will and ways of God that spreads a heavenly *serenity* and *calm* and *sweetness* over your mind, in the midst of the *trials* and *vicissitudes* to which you are subjected?

Or do they behold you vexed, anxious, careful, easily disturbed and exhibiting the spirit of the world? My dear soul, if this is so you are a horrible disgrace to religion; you are unlike Jesus. Was this the spirit that Jesus manifested?

Let me inquire again: what are you doing for the conversion of sinners around you, and what for the conversion of the world?

Would one hundred million such Christians as you are, and living just as you live, be instrumental in converting the world?

Suppose there are a thousand million of men upon the earth and suppose that one hundred million of these were just Christians as you are, in your present state and at your present rate of usefulness; when would the world be converted?

Is the church and the world *better* and *holier* on account of your profession? And are they really *benefited* by your life?

If not, your profession is a liability upon the Christian religion. You are, like Peter, *denying* your Savior; and like Judas, you have kissed but to *betray* Him.

Now, beloved, I will not take it upon me to decide these questions that I have put to you on my knees and in the spirit of love. Will you be honest and, on your knees, spread out this letter to God your Maker and Christ your Savior? Will you not upon your knees read over these questions, one by one, and ask God to show

you the real state of your life as it relates to each of them?

And here, beloved, I leave you for the present; and may the Savior aid you and make you honest in meeting cordially and answering honestly these questions. You must be searched and humbled and broken down in heart before you can be built up and made strong in Christ.

Do be *honest* and in *haste*, and address yourself to the work of self-examination without delay. I beg of you to prepare yourself to receive the consolations of the gospel of Christ, for my soul is panting to spread them out before you.

Providence permitting, you may expect to hear from me again soon.

C. G. FINNEY

A Servant of the Lord Jesus Christ

[Back to Top](#)

True and False Religion

Lecture IV

February 13, 1839

**by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College**

Text.--Gal. 5:1: "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

The observances of the ceremonial law were designedly a typical representation of the gospel. The Jews had misunderstood them, and supposed that their observance was the ground of justification and acceptance with God. After the introduction of Christianity, many of the Christian Jews were exceedingly zealous for their observance, and for uniting the ceremonial dispensation with Christianity. On the contrary, Paul, "the great Apostle of the Gentiles," insisted upon justification by faith alone, entirely irrespective of any legal observances and conditions whatever. There were a set of teachers in the early days of Christianity who were called Judaizers, from the fact, that they insisted upon uniting legal observances with Christianity, as a ground of justification. Soon after the establishment of the Galatian Churches, by St. Paul, these Judaizers succeeded in introducing this corruption into the Christian Churches. To rebuke this error, and overthrow it, was the design of this epistle. The yoke and bondage spoken of in the text, was the yoke of legal observances. The liberty here mentioned is the liberty of love--of justification--and of sanctification, by faith alone.

In discussing this subject, I design to show,

I. What it is to make a man a slave.

II. What it is to be a slave.

III. What true liberty is.

IV. That the religion of many persons is mere slavery.

V. That true religion is genuine liberty.

I. I am to show what it is to make a man a SLAVE.

To enslave a man is to treat a person as a thing--to set aside moral agency; and to treat a moral agent as a mere piece of property.

II. I am to show, what it is to be a SLAVE.

It is not to be in a state of involuntary servitude, for, strictly speaking, such a state is impossible. The slaves in the Southern States are not, strictly speaking, in a state of involuntary servitude. Upon the whole, they choose to serve their masters, rather than do worse. A man cannot act against his will, but his will may be influenced by considerations that set aside his liberty. To be a slave, is to be under the necessity of choosing between two evils. Thus the slaves in the Southern States prefer being as they are, to being in a worse condition--to being imprisoned or whipped for attempting to escape. But plainly, this is a choice between two evils, neither of which, if left to themselves would they choose. So a wicked man may choose to obey human laws, rather than suffer the consequences of disobedience; still he may abhor the laws, and feel himself shut up to the necessity of choosing between two evils. So a wife who does not love her husband, may choose, upon the whole, to live with him, rather than break up her family--lose her character--and subject herself to poverty and reproach. And yet, if she does not love her husband, she will consider living with him, merely as the least of two calamities. She feels shut up to the necessity of choosing between two courses, neither of which is agreeable to her. All that can be said, is that she chooses that course which, upon the whole, is the least disagreeable.

To be obliged to choose against our feelings and inclinations--to be shut up to the necessity of pursuing a course of life not chosen for its own sake, but as the least of two evils--is the very essence of slavery.

III. I am to show what true liberty is.

1. True liberty does not consist in the unrestrained indulgence of lust and selfishness.
2. Nor in freedom from all law, or rule of action.
3. But true liberty consists in the privilege of choosing and pursuing that course of life in which our whole moral being will harmonize--where violence is done to no law of the mind.
4. In other words, and more particularly, it consists in pursuing that course which is preferred for its own sake--that course of life which is not chosen as the least of two evils; but of all possible courses, is that which the mind prefers; e.g. a wife who loves her husband, and prefers his society to that of

any other man, is free, in the proper sense of the term, in living with him; whereas, if she preferred another man to him, and lived with her own husband, from other considerations than love, she would be a slave, and not free.

A man who obeys wholesome laws, from love to virtue and good order, is free in the highest sense; but when he obeys law from restraint, not because he loves virtue, but from fear of punishment, he is a slave. Here it is plain that his choice of obedience is, by him, considered as a choice of two evils, and not that course of conduct which he prefers for its own sake.

IV. The Religion of many persons is mere Slavery.

1. Their religion is not that in which they are most deeply interested. Their conduct shows that many other things interest them more deeply than the subject of religion--upon which they are more excited and engaged. Their religion seems to be like the labor of children. Children choose to play for its own sake--in that they are deeply interested. Therein you see their engagedness and zeal. But when put at work, it is manifest that this is submitted to as the least of two evils. They don't love work for its own sake, but prefer it to punishment. Just so it seems to be with the religion of many professors. Religion is not that to which they naturally turn as the great central object of their affections, and to which they return with the force of gravity, as soon as the pressure of any object that has diverted their attention for a time, is removed. On the contrary, their attention is somewhere else, even while they are outwardly, and languidly attending to what they call religion.

2. Their religion is altogether a secondary business. It is not the great, absorbing, commanding, prominent object of their lives; but is so far huddled into a corner, that everyone may see that religion is not their main business, that they have some other business, and that religion is a matter by the bye.

Thus, what they call their religious duties--their prayers--reading the scriptures, &c. are hurried over, or for slight causes wholly omitted. While that which constitutes their main business, commands their time, and thoughts, and hearts.

3. Religion, with them, is a matter rather of conscience, than of the heart. They feel themselves driven by the remonstrances of conscience, to the performance of their religious duties, rather than drawn by the deep love of religion itself.

4. That their religion is slavery is evident from the fact that it does not constitute their happiness. This demonstrates that it is not a thing chosen for its own sake. True, they cannot be happy without it, nor can they be happy with it. Conscience will not suffer them to rest without something they can call religion. And yet they do not choose it for its own sake. The mind is not satisfied with it, nor is it made happy by it.

5. They are religious upon the same principle that men take medicine in time of sickness. It is submitted to for the benefits of it. The medicine may be nauseous and offensive in itself, but is submitted to as the least of two evils.

6. Just so religion is by many submitted to as something they must attend to. Not that it is loved for its own sake. Nor that the mind chooses it as that course which, on every account, is most desired and valued by the mind; but as something that it will not do to neglect.

7. Religion is regarded by this class of persons as the most important, yet not the most loved employment. Their reason affirms that it is the one thing needful. But their hearts do not affirm that it is the one thing most loved, and rejoiced in for its own sake.

8. The real state of mind in which this class of persons are, may be learned from the fact, that in exhorting others to attend to the subject of religion, they rather dwell on the danger of neglect, than on the blessedness of the thing itself.

9. And that this does not arise merely out of the fact that they expect such considerations to be most influential with those to whom they speak--you will observe that in speaking about or considering their own case, they are influenced mainly by the same reason they press upon others. Religion is, with them, some thing that it will not do to neglect. The hazard of neglect--the stings of conscience, and the misery that neglect brings with it, are the things which most influence them.

10. They are under circumstances of constraint. They must serve God--they must attend to their duty--they must prepare for death.

11. Their enjoyment consists mostly in their hope, and not in the exercise of religion itself. Did they never expect to be more happy in their religion than they are now, they would be "of all men the most miserable." Hence they drag out their religion, in obedience to the dictates of conscience, knowing that it does not constitute their happiness here--but somehow they hope it will be more agreeable to them in heaven.

12. Their religion acts by way of restraint and It serves as a bridle to rein in, and restrain their rampant, sinful propensities, on the one hand, and a whip to urge them forward in their religious duties, on the other. It is not that course of life which of all possible, or conceivable courses, is the most agreeable to them for its own sake. But they have an existence, and there is no alternative. They must be religious, or they must be damned. They must continually be thrown upon the terrors of their conscience, or drag on in duty, however much their heart may reluctant.

13. Consequently, you hear them calculating about how much is their part, in any religious or benevolent enterprise; and they seem to be glad when they think they have done what they suppose falls to their share. Then they think they have done up their duty, and may rest awhile, or attend to their own affairs. --Hence,

14. The inquiry, how little they can get along with doing, and giving, and praying, and still maintain a hope? How little religion is compatible with going to heaven?

In short, it is plain that their religion, instead of being their happiness, as something chosen for its own sake, and pursued on its own account, is their misery, as the least of two evils. Instead of making them happy, enough of it would be hell.

V. I am to show, that true religion is genuine liberty.

1. Because it is that which is chosen for its own sake--that course which the mind prefers to all other conceivable courses of life.

2. It is the highest good, in the estimation of the mind that possesses it.

3. If left entirely unbiassed[sic.] by every other consideration, and having all other possible and conceivable courses of life, and conduct spread out before it, the religion of Christ would be its supreme, eternal choice.

4. It is that in which the whole being, in all its powers, unites and harmonizes. The reason--the conscience--the understanding--all the affections and emotions--in short, the volitions, and all that makes up the moral being, unite and sweetly harmonize, in the exercise of this divine religion.

5. Consequently it constitutes real, permanent happiness.

6. It casts out fear--fear of hell--fear of disgrace--fear of man--and all fear that hath torment is annihilated, and the mind sweetly bathes itself in an ocean of love and peace.

7. The soul yields obedience to all the requirements of God joyfully. For the will of God marks out to it the very course, of all others, which it delights to pursue. The affectionate wife obeys her husband, and his wish is her law, not of constraint but willingly, because her happiness is wrapped up in doing his will. She loves him, and to please him is her element and her life. Just so it is with the true Christian. To please God is his supreme joy.

8. The true Christian never yields to the will of God by constraint; but always prefers the will of God, whenever that will is known. In other words he really wills what God wills, as soon, and as far as he knows what that is. He may have desires for this and the other object, and may express those desires to God in prayer. He may think this, or that course would be most for the glory of God. But true religion always prefers that God's will should be done. His will is controlled by infinite wisdom and love. It is impossible, therefore, that true religion should ever be made miserable, by being obliged, or constrained to submit to the will of God.

9. True religion is not submitted to, by him that possesses it, as medicine, but is like food, that we eat for its own sake. We love our food, and should eat it for the pleasure of eating, whether we expect to be benefited by it or not. Just so in religion--The mind is not mainly influenced by the benefit to be received; but it is the food of the mind--the natural aliment on which it lives.

10. The truly religious man does not inquire how little religion he can get along with; but how much he may possess.

11. Not how much sin may be indulged in, and yet he get to heaven; but how he can be rid of all sin, whether he goes to heaven or not. Not how sinful he may be, and still be a child of God; but how holy he may and can be.

12. His religion makes up his happiness. It is the continual exercise of it that mainly makes him blest, and enough of the same kind would make heaven.

REMARKS.

1. From what has been said, it is manifest, that many professors of religion, in reality, regard God as a great slaveholder. I do not mean that they would say this in words. Nor that they understand that they do regard him in this light. The reason is, that they do not understand themselves to be slaves. If they realized what slavery is, and that they themselves have the spirit of slaves, and are, in their religion, all that is meant by being slaves, they would then be shocked with the irresistible inference that they do regard God as a Slaveholder.

2. What an abomination such a religion must be in the sight of God. Instead of seeing his professed children engaged, heart and soul, in his service--finding it the essence of true liberty, and their supreme joy--he beholds them groaning under it, as a severe burden, submitted to only to escape his frown.

3. You see, in this discourse, the true distinction between the religion of law, and that of the gospel. The religion of many professors seems to set as painfully on them, as a straitjacket. It is evidently not their natural element. It is the bondage of law, and not the religion of peace.

4. Many express indignation against Southern slavery, as they may well do, but who are slaves themselves. They know full well, that if they would be honest with themselves, their religion is to them a yoke of bondage. They are afraid of death--afraid of the judgment--afraid of God.

They submit to religion as the only method of escaping "the wrath to come." But yet, let it be known to them, that there is no hell--no solemn judgment--that men will universally be saved, do what they will, and they will feel relieved of a

weighty burden. They will feel rid of the responsibilities of moral agents, and cast off their religion as of no consequence.

5. This slavery is utterly inexcusable, and consists in the perverse state of the heart.

6. Such religion is worse than no religion.

(1) It is not any more safe, than no religion.

(2) It is more hypocritical than none.

(3) It confirms self-righteousness.

(4) It begets, and perpetuates a delusion in the mind.

(5) It ruins the soul of the professor, and is a stumbling block to others. What is a greater stumbling block, for example, than for an impenitent husband to see his wife possessing this painful, legal religion? Instead of observing her happy, humble, sweet, heavenly minded, and peaceful, like an angel, he perceives that her religion makes her complaining, uneasy, and irritable; in short, that it is the lashings of conscience, by which she is actuated, and not the constant flow, of the deep feelings of her heart.

(6) This kind of religion is more dishonorable to God than none. It is really the contrast of true religion. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against which there is no law." Now the religion of which I have been speaking, is the very opposite of all this. To be sure, a man who is openly irreligious, dishonors God. But a man who professes to be God's representative--to exhibit God's spirit--and to be the reflection of his image; and then go about the duties of religion, as a task to be submitted to, instead of pouring out the overflowings of His benevolence--to unclench His hard hand, at the stern biddings of conscience--is to publish as gross a libel upon the character of God, and the religion of the gospel, as is possible.

(7) It is worse than none, inasmuch as it prevents conviction, and true conversion. Persons in this state suppose themselves to be truly religious, and seem not to dream that this is the very opposite of true religion.

Now, while under this delusion, it is vain to expect their eyes to be opened,

and to anticipate a real and thorough conversion to God.

7. All who have left their first love, are again entangled in the yoke of bondage. If any of you have known what it was to love God with all your heart, you have known what it was to be free. You know, by your own consciousness, that your religion was then the essence of true liberty. But if you have laid aside your love, no matter by what other principles you are actuated, you are "entangled again in the yoke of bondage." Your religion has ceased to be liberty, and you have become a slave.--Now I ask you, "Where is the blessedness" you once spoke of? Have you that great peace that they possess who love the law of God? Does the peace of God rule in your hearts? Is Christ's joy fulfilled in you? Or are you lashed along by your conscience, actuated by hope and fear, and any, and every other principle than love?

And now, beloved, I ask you, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, whether you have the religion of the gospel. I have, in this discourse, endeavored to set before you, in as simple a form as is possible, the grand distinction between true saints and hypocrites. To which of these classes do you belong? Remember the eye of God is upon you. "Be ye not deceived, for God is not mocked." "If the Son hath made you free, then are ye free indeed." And I exhort you in the words of the text, "Stand fast therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." But, on the other hand, if the Holy Ghost sees you with the chains of slavery upon your soul, driven on by conscience, as by a slave-holder, working out your painful religion, lest you should lose your soul, I beseech you, in the name of Christ, get up out of this bondage--lay aside these chains--"loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion,"--lay aside this legal yoke, and come forth from slavery, and death, that Christ may give you liberty and life.

[Back to Top](#)

The Law of God-1

Lectures V

February 27 & March 13, 1839

by Charles Grandison Finney

President of Oberlin College

LECTURE V.

Text.--Matt. 22:36-40: "Master, which is the great commandment, in the law? Jesus said unto him, thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law, and the prophets."

In discussing this subject, I shall show,

I. That obedience to these two commandments, comprises the whole of true Religion.

II. What constitutes true obedience.

III. Notice several mistakes into which men have fallen on this subject.

I. I am to show that obedience to these commandments comprises the whole of true religion.

1. This is evident from the text itself. Upon these two precepts, said the Savior, "hang all the law and the prophets," i.e. the whole of what is required in the law, and the prophets, is here epitomized.

2. In Rom. 13:8-10, it is said, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, thou shalt not commit adultery--thou shalt not kill--thou shalt not steal--thou shalt not bear false witness--thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, viz. thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Here it is declared, that love, with corresponding action, of course, comprises our whole duty to our fellowmen.

Reason affirms that there is no virtue without love, and that perfect love to God and man, with its natural fruits, is the consummation, and the whole of virtue. This is also agreeable to the dictates of conscience and common sense.

3. The law of God is the standard of right and wrong. The whole law of God is summed up in these two precepts. Consequently, obedience to these is the whole of virtue or true religion. In other words, it is the whole of what God requires of man. But I need not insist at large upon this, as it will not probably be denied or doubted.

II. I am to show what constitutes true obedience.

Love is the sum of the requirement. But I may, and should be asked what is the kind of love required by these commands? I shall consider:

1. The kind of love to be exercised towards God.

(1) It is to be love of the heart, and not a mere emotion. By the heart I mean the will. Emotions, or what are generally termed feelings, are often involuntary states of mind; i.e. they are not choices, or volitions, and of course do not govern the conduct. Love, in the form of an emotion, may exist in opposition to the will; e.g. we may exercise emotions of love contrary to our conscience, and judgment, and in opposition to our will. Thus the sexes often exercise emotions of love towards those to whom all the voluntary powers of their mind feel opposed, and with whom they will not associate. It is true, that, in most cases, the emotions are with the will. But they are sometimes, nay, often opposed to it.

Now, it is a voluntary state of mind that the law of God requires; i.e. it lays its claims upon the will. The will controls the conduct. And it is, therefore, of course, the love of the heart or will, that God requires.

(2) Benevolence is one of the modifications of love, which we are to exercise towards God. Benevolence is good will. And certainly we are bound to exercise this kind of love to God. It is a dictate of reason, of conscience, of common sense, and of immutable justice, that we should exercise good, and not ill-will to God. It matters not whether he needs our good will, or whether our good, or ill will, can, in any way, affect Him.--The question does not respect the necessities but deserts.

God's well-being is certainly an infinite good in itself, and consequently, we are bound to desire it--to will it--to rejoice in it--and to will it, and rejoice in it, in proportion to its intrinsic importance. And as his well-

being is certainly a matter of infinite importance, we are under infinite obligation to will it with all our hearts.

(3) Another modification of this love, is that of complacency or esteem. God's character is infinitely good. We are therefore bound, not merely to love him, with the love of benevolence; but to exercise the highest degree of complacency in his character. To say that God is good and lovely is merely to say that he deserves to be loved. If he deserves to be loved, on account of his goodness and love, then he deserves to be loved in proportion to his goodness and loveliness. Our obligation, therefore, is infinitely great to exercise towards him the highest degree of the love of complacency, of which we are capable.

These remarks are confirmed by the Bible, by reason, by conscience, and by common sense.

(4) Another peculiarity of this love, which must, by no means, be overlooked, is, that it must be disinterested; i.e. that we should not love him for selfish reasons. But that we should love him for what he is--with benevolence, because his well-being is an infinite good--with complacency; because his character is infinitely excellent--with the heart; because all virtue belongs to the heart. It is plain, that nothing short of disinterested love is virtue. The Savior recognizes and settles this truth, in Luke 6:32-34: "For if ye love them who love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again." These words epitomize the whole doctrine of the Bible on this subject, and lay down the broad principle, that to love God, or anyone else, for selfish reasons, is not virtue.

(5) Another peculiarity of this love is that it must be in every instance supreme. The text plainly requires this. Besides, anything less than supreme love to God, must be idolatry. If anything else is loved more, that is our God.

Observe, that God lays great stress upon the degree of love. So that the degree is essential to the kind of love. If it be not supreme in degree, it is

wholly defective and in no sense acceptable to God.

2. I will consider the kind of love to be exercised towards our fellowmen.

(1) It must be the love of the heart, and not mere desire or emotion. It is very natural to desire the good of others--to pity the distressed--and to feel strong emotions of compassion towards those who are afflicted. But these emotions are not virtue. Unless we will their good, as well as desire it, it is of no avail. James 2:15, 16: "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food. And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be you warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?"

Now here the Apostle fully recognizes the principle, that mere desire for the good of others, which of course will satisfy itself with good words, instead of good deeds, is not virtue. If it were good willing, instead of good desiring, it would produce corresponding action; and unless it is good willing, there is no holiness in it.

(2) Benevolence to men is a prime modification of holy love. This is included in what I have said above, but needs to be expressly stated and explained.

It is a plain dictate of reason, of conscience, of common sense, and immutable justice, that we should exercise good will towards our fellowmen--that we should will their good, in proportion to its importance--that we should rejoice in their happiness, and endeavor to promote it, according to its real value in the scale of being.

(3) Complacency towards those that are virtuous is another modification of holy love. I say towards those that are virtuous, because while we exercise benevolence towards all, irrespective of their character, we have a right to exercise complacency towards those only who are holy.

To exercise complacency towards the wicked is to be as wicked as they are. But to exercise entire complacency to those that are holy, is to be ourselves holy.

(4) This love is to be in every instance equal. By equal I do not mean that degree of love which selfish beings have for themselves, for this is supreme. There is a grand distinction between self-love and selfishness. Self-love is that benevolence to self, or regard for our own interest, which its intrinsic importance demands. Selfishness is the excess of self-love: i.e. it is supreme self-love--it is making our own happiness the supreme object of pursuit, because it is our own. And not attaching that importance to other's interests, and the happiness of other beings, which their importance demands. A selfish mind is therefore in the exercise of the supreme love of self.

Now the law of God does not require or permit us to love our neighbor with this degree of love, for that would be idolatry. But the command, "to love our neighbor as ourselves," implies,

(a) That we should love ourselves less than supremely, and attach no more importance to our own interests and happiness than they demand.--So that the first thing implied in this command is that we love ourselves less than supremely, and that we love our neighbor with the same degree of love which it is lawful for us to exercise towards ourselves.

(b) Equal love does not imply, that we should neglect our own appropriate concerns, and attend to the affairs of others. God has appointed to every man a particular sphere in which to act, and particular affairs to which he must attend. And this business, whatever it is, must be transacted for God and not for ourselves. For a man, therefore, to neglect his particular calling under the pretense of attending to the business of others, is neither required nor permitted by this law.

Nor are we to neglect our own families, and the nurture and education of our children, and attend to that of others. "But if any provide not for his own, especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." --To these duties we are to attend for God. And no man or woman is required or permitted to neglect the children God has given them, under the pretense of attending to the families of others.

Nor does this law require or permit us to squander our possessions upon the intemperate, and dissolute, and improvident. Not that the absolute necessities of such persons are in no case to be relieved by us, but it is always to be done in such a manner as not to encourage, but to rebuke their evil courses.

Nor does this law require or permit us to suffer others to live by sponging out our possessions, while they themselves are not engaged in promoting the good of men.

Nor does it require or permit us to lend money to speculators, or for speculating purposes, or in any way to encourage selfishness.

(c) But by equal love is meant, I have said, the same love in kind and degree, which it is lawful for us to exercise towards ourselves. It is lawful, nay, it is our duty to exercise a suitable regard to our own happiness. This is benevolence to self, or what is commonly called self-love. The same, both in kind and degree, we are required to exercise to all our fellow men..

(5) Another feature of holy love is that it must be impartial; i.e. it must extend to enemies as well as friends. Else it is selfish love, and comes under the reprobation of the Savior, in the passage before quoted, Luke 6:32, 34, "For if ye love them who love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same."&c.

Now observe that this test must always be applied to the kind of love we exercise to our fellow men, in order to understand its genuineness.--God's love is love to enemies. It was for his enemies that he gave his Son. Our love must be the same in kind--it must extend to enemies, as well as friends. And if it does not, it is partial and selfish.

III. I am to notice several mistakes into which men have fallen on this subject.

1. It seems to be a very general opinion among men that love to God and men may be genuine in kind, but deficient in degree; i.e. that we may have some true love to God, that is not supreme love.

Now this cannot be true. For God lays great stress, in his law, upon the

degree of love. Besides it is perfectly plain, if it be not supreme in degree that the mind loves something else more, and is consequently in a state of idolatry, instead of having any degree of holy love.

2. It seems to be a very general opinion that there is such a thing as imperfect obedience to God; i.e. as it respects one and the same act.

Obedience may be imperfect in respect to its constancy. An individual may obey at one time, and disobey at another. But I cannot see how an imperfect obedience, relating to one and the same act, can be possible. Imperfect OBEDIENCE! What can be meant by this but disobedient OBEDIENCE! a sinful HOLINESS!

Now to decide the character of any act, we are to bring it into the light of the law of God. If agreeable to this law, it is obedience--it is right--wholly right. If it is in any respect, different from what the law of God requires, it is disobedience--it is wrong--wholly wrong. Consequently,

3. It is supposed that a person may be partly holy, and partly sinful, in the same act and exercise.

I was formerly of this opinion myself; and I believe in some one of my reported lectures it is expressed. I formerly reasoned in this way; that an exercise might be put forth, in view of several motives, some of which were right, and some wrong. And that the exercise, therefore, had the complex character of the motives that produced it. But I am now persuaded that this philosophy is false. Whatever may have preceded a given exercise, that may have led the way to its being put forth, is not the question; nor does it alter the character of that exercise. For whenever the exercise is put forth, it must be in view of some one consideration, which the mind contemplates at the instant. If the reason which the mind has for the exercise be disinterested, the action is holy. If otherwise, it is sinful. By disinterested I do not mean that the mind must necessarily feel that it has no personal interest in the thing. But that the degree of self-interest that is felt should not be disproportioned to the interest which the mind takes in the matter, on account of its own intrinsic importance. In other words, if the mind's interest in it is selfish, the action or exercise, whatever it may be, is sinful. If it be not selfish, it is holy, although there may be a suitable regard to our own interest, at the moment of decision.

But that the action or affection must be either right or wrong--that when the test of God's law is applied, it must be pronounced an act of obedience or disobedience seems to me to be very plain. That it should be of such a mixed character as both to be obedience and disobedience, if the nature of God's law be considered, appears to me to be impossible. It should be understood that holiness and sin belong to the will or choice of the mind. Where the mind is under the influence of an existing sinful choice, it should be understood that this choice is sinful, because it is selfish. Now a multitude of considerations may from time to time present themselves to the mind, that may diminish the power of a wrong or sinful preference or choice. But however much the power of a selfish choice may be weakened, yet there is no virtue till the mind comes to exercise an opposite or disinterestedly benevolent choice. Now whenever the mind puts forth a holy choice, it is absurd and contradictory to say that any degree of selfishness is exercised by the mind in putting forth that choice. For selfishness is supreme love. Therefore, it is naturally impossible that selfishness should mingle with holiness. It is the same contradiction as to say that supreme self-love co-exists with supreme disinterested love. Therefore the volition cannot possibly have a mixed character; i.e. it cannot be partly selfish and partly holy. If any degree of sin can be affirmed of it--if in any way it is defective, it must be on account of the degree of its strength, and not on account of its co-existence with some degree of selfishness.

But here let it be understood that it cannot be defective in degree, and yet be holy, unless it can be holy without being agreeable to the law of God. It must be supreme in degree to have the character of holiness at all. It must be disinterested in opposition to selfish or it is wholly sinful. If, therefore, it is disinterested in kind, and supreme in degree, it is wholly a right affection. Otherwise, it is wholly wrong.

4. Another mistake is, that holiness may be deficient in degree as well as in permanency.

This is only another form of expressing nearly the same idea. But I aim at perspicuity; and I choose to reassert the mistake in this form, (viz.) that holiness may be real, while deficient in degree, as well as in permanency.

Now, holiness is love. To say therefore, that holiness may be deficient in degree, is the same as to say that love may be true, acceptable love to God,

while it is less than supreme in degree, which is plainly contrary to both the letter and spirit of the law of God; or, in other words, it may be acceptable to God, while we love something else more, and are in fact idolaters.

5. That we may be conscious of loving God less than something else, and yet have some genuine love, and some true religion.

Now love, to be genuine, must possess all the attributes which the law of God requires. And as God lays great stress upon its being supreme, if we are conscious that we love other things more than God, it is impossible that we should be in the exercise of any true religion.

6. That emotions of love, while the heart or will is selfish is true religion.

Now that there may be emotions, and strong emotions of love to a being, or thing, to which our will is opposed, is the experience of every day. And I see not why emotions of love to God, as well as emotions of gratitude to God, may not exist, while the will is selfish, and therefore the heart entirely depraved. I know from my own experience, that such emotions can exist in an unconverted mind; and it appears to me, that herein consists the grand delusion of vast multitudes of professors of religion, as well as of those who are professedly impenitent. When some flashes of light, in regard to some of the attributes of God are witnessed--when he is exhibited in certain relations--and his feelings of compassion are thrown out before the mind, as exhibited in the death of Christ, I think I know by experience, and I see not why it is not in accordance with true philosophy, that there should be a gush of emotion, which may be, and often is taken for true religion, while the heart or will is entirely selfish. This is illustrated in the character of those who, in revivals and seasons of religious excitement, will manifest a high degree of religious emotion, while in their business operations they prove to be completely selfish.

7. That some degree of selfishness may co-exist with some degree of holiness.

I say co-exist. I do not mean to deny, that a mind may be selfish at one time, and benevolent at another. But I do deny, that a mind can be selfish and benevolent at one and the same time; or that any degree of holiness can exist in the mind, in the exercise of selfishness. Selfishness, as we have already

seen, is the supreme love of self. It is always the supreme affection of the mind, and cannot be exercised in any one instance, in any other form than that of supreme regard to self. It is what God expressly forbids. Every exercise of it, therefore, not only implies that we love ourselves more than we love our neighbor; but as it is a violation of the law of God, it is loving ourselves more than we respect the authority of God.

To say therefore, that some degree of selfishness may co-exist with some degree of holiness, is the same absurdity, as to say that we can love ourselves supremely, and God supremely, at one and the same time.

8. That we may be conscious of loving our neighbor less than ourselves, and still love our neighbor with some degree of acceptable or holy love.

Now this is a radical and ruinous mistake. That we should feel compassion or pity for a person in distress is natural, whatever be the state of our will. But if our love only amount[s] to desire--if it is not good willing as well as good desiring, there is not a particle of anything good in it. It must be love of the heart, or will--that which will control the conduct. Again I repeat James 2:15, 16: "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food. And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be you warmed, and filled; notwithstanding, ye give them not those things which are needful for the body, what doth it profit?"

Now there can be no doubt that multitudes are radically deceived upon this point. They mistake their kind feelings, which are merely constitutional, for that love which the law of God requires them to exercise. Hence they will be very pitiful and benevolent in word but not in deed.

9. That a man can be selfish in his business, both in its design and in the manner of performing it, and yet be truly, though defectively religious--that in establishing himself in business, he may have a supreme regard to his own interest--that it is neither love to God nor man, that mainly actuates him, in the establishment of his business--but that his great object may be to make property for himself and family, and yet be truly religious--that the transaction of his business may be on the same principle upon which it was established--that in his dealings with men, he may aim mainly at promoting his own interest, and may consult his own side of the bargain, with very little reference to the individual with whom he is trading, or the community

in which he lives.

I believe this to be a sad and ruinous mistake. A man's business is that in which he is engaged, or at least is supposed to be engaged, six days in seven of his whole life. It is that which mainly occupies his time, and thoughts, and energies. Now, if in this he is selfish, either in his object, or manner of performing it, it is as impossible that he should have any degree of true religion, as that he should be supremely selfish and religious at the same time.

It is supposed by many, that selfish love to God is true religion. In my lecture to Christians, published in the last volume of my Sermons, is a whole discourse, devoted expressly to the discussion of this question. As you can consult that, I will not dwell upon it here.

10. That selfish, or partial love to man is true religion.

There are many who cannot speak peaceably of an enemy, who are nevertheless, very affectionate to their friends--who seem to have adopted the corrupt maxim of the Jews: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy," which Jesus Christ so severely reprobates. Christ insists, that, to be like God, we must "love our enemies," "do good to them that hate us," and "pray for those that despitefully use us." Here also, doubtless, many make a ruinous mistake. They have a great affection to individuals, who are friendly to them--of their own sect, or party, or way of thinking--while they exhibit and manifest any thing but love towards those that differ from them.

11. That entire holiness implies a high, and constant, and, of course insupportable degree of excited emotion.

Whatever may be true of the mind, when separated from the body, it is certain, while it acts through a material organ, that a constant state of excitement is impossible. When the mind is strongly excited, there is of necessity, a great determination of blood to the brain. A high degree of excitement cannot long continue, certainly, without producing inflammation of the brain, and consequent insanity. And the law of God does not require any degree of emotion, or mental excitement, that is inconsistent with life and health.

Our Lord Jesus Christ does not appear to have been in a state of continual

excitement. When He and His disciples, had been in a great excitement, for a time, they would turn aside, "and rest awhile."

Who, that has ever philosophized on this subject, does not know that the high degree of excitement which is sometimes witnessed in revivals of religion, must necessarily be short, or that the people must become deranged. It seems sometimes to be indispensable, that a high degree of excitement should prevail for a time, to arrest public and individual attention, and to draw people off from other pursuits, to attend to the concerns of their souls. But if any suppose that this high degree of excitement is either necessary, or desirable, or possible, to be long continued, they have not well considered the matter.

And here is one grand mistake of the Church. They have supposed that the revival consists mostly in this state of excited emotion, rather than in conformity of the human will to the will of God. --Hence, when the reasons for much excitement have ceased, and the public mind begins to grow more calm, they begin immediately to say, that the revival is on the decline; when, in fact, with much less excited emotion, there may be vastly more real religion in the community.

Excitement is often important and indispensable. But the vigorous actings of the will are infinitely more important. And this state of mind may exist in the absence of highly excited emotions.

12. That entire conformity to the law of God implies, that the attention of the mind is continually and exclusively directed to God. So that God is the direct object of thought, volition, and feeling.

Now holiness implies no such thing. The law of God requires supreme love of the heart. By this is meant, that the mind's supreme preference should be of God--that God should be the great object of its supreme love, and delight. But this state of mind is perfectly consistent with our engaging in any of the necessary business of life-- giving to that business that attention--and exercising about it all those affections and emotions, which its nature and importance demand.

If a man love God supremely, and engage in any business, for the promotion of his glory, if his eye be single, his affections and conduct are entirely holy,

when necessarily engaged in the right transaction of his business, although, for the time being, neither his thoughts, or affections are upon God.

Just so a man who is supremely devoted to his family may be acting consistently with his supreme affection, and rendering them the most important and perfect service, while he does not think of them at all. As I have endeavored to show, in my lecture on the text, "Make to yourselves a new heart, and a new spirit," I consider the moral heart to be the mind's supreme preference. As I there stated, the natural, or fleshly heart, is the seat of animal life, and propels the blood through all the physical system. Now there is a striking analogy between this and the moral heart. And the analogy consists in this, that as the natural heart, by its pulsations, diffuses life through the physical system; so the moral heart, or the supreme governing preference of the mind, is that which gives life, and character to man's moral actions; (e.g.) suppose that I am engaged in teaching Mathematics. In this, the supreme desire of my mind is to glorify God, in this particular calling. Now in demonstrating some of its intricate propositions I am obliged, for hours together, to give the entire attention of my mind to that object. Now, while my mind is thus intensely employed in this particular business, it is impossible that I should have any thoughts directly about God, or should exercise any direct affections, or emotions, or volitions towards Him. Yet if, in this particular calling, all selfishness is excluded, and my supreme design is to glorify God, my mind is in a sanctified state, even though, for the time being, I do not think of God.

It should be understood, that while the supreme preference of the mind has such efficiency, as to exclude all selfishness, and to call forth just that strength of volition, thought, affection, and emotion, that is requisite to the right discharge of any duty, to which the mind may be called, the heart is in a sanctified state. By a suitable degree of thought, and feeling, to the right discharge of duty, I mean just that intensity of thought, and energy of action, that the nature and importance of the particular duty to which, for the time being, I am called, demand.

In this statement, I take it for granted, that the brain, together with all the circumstances of the constitution are such, that the requisite amount of thought, feeling, &c. are possible. If the constitution, physical, or mental, be in such a state of exhaustion as to be unable to put forth that amount of

exertion which the nature of the subject might otherwise demand, even in this case, the languid efforts, though far below the importance of the subject, would be all that the law of God requires. --Whoever, therefore, supposes that a state of entire sanctification, implies a state of entire abstraction of mind, from everything but God, labors under a grievous mistake. Such a state of mind is as inconsistent with duty, as it is impossible, while we are in the flesh.

13. That entire holiness implies an equal degree of strength in the affections of the mind, at all times.

Now, this is neither consistent with duty, nor possible. Every particular duty to which we are called, does not demand the same degree of mental action. Nor, as I have already said, is the brain, the physical organ through which the mind acts, capable of sustaining the same degree of mental affections. If, in performing any work for God, the affections be as high as the nature of the particular subject requires in order to its right performance, and in every case where the action of the mind is equal in strength to the present capacity of the brain, or physical organ through which the mind acts, it is all that the law of God requires. Here it should be distinctly remembered, that the holiness of the mind, when some kind of business, or labor for God is the object of the mind's attention, does not consist, so much in the strength of those particular affections, which may be more or less energetic, as the state of the brain may admit, or the nature of the subject may require. But it does consist in the supreme preference of the mind--in that state of supreme devotedness to God, that has called the mind to the performance of this particular work, and for this particular reason, (i.e.) for the glory of God.

14. That a state of entire holiness implies equal strength in all the volitions of the mind.

But this is absurd. It is neither requisite, nor possible. All volitions do not need the same strength. They cannot have equal strength, because they are not produced by equally powerful reasons.

Should a man put forth as strong a volition to pick up an apple, as to extinguish the flames of a burning house? Should a mother, watching over her sleeping nursling when all is quiet and secure, put forth as powerful volitions, as might be requisite to snatch it from the devouring flames? Now,

suppose that she was equally devoted to God, in watching her sleeping babe, and in rescuing it from the jaws of death. Her holiness would not consist in the fact that she exercised equally strong volitions, in both cases; but, that in both cases, the volition was equal to the accomplishment of the thing required to be done. So that persons may be entirely holy, and yet continually varying in the strength of their affections, according to their circumstances--the state of their physical system--and the business in which they are engaged.

15. That no degree of mental languor, or rest is consistent with a state of entire holiness.

This is so far from true, that every degree of rest and languor, which the nature of man requires, is consistent with a state of entire sanctification.

16. Another mistake respects what constitutes partial, and what entire sanctification.

As I have already said, some seem to suppose, that partial sanctification relates, as well to the degree of holy affection, as to its constancy. I trust I have already said enough to show, that partial sanctification cannot relate to the degree of holy love; but that love must be supreme, in degree, to be holiness at all. And here let me remind you again, that all holy affections, thoughts, and volitions, have not necessarily God for their direct object, but may be employed about other things, and are entirely holy, when the design of the mind, in engaging in these callings, and pursuits, is supremely to glorify God. You will here understand, also, that by the constancy of holy affections, is not meant, as I have just said that they should have God for their immediate object, or that it is an interruption of obedience for the mind to think, and act, and feel upon any subject to which duty calls it.

By partial sanctification, I mean that state of mind, in which, it sometimes acts selfishly, and at other times benevolently.

17. That entire holiness in man, implies the same degree of holiness that is in God.

No such thing is implied, for God's holiness is infinite. For us to be holy as God, is not to be as holy as he is in degree, but to have as single an eye as he has.

Nor does entire sanctification imply the same strength of holy affections, that Adam may have had before the fall--before his powers were debilitated by sin.

Nor does it imply that we exercise the same strength, or consistency of holy affection, that we might have done had we never sinned. If we love him with what strength we have, be it more or less, however debilitated our powers may be, it is all that the law of God requires.

Nor does it imply, that we love him as much as we should, were we not so ignorant, or had we as much knowledge of Him as we might have had, had we improved our time, and opportunities of gaining information. The law of God requires, nothing more than the right use of our powers, as they are, without respect to whatever might, and would have been, had we never sinned.

18. That a state of entire holiness is inconsistent with the existence, and exercise of our constitutional susceptibilities.

A great portion of the temptations to which the mind is subject, consists in the excited state of the susceptibilities of the body and mind, that are purely constitutional. All the susceptibilities of our nature, Christ must have had, or he could not have been "tempted in all points like as we are." It was the excitement of Adam's constitutional appetites and susceptibilities, that led him to sin. But his sin consisted not, either in the existence of these susceptibilities and appetites, or in their being excited, but in consenting to gratify them in a prohibited manner. If our constitutional susceptibilities were annihilated, our activity would cease. So that if anyone supposes, that to be sanctified "wholly, body, soul and spirit," implies the extinction of any appetite, or susceptibility that is purely constitutional, he is deceived. A state of sanctification consists in subordinating all these to the will of God, and not in their annihilation.

19. That it implies a cessation of spiritual warfare.

If, by this, they mean a war with our selfishness, they are right. But if they mean that our war with the world, the flesh and the devil, will ever cease in this life, they are mistaken.

20. That it is inconsistent with growth in grace.

I suppose that saints will continue to grow in grace to all eternity, and in the knowledge of God. But this does not imply, that they are not entirely holy, when they enter heaven, or before.

21. That it is entirely inconsistent with any sorrow, or mental suffering. It was not so with Christ. Nor is it inconsistent with our sorrowing for our own past sins, and sorrowing that we have not now the health and vigor, and knowledge, and love, that we might have had, if we had sinned less; or sorrow for those around us--sorrow in view of human sinfulness, or suffering. These are all consistent with a state of entire sanctification, and indeed are the natural results of it.

22. That it is inconsistent with our living in human society--with mingling in the scenes, and engaging in the affairs of this world. Hence the absurd and ridiculous notions of papists, in retiring to monasteries, and convents--in taking the veil--and, as they say, retiring to a life of devotion.

Now I suppose this state of voluntary exclusion from human society, to be utterly inconsistent with any degree of holiness, and a manifest violation of the law of love to our neighbor.

23. That a state of entire holiness would be recognized as such by all men.

Now this is as far as possible from being true. It was insisted, and positively believed, by the Jews, that Jesus Christ was possessed of a wicked, instead of a holy spirit. Such were their notions of holiness, that they no doubt supposed him to be actuated by any other than the Spirit of God. They especially supposed so on account of his opposition to the current orthodoxy, and the ungodliness of the religious teachers of the day. Now, who does not see, that when the Church is in a great measure conformed to the world that a spirit of holiness in any man, would certainly lead him to aim the sharpest rebukes, at the spirit and life of those in this state, whether in high or low places. And who does not see that this would naturally result in his being accused of possessing a wicked spirit?

24. That a state of entire holiness implies a state of entire moroseness of temper and manners.

Nothing is farther from the truth than this. It is said of Xavier, whom perhaps few holier men have ever lived, that "he was so cheerful as often to be

accused of being gay." Cheerfulness is certainly the result of holy affections. And sanctification no more implies moroseness in this world than it does in heaven.

25. That entire holiness is inconsistent with any further dependence on Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Now this idea arises out of the very obscure notions, that people have with regard to what constitutes entire sanctification. They seem to suppose, that in sanctification, the Holy Spirit changes the nature, so that men remain holy without any further influence from the Spirit of Christ. Whereas, a state of entire and permanent sanctification is nothing else, than a state of entire and perpetual dependence on Christ, and on the Holy Spirit. It is the state in which the mind throws itself entirely upon the supporting grace of Christ.

REMARKS.

1. From what has been said, you can see the error of those who suppose, we are incompetent witnesses of our own sanctification.

It is true that our testimony may not be satisfactory to others. But still it is true, that so far as we are regarded as honest men, our testimony should be as satisfactory upon this, as upon any other subject. It is a point upon which, we have the testimony of our own consciousness, which is the highest kind of evidence. And we are just as competent witnesses, to testify to our entire sanctification, as that we have any religion at all.

But it is objected, that we may be deceived. True: but is this any good reason why a man should not be a competent witness to that of which he has the testimony of his own consciousness?

But it is said, that many profess sanctification, who are manifestly deceived. Therefore, it is a suspicious circumstance, not to say ridiculous, for a person to profess sanctification. Now this is the very reason urged, by Unitarians, against all spiritual religion. They say, that men may be, and many manifestly are, deceived; and therefore it is ridiculous for men, to profess spiritual regeneration.

Again, it is objected that it is dangerous to preach the doctrine of holiness, because it may lead to deception--that many may, and will think themselves sanctified, when they are not, and will consequently be puffed up with pride, and

fall into the condemnation of the devil. Now, who does not know that this is the very objection to insisting upon spiritual religion at all? And the argument is just as forcible, against our having any knowledge of our being regenerated, as against our knowing that we are entirely sanctified.

2. I said that religion is always a matter of consciousness. This must be true, if religion consists in supreme love to God. If we are not conscious of the supreme affection of the mind, of what are we conscious? And here let me guard you against a mistake. Do not suppose that I mean by this, that every thought, volition, and feeling has God for its direct object, and is an act of supreme conscious love to God. A man may be engaged in transacting some business for God, that may require, for the time being, his whole attention. In this state of mind he cannot be conscious, all the while, that God is the direct object of thought, and affection, for this is not the fact. But he may, all the while, be conscious that he is doing this for God. And that it is the supreme preference of his mind for God, that has engaged him in his present business.

3. True religion does not abrogate the law of God, but fulfills it.

Hence Paul declares, (Rom. 8:4) "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

Here let me remark, that it is a strange infatuated dream, that persons in a sanctified state, are under no obligation to obey the moral law. If they are under no such obligation, then obedience is not virtue. And it is the aggregate of all that is absurd and contradictory; to say that a man is entirely holy, and yet under no obligation to obey law. What is law, but a rule of action; and what is holiness, but conformity to this rule; and what is sin, but a violation of it? Now if the rule is abrogated, then there is neither holiness, nor sin in men, any more than there is in brutes.

It is true, that a person, in a sanctified state, does not obey the law, through fear of the penalty. Nor does he love God, simply because God commands it; but grace gives him such an acquaintance with God, and Christ, as to produce the very spirit of the law, (i.e.) perfect conformity of heart to the law. The very love which the law requires is thus begotten in the mind. Hence the Apostle says, "Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid, yea, we establish the law."

I design to continue this subject in my next lecture, and shall then show more

particularly, that the law of God can never be repealed, or altered.

LECTURE VI.

March 13, 1839

[Back to Top](#)

THE LAW OF GOD--No. 2

Text.--Matt. 22:39: "And the second (commandment) is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

In continuing the discussion of this subject, I design to show:

- I. The real spirit and meaning of this commandment.*
- II. Its tendency, and the natural results of perfect and universal obedience.*
- III. The tendency and natural results of universal disobedience.*
- IV. That it is the universal and unalterable rule of right.*
- V. Wherein it differs from human laws.*
- VI. That every violation of this rule is fraud and injustice.*
- VII. That the public, and to a great extent, the private conscience is formed on the principles of commercial justice.*
- VIII. That the transaction of business upon principles of commercial justice merely, is a violation of the law--rebellion against God--and in a professor of religion, is real apostasy.*
- IX. That restitution must be made, whenever restitution is practicable, in all cases where this law is violated, or there is no forgiveness.*

I. I am to show the real spirit and meaning of this commandment.

1. I will show what the law prohibits.

(1) It prohibits supreme self-love, or selfishness. In my last lecture, I

attempted to show, that the command, "love thy neighbor as thyself," implied, not that we should love our neighbor supremely, as selfish men love themselves; but that we should love ourselves, in the first place, and pursue our happiness, only according to its real value, in the scale of being. But I need not dwell upon this; as it will not probably be doubted, that this precept prohibits supreme self-love.

(2) It prohibits all excessive self-love: (i.e.) every degree of love, that is disproportioned to the relative value of our own happiness.

(3) It prohibits the laying of any practical stress upon any interest, because it is our own.

(4) It prohibits, of course, every degree of ill will, and all those feelings that are necessarily connected with selfishness.

(5) It prohibits apathy and indifference, with regard to the well being of our fellow men.

2. I will show what the law requires.

(1) It requires the practical recognition of the fact, that all men are brethren--that God is the great Parent--the great Father of the universe--that all moral agents, every where, are His children--and that he is interested in the happiness of every individual, according to its relative importance. He is no respecter of persons. But so far as the love of Benevolence is concerned, He loves all moral beings, in proportion to their capacity of receiving, and doing good.

Now the law of God evidently takes all this for granted; and that "God hath made of one blood all nations of men, to dwell on all the face of the earth."

(2) It requires that every being, and interest should be regarded and treated, by us, according to its relative value; (i.e.) that we should recognize God's relation to the universe--and our relation to each other--and treat all men as our brethren--as having an inalienable title to our good will, and kind offices--as citizens of the same government--and members of the great family of God.

(3) It requires us to exercise as tender a regard to our neighbor's reputation, interest and well-being, in all respects, as to our own--to be as unwilling to mention his faults, as to have our own mentioned--to hear him slandered, as to be slandered ourselves. In short, he is to be esteemed, by us, as our brother.

(4) It justly reprobates any violation of the great principle of equal love, as rebellion against the whole universe. It is rebellion against God, because it is a rejection of his authority--and selfishness, under any form, is a setting up of our own interests, in opposition to the interests of the universe of God.

II. I am to show the tendency, and natural effect of universal obedience to this law.

1. The tendency and effect of obedience, is to make the obedient individual happy. The state of mind required by the law, is itself happiness. And if there were but one individual who was obedient, he would be happy, for that reason.

2. But, were obedience universal, the tendency and effect would be the greatest sum of public happiness. Public happiness is made up of the happiness of individuals. Now, as I have said, the universal exercise of the spirit of this law, would make any individual who exercised it, happy. Furthermore, universal obedience implies, that everyone is engaged in making others happy; so that the aggregate amount of happiness, would be made up, not only by the happiness which each one would experience, by conformity to the law; but to this must be added, the vast amount of good from each one endeavoring to make all around them happy.

3. It would destroy all selfish competition among men, and, consequently, all that brood of infernal passions, and all the great and crying evils, that are the legitimate offspring of selfish competition.

4. It would promote a benevolent competition, that would greatly increase public and individual happiness. Take an illustration. Suppose two book-sellers to be actuated by principles of pure benevolence, and one of them should print an edition of the Bible, with a design of furnishing the book, to every person, at as cheap a rate as possible, from motives of pure

benevolence. Now suppose the other could print a cheaper edition, equally valuable, and could thus supply the poor with the bread of life, at a still cheaper rate. Now would not the first of these rejoice in the fact, that the Bibles were afforded at this low rate, even if he should never sell his own? The great object that he had in view, (i.e.) to supply the poor with Bibles, is accomplished, and in a better manner than he could do it himself. And it is easy to see, that in this, he would heartily rejoice.

So with the American, and British and Foreign Bible Societies. Suppose them to vie with each other, in furnishing the world with Bibles, at the lowest possible rate. Now, their object being the same, each would rejoice to be outdone by the other. Thus the competition would be holy, and not selfish. And instead of engendering every infernal passion, it would increase "that love which is the bond of perfectness."

It is easy to see, that perfect obedience to this law, would create a perfect state of society; and for any community to live together, in conformity to this principle, would be heaven itself.

III. I am to show the tendency, and natural results of disobedience.

1. It would cause individual misery, because selfishness is misery. And to say nothing of the internal war and mutiny, that selfishness creates in the mind, it is misery, because it can never be gratified. From the very nature of the case, there could be but one selfish being in the universe, gratified. Nor even one; for did he possess all actual and existing good--did he possess all that is to be possessed--and govern all that are to be governed, instead of satisfying him, it would only "enlarge his desires as hell."

2. It would produce the greatest sum of public misery. Public misery is made up of the misery of the individuals who compose the public. Now each of these is miserable in the exercise of his own selfishness. And where selfishness is universal, and unrestrained, each one is engaged in making all around him miserable. In this state of things, every evil passion would be generated--perpetuated--increased--and perfected. And universal grasping after each other's possessions, would produce universal war. Indeed, it would result in universal hell.

IV. I am to show, that it is the universal and unalterable rule of right.

Because it is founded in the nature and relations of moral beings.

It is universal, because it is entirely suited to the nature of moral beings, in whatever world they may exist.

It is unalterable, because the nature of moral beings is unalterable. And as their nature is unalterable, so are their relations, of course. While these natures and relations exist, even God himself has no right to abrogate this law. He has created these natures, and established these relations; and while they exist, this law must exist, of course.

And here let me say, that any system of religion--any pretended revelation--any scheme of doctrine, that sets aside, repeals, or alters this law, is certainly from hell. No proof can sustain the claims of such a book, or scheme of doctrine, to be a revelation from God.

V. I am to show, wherein it differs from human laws.

And let me begin by saying, that it is one of the first principles of common law, that whatever is contrary to the law of God is not law, (i.e.) is not obligatory upon men. So that the difference between human laws, and the law of God, is not that they are contrary, the one to the other, for, properly speaking, any human enactment, that is contrary to the law of God, is, after all, not law.

The difference lies in the fact, that human laws do not require enough. Their requirements are good, so far as they go, and should be strictly obeyed. But as they fall short of the requirements of God's law, they may be strictly obeyed, without one particle of virtue, or holiness. But to be more particular, I remark,

1. That human laws are of a negative character. They are designed to prohibit outbreaking selfishness; and although they are said, by legal writers, to command what is right, and prohibit what is wrong, yet it will be seen, on close examination, that they are far from prohibiting all that is wrong. And that, in no case, do they require what God's law esteems to be really right. In their prohibitions, they necessarily stop short, at the outward act, without pretending to judge, or restrain the thoughts and affections of the mind, any farther than as they are developed in the outward actions. So that, in every case, all that constitutes the real moral character of the crime, may exist in any mind, without being recognized as a crime by any human law. The moral character lies in the disposition of the mind. But if this

disposition be not acted out, human laws take no cognizance of it.

2. They only prohibit outward acts of selfishness, or the open violation of other men's rights, and do not require even outward benevolence. They leave every man to be as selfish as he will, provided he restrains his selfish conduct within certain limits. Now it is easy to see, that all this falls entirely short of the spirit and letter of the law of God.

3. The law of God is positive. It not only restrains outward, but all inward selfishness. It not only prohibits outward selfish acts, but the inward selfish thoughts and feelings. It regards the outward act as crime, and deserving of punishment, only because it is the result of the inward feelings and affections of the mind. Hence, it aims its prohibitions at the heart, and spreads out its claims over all the movements of the mind.

4. It commands perfect inward and outward benevolence. (i.e.) not only that men should not hate each other, but should love each other as they do themselves--that they should not only abstain from injuring one another, but should positively engage in promoting each other's happiness, to the extent of their ability.

5. Another difference is, that perfect obedience to human laws, would not necessarily secure one particle of happiness. It would only lessen the amount of misery. As we have just seen, there might be perfect obedience to human laws, and yet supreme selfishness exist in every mind. So that perfect obedience, to the wisest and best of human enactments, may consist with a vast amount of individual and public misery.

But, on the other hand, perfect and universal obedience to the law of God, as we have seen, would secure the greatest amount of individual, and public happiness.

VI. I am to show, that every violation of this rule is fraud, and injustice.

1. Because this is the only rule of right. Remember that it is not by human law, but by his own law, that God will judge the world. The question is not, what is fraud, and dishonesty, in the light of human laws; but what is real fraud--what is real injustice? This can only be known, by a reference to the law of God. And every violation of this rule wears upon its front the seal of God's eternal reprobation. It is not enough, in the light of the law of God,

that you abstain from trespassing upon your neighbor's possessions. If you do not actually love him, and love him as you do yourself, you as actually invade his rights and deny him that which is his due, as if you should steal his property. He has as absolute a right to your equal love, as he has to any article of property, which he may have in possession. And you have no more right to withhold the one, than to take the other. You are as much bound to consult his interest, in your dealings with him, as your own; and he has as actual a right to expect you to consult his interests, as well as to consult your own, as he has to expect that you will not steal his money. And to omit the former, is as absolute fraud, and injustice, as to do the latter.

Every violation of this law is injustice, fraud, and dishonesty towards God, and toward every individual in the universe. It is setting aside the rights, and authority of God, and trampling upon the rights of our neighbor. And as all mankind are one family, and have one common interest, to defraud one, is to injure the whole.

VII. I am to show, that the public, and private conscience, is formed on the principles of commercial justice.

By the principles of commercial justice, I mean mere human laws, in relation to human dealings.

In proof of this position, I observe, that men generally satisfy themselves with acting legally, and at most equitably. But the courts, both of law and equity, lay down rules for the government of human conduct, as we have seen, that fall entirely short of the law of God.

By the public and individual conscience being formed on the principles of commercial justice, I do not mean that men are always satisfied, with mere obedience to human laws, for this is far from being true; and many a man feels, in his conscience, what an elder in a Presbyterian church once said to me, "that he was avoiding the payment of his debts, by the public sale of his property, through the finesse of the law."

The truth is, that men often feel as if they were guilty, in the sight of God, when they have acted in strict conformity with human laws. Nevertheless, it is true, to an astonishing, and alarming extent, that men generally, and even professors of religion, content themselves with transacting business in conformity with the

principles of human laws.

VIII. I am to show, that the transaction of business upon principles of commercial justice merely, is a violation of this law--rebellion against God--and in a professor of religion is real apostasy.

1. Because it is setting aside the law of God, and establishing another rule of action.
2. It is a total rejection of the divine authority.
3. This self-constituted rule, with which we blind our mind, and stifle our conscience, only restrains selfishness within certain limits, while it is consistent with the deepest selfishness of heart. Who does not know that the principles of commercial justice are established, to regulate the selfish transaction of business. They are instituted by selfish men, for selfish purposes; (i.e.) they are so framed, as to aid every man, in securing all his selfish ends, so far as is consistent with a certain degree of respect for the selfish pursuits of others.

Now if casting off God's authority be rebellion in any individual, as it really is; in a professor of religion it must be outrageous apostasy.(sic.)

Obedience to God's law is the rejection of all selfishness, and the practical adoption of the principle of universal benevolence. For any individual, therefore, to engage in selfish business, is a total departure from God. And it includes in it, all that really constitutes apostasy.(sic.)

And what is still worse, it adds shameless hypocrisy to apostasy; for while men really apostatize in heart, instead of openly avowing, as in all honesty they ought to do, their rejection of the law of God, they remain in the Church, and keep up a hypocritical show of obedience.

IX. I am to show, that restitution must be made in all practicable cases where this law has been violated, or there is no forgiveness.

This is evident from the fact, that without restitution there can be no repentance. Certainly, in no proper sense, can a man be said to repent, who has defrauded his neighbor, and refuses to make him the satisfaction that is in his power. But without repentance, God has no right to forgive. What would you say, if the

governor should forgive a man who had stolen your money, while he refused to restore it. He has no right to do this; nor has God any right to forgive fraud, and injustice, without repentance and restitution. It would, therefore, dishonor God, and ruin the universe, should he connive at your sins, and not hold you bound to restore your ill-gotten gains.

Now I beseech you to remember, that the restitution demanded of you, is not merely where you have defrauded men at common law, but in every case, so far as you can remember where you have not acted agreeably to the law of God. Wherever you have not consulted your neighbor's interest, equally with your own, in your business transactions, you have been guilty of fraud. God's law has pronounced that transaction dishonest, and unjust, and has aimed its eternal thunders at your head.

REMARKS.

1. The Church can compel the world to transact business upon the principles of the law of God. The Church members often excuse themselves, in the transaction of their worldly business, by saying, that they cannot compete with worldly men, without dealing upon the same principles with them. To this I answer,

(1) That if this were true, then worldly business cannot be engaged in, by men, without absolute ruin to their souls.

(2) But this is not true. It is as far from the truth as possible. Now suppose that professors of religion were universally to transact their business upon the principles of the law of God--consulting, in every instance, the real good of those with whom they deal, as much as they do their own. This would immediately result, in their doing the entire business of the world, or in compelling worldly men to follow their example; for who would trade with a selfish man, who would consult only his own interest, while those were at hand, with whom he might trade with the assurance, that he should not be over-reached, but that the business would be transacted upon principles of entire benevolence?

2. Almost any individual of any calling, may compel those in the same business to conduct their affairs upon the principles of God's law. Let him but adopt this principle, in his own dealings, and he would soon force others to come to the same standard, or drive them to bankruptcy, through loss of business.

3. You can see the desert(sic.) of every act of selfishness--that it includes in it the entire rejection of the authority of God--and a trampling upon the rights of the universe. In this there is certainly infinite guilt, and the desert(sic.) of eternal punishment.

4. You see what is the duty of God in relation to selfishness--that as the Father, and Supreme Executive Magistrate of the Universe, he is bound to punish it in every case, with unsparing severity, where there is not repentance.

5. That the government of God is very little understood in this world. And human law, instead of the law of God, has come to be very generally regarded as the rule of right. This has blinded the world, and the Church, in regard to what real religion is. So that much passes current, among men, for true religion, that is, after all, an entire violation of the law of God. Multitudes in the Christian Church, are regarded as pious men, who are daily transacting business upon principles of entire selfishness.

6. Infidels are always fighting a shadow, and making war, not upon Christianity itself, but on something else falsely called by this name. Where can an infidel be found, who will have the hardihood to object to these two great principles of the government of God? But these constitute the whole of the Christian religion. It is then some corrupt dogma of the Church--the lives of hypocrites--and a spurious representation of the Christian religion, against which they array themselves. But let them march up and object anything, if they can, to the Christian religion, as it is taught in the Bible; and to the government of God, as it is embodied in these two precepts.

7. You see why there is so little conviction, among men, both in and out of the Church. It is because they judge themselves by a false standard. If they live in conformity with human laws, and keep up the morality of public sentiment, they feel in a great measure secure. But be assured that God will judge you by another standard.

8. In the light of this law, how perfectly obvious is it, that slavery is from hell. Is it possible, that we are to be told, that slavery is a divine institution? What! Such a barefaced, shameless, and palpable violation of the law of God authorized by God himself? And even religious teachers, gravely contending that the Bible sanctions this hell-begotten system ?

"O shame, where is thy blush?"

What! make a man a slave-- set aside his moral agency-- treat him as a mere
piece of property--

"Chain him-- and task him,

And exact his sweat, with stripes

That Mercy, with a bleeding heart, weeps

When she sees inflicted on a beast;"

and then contend that this is in keeping with the law of God, which, on pain of death, requires that every man should love his neighbor as himself! This is certainly, to my mind, one of the most monstrous and ridiculous assertions ever made. It is no wonder that slaveholders are opposed to the discussion of this subject. It cannot bear the light-- it retires from the gaze, and inspection, and reprobation of the law of God, as darkness retires before the light.

9. We see the true character of those speculations in provisions, and in the necessities of life, with which the land is becoming filled. The custom of buying up the necessities of life, so as to control the market, and raise the price of provisions, while there is an abundance of them in the country, is a plain and manifest violation of the law of God.

Suppose there were a famine in this land, and a multitude of vessels should be freighted with flour, and sail from Europe to supply the starving population. Suppose the owners to instruct their captains to sell it for five dollars per barrel. And now, suppose certain speculators in New York should receive advices of the arrival of the fleet upon our coast--they charter a boat, and go out and purchase all the flour. And when the fleet comes in sight, the docks, and every passage in the city is thronged with starving people, with their bags, and whatever money they can command to supply their starving families. But on the fleet's coming to anchor, they are informed, that the speculator demands seventy-five dollars per barrel for the flour. In this case, no doubt, the public would set the seal of reprobation, on such an outrage. But how does this differ, in principle, from that which is becoming so common, even among professed Christians, to secure as far as possible, and so as by all means to control the market, the bread stuffs, and to a great extent, the other provisions, throughout the length and breadth of the

land, and then enrich themselves, by selling them at their own prices? Is this loving their neighbor, or is it supreme and horrible selfishness?

In speaking of this speculation in provisions, I have taken it for granted, that they were not in reality scarce; but merely rendered so by speculators controlling the market. But suppose they were really scarce; suppose that a great drought, such as we have had the past summer, should extend throughout the whole land, and produce a universal scarcity of provisions. In this case, it is contrary to the law of God, for those who have them to spare, to increase their price, simply because they are scarce. I say simply because they are scarce, for cases may occur, in which the raising of them may have cost more than in ordinary seasons. I have, for many years, known one man, of whom it is said, that he has practically recognized the principle of the government of God, in his transactions upon this point. When there has been a scarcity of provisions, and of course the prices were greatly increased, he would receive no more than the common prices of articles, when there was no scarcity. If questioned, in regard to the reasons of his conduct, he would simply answer, that they cost him no more than formerly, and what his family did not want, the consumers might have at former prices.

Now the corrupt maxim of businessmen is this, that an article is worth all that it will bring in market; and they will cause it to bring in market just what the necessities of people may compel them to give. So that if the scarcity of an article will permit, they make no conscience of demanding any price for it. Now the real question should not be, what, under the circumstances, may you compel a man to give; but what did it cost, and how cheap can you afford it to him, without injuring yourself more than you will benefit him? For it should be borne in mind, that the law of love requires, that we should afford every thing as cheap as we can, instead of getting as much as we can. The requirement is, that we do all the good we can, to others, and not that we get all we can ourselves. The law of God is, sell as cheap as you can--the business maxim, as dear as you can.

But suppose it should be asked, by what rule am I to be governed, in the sale of an article, when, in the purchase of it, I gave more than it has since proved to be worth? I answer, the loss is yours. You have no right to sell it, or to expect to sell it, for more than its real value, whatever price you may have paid for it.

But here another question may arise. What is the duty of the individual who sold me the property, for so much more than it afterwards proved to be worth? I answer, that he is bound to act upon the law of love. And if, at the time of the

purchase, you and he were both deceived, with regard to the real value, he has a right to receive of you no more than the real ascertained value. But if he will insist upon the wrong, and compel you to pay what you agreed to pay, or not refund what you have already paid, you are, nevertheless, bound to be governed by the law of love, in the sale, and not to ask, or receive, more than its real value.

To illustrate this, suppose that you had purchased a piece of land, under the impression that it contained a mine of gold--that it was sold to you in good faith, both you and the seller supposing that this was the matter of fact. If, afterwards, it should prove that you were deceived--that no such mine existed--and that, therefore, the land is of no more value than any other land, it were contrary to the law of God, for him to insist upon the fulfillment of this bargain--and that you should pay what, under the circumstances, you had agreed to pay.

10. You see the character of those speculations in government lands, that have become so common. The government proposes to sell their lands to those who will improve them, for one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre, designing thereby to encourage the settlement of the country. But speculators rush forth, and purchase all the most eligible locations, and raise the price, and thus retard the settlement of the country. When the laborer, who would cultivate the land, with a small amount of means, comes, he finds that, instead of being able to purchase at the government prices, he must pay ten, twenty, thirty or even one hundred dollars per acre; and that, too, when no improvement has been made by the speculator.

Now it is in vain to attempt to justify this, as some have done, by saying that those lands are really worth what the speculator demands for them. Suppose they are; what right has he to demand that price? He did not design to cultivate the land; and but for him, the laborer might have had it at the government price. Now the violation of the principles of God's law, in this case, is just as manifest, as it would be if my family were starving for a barrel of flour, and I was on the point of purchasing it for five dollars--all the money I had--and a speculator, knowing my circumstances, should forestall me, and buy the barrel, and then demand seventy-five dollars for it; and should say to me, "O sir, it is worth that to you." True, it may be worth that, rather than that my family should starve. But I ask, what right had he to purchase it, and then make this demand?

But for all this, there are many hypocritical excuses urged. Many pretend to be making money for God. This is truly a strange manner of serving God; to rob his

children to give to him--to violate the law of God--to set aside God's authority, for the sake of making money for him.

But, as a general thing, this is a mere pretense; for it is seen to be true, that, in proportion as the speculators grow rich, they increase their expenditures, until men of the greatest wealth, are among the first to complain of poverty, when called upon to give. Now they can never convince mankind, that they are honest, in pretending to be driving their speculations for God, until it is seen, as a matter of fact, that they do not increase their expenditures with the growth of their property, and lay out this money upon their lusts; but that they really appropriate it to benevolent purposes.

But if it were true, as it sometimes may be, that they really intend to appropriate money, obtained in this way, to build up the kingdom of God, still the manner of getting it can never be justified, by the law of God, and can never be acceptable in his sight. Will the end sanctify the means?

11. Much restitution is to be made by speculators, or they must go to hell. Those that have enriched themselves, by speculations that involved a violation of the law of love, must give back all their ill-gotten gains--must renounce their wealth, and render obedience to the government of God or they must be damned.

12. It is very obvious, that many persons have involved themselves in a snare, from which probably they never will escape. They plunged into a series of speculations, and at the time, no doubt, were so blinded by public sentiment, that its utter inconsistency with the law of God, was not seen; and now, when the test is applied, and the law comes to pour its light upon them, they will either hide away in darkness, and strive to conceal the true character of their conduct even from their own eyes; or, seeing it, they will "go away sorrowful, because they have great possessions," and will not make the restitution that the law of God demands.

13. In the light of this subject, you can easily judge what kinds of business are lawful. And that for any person to engage in selling articles that are injurious, is rebellion against God, and a trampling upon the rights of the universe. Such is the sale of alcohol, tobacco and narcotics of every kind, that are used as articles of luxury, or diet. Their sale for these purposes is utterly unlawful. It is no excuse, to say that people will have them, and that you may as well sell them as any body else. I beseech you to remember the words of the Savior: "It is

impossible but that offences should come; but woe unto HIM through whom they come."

14. It is objected, that the adoption of this principle, in the present state of human society, is impossible. To this I reply,

(1) That it is the law of God, and must be adopted, and practiced by you, or you must be damned.

(2) It is the simplest, and most practicable rule of conduct conceivable. To a selfish mind, I grant, it may be a stumbling block; but to a truly benevolent mind, it is, in almost all cases, as plain as sun-light. In those cases where individuals do really love each other, as they love themselves--as husbands and wives, parents and children, do they find any difficulty in the application of this rule? No. And should they extend their benevolent regards to all mankind, and did all mankind recognize their relations to each other, and regard themselves as one family, this rule would be found to be of the easiest application.

15. It is objected, that its application would overturn nearly all the business transactions of the world. It would certainly revolutionize nearly all the business of the world, and produce changes in the state of society, that to most people is wholly inconceivable. As business is now transacted, the more business, the more jealousy, envy, and strife. But were all men really benevolent, they would universally vie with each other, in seeing who could accomplish the greatest good, and produce the greatest amount of human happiness.

16. I said that the government of God was very little understood, in this world. Now it is plain, that a leading object of Jesus Christ, was to put the world in possession of the true spirit and meaning of the law of God. It is astonishing to see how slow of heart, a selfish mind is, to understand the law of God, and the nature of true religion. For a mind, whose whole object is to get, and appropriate to itself all it can, it is difficult to conceive of the nature of that religion which finds its happiness in giving, instead of getting.

The preaching of Christ, but more especially his example, put his followers in possession of the idea, "that it is more blessed to give than to receive." The life of Christ was designed as an illustration of this cardinal principle, that the proper happiness of a moral agent lies in doing good--in denying self, for the benefit of

others. In diffusing happiness, it finds its own happiness.

Now the apostles and early Christians, caught this same idea--preached it--carried it out in living illustration before the world--and it was soon said of them, that they had "turned the world upside down."

If I mistake not, an infidel writer has somewhere attempted to account for the rapid spread of Christianity, in the Apostles' days, by saying, that "it was the natural result of the spirit and conduct of the primitive Christians. They gave themselves up to acts of benevolence, and in laboring for the good of others." Now this is true, and it is also true, that the natural result of this would be, powerfully to influence mankind, in favor of Christianity. But how could he overlook the fact, that such a spirit and temper must be divine?

It is true, as a modern writer has said, that "the Church now, is the exact contrast of the primitive Church." Primitive Christians rushed forth, at the hazard of their lives, and millions of them sacrificed their lives without hesitation, for the salvation of the world. They were seen denying themselves, and offering themselves upon the altar of benevolence, for the salvation of those who were perishing in sin.

But for centuries, selfishness has been the most prominent feature of the church. And instead of sacrificing herself for the salvation of men, she is sacrificing the world, to gratify her own lusts.

17. It is naturally impossible that a selfish church should ever succeed in converting the world. They cannot possibly make the world understand the gospel. The light which they hold up is darkness. Their "salt has lost its savor"--their benevolence is selfishness--their religion is rebellion against God. Suppose Jesus Christ had come, as the Jews expected, as a great temporal prince--living, and reigning in mighty earthly splendor--overawing and subduing the nations--and exterminating his enemies by the sword. Could he, by any precepts whatever, have put the world in possession of the true spirit of religion? Could they have possibly received from him the idea of what constitutes obedience to the law of God? Certainly not. Nor could the Apostles, and primitive Christians, have possibly possessed the world with the right idea of religion, in any other manner, than by offering themselves up a living sacrifice for their salvation. And never can the world be converted--never can missionary enterprises succeed, until true religion is taught in the lives of its professors--until benevolence, and

not selfishness, is exhibited by the church.

18. I beg of you to remember, that this law is to be the rule of judgment, by which all the secrets of your heart, and soul, and life, shall be judged. Do therefore, I beseech you, bring yourselves to the true test--examine yourselves by this rule--decide your former life, and your present character, by inspecting it in the light of this law. You have never embraced the gospel, any further than you are under the practical influence of the law of God. The gospel was designed to annihilate selfishness--to produce true obedience. If it does not produce this result in you, you are lost forever.

Now will you go down on your knees--will you open your heart before God--will you spread this discourse before him--will you be honest, in deciding upon the real character of your business transactions--of your daily life, and walk, and spirit?

Now I urge this upon you, at the conclusion of every lecture, for these truths must be to you "a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death." I beseech you, do not cover up your sins, nor try to avoid the light. It will do you no good to cavil. Truth is truth, whether you receive it or not. And I pray God that you may receive it, so that your whole body, soul, and spirit, may be sanctified through the truth, and preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[Back to Top](#)

Glorifying God

Lecture VII

March 27, 1839

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--I Cor. 10:31: "Whether, therefore, ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

In this discussion, I design to show,

- I. What is to be understood, by the glory of God.*
- II. How we may glorify Him.*
- III. To what extent, we are to apply this rule, in practice.*
- IV. The importance of glorifying God.*
- V. That whatever is short of this, is enmity against God.*

I. I am to show, what is to be understood, by the glory of God.

Theologians speak of the essential, and declarative glory of God.

His essential glory is the intrinsic excellence of his natural, and moral attributes. His declarative glory is his renown, or reputation, or the estimation in which he is held, by moral beings.

It is in the latter sense, that the term is manifestly used, in the text. In the former sense, our conduct has nothing to do with the glory of God. But in the latter sense, as we shall see, it has everything to do with it.

II. I am to show how we may glorify God.

1. By exhibiting his spirit, and temper, and character, as Christ did. The man Christ Jesus was a living illustration of the spirit, and temper, and character of the invisible God. As a man, he was constantly engaged in glorifying God. And it is easy to see, that by thus representing God, he highly honored his Heavenly Father, and gave the world occasion to admire, and love, and obey Him.

2. We are to illustrate, by precept, and example, the excellence of his law, and the glorious tendency of His government. We are to embody in our lives, the very spirit, and meaning of the law, and thus possess the world of the idea, that God is love. It is easy to see to what an extent, this would constrain the world to acknowledge the glorious excellency, of his "glorious majesty."

3. We are to glorify him, by holding forth, both in precept and example, the true light, and doctrines of the gospel. The gospel can never be understood, by precept, without a corresponding example. By precept, we are to lay

down the principle of the law, and our lives are to be a living illustration of it. The truths of the gospel are, in themselves, exceedingly simple. They are, however, at so great a remove from the common prejudices of men, that no truths in the world need so much to be illustrated, in order to be understood; and no illustration can be effectual, but the souls, and spirit of Christians. And herein is the great source of the ignorance of impenitent men, on the subject of religion. Many of them attend the preaching of the word; but to them, it is a mere abstraction--a dead letter, for want of living illustration, among professors of religion, around them. It is impossible that the gospel should take effect, without being understood; and it is impossible that it should be understood, by selfish minds, without illustration; and it is impossible that it should be illustrated, but by the lives of Christians. Hence, Christ's life first illustrated it to the Apostles--the lives of the Apostles and primitive Christians, to the impenitent of their day, and precisely as living illustrations are found, the gospel is seen to be the "power of God unto salvation."

4. By acting the part of faithful witnesses for God. "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord." Now the appropriate business of Christians, is to bear testimony continually for God; and the success of his cause on earth, depends upon the fulness, and faithfulness of their testimony. If his witnesses contradict, by their practice what they inculcate in precept, their testimony is destroyed. If at one time, during a revival of religion, they live, and talk, and act, so as practically to represent God; yet, if they suffer a reaction to come over them, they then contradict their former testimony. And like a witness who contradicts himself, on a cross-examination, their testimony goes for nothing.

III. I am to show, to what extent, we are to apply this rule, in practice.

1. In the arrangement of our business. We are bound to make it manifest to all around us, that our business is calculated, and designed, to promote the happiness of our fellowmen. If this does not appear, we do not represent God; but misrepresent him. It is manifest, that all the works of God, are designed to promote happiness; and if, in our works, the same design is not manifest, we are not glorifying, but dishonoring God. If, therefore, our business be of such a nature, as to show that it is a selfish employment; and especially if the business is, in itself, injurious to the interests of society,

scarcely a greater abomination than this, in a professing Christian, can be named. Is this like God? No; it is like the devil. It is representing hell, and not heaven.

But if the business be in its nature lawful, yet, if it be transacted, in a selfish manner--if it be manifest to those with whom you deal, that your main object is to get, and not to communicate good--to accumulate property, and not to diffuse happiness abroad, this is exactly the reverse of glorifying God. It is a misrepresentation of his character, and religion; and there are no more effectual agents of the devil, than those professors of religion who are selfish in the transaction of their business. God's temper, and spirit is to give, give, GIVE--their spirit, and temper is to get, get, GET. This is the exact contrast of true religion.

2. In our houses, equipage, and furniture, we are to glorify God. We are to so arrange our houses, equipage, and furniture, as to show that our hearts are not set upon these things, and especially to demonstrate that it is utility, and not ornament, at which we aim.

By this, I do not mean, that we are not to regard a correct taste, in these things. God has every where, in his works, displayed a most exquisite, and infinitely refined taste; and to pay no regard to this, is to violate a fundamental law of our nature, and to misrepresent God.

But in our houses, and equipage, and furniture, we are to see to it, that we do not appear to have our hearts upon such things, and as if we sought our happiness in them; but, on the contrary, should show to the world, that we seek those things only, that are convenient, and have no fellowship with display, and useless, and worldly ornament.

There are two extremes, upon this subject, both of which are as ridiculous as they are wicked. One is to launch forth into all manner of extravagance; and the other is to discard all taste, decency, and utility, and rush back to barbarism. Now both these extremes are to be avoided by Christians. While they do not neglect the decencies and conveniences of life, they are to avoid useless display, and ornament.

3. In the furnishing of our tables, we are to glorify God. In this, we are continually to demonstrate, that we are not creatures of appetite--that our

belly is not our God--and that we do not live, like swine, merely to eat and drink. Scarcely anything is more injurious to the cause of Christ, than for Christians to show, that they are fond of high living. This disposition, in some of the primitive professors of religion, greatly distressed the Apostle, and caused him to say, whose "god is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, whose end is destruction." The text expressly enjoins upon us to glorify God, in eating, and drinking. This must respect,

(1) The quality of our food. This should be such, and only such, as is healthful, nutritious, and calculated, in the highest degree, to promote the activity of our bodies, and the clearness, and energy of our minds. It is sin in us to eat and drink those things which we know to be injurious to our health; and the eating and drinking of which violates the laws of life.

(2) In respect to the quantity. We are to eat no more, and no less, than our health requires. It is astonishing to see, to what an extent, mankind are under the government of their appetites, and how much time, and thought, and labor are expended, in procuring something that will gratify their taste, regardless of health, and duty to God, or man. And so much are even some professors of religion, under the influence of a depraved, and artificial appetite, that you can hardly produce a greater excitement, on any subject, than will be created, by calling in question their manner of living, in regard to "meats and drinks." You touch their tea, and coffee--those fashionable narcotics--and you touch the apple of their eye. They are ready to cry out, "the kingdom of God consists not in meats and drinks; but in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Now the quotation of this passage, comes with a very ill grace, from this class of persons; for their practice would indicate, that their living did consist in meat and drink; and their fierce contentions, in support of the gratification of their tastes, would seem to demonstrate that "meat and drink" is, to them, of much more importance than "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Now it is manifest, that for Christians to show that they are creatures of appetite, is exceedingly to misrepresent, and dishonor God. And we are bound, as we value the honor, or regard the authority of God, so to eat and drink, as to show, that we have a higher source of enjoyment, than the pleasure of eating and drinking; and to illustrate

the truth of that saying, "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." In short, it should be manifest, that we eat and drink, not to gratify our palates, but that we may be able, in the best manner. to do the work of God.

4. In the choice of our books, we are to glorify God. Our books are our companions--their authors, the spirits with whom we hold communion; and if a "man may be known by the company he keeps," surely a man's favorite books will tell the story of what is in his heart. Our books, therefore, are always to be chosen with reference to the glory of God--to prepare our minds, in the best manner, to serve Him. They are to be so chosen, as to manifest that we regard the knowledge of God, as infinitely more important than any other knowledge.

Few things are more dishonorable to God, than for a Christian to load down his table, or pollute his closet, with plays and novels, with Shakespeare, Byron and Walter Scott. Are these the spirits with whom Christians are to commune? Do these promote the knowledge of God? Can a Christian make these his favorite companions, and yet make the world believe, that he considers the knowledge of God as of the greatest importance? The Bible represents the knowledge of God as the sum of all that is desirable in knowledge; and declares, that to "know God, is life eternal."

Take the following Bible declarations of the importance of true wisdom; (i.e.) of a knowledge of God, Job 28:12-28: "But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. The depth says, It is not in me; and the sea saith, It is not with me. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it: and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls: for the price of wisdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold. Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears. God understandeth the way thereof, and he

knoweth the place thereof: for he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; to make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure. When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder: then did he see it, and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out. And unto him he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding."

Now can a Christian believe this, and spend his time with novels? He can scarcely give a higher demonstration, that he neither believes, nor loves the Bible, than in choosing such companions for his closet. Certainly it is not paying God a very high compliment, nor attaching much value to a knowledge of him, nor making the impression upon mankind, that divine knowledge is infinitely more important than any other, for Christians to spend their time, in the light, and miscellaneous reading of the day.

5. In all our employments, and spirit, and temper, and conversation--in every thing, we are to glorify God, by exhibiting that which is the very reverse of the spirit, and temper of the world. In other words, in every thing, as fully as possible, to represent God, (i.e.) to glorify Him.

IV. I am to show the importance of glorifying God.

I remark,

1. That God's government is moral, (i.e.) a government of moral suasion, and not of force. Consequently, the stability and strength of this government depend upon His reputation, or the estimation in which his subjects hold him. The devil ruined the world, by shaking the confidence of our first parents, in God. While their confidence continued, their obedience was perfect; and thus it always is. Perfect confidence naturally secures perfect obedience in the subjects of any government, while distrust, or unbelief, certainly, and necessarily results in disobedience.

2. That unconverted men and women, form their opinions of religion, by the lives and temper of professing Christians. Now it is as important, that your lives and temper, should be just what they ought to be, as that their opinions of God, should be just what they ought to be. Their hearts cannot be right, unless their opinions are right, and as their opinions depend upon your lives, if you sin, and exhibit a wrong spirit, you are not only

chargeable with all the sin which you thus cause; but their blood will be required at your hands.

3. The efficacy of Christ's death, depends on your living in such a manner, as to illustrate its design. Unless your life is full of love--unless you breathe the spirit, and exhibit the temper, that led Christ to die for sinners, you misrepresent him--contradict the gospel--and throw a cloud of impenetrable darkness around the cross of Christ.

If, on the contrary, you exhibit disinterested love, in all your life, you will be a living illustration of the spirit of the glorious gospel, and will thus glorify God.

4. That Christians under God will save, or ruin the world, and that, in proportion as they live for the glory of God, or not, Christ represents them as "the light of the world," as "the salt of the earth." Thus plainly teaching, that if their "light be darkness," and their "salt have lost its savor," the world must sink down to hell in darkness.

V. I am to show that whatever is short of this, is enmity against God.

1. Because it is slandering God. For a professor of religion to misrepresent God, is to do his utmost to dethrone him. It is the highest influence that can be brought against any government, to misrepresent and slander it. It is by slander, and falsehood that Satan has always maintained his influence in this world. Whoever then misrepresents, and slanders God, is in league with the devil, against God.

But none are so efficient agents of the devil, as inconsistent professors of religion. They are enemies, in the camp. They are God's professed children, and it is taken for granted, that they know God, and that their testimony may be relied on; and as they are God's own witnesses, if they testify against, and misrepresent him, his cause must fail. It is more injurious than the slander of a legion of devils. It is by no means true, as some have supposed, that Satan wishes to have every body openly wicked. The testimony of one worldly professor, is more influential, in favor of Satan, than that of a host of infidels. He would, doubtless, be glad to have all men professors of religion, if they would be inconsistent enough to misrepresent, and thus betray God.

Now there is no neutral ground upon this subject. Christ has said, "he that is

not with me, is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." It is impossible, that you should not in all your life, and walk, and spirit, either honor, or dishonor God. Your whole spirit, and temper, and deportment, are watched, and scrutinized, by those around you; and inferences are continually drawn, either in favor of, or against the God you profess to worship.

2. He who does not live to the glory of God, is the common enemy of the universe. Just as he is the common enemy of any government, who sets himself to slander, betray, and ruin that government.

REMARKS.

1. You see why God is represented, in the Bible, as seeking his own glory, as a thing of the highest importance to the universe. Infidelity has objected to the idea of God's seeking his glory, as if, in this, he was proud, and jealous, and ambitious, of being esteemed. But when it is understood, that by his glory is meant his reputation, it is easy to see, that in a moral government of such an extent, and duration as his, the estimation in which the great head of the government is held, by the subjects, is of infinite importance. And should he not pursue his glory, as of the greatest good, he would not estimate things according to their real value.

This text lays down an easy rule, by which to judge of the lawfulness of any employment, in which we propose to engage. If it is business, the question is, is it such an employment as Christ would engage in, under the circumstances? Is it that kind of business, in which you can reasonably expect to represent, and honor God?

If any amusement invites us, the question is easily settled. Should anyone see me engaged in it, would it be honorable to God, and fairly represent the spirit of his religion?

2. We are not only bound to live to the glory of God, but to choose those employments, and pursue them, in that manner, which will best glorify God. We are to inquire, for what employment we are best suited--in what way we can not only do good, but do the most good! And when we have understood ourselves--our adaptedness, and calling to any employment, we are cheerfully, and with all our hearts, to engage in it, for the glory of God.

3. Herein may be seen the true point of distinction, between real saints, and hypocrites. The true Christian loves God supremely, God's honor, and glory, are of course, dearer to him, than any thing, and every thing else. He just as naturally devotes himself to the glory of God, and lives only for that end, as a man naturally pursues that in which he has supreme delight. If a man is not conscious that this is the end for which he lives--that the glory of God, is dearer to him than all things else, he certainly has not the spirit of God, and it is preposterous to call himself a Christian.

Now right over against this is the hypocrite. He professes to live for the glory of God; but yet he certainly knows, or ought to know, by his own consciousness, that if he seeks God's glory at all, it is with him a subordinate, and not a chief end. He knows full well, if he will be honest with himself, that selfishness lurks in all the religion he has. Instead of having a strong, and permanent consciousness, that he is living for God, the most that he can say is, he hopes he is thus covering up his hypocrisy.

4. From this subject, it is easy to see, how shocking and abominable, are the pretensions of many professing Christians. How many of them are engaged in employments, in which they cannot hope to glorify God, and can make no such pretension, without rendering themselves ridiculous.

5. Public sentiment seems to have restricted the obligation of this rule to ministers. They are expected to live for the glory of God. Every body feels, that a minister, in his particular employment, should aim at the glory of God. And should a minister engage in many branches of business in which laymen think it lawful for themselves to engage, it would shock common sense.

It is wonderful to see, that where selfishness does not blind them, how ready men are to form right opinions. Previously to the commencement of the Temperance Reformation, I recollect of having heard of a minister, who, by ill health, or for some other cause was prevented from preaching; and for the maintenance of his family, he established a grocery, in which he sold alcohol. This was, even then, universally reprobated. It seemed to shock the common sense of the whole community. And yet multitudes of laymen, and even Christian laymen, were engaged in the same employment, without supposing themselves to be doing anything wrong.

Now why should the operation of this rule, be thus, by public sentiment,

restricted to ministers? It certainly cannot be, unless salvation is also restricted to them. Every man is as much bound to observe this rule, as a minister; and the same reasons that make it obligatory upon a minister, make it obligatory on every man. Now you would say, and say truly, that a minister was no Christian--that he could not be saved, if, in his employment, he did not aim at the glory of God--if his main object was to support his family, under the pretense of complying with the command, to provide for his own household, you would say, that he could not be saved. Now a minister may have, and is bound to have, just as much respect to the maintenance of his family, as any other man may lawfully have to the maintenance of his. But neither has any right to pursue any worldly object, or any heavenly objects whatever, as an end, other than the glory of God. Every man, who has a family, is bound to make the maintenance of his family one of the ways, and one of the means of glorifying God. But to pursue this as an end, is ruin and death.

6. Every man is bound to pursue that employment to which he is called of God, as much as a minister is.

He is bound to be as careful, and diligent, in ascertaining his duty, and mark the leadings, and providences of God, in relation to his employment for life, as a minister is; and he has no right to pursue any business, to which he is not called, by the Providence, and Spirit of God, any more than a minister has, to preach without such a call.

7. It seems sometimes as if nearly all the laymen in the Church, must go to hell. You find them driving in different directions, and pursuing almost every kind of business, and, in great multitudes of instances, without the least pretense, that they were ever called to that particular employment, by the Spirit, or Providence of God.

I, some time since, asked a lawyer, if he supposed God called him to that particular employment, and if he engaged in it from such motives, as he supposed a minister ought to engage in the work of the ministry. He frankly said, "No." "How then," I inquired, "can you be saved? Are you not bound to live for the glory of God, as much as any minister? Are you not living in the habitual neglect of known duty? Is not the whole tenor of your life selfishness, and a palpable violation of the commandment of God?" In the light of this text, he could not deny, that it was so. Now there are hundreds, and thousands of such laymen, in the Church. They know themselves to be pursuing courses of life,

from such motives as they would utterly condemn, in a minister. And they would judge, and rightly judge, that he had no religion at all. Know then, assuredly, that in your employment, whatever it is, unless you have such an eye to the glory of God, as you know a minister ought to have, in his employment, you cannot be saved.

8. From this subject, you can see the great wickedness of dishonoring God, in our methods of obtaining property, under the pretense that we shall devote it to benevolent purposes. Unless we get money, in a manner which is honorable to God, it is in vain to pretend to make any amends, for the manner of getting it, by the use we make of it.

9. You see how absurd and wicked it is, to engage in any business, that is dishonorable to God, for the purpose of paying debts. Because it is dishonorable to God to be in debt, some persons will engage in employments that violate the law of love, and trample on God's commandments, for the sake of getting money to pay their debts. Now why not as well steal to pay your debts, or engage in highway robbery, or piracy? It is as absolute a violation of the law of God, to obtain property by any selfish means, as to steal, or engage in piracy.

10. Every pretended conversion, that does not result in shaping the man's business, and life, and spirit, in conformity with this precept, is a spurious conversion. Have you seen a man engaged in the selfish transaction of any business, and does he profess conversion? Now mark me, if one of the first fruits be not the reformation of his business, that man is deceived. If his business was unlawful in kind, he will renounce it altogether. If the fault was in the manner of transacting a business, lawful in its kind, he will instantly reform the manner. And it is an outrage to common sense, to call that man a Christian, the secret of whose life, and thoughts, and especially whose business transactions are not turned manifestly into the channel of glorifying God.

11. The same is true of those seasons of religious awakening, in which great multitudes profess conversion to God. If the fruits of these excitements fall short of the principle laid down in this text--if it does not break up, and reform the business transactions of selfish men, no matter how great their excitement of mind may have been--they have, after all, fallen short of true conversion--they have not yet taken the first step in religion, and do not yet understand in what it consists.

12. Since my last lecture was written, a question has been proposed to me, by a brother, an answer to which may well be given here. It is, Does the law of love, when applied to business transactions, require that a man should merely support his family, by his business, and have nothing more, or less, reserved to himself? I answer,

(1) That the support of a man's family is not to be the end at which he aims; but, as I have already said, the support of ourselves, or families, is to be regarded by us, as one of the means of glorifying God.

(2) That the support of ones-self, or family, is by no means to be the criterion, by which we are to be governed in the transaction of business, (i.e.) whatever it may cost to support ourselves, or families, is not to regulate the prices, at which we are to buy or sell. If a man should keep one cow, and under the pretense of her being the support of his family, should attempt to sell milk at two shillings per quart--this certainly would not be lawful, any more than keeping one hen, and attempting, under the pretense of supporting his family, to sell eggs for one dollar each, would be lawful. The truth is, that no man has a right to attempt to support himself, or family, in such a way as this.

So, on the other hand, if a man be engaged in an extensive business, the amount of his necessary expenditures, in the maintenance of his family, is not to be the criterion by which he is to be governed, in his established prices. But in buying, and selling, he is to have the same regard to the interest of every individual, with whom he trades, as to his own. He is to sell as low as he can, without injuring himself, more than he benefits others. And the amount of what he makes must depend upon the amount, and nature of his business.

Suppose a wholesale merchant to employ an immense capital, and perform a vast amount of business, and suppose him to supply one hundred country merchants with goods, and in this suppose him to consult the good of each, equally with his own. In this case, the aggregate of his income would be equal to the aggregate of all their income together. So that, in fact, he might become very rich, and have it in his power, to exercise great hospitality, and greatly promote benevolent objects, and still consult every man's interest, with whom he trades, equally with his own.

13. Here another question may be, and has been recently asked. It is said, if

every man is bound to sell so low, as to consult every customer's interest, equally with his own, then those who have a small capital cannot live, by their business. To this I answer,

That no man has a right to live, by business, by which he cannot support himself, and transact it, upon the principle of the law of God.

I was asked, the other day, this question: Suppose a certain man, in the employment of an immense capital, should conduct his business upon the principle of the law of God; and, in consulting his customers' interests as much as his own, should undersell those of smaller capital, or sell at prices so low that they would become bankrupt, in attempting to support their families, at these prices? Now, in this case, it is said the man of great capital, would ruin the business of all the rest. To this I reply,

It is every man's duty to benefit the public as much as possible. And if one man can supply the market, at a lower rate, than others, he ought to supply it, and no others have a right to complain. Individuals, and their families, are not to be supported at the expense of public, and higher interests. If other individuals cannot afford to act upon the law of love, their business ought to cease. And they are bound to engage in some employment, in which they can conform themselves to the law of God. The very question I have been answering, is founded upon the supposition, that every man has a right to engage in any particular calling, and support his family by it, whether consistent, or inconsistent with the public good. But this is the direct reverse of the truth.

If one man, therefore, is so circumstanced, that he can supply the whole demand, in any market, more advantageously to the public, than another, he not only has a right, but is bound to do so; and the other is under obligation to retire.

Another question has been proposed, (viz.) If persons are to sell, as cheap as they can, without injuring themselves, more than they benefit those with whom they deal, would not their profits be so small as to prevent their accumulating property with which to do good? Now this is indeed a strange question. If a man is living, and conducting business, upon the principles of the law of God, or of love, he is all the time, doing good upon the largest scale possible. And can it be imagined, that he would really do more good, by overreaching his customers, for the sake of giving his property to others? Shall a man do injustice to one man, and violate the law of God, for the sake of giving to another man? As well might

a man steal, to give to the poor, or support the gospel, under the pretense of doing good, as in any other respect, to violate the law of love, for the sake of acquiring property, to do good with. It should be understood, that the man who lives, and feels, and acts, and transacts business upon the principles of the law of God, is continually doing all the good in his power. He is diffusing more happiness, by far, than if he were grinding the faces of his customers one day, to give to some benevolent object the next.

It is as ridiculous, as it is wicked, for a man to violate the law of benevolence, under the pretense of having something to give away. Suppose that every man were conformed to the law of love; then every man would be continually doing all that he possibly could do, for benevolent objects. And in such a case, where would be the necessity of one man laying up money, to give to these objects? He is giving, as fast as he receives, to benevolent objects. The fact is, that, in such a case, the coffers of all benevolent institutions would immediately overflow. The ice that has so long locked up the channels of love, would be universally dissolved, and the streams of light, and life, and love, would flow on, until what are now commonly called objects of charity, and benevolence, could not be found.

14. I have often been led to inquire, in what do Christians of the present day, suppose religion to consist? It seems as though they thought it consisted in praying in their closets--reading their Bibles--attending church on the Sabbath--and occasionally giving something for the support of the institutions of religion. Now religion consists, in no one, nor in all these things together. And millions of such things would not make a particle of true religion. Religion consists in the true benevolence of the heart. Not a mere desire to do good, but a willing good--a benevolence that controls the conduct--that is, active, blessed, god-like.

15. To glorify God, is the only object for which you have any right to live, for one hour. And you can live for no other purpose, with the least reasonable hope of being saved. If this be not the end, and object of your life, I forewarn you, that your hope will perish "in the giving up of the ghost."

16. And now, beloved, let me ask you, have you ever laid your all upon the altar, and rendered yourselves, a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God?

Is it your daily prayer, and constant endeavor, to be used all up with the most divine economy for God?

Do you husband your time, your strength, your all, in such a way as to make the most of your influence for the promotion of the glory of God?

Is it really in your heart to live, and die for Him?

Are you willing--nay, are you supremely desirous, and are you conscious of this desire, to live, or die--to be sick, or well--rich, or poor, or in any other circumstances, that will make the most of you, and use you up with the greatest economy for God?

Do those with whom you sit at table, see that you eat and drink for the glory of God--that you have made yourself acquainted with dietetics, so far, at least, as to exclude whatever is injurious?

Do you prove to them, by the quantity, and quality, of your food, that you are not a creature of appetite--that you live, not to eat, but eat to live, and live to glorify God? "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

[Back to Top](#)

Professor Finney's Letter
of April 10, 1839

from "The Oberlin Evangelist" Publication of Oberlin College

Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

TO THE CHRISTIAN READERS OF
"THE OBERLIN EVANGELIST"

Beloved:

The object of this letter is to state a little more definitely than I have thitherto done some of the reasons why young converts have not grown in grace more, and why I have feared, as I said in a former letter, that revivals would become more and more superficial till they would finally cease.

I have from my earliest conversion been led to notice more and more particularly the fact that there are four classes of professors in the church.

The first class seems to have had very little conviction of sin, and consequently there is not light enough in their experience; that is, they have not experience enough so to understand the Bible as to be able, under God, to convict others of sin. They pass along, and nearly their whole lives seem to be worse than useless so far as the interests of religion are concerned.

A second class seems to have had frequent and deep conviction of sin but appear never to have been truly regenerated. They understand the Bible measurably on the subject of depravity, so as to be able under God to bring others under conviction and distress of mind; and here they stop. They rarely if ever are instrumental in the regeneration of a sinner. Having no experience on the subject of conversion themselves, they are all in the dark. And when the inquiry is made by an anxious sinner, "What shall I do to be saved?"-- although they may give him directions in the language of Scripture, yet as a matter of fact they cannot so answer his inquiries and shape their directions and remove his difficulties as to bring him into the kingdom of God. This class is very numerous. And I have been astonished to find how seldom it is that professors of religion know what to say to anxious sinners. From long and close observation, I am led to believe that the difficulty lies in their total want of *experience* on the subject of regeneration.

The third class have been really converted and understand the way through the gate of regeneration well enough to direct others. Knowing themselves what it is to be converted, thus far they can go with sinners. They know measurably how to use the law to produce conviction, and enough of the atonement and of Christ as a justifying Savior instrumentally to bring sinners fairly into the kingdom; for in this they have personal experience.

But they have gone no further than this. Their time and thoughts and lives have been employed with these two classes of truths-- the law, and so much of the gospel as to produce conversion. They have, though, advanced no further than "the first principles of the oracles of God." They continue to lay again and again "the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptism and the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment." They go round and round in the circle of these first principles of the doctrine of Christ and never "go on to perfection," either in doctrine or in practice.

Hence, having never given their attention to those higher and more spiritual truths of the gospel which are the more appropriate food of the Christian soul and indispensable to his growth in grace, they make little or no progress in holiness and often in a few years become mechanical in their efforts to convert sinners. Their spirit, not being sweetened by deep and constant and increasing intercourse with Christ, becomes bitter and censorious. They know very little what to say to an anxious Christian struggling against remaining sin. Let them be consulted by a Christian who has made any considerable attainments in piety and who understands measurably the plague of his own heart and is panting after the utter annihilation of sin in all its forms and to be raised up "to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," and they are in the dark. They will generally insist upon such persons going to work for the conversion of sinners [and] reproach them with not being at work for God and for thinking so much about themselves and their own sins. The fact is, they are in the dark in regard to the real state and necessities of such persons. This state of mind is entirely beyond their experience. They seem to be totally destitute of that to which Paul refers in 2 Cor. 1:3-6: "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation."

Here the Apostle found that God gave him deep Christian experience and comfort that he might be able to understand the distresses and administer comfort to those in like circumstances.

Now as a general thing I do not believe it is possible for a Christian to go much beyond his own experience in administering the consolations of the gospel or in removing the difficulties that obstruct the paths of others. Even Christ himself was, in this respect, made perfect through sufferings; "for in that he hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succor those that are tempted." The New Testament, and especially the Epistle to the Hebrews, seems plainly to recognize this truth that Christ having been in the flesh "and tempted in all points like as we are" is thereby qualified to sympathize with us, because he "can be touched

with the feelings of our infirmities." It seems plain from the very nature of mind that in order to lead others, we ourselves must be acquainted with the way; and it is alarming and affecting to see how few Christians there are in the church who have experienced enough to direct those who are struggling after high attainments in piety. Whenever a teacher attempts to go beyond his own experience, he becomes a blind leader of the blind.

This class of converted Christians who are able, at least for a time, to labor successfully for the conversion of others, without ever having grown much in grace themselves and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, has been much increased during the great revivals.

The fourth class, and I am constrained to say that they are comparatively few, have learned so much of Christ as a *sanctifying* as well as a *justifying* Savior, have drunk so deeply at the fountain-head of love and of the waters of the sanctuary, as to be able not merely to direct an inquiring *sinner* but an anxious *Christian*. I have always observed that this class of Christians feel peculiarly solicitous for the weak lambs of the church. The weak and stumbling and God-dishonoring state of the church is what most peculiarly afflicts them. Their compassions are greatly moved when they behold the haltings, complainings, anxieties and follies of the church.

Now it seems to me that there is something in the history of Paul that ought to be instructive to the church on this subject. He seems to have spent a number of years almost exclusively in the conversion of sinners and in the establishment of churches. But during his confinement at Rome and in the latter part of his ministry, he appears to have had his attention turned particularly to the subject of strengthening the church. And it is very edifying to see in all his epistles this prominent feature of his character: a great solicitude to promote growth in grace among Christians. It is not to be supposed that he omitted to labor for the conversion of sinners. But it is, I think, manifest beyond all dispute that his mind was mainly engrossed with the sanctification of the church. And it is evident from his epistles that he did not believe that the church would ever be sanctified merely by pressing them to labor exclusively for the conversion of sinners or by dwelling upon that particular class of subjects that were denominated by him "the beginning of the doctrine of Christ." His letters were, I think, undeniably designed to lead Christians into a fuller knowledge of Christ, in all his relations--to the necessity, means and practicability of entire sanctification. The same

seems to have been true of all the apostles whose epistles have come down to us.

But I have made so many preliminary remarks that I must omit my main design, that is to notice some of the reasons why converts have not grown more in grace, till my next.

C. G. FINNEY

A Servant of the Lord Jesus Christ

[Back to Top](#)

True and False Peace

Lecture VIII

April 10, 1839

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Psalm 119: 165: "Great peace have they, who love thy law; and nothing shall offend them."

In this lecture, I design to show,

I. What we are to understand by law, in this passage.

II. What it is to love the law of God.

III. That the natural result of this love is great, and constant peace of mind.

IV. That nothing shall offend them, that love the law of God.

V. Notice a delusion upon this subject ,that is very common among professed Christians.

I. I am to show, what we are to understand by law, in this passage.

Law is the revealed will of the lawgiver. The whole revealed will of God, is to be

understood as his law, however that revelation is made--whether in the Bible--in the Providence--or by the Spirit of God. The term law, as used in this Psalm, and very often in the Bible, is doubtless to be understood, in this extended, and indeed its most proper sense.

In a more restricted sense, all the commandments of God, are to be considered as His law. And in a sense still more limited, the ten commandments are his law. And these, again, are condensed into the two precepts, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself."

But God's will--his whole will--is His law. And whenever this will is revealed, in any way whatever, it becomes binding on us. So that when we are informed, by his word, or Providence, that anything is agreeable to the Divine will, that is to settle the question, with us, and we are sweetly to acquiesce in it.

II. I am to show, what it is to love the law of God.

It is a disinterested preference of the will of God--a preferring, with all our heart, that the will of God, whatever it is, should be done; because it is holy, wise, and good. It is not the making a virtue of necessity, and yielding by constraint, because resistance will do no good--but it is the mind's supreme choice, that God's will shall be done, on earth, as in heaven. It is a sweet, and entire complacency in the will of God, however that will may be revealed. It is that state in which the mind continually cries, and echoes, and reechoes, "thy will be done, on earth, as it is done in heaven." It is a supreme, and sweet delight in whatever is the will of God, because it is his will. It is not that forced submission of the mind when it is prostrated, and the will broken down, by absolute agony. But it is a sweet and heavenly rest, in the will of God--a spontaneous gushing forth of the heart, that meets, and responds, Amen, to all the will of the blessed God.

III. I am to show, that the natural result of this love is great, and constant peace of mind.

By peace, I do not mean indifference, or that quiet of the mind, that results from diverting the attention, from that which had before agonized it.

Peace is opposed to war. A war of mind is a state of mutiny, where the heart, and conscience, and perhaps other powers of the mind, are in conflict with each other. The heart chooses what the conscience condemns; and the conscience

demands what the heart refuses. And the emotions, in such cases, may be thrown into a state of great excitement, and agitation, filling the mind with agony, and every hateful passion.

Now peace is the opposite of this state of mind--not the mere absence of it--not the mere absence of agony, and inward mutiny; but a delightful, and sweet harmony, in the exercise of all the powers of the mind. The will, and the conscience are at one--the heart sweetly choosing, and delightfully reposing, in that which is agreeable to the decisions of the conscience--and the conscience, as it were, sweetly smiling approbation upon the decisions of the will--and the emotions flowing, like a gentle stream let, in delightful accordance with both the conscience, and the heart.

This is far from being a mere negative, or quiescent state of mind, which is often mistaken for peace. It is a positive, active, and heavenly state of mind. It is a wakeful, and deep composure of the soul, like the deep, pure, calm ocean; clear, composed, and heavenly. It is a state of mind far better understood, by experience, than described in words. It is "the peace of God, that passeth understanding." This peace have they, that love the law of God. To show this, let me observe,

That in this state of mind, they certainly can know, no resistance to whatever they discover to be the will of God. And whatever desires they may have, or prayers they may make, in relation to any particular event--when, by any means, they are led to understand, the will of God, respecting that event, they joyfully acquiesce. We have an illustration of this, in the case of David, who mourned sorely, when his child was sick. He "besought God for the child, and fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth;" for he said, "who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live?" But as soon as the child was dead, and he was thereby informed, what the will of God was, "he arose from the earth, and washed, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped, and said, I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

This peace will be a great peace; (i.e.) it will extend to every providence, and to all the will of God. How can it be otherwise, if the heart is in such a state, as to have a supreme preference for his will? What can occur, in such a state of mind, that shall break, or disturb, its deep repose in God?

IV. I am to show, that nothing shall offend, or stumble those that love the

law of God.

You will observe, that in the margin, it is written, they shall have no stumbling block; (i.e.) that they shall so acquiesce in all the will of God, as not to stumble, and fall into rebellion, on account of anything revealed in the Bible, or, on account of any Providence of God.

By this, is not meant, that persons in this state of mind, can know no such thing as sorrow, or distress. Various things may occur, to disturb the emotions of the mind, while the heart, or will is as undisturbed, as the great deep of the ocean. We have an illustration of this, in the great agony of Christ in the garden. His conflict was so severe, and the excitement of his emotions so great, that "he sweat great drops of blood." And yet, it was manifest, that his heart, or will, was firmly settled, to do the will of God--as unmoved as the everlasting mountains. His will was not disturbed, or shaken. And, in this respect, his peace was undisturbed; and while he cried out, in the anguish almost of death, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me," --the deep steadfastness of His heart, in the will of God, concluded every time, "not as I will, but as thou wilt." Here was an instance of great desire existing for a certain blessing, and yet the will most steadfastly clinging to the will of God.

Now, when I said above, that the peace spoken of in this text, includes the harmonious action of all the powers of the mind, I did not mean, certainly, that the emotions, which are involuntary states of mind, are always at rest, or composed. They generally accord with the state of the will. But sometimes circumstances occur, as in this case of Christ, when the emotions or desires, are greatly excited, while the will remains unshaken. Nor is this to be considered as really disturbing the peace of mind. These are accidental, or perhaps more properly, providential fluctuations of the involuntary powers of the mind. And the emotions may be exceedingly joyous, without any true peace, as they often are in fits of laughter, and merriment.

So they may, on the other hand, be painful, and agonizing, without breaking up, or affecting the deep repose of the will, as was manifestly the case with Christ. When the will is at rest in the will of God, the emotions will sweetly acquiesce, unless it be in cases of strong temptation and trial, as in the case of Christ, and David, just mentioned. But in such cases, a Christian's sorrows may be stirred, and yet their peace, properly speaking, remain unbroken. So a Christian, who loves the law of God, may be exercised with great compassion for sinners--with

deep travail of soul for Zion--with distress, and indignation at sin--and in many ways the surface of the mind, as it were, may be ruffled, while, like the ocean, its deep fountains are unmoved.

The text says, "they have great peace, who love thy law, and nothing shall offend" [or stumble] "them." Nothing can occur, that can throw them into a state of discontent, or repining at God. They shall not be disappointed in anything. Dr. Payson could say, "he had not known what disappointment was, since he had given up his own will."

To love the law, or will of God, is to have our will submerged in his will--to have no will of our own, separate from his; but to will with all our heart, that his will should be done. Now this state of mind absolutely precludes a state of discontent, resistance, repining, or disappointment at the revealed will of God. Nothing certainly can occur, which is not, upon the whole, according to the will of God; (i.e.) he has either actively brought it about by his own agency, or seen it wise, upon the whole, not to prevent its being accomplished, by the agency of others. So that whatever is, is upon the whole, "according to the counsel of his own will;" (i.e.) he, upon the whole, prefers its being just as it is, to such an alteration of his providential, and moral government, as to have brought about a different result. The enlightened Christian that knows this, and every Christian who can be truly said to love the law of God, is enlightened enough to know this, will find, as a matter of fact. that nothing shall offend, or stumble him.

V. I am to notice, a delusion upon this subject, that is very common among professing Christians.

The delusion consists in their obtaining a false peace, from time to time, by a natural process of mind, which they do not seem to understand. In an impenitent state, the heart is selfish, and the conscience and heart are opposed to each other. Instead of their being at one, and thus creating a great calm and peace in the mind, there is often a great conflict--the conscience sternly demanding, and insisting upon sacrifices, which the heart is unwilling to make. It is often the case, that the conscience continues to distress the mind, and press the will with its claims, until, from some consideration purely selfish, the heart will yield one point after another, and thus afford the mind a temporary relief. Suppose (e.g.) the conscience to upbraid the mind with the indulgence of any particular form of sin. This throws the mind into distress, and in its agony, it casts about for relief. Suppose the sin to be intemperance. It is easy to see, that the mind, in

contemplating the subject, may see a great many reasons for yielding the point, and giving up intemperance, and it may be yielded, and intemperance really abandoned, from any other, and every other consideration, than love to the will of God, and hatred of sin, as such. Now if the point is yielded, from whatever motive, although true peace does not follow, yet a natural reaction takes place in the mind, which is often mistaken for peace. Thus when anything is proposed, and pressed upon the heart, which it resolutely resists, the tendency is to throw the mind into an agony. But if the point is yielded, there is naturally induced a quiescent state of mind, and sometimes a verging to the opposite extreme of joyousness, which, though a common fact, does not seem to be generally understood.

Perhaps some of you have witnessed a case of this kind, where a proposal of marriage has been made to a lady, on many accounts highly honorable, and advantageous; but to which her heart is strongly opposed, either from a want of interest in the person, or on account of a pre-existing attachment. Now if the proposal be pressed, by the person himself, and by her friends--urging considerations upon her as inducements to consent, she becomes agonized--can neither eat nor sleep; and in her distraction casts about for relief, until overcome by argument, and persuasion, and flattery, and appeals to her ambition, she consents. Now the will is carried, but not from proper motives. The conflict ceases, and a natural reaction of the mind takes place. A calm ensues, that verges towards sweetness, and affection, for her admirer, and complacency in the proposal. But still he is not the object of her choice. It is not love to him, but other considerations that have influenced the will. Now as soon as they are united, and his will comes to be the rule of her action, she will discover her mistake, and find that it was a forced submission. And not loving her husband, it is impossible for her to be at peace. At every turn, she will find her will opposing his will. And conscience--a regard for reputation--or some other like inducement, must force submission from time to time, after a protracted and agonizing struggle.

Now this is exactly the conduct and character of many a convicted sinner, who obtains a false hope, and many a deceived professor of religion. Enlightened by the Spirit, conscience gives them no rest. Their distress increases till a forced submission is produced. The fear of punishment--the hope of pardon--a desire for peace, and the consolations of the gospel, and many other selfish inducements, may come in to influence the will, till there is a forced submission

of some point, upon which the mind is particularly pressed. Perhaps it is the duty of family prayer, which the mind is resisting--perhaps it is the confession of some sin--the making restitution--the taking an anxious seat--attending a meeting of inquiry, the opening the mind to a minister, or something of this kind. Now when inducements are held out to yield this point, instead of the character of God being so presented as to make the mind fall in love with Him, it is plain, that multitudes of selfish considerations may cause the mind to yield, when, after all, it has no knowledge of God, and no love to him--when the mind is as far as possible from true repentance, or faith, or love to God, or man. Conscience has forced the will upon such a dilemma, that it has yielded the point, yet from selfish considerations--it has not at all changed its attitude toward God--it has only substituted one form of selfishness for another. When driven to desperation, and looking all around for peace, it has taken sanctuary in yielding the point--from some selfish motive.

Now it often occurs, that when a sinner sits upon his seat, and a call is made for the inquirers to come forward, as soon as he makes up his mind to go, from whatever motive, his distress leaves him. He felt a desperate struggle, till the question was decided; but as soon as the decision was made to go, although it was the anxious seat, and not God, or Christ, that was in all his thoughts, perhaps he became calm--he felt as if a mountain weight had rolled off from his soul. Now how natural for him to mistake the calm, which is the legitimate effect of a reaction in his mind, for the peace of God. He has yielded the point that occasioned so great a struggle. Others have gone to the anxious seat, and obtained hopes. He knew he was kept back by pride. His conscience, and reason, and a thousand inducements clustered around him, and bade him go, if peradventure he might be blessed. Now while the pride of his heart resisted, there would of course be a tremendous struggle; and whatever inducements caused him to yield, would produce calm; and that calm might, and doubtless often is, fatally mistaken for true peace. For it should be understood, that this natural reaction may be sudden and great, in proportion to the greatness of the distress, that had preceded it. The reaction may go much further than a calm, and the absence of distress. A joyousness may, and naturally will succeed, which, being mistaken for true religion, will encourage hope; and hope encouraged in the mind will increase joy--and joy increased, will strengthen hope--this strengthened will, in its turn, strengthens joy, until the deluded soul persuades himself, that he is filled with the love of God.

Now the true distinction between this state of mind, and that peace, which they have who love the law of God is this. Instead of enforcing submission to the performance of some particular duty, the mind apprehends and loves the character of God--the will yields not to the biddings of conscience--or force of circumstances--or selfish considerations; but the mind, being diverted from all selfishness, looks away to God, and Christ, and sweetly yields to, and acquiesces in, his will.

Now the difference in these two states of mind. will be apparent in this. The deluded sinner, not having his will merged in the will of God, will soon find, that what he calls his peace, is continually broken. Instead of finding that he is not stumbled, or offended with the providences, and will of God, he will find that he is almost continually stumbled. He is thrown into an excitement of mind, at every providence, and every commandment of God, that crosses his path. The will of God is not the law of his being. So far from it, he often finds himself in such a state of mind, that conscience must enforce its claims upon the heart, and sometimes a severe conflict, compels him to yield one form of sin after another. Thus he submits, and yields one point today, from some selfish consideration, and to-morrow there is some new call to duty--some demand of self-denial--or something else, which brings him up to a stand of strong resistance, and throws him into great confusion. This, perhaps, after a severe struggle, the mind will yield, and retreat to some refuge, prepared to resist the next demand upon its selfishness.

Now right over against this, is that state of mind, that constitutes true peace. True peace is the result of the heart's having yielded to God, (i.e.) in its loving God, and preferring the will of God to all other things. Instead of being fretted, and stumbled, and thrown into agony, and disappointment, and discontent, by every call to self-sacrifice, and duty, all these calls are so many joyful occasions, on which to gratify its love, and in which it feels the sweetest, and most profound complacency. As it turns over the leaves of the Bible--as it listens to sermons--as the unfoldings of Providence point out new paths of duty, and call afresh for self denial, instead of being thrown in an agony at these demands, it is delighted with these opportunities of manifesting its love; and it finds that its repose is deepened, and its joy heightened, and rendered more exquisite, by how much the more frequently these demands are made.

Now perhaps I am relating the very experience of some of you. How is it, when

duty is pointed out? Do you find that the pressure of obligation disturbs your peace? Does conscience, the law, and the Spirit of God point out your duty, and does your heart hold back? It is then to you a stumbling block, and a rock of offense. And if you find it impossible to divert your mind, you may take shelter in the outward performance of duty, and so far yield the point, as to perform the duty, without any love to God. A calm succeeds, which you mistake for true peace. You rest in your delusion, for a day, to be called, perhaps to-morrow, to a new conflict with your conscience, and the will of God.

Now rest assured, if this is your character, and this your experience, "you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity." How many such persons have I seen, who would appear to be very happy in religion, while no sacrifice was called for, and no demand made upon their selfishness. But attack their lusts--call on them for self denial--ask their money for benevolent objects--point at some of their intemperate practices, in eating and drinking--reprove some favorite indulgence, and instantly you have destroyed all their religion. Their peace is all gone. Conscience, and the will are up in arms, and mutiny, and war immediately ensue.

Now let me place beside this picture, the experience of a Christian. In him, so far as he is a Christian, selfishness is subdued, and his conscience and heart are at one. In such a case, the office of conscience is not to force the heart, for the heart needs no force. Conscience is that power of the mind, that points out the moral qualities of actions, and enables the mind to distinguish between what is right, and what is wrong. Now the Christian heart is in love with what is right, (i.e.) with the will of God, whenever it discovers what it is. So that the dictates of conscience are readily, spontaneously, and joyfully obeyed by the heart. In this case, the peace of mind is unbroken, and there is a joyful acquiescence in all the will of God. Let there be new calls to duty--new occasions for self-denial--new demands upon life, and health, and strength, for the promotion of God's glory--no mutiny results, but peace, and a joyful yielding--a supreme and delightful preference of the will of God, reigns throughout the soul.

REMARKS.

1. Selfish professors cannot understand religion. They continually make conscience, and selfish resolutions, supply the place of love. They do not distinguish between being influenced, in their conduct, by selfish resolutions, and purposes, and by the reproaches of conscience; and that love which begets a

joyful acquiescence in all the will of God.

2. Many persons are spending their time, in putting a conscientious restraint upon selfishness, instead of giving it up. They are, like children, building dams of sand, that by the slight risings of the water, are instantly driven away. They see the risings of their pride--the rufflings of their temper--their worldly-mindedness, and their sin, under many forms. These they are busied in putting down. They resolve, and re-resolve--they vow, and break their vows--they purpose, and fail to fulfill, and for the best of all reasons, their heart does not love God; and selfishness is too strong for their conscience; and sin will break over their dams of sand.

But here, it may be asked, are we to have no regard to conscience, in our daily walk and conversation? I answer, yes. No man can walk with God, unless he "keeps a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards man." But observe, there is no virtue--no real holiness, except the heart loves what the conscience pronounces to be right. To comply with conscience, from some other motive than love, is not religion. Saul of Tarsus, it is said, "lived in all good conscience before God;" but his conformity to the dictates of conscience was legal; (i.e.) he was influenced by legal or self-righteous considerations, and not by love.

3. In this discourse, you can see the true distinction, between a professor under the law, and a Christian, who has entered into the rest of the gospel.

4. From what observation I have been able to make, I cannot but fear, that only a comparatively few of the visible church are converted to God. It is a matter of fact, that they have not the peace expressly promised, in the text, to those that love the law of God. Indeed, I should not say that this peace is promised--it is expressly declared to be the state, in which they now are, who love the law of God: "Great peace HAVE they, that love thy law."

Now have you this peace? Have the church this peace, as a matter of fact? As God is true, they only love the law of God, who do, as a matter of fact, have this peace.

5. Much of the instruction given to anxious sinners, and professors of religion, is only calculated to give, and encourage a false peace. When they are convicted, and anxious, instead of spreading out before them the objects of faith, and love,

to engage their attention and win their affections, they are perhaps pointed to some form of sin, and required to give that up, and to resolve never to commit it again; and then to another, and another, leading them, perhaps by various, and selfish considerations, to yield some point, or points, upon which there is a conflict in the mind; and thus inducing, as I have already shown, a false peace, while there is not a particle of the right knowledge, or of the love of God.

It appears to me to be impossible, that true religion, and true submission, should be produced in the mind, without pressing upon the attention the character of God, and of Christ, as presented in the Bible. Those great and commanding objects of love, and of faith, must be presented, and embraced: and there must be a yielding up of selfishness, through the power of truth, and the Holy Ghost, or there is no true religion in the soul. But if selfishness is subdued, you will not witness these perpetual conflictings, that are so common, when professors of religion are pressed up to duty.

6. And now I must conclude, by pressing home upon you, the solemn inquiry, are you a Christian? Do you love the law of God? Is the will of God your rule of action? Or do you merely acknowledge, that it ought to be, while, as a matter of fact, you do not make it so?

Have you so renounced your own will, as to find yourself undisturbed, peaceful, and joyous, when anything turns out, in the providence of God, different from what you had hoped, and expected?

Whenever a sin is pointed out to you, or any duty to perform, do you find that it distresses you, to sacrifice that sin, or to perform that duty? Do you yield by constraint, or willingly--joyfully?

Beloved souls, be ye not deceived. To love the law of God, is to love the will of God--to prefer his will to your own will. Now do you, as a matter of fact, find your mind to be in this state? Or is it true of you, that instead of yielding your own will to the will of God, without debate, or distress, you only yield after a severe conflict, and are compelled by conscience, rather than sweetly constrained by love?

Now just mark what this text says--not that they may have--ought to have--or shall have great peace, that love the law of God; but that they actually DO HAVE great peace.

This is a matter of fact, and the natural result of yielding the will to the will of God. Indeed, I should rather say, that this peace consists in your yielding to the will of God, and preferring his will to your own.

Now your own consciousness must teach you, with absolute certainty, whether you are in this state of mind.

Will you be honest before God?

Will you decide this question, as before the solemn judgment?

I pray you to settle these solemn questions; and remember, that your salvation or damnation, is suspended upon their being decided according to truth.

[Back to Top](#)

Dominion Over Sin

Originally untitled. Title supplied by WStS.

Lecture IX

April 24, 1839

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Romans 6:14: "For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace."

I shall attempt to show,

I. What sin is.

II. When it may be said, that sin has dominion in the soul.

III. What it is to be under the law.

IV. What it is to be under grace.

V. That under the law, sin will have dominion over an unsanctified mind, of course.

VI. That sin cannot have dominion over those who are under grace.

I. I am to show, what sin is.

Sin is a state of mind, which is the opposite of the law of God. As I have shown, in a former lecture, the whole of true religion consists in obedience to this law, which requires supreme disinterested love to God, and disinterested and equal love to our neighbor. This is the opposite of selfishness or a supreme regard to our own interest. Selfishness therefore, under all its forms, is sin, and there is no form of sin, that is not some modification of selfishness.

Sin then is not any part of our physical or mental constitution--it is no part or principle of nature itself; but a voluntary state of mind, (i.e.) an action, or choice of the mind--a preferring our own interest, because it is our own, to other and

higher interests. It does not consist in any defect of our nature; but in a perversion, or prohibited use of our nature.

II. I am to show, when sin has dominion in the soul.

It cannot be properly said, that sin has dominion, because the soul has fallen under the power of an occasional temptation.

Some have supposed this passage to teach, that a person, under grace, could not sin under any circumstances. They have maintained, that to sin once, is to be brought under the dominion of sin.

Now although I am for making the promises mean all they say, yet I do not believe that such language as this can be justly interpreted to mean all that such persons contend for; (e.g.) if a man should be once intoxicated, under circumstances of peculiar temptation, it would be neither fair, nor true, in speaking of his general character, to say that he was under the dominion of the ardent spirits, and a slave to his appetite.

As an illustration of my meaning, take a parallel promise, John 4:14. Christ says, "But whosoever drinketh the water, that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water, that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Now some have understood this promise to mean, that if a person became a partaker of the Holy Ghost, he could never again know what it was to thirst for the divine influence, in any sense--that he would have such a fullness of the Spirit of God, as to have at no time any thirsting for more. But this is certainly a forced construction of this passage. It is not in accordance with what we should mean, in the use of similar language. Should you promise your neighbor, if he came and boarded with you, he should never hunger nor thirst, would he understand you to mean, that he should never have a good appetite for his food; or merely that he should not be hungry, or thirst, without being supplied? He would doubtless understand you, and you would expect him to understand you, to promise, that he should have enough to eat, and to drink--that he should not suffer the gnawings of hunger, or the pains of thirst, without the supply that nature demands.

Just so I understand this promise of Christ, that if any man has partaken of these waters of life, he has the pledge of Christ, that he shall have as great a measure of His Spirit, as his necessities demand--that whenever his soul thirsts for more

of the waters of life, he has a right to plead this promise, with an assurance that Christ will satisfy his thirsty soul, with living waters.

I suppose this text to have a similar meaning. It does not mean, that no person, under temptation, can fall under the power of an occasional sin; but that no form of sin shall be habitual--that no form of selfishness, or lust, shall in any such case, be habitual, in the soul, that is under grace--that no appetite, or passion, or temptation of any kind, should in this sense be able to bring the soul into bondage to sin.

III. I am to show, what it is to be under the law.

1. To be under the law, is to be subject to the law, as a covenant of works. In other words, to be under the necessity of perfectly fulfilling the law, in order to obtain salvation thereby.
2. To be under the law, is to be influenced by legal motives, or considerations --to be constrained by the fear of punishment, or influenced by the hope of reward.
3. To be under the law, is to be constrained by conscience, and a sense of duty; and not by love. Individuals seem to go painfully about their duty, under the biddings of conscience; and submit with about as much pain, and reluctance, as a slave to his master.
4. To be under the condemning sentence of the law, like a state criminal, and of course shut out from communion with God. A state criminal, under sentence, is of course shut out from all friendly intercourse with the government--is considered, and treated as an outlaw. Just so with a sinner, under the sentence of God's law. While he remains in a state of spiritual death, and alienation from God, the sentence of eternal death is out against him--he is shut out from communion with God, and consequently sin will have dominion over him.

IV. I am to show, what it is to be under grace.

1. To be under a covenant of grace, in opposition to a covenant of law. By a covenant of grace, I mean the covenant which confers all the blessings of salvation, as a mere gratuity; and more than a gratuity, as being the direct opposite of our deserts.

2. To be influenced by love, excited by grace, and not by legal motives.

3. To be put in possession of the blessings of the new, or gracious covenant, Jer. 31:31-34; "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which My covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord;) but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: after those days, saith the Lord, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and will remember their sin no more." Heb. 8:8-12; "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I make with their fathers, in the day when I took them by the hand, to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in My covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord: I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

4. To be under grace, is to be so united to Christ, by faith, as to receive a continual life, and influence from Him. He represents Himself, as a vine; and His children as the branches. And to be under grace, is to be united to Him, as a branch is united to the vine--so as to receive our continual support, and strength, and nourishment, and life from Him.

To be under grace, is to pass from death unto life--to be translated from the kingdom of darkness, into the kingdom of God's dear Son--to pass from the state of a condemned criminal, into a state of redemption, justification and adoption.

V. I am to show, that under the law, sin will have dominion over an unsanctified mind.

1. Because this is the certain effect of law upon a selfish mind. A selfish mind is seeking its own interests of course. And if it attempts to obey the law, it will be through selfish considerations--either through hope or fear. But in every such attempt, the mind must fail of course; for selfishness is the very thing which the law prohibits. And every attempt to obey from selfish motives, is only a grievous breach of the law. Therefore, if all former sins were canceled, and salvation depended upon future obedience to the law, salvation would in this way be forever impossible. Hence, if the mind attempted to obey for the sake of obtaining salvation, this would be selfishness, and disobedience; and in every such attempt, the mind must fail of course.

2. Sin must have dominion over a selfish mind, that is under law, or it would amount to this absurdity, that the disinterested love demanded by the law, would flow from selfish motives--a thing naturally impossible.

3. To produce disinterested love, salvation must be gratuitous, (i.e.) the soul must understand, that obedience to law, is not the condition to salvation; for if it understood legal obedience to be the condition of salvation, it is impossible that this consideration should not influence a selfish mind, in its efforts to obey. So that this consideration would render all attempts at obedience ineffectual; and sin would continue to have dominion.

4. Selfishness will of course seek present and selfish gratification, until compelled, by deep conviction to desist. In which case, the will certainly takes refuge in a self-righteous attempt to obey the law, unless it understands that salvation is gratuitous, or a matter of grace. There seems to be, as a matter of fact, no other way in which the power of selfishness can be broken, except to annihilate the reasons for selfish efforts, by bringing home to the soul the truth, that salvation is by grace, through faith.

The effect of law upon a selfish mind, is beautifully illustrated by the Apostle, in the 7th chapter of Romans. The case there supposed is what the Apostle, as is common with him, represents as if it were his own experience. It appears, from its connection, to illustrate the influence of law over an unsanctified mind. It is plainly a case where sin was habitual --where it had dominion -- where the law of sin and death in the members so warred against the law of the mind, as to bring the soul into captivity. Now some have

contended, and continue to contend, that the Apostle, in this chapter, describes the experience of a saint under grace. But this cannot be; because, in this case, it would flatly contradict the text upon which I am preaching. As I have said, the case described in the seventh of Romans, is a case in which sin undeniably has dominion, the very thing of which the Apostle complains. But the text affirms, that sin shall not have dominion over the soul, that is under grace. Besides, it is very plain, that in the seventh of Romans it was the influence of law, and not of grace, which the Apostle was discussing.

5. Another reason, why sin will have dominion under the law is, that under law men are left to unaided exercise of their own powers of moral agency without those gracious helps, which alone can induce true holiness. The law throws out its claims upon them, and requires the perfect use, and entire consecration of all their powers, to the service of God, and then leaves them to obey, or disobey at their peril. It neither secures, nor promises to them any aid; but requires them to go forth to the service of God--to love Him with all their heart, and their neighbor as themselves, on pain of death. Now in such circumstances, it is very plain, that a mind already selfish, will only be confirmed in selfishness, under such a dispensation.

VI. I am to show, that sin cannot have dominion over those, who are under grace.

1. Because the law is written in the heart, (i.e.) the spirit of the law has taken possession of the soul, and made us forever "free from the law of sin and death," which was in our members.

2. Because the soul has become acquainted with God, and with Christ, and has fallen deeply in love with their character. It delights in God, and exercises the very temper required by the law, uninfluenced by the hope of its rewards, or by the fear of its penalty. It is overcome and swallowed up with that love, that naturally results from a right acquaintance with God. Now in this state of mind, sin can no more have dominion over the soul--no form of selfishness can be habitual, any more than a wife, who loves her husband supremely, can become a habitual adulteress. A woman who loves her husband, might, by force of circumstances, and by some unexpected and powerful temptation, be led to sin against her husband; but for this to become habitual, while the supreme love of her husband continues, is a contradiction.

3. Sin cannot have dominion over the soul, because Christ has become its life. He is represented not only as the life of the soul, but as the head of the Church, and Christians as members of His body, and flesh, and bones. Now as the vine supplies the branch, and as the head controls the members, so Christ has become the main-spring--the well spring of life, in the soul; and sin cannot have dominion over such a soul, unless it can have dominion over Christ. Christ may find it necessary to permit the soul to fall into an occasional sin, to teach it by experience what perhaps it will not learn in any other way. But that sin, under any form, should become habitual, cannot be necessary to give the soul a sense of its dependence; and Christ, by express promise, has secured the soul against it.

4. Because the soul so reposes in the blood of Christ for justification, and salvation, as to have no motive to selfish efforts, being released from the responsibility of working out a legal righteousness. It is constrained by such a sense of abundant and overflowing grace, that it loves and serves God, having no reason to serve itself.

5. Because it is so constrained by a sense of the love of Christ, as to be as unable to indulge in sin, and vastly more so, than the most dutiful and affectionate child is to indulge in habitual and willful disobedience to its parents.

6. It is impossible for sin to have dominion over a Christian, because it implies a contradiction. To be a Christian, is habitually to love, and serve, and honor God. Obedience is the rule, and sin is the exception. It is therefore impossible that sin should have dominion over a Christian, for this would be the same as to say, that a person might be a Christian while sin was his rule, and obedience the exception; or, in other words, that sin is habitual, and obedience only occasional. If this is the definition of a Christian, then I know not what a Christian is.

7. Sin cannot have dominion, because the veracity of the God of truth is pledged, that it shall not.

8. Because the very terms of the covenant of grace show, that to be under grace, is to have the law written in the heart--to be made or rendered obedient to God, by the residence of the Spirit of Christ within us.

9. Because every form of sin is hateful to the soul, and can have no influence, only during a moment of strong temptation--when the involuntary powers, or emotions, are so strongly excited by temptation, as to gain a momentary ascendancy over the will; while the deep preference of the mind, although for the time being comparatively inefficient, yet remains unchanged.

10. Because the soul, under grace, is led by the Spirit, to such an understanding and use of its powers, as to make the soul a partaker of the Divine nature. John says, a man "born of God, doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him" (i.e.) the Spirit of Christ dwelling in him, renders it unnatural for him to sin.

11. Because old things are passed away, and all things are become new. The grand leading design of the mind has undergone a radical change. And as the leading design of the mind must of course control the habitual conduct of the soul; and as deviations from its influence will only be occasional, and not habitual, so the soul under grace will not, cannot, be under the dominion of sin.

REMARKS.

1. There is no sound religion where there is not universal reformation. It should be constantly and strictly observed, in all cases of professed conversion, whether the reformation in habits and life is universal --whether it extends to selfishness, and sinful lusts, and habits of every kind, and under every form. If any lust is spared--if selfishness, under any form, is indulged, and habitual--if any sinful habit still remains unbroken and unsubdued--that is not a sound conversion. No form of sin will have dominion, where conversion is real. Occasional sin may occur through the force of powerful temptation; but no form of sin will be indulged.

2. Want of attention to this truth, has suffered a great many unconverted persons to enter the Church. In some respects, a reformation has been apparent. In such cases, without sufficient discrimination, hope has been indulged by the individual himself, and encouraged by members of the Church--and he has been admitted to the communion, to the great disgrace of religion. It does not appear to me, to have been sufficiently understood, that grace not only ought, but actually does, in every case where piety is real, so overcome sin as to leave no

form of it habitual. It has indeed been a common maxim, that where sin is habitual, there is no real religion. But this has manifestly not been adopted in practice; for great multitudes have been admitted, and are still permitted to continue as members, in good standing in Christian Churches, who habitually indulge in many forms of sin. I think the gospel demands, that no professed convert should be thus encouraged to hope, or suffered to become a member of the Church, whose reformation of life and habits is not universal.

3. You see, that all those persons who have frequent convictions, and conflicts with sin, and yet are habitually overcome by it, are still under the law, and not under grace; (i.e.) they are convicted, but not converted. The difficulty is, their hearts are not changed so as to hate sin under every form. Temptation is too strong, therefore, for their conscience, and for all their resolutions. Their hearts pleading for indulgence will of course render them an easy prey to temptation. This seems to have been exactly the case described in the seventh chapter of Romans, to which I have referred. Where regeneration has taken place--and the heart, as well as the conscience has become opposed to sin--in every such case, the power of temptation is, of course, so broken as that sin will, at most, be only occasional, and never habitual. In all cases, therefore, where individuals find themselves to be, or are seen by others to be under the dominion of sin, or lust, of any kind, they should know, or be told at once, that they have not been regenerated--that they are under the law, and not under grace.

4. What can those persons think of themselves, who know, that they are under the dominion of selfishness, in some of its forms? Do they believe this text to be a direct, and palpable falsehood? If not, how can they indulge the hope, that they are Christians? This text asserts, as plainly as it can, that they are under the law, and not under grace.

5. You see the state of those who are encouraged by the seventh chapter of Romans, supposing that to be a Christian's experience. If they have gone no farther than that, they are still under the law. I have been amazed to see how pertinaciously professors of religion will cling to a legal experience, and justify themselves in it, by a reference to this chapter. I am fully convinced, that the modern construction of the chapter--from the 14th to the 25th verses--interpreting it as a Christian experience, has done incalculable evil; and has led thousands of souls there to rest, and go no farther, imagining that they are already as deeply versed in Christian experience as Paul was, when he wrote that

epistle. And there they have stayed, and hugged their delusion, till they have found themselves in the depths of hell.

6. There may be much legal reformation, without any true religion.

7. A legal reformation, however, may generally be distinguished, by some of the following marks:

(1.) It may be only partial; (i.e.) extend to certain forms of sin, while others are indulged.

(2.) It may, and almost certainly will be temporary.

(3.) In a legal experience, it will also generally be manifest, that some forms of sinful indulgence are practiced and defended, as not being sin. And where there has not been a powerful conviction, that has deterred the soul from indulgence, selfishness and lust are still tolerated.

A gospel, or gracious experience will manifest itself in a universal hatred of sin and lust, in every form. And, as I have said, sin will have no place, except in cases of such powerful temptation, as to carry the will for the time, by the force of excited feelings, when a reaction will immediately take place, and the soul be prostrate in the depths of repentance.

8. By reference to this text, and the principles here inculcated, not only may the genuineness of each pretended conversion, be decided; but also the genuineness, or spuriousness of religious excitements. That is not a revival of true religion, but falls entirely short of it, that does not produce universal reformation of habits in the subjects of it. There is many a revival of conviction, and convictions are often deep, and very general in a community, where, for want of sufficient discriminating instruction, there are very few conversions.

9. You see the mistake of those sinners who fear to embrace religion, lest they should disgrace it, by living in sin, as they see many professing Christians now do.

Sinner, you need not stand back on this account. Only come out from under the law, and be truly converted--submit yourself to the power and influence of sovereign grace, and no form of sin shall have dominion over you, as God is true.

10. This text is a great encouragement to real Christians. They often tremble when they have once fallen under the power of temptation. They greatly fear that sin will gain an entire ascendancy over them.

Christian, lift up your head, and proclaim yourself free. The God of truth has declared that you are not, and shall not be a slave to sin.

11. This is a proper promise, and an important one, for Christians to plead in prayer. It is like a sheet anchor, in a storm. If temptations beat like a tempest upon the soul, let the Christian hold on to this promise with all his heart. Let him cry out, O Lord, perform the good word of Thy grace unto Thy servant, wherein Thou hast caused me to hope, that sin shall not have dominion over me, because I am not under law but under grace.

12. Let those who are under the law--over whom sin, in any form, has dominion--remember, that under the law, there is no salvation--that "whatever things the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law"--and that "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them."

[Back to Top](#)

Carefulness A Sin

Lecture X

May 8, 1839

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Phil. 4:6: "Be careful for nothing."

In this discussion, I design to show,

I. What carefulness, as used in this text, is.

II. That this state of mind is sin.

III. How to avoid it.

I. I am to show the meaning of the word carefulness.

The terms care, and carefulness, are used in two different senses, in the Bible--one good--the other bad. The one kind of care is virtue--the other kind is vice. I will quote a few passages, to illustrate both these senses. In some of the passages, the words care and carefulness are not used in the translation; but in every instance the same word is used in the original, that in the text is translated careful. In 1 Cor. 12:25, the Apostle says, "the members should have the same care one for another." In Phil. 2:20, he also says, "For I have no man like minded who will naturally care for your estate." In 1 Pet. 5:7, care is spoken of as being exercised by God.

It is manifest, that the state of mind described in these passages, is a virtuous state--it is that degree of wakeful desire and solicitude for our own, or the happiness of others, that begets due attention, and produces that prompt and diligent use of means necessary to obtain a desirable end. This state of mind does not imply doubt, distress, corroding anxious suspense, and concern. This kind of care, however, may be very intense, and in its degree, amount to real travail of soul; and even to those "groanings which cannot be uttered," and yet be a virtuous, and highly commendable state of mind. For this, instead of being the peevishness of unbelief, and the corroding anxiety and carefulness which are the result of unbelief, is faith mightily wrestling with God, for promised blessings.

But in the following passages, we have the term used in a different sense: Matt. 6:25, "Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body what ye shall put on." And in the 27th verse, "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" And v. 28, "Why take ye thought for raiment?" &c. And v. 31, "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat, what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed?" Luke 10:41, Christ says, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and troubled about many things." 1 Cor. 7:32-34, "But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: but he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is a difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit; but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband." And in the text, the

Apostle says, "Be careful for nothing."

Now it is manifest from these passages, in which the same original word is used, as in the text, that the term is used in a bad sense. It implies doubtfulness, anxiety, absorbing and anxious concern, and unhappiness. This state of mind is but too common, and needs very little description to be understood by almost everyone.

II. I am to show, that this kind of carefulness is sin.

1. It is sin because it is expressly forbidden by God himself. Not only does the text forbid it; but it is expressly, or impliedly forbidden in all the texts I have quoted, where it is used in a bad sense. It is, therefore, as much a violation of the law of God as profanity, drunkenness, or any other abomination. It is as expressly forbidden, and as diametrically opposed to the command of God, as a lustful, covetous, thievish, or licentious state of mind.

2. Because it is distrust of the wisdom and benevolence of God. Who that believes in a divine providence can suffer himself to be exercised with carefulness, without directly impeaching, or denying the wisdom and benevolence of the blessed God. If God exercises a universal providence, then whatever comes to pass is in some way, directly or indirectly, brought about by the providence of God. To suffer ourselves then to be made unhappy--to be filled with anxiety, solicitude, and suspense, is either to deny that God is wise and good, in bringing about these events, or is a virtual declaration on our part, that, however wise and good he may have been in producing them, we are very far from being pleased with his providence. So that carefulness is either infidelity in regard to the providences of God, or downright rebellion against Him.

3. Because it is setting aside all the evidence which God has given that He cares for us. He has given us the most ample assurances, by his providences--in his Word--and by giving his only begotten Son to die for us, that he cares for us, and all our interests with all the tender solicitude of an infinitely benevolent Father; and yet we set aside all His declarations, and all these evidences, and refuse to cast our care upon him. We suffer our minds to be corroded, and borne down, and banished out of the presence of God, by carefulness.

4. Because it can do no good. It is a waste, and worse than a waste of time, and energy, and life. Who among you ever found yourselves benefitted, in any respect, by this kind of carefulness? Does your worldly business prosper any better for indulging this state of mind--do you pay your debts, or manage any part of your business any better by suffering your mind to be borne down with care? Do you get along any better in religion? Are your prayers any more prevalent--do you use any better directed, and successful means for your own, or the spiritual improvement of others, when oppressed with carefulness? And let me ask, can you in any instance recollect, that this kind of carefulness ever resulted in any good?

5. Because it is highly injurious to yourself. I beseech you to reflect upon your past history. Have you not found, in multitudes of instances, that this kind of carefulness was a real obstruction to your worldly business? And have you not found that the more you indulged this state of mind, the more embarrassed and perplexed your secular affairs became? And no wonder, for in this state you are in some sense a maniac, and not qualified to manage business of any kind. How many persons there are, who, instead of keeping calm, and preserving a state of mind, in which they can act with discretion and wisdom, will become so filled with carefulness as to incapacitate themselves for superintending their affairs with discretion; and they wonder, that, after all their attention, and carefulness, and anxiety they do not succeed any better. They seem to think that the providence of God is wholly adverse, and is designed to perplex them, while in reality nothing uncommon has happened in the providence of God; and their foolish and wicked carefulness is that to which they may ascribe their failure.

It is just so in matters of religion. Multitudes suffer themselves, in the peevishness of their unbelief, to be so distracted and confounded with carefulness about their spiritual state, or the spiritual state of those around them, that they are forever whining, complaining, and murmuring, as if it were the most difficult matter in the world to persuade God to be good, and kind, and gracious. They seem to act as if it were as difficult a matter to get hold of the grace of God, as to be saved by the law. And notwithstanding all the declarations in regard to the freeness of gospel salvation, it would seem as if they supposed the wells of salvation were infinitely deep, and their waters infinitely beyond their reach; and the promises of eternal life were infinitely high above their heads. Indeed, they are in that state of mind, that

from its own nature excludes the grace of the gospel, and sets aside all the promises of God. Now let me ask, did you ever find that this kind of carefulness has resulted in any thing else than evil to your own souls? Why then indulge in it? Persons in this state are very apt to think their circumstances, and condition deserve commiseration. They look around for sympathy, and pity; and often secretly blame God for not pitying them, when they have so carefully sought him. Now this is a state of horrible rebellion against God. Here is an ocean of the waters of eternal life, flowing at your feet--here is a table spread before you with infinite provisions for your souls, and as free as the heart of God, and yet you stand and distress yourself, and complain, and are filled with vast cares, and anxieties, lest you should lose your soul--starving, thirsting, dying with these provisions and waters of eternal life before you. Precious soul, lay aside your carefulness, I beseech you, and believe, or you must perish.

6. Because your carefulness is a great stumbling block and injury to those around you. Are they professors of religion--they are emboldened to exercise this same temper because they see it in you. Are they impenitent sinners--they wonder what religion is good for. They see you fretted with the same cares and anxieties that others are who have no hope in Christ. What inference can they draw from witnessing your state, only that religion is a name that has no consolation or salvation in it.

7. Because it grieves the Spirit of God. What would a husband say should he observe that his wife had no confidence in his providence, and was perpetually exercised with great carefulness, lest he should not fulfill to her the duties implied in his relation to her? And suppose that your children should groan about the house, under the distressing apprehension that their wants would be overlooked. Would not husbands and parents feel themselves grieved and insulted by such a course? How, then, must this shameful carefulness appear to the Spirit of the blessed God? He is your comforter, but you refuse to be comforted--he cares for you, but you refuse to cast your care upon him, and insist upon bearing your own burdens. Do not, I beseech you, thus grieve the Holy Spirit of God, "whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

8. Because it is as highly dishonorable to God, as it is grievous to the Holy Ghost. What can be more dishonorable to the father of a family, than for its

members to be filled with carefulness through distrust of his providence. And how does it gratify hell to see the children of God weighed down with carefulness, as if their heavenly Father were unable or unwilling to provide for them.

9. Because it is selfishness. Persons are never filled with carefulness unless they have some selfish interest in that which excites their care. You see the most diligent and efficient clerks, and those employed in other people's business; and while they have a sufficient solicitude to be prompt and energetic in the business of their employers, yet they are not filled with care about it. When they have performed their duty they can eat, and sleep calmly, and quiet themselves without corroding carefulness, with regard to the results of their business.

Just so with the servants of God, if their hearts are right. They perform every thing for him, and consider nothing as their own business--are prompt and energetic in the discharge of their duties; and calmly and quietly leave all the results to the disposal of his providence. It is just so with them on all religious subjects. They know that themselves, and all they have, are his, for time and eternity. And they can as cheerfully submit their spiritual, as their temporal interests to His disposal without carefulness, "always rejoicing in the Lord."

III. I am to show how to avoid carefulness.

1. Consider the reasons against it. Many persons are so inconsiderate as never to avoid any sin of heart, or life to which they are strongly tempted. But without consideration it is not to be expected that sin of any kind will be avoided. Consideration might and doubtless would have prevented the sin of our first parents. And it is not probable, that any being does or would sin with all the considerations against sin fully before, and subject to the attention of the mind. Let a mind fully consider the moral character of this state, and all the reasons against it, even should it go no further than I have described in this discourse--that it is forbidden of God--that it is infidelity--that it is rebellion--that it is setting aside all the evidences of God's love--that it can never benefit you, nor any one else--that it destroys your own happiness, and the happiness of those with whom you are connected--that it is a stumbling block to the Church, and an occasion of blasphemy to the world--that it grieves and dishonors the blessed God--and is one of the most

loathsome and detestable forms of selfishness--let the mind, I say, consider these things, and it would put away this sin from the heart.

2. Consider the reasons for an opposite state of mind--that you may, and ought to be in a state of cheerful serenity, and calmness and peace--that God's providences, and promises, and grace are such a sure foundation, and afford such infinite reasons for repose in God, that calmness, quietude, a deep unbroken repose in God, is the most reasonable state of mind that can be conceived. Consider that God requires you always to rejoice in him; and has made such infinite provisions for your help, consolation, and eternal salvation--and to meet the necessities of the Church, and the world, that there is no room left for carefulness, except it exists in the form of downright rebellion against God.

3. Cultivate a considerate state of mind. Let no temptation to carefulness prevail without taking time to consider the reasons against it, and for an opposite state of mind.

4. Put away selfishness. If selfishness is suffered to reign, carefulness will be a thing of course. Examine yourself, therefore, attentively, and exclude selfishness, under every form. You may find sometimes, that to decide what is, and what is not selfishness, will require considerable thought and attention. Your neighbor may make a selfish demand of you, or selfishly ask you for a favor, that it may not be your duty to grant, and yet he may attribute your refusal to selfishness. In all such cases you are to weigh the matter well, and decide in the presence of God, whether the law of love requires you to act in one way, or in the other. Persons are very apt, in this matter, to fall into a mistake, and to suppose themselves to be doing as they would be done by, and to censure others for not doing as they desire, because they are unacquainted with the circumstances, e.g. I ask a favor of a man, which perhaps I have no right to ask. I think that in asking it I am doing what, under the circumstances, I should be willing to grant myself; and yet were I to know all the circumstances, I should perceive that I had no right to make the request and should heartily approve of his refusal to comply. In a world where there is so much selfishness, a truly benevolent mind needs to be wide awake, to avoid, on the one hand, the appearance of selfishness, which will, after all, in some cases be impossible; and on the other hand, to avoid being devoured by the selfishness of others. But

whenever selfishness does exist, it must be sought out--it must be put away; and wherever this kind of carefulness exists there is selfishness. Of this you may be certain. Search, then, for this leaven of wickedness. Bring it forth to the light; and go and cast it into the valley of the son of Hinnom, among the abominations that defile that image of hell.

5. Put away unbelief. Unbelief is always the cause of all this kind of carefulness. This may easily be seen, by a moment's reflection. Confidence in God would instantly banish all this distrustful carefulness from the mind.

6. Dwell much upon grace received. Cultivate a spirit of thankfulness. Instead of reflecting much upon what they have received of temporal and spiritual mercies, many persons reflect much upon the things which they yet need. Being taken up with their wants, instead of their mercies, they naturally fall into a state of repining. Now it is of great importance that you should dwell much upon your temporal and spiritual good things, and spend much time in blessing and thanking God for existence, life, health, sickness, poverty, or wealth or whatever his providence has allotted you--that you were born in this age--in this land--under such circumstances--and, in short, you ought to realize that God is equally good in every thing, and that all things are subjects of thankfulness, and praise to God. Go over, then, and over again, often and often, your mercies; and cultivate such a spirit of gratitude and thankfulness as shall naturally beget a spirit of trust in God for future blessings.

7. Reflect much upon the fact that God has always been better to you than your fears--how your former anxieties, and fears proved in the end to have been all uncalled for. In how many instances can you look back upon your former carefulness, and say, "how have I been disquieted in vain?"

8. Commit everything to God in prayer, and know assuredly, that the result will be just what you would wish it to be, when you know all the circumstances and reasons. The Apostle says in the verse of which the text is a part, "In every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." Now many persons, instead of carrying any thing that lies upon their minds to God, and committing it all to him, undertake to bear their own burdens--to work it out by their own thoughts and exertions, without committing their way unto the Lord, with the assurance that he will bring it to pass. Nothing should be undertaken

without prayer; and any thing, and every thing that cannot consistently be made a subject of prayer, is to be avoided of course, as you would avoid the Devil. Now observe what I say, I do not advise you merely to pray about every thing; but to commit your way in all respects unto the Lord--so to give up your affairs to his guidance, and control, as to render all this carefulness impossible--so commit them to him as to leave the event cheerfully with him, and make up your mind to be satisfied with the result, be it what it may. Be solicitous to do your duty, leaving consequences most cheerfully and joyfully with him who careth for you.

9. Trust in Christ for grace in this thing. Do not suppose that by any unaided efforts of your own you are to avoid carefulness. Selfishness is one of your most powerful enemies; and you may as well attempt to grapple with Satan in your own strength, as to put down selfishness without the aid of Christ. Remember that he is your life, your strength, your righteousness, your salvation and redemption, not only from the curse of the law; but from every form of sin. Cleave to him, and whenever you find yourself tempted to carefulness, be sure to lay all your cares upon him. He is able and desirous to bear all your burdens.

10. Be sure to give up your own will. While you have a will of your own, separate from that of God, you will of course be often filled with care, lest you should be disappointed. Lay aside your own will, and make up your mind to be joyful always in the will of God.

11. Cultivate a calm and quiet state of mind. If temptation assail you to ruffle and disturb the deep repose of your soul in God, be quiet--keep calm--lift up your heart to God--keep still, and if possible suffer yourself not to speak until your mind becomes composed--let it be the fixed purpose of your heart not to suffer yourself to be thrown into a state of carefulness and anxiety on any occasion whatever.

REMARKS.

1. This requirement extends to every thing, temporal and spiritual. Many persons think themselves to do well, in being perpetually filled with great carefulness about their spiritual concerns. But this spirit is just as inadmissible and wicked in spiritual, as in temporal things. It is God-provoking, and dishonoring unbelief, on whatever subject it is exercised.

2. How seldom is this state of mind looked upon as a sin, even by the Christian himself. Many persons claim and receive as much sympathy in this state, as if it were a dire calamity instead of a sin. Nay, they make it a matter of self-righteousness; and pride themselves in their great anxiety and trouble about spiritual things. To "rejoice in the Lord" is wholly out of the question with them. They lament over themselves, and are mourned over by others, as if they deserved infinite pity, rather than to be blamed for their unbelief.

Now, beloved, you ought to know, that your carefulness is sin, and nothing but sin--that it no more calls for commiseration, sympathy, or pity, than the crime of adultery, or drunkenness, or any abomination whatever. It is unbelief. Away with it. It is the enemy of God.

3. This carefulness is as ridiculous as it is wicked. What would you say, should you see the children of a great and mighty prince, filled with carefulness and anxiety about their daily food, when millions were at their disposal? You could account for it only upon the principle that they were monomaniacs. But what shall we say of the children of the King of kings, and Lord of lords, whose Father is not a mere temporal prince, but possesses all the attributes of God--every where present with them--ever wakeful to their interests--whose infinite resources, moral and physical, are at their disposal; and yet they are weighed down with care. What is the matter with you, my dear soul? Are you deranged? What do you mean? What ails you? Surely you dream and disquiet yourself in vain. "Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk, and not faint." [Isa. 40:28-31]

4. How destructive to your peace and growth in grace, is the indulgence of this spirit.

5. What advantage it gives Satan. It is just cutting yourself loose from your moorings upon the promises of God, and giving yourself up to the merciless buffetings of the prince of hell.

6. It is our duty freely and frequently to admonish one another upon this point.

There is a great fault among Christians in this respect. Whenever care is depicted upon a brother's or sister's countenance, inquiry should instantly be made into the cause. They should be reproved for the sin; and admonished, and entreated to desist from it immediately. They should be conjured by every consideration that is lovely and of good report, to entertain no carefulness for a moment.

7. From this subject, it is easy to see how important it is for husbands and wives, and those associated in the more intimate relations of life to bear each other's burdens; and as far as possible to diminish the amount of temptations to carefulness.

8. It is very important to resist the beginnings of this sin. Many Christians, and I have reason to believe, some ministers have fallen into great trouble by not resisting the beginnings of this "evil and bitter thing." They have begun perhaps by indulging carefulness about temporal things, and having by this grieved the Spirit, they are plunged into darkness in regard to their spiritual state. And as you pass by, you may hear their groanings; but there is no relief, because they will not "encourage themselves in God."

9. This truth is very applicable, and very important to indigent students, who are often so straitened in their temporal circumstances as to indulge a degree of carefulness that is very destructive, both to intellectual attainments, and to growth in grace. Such persons should remember, that their carefulness will in no instance help them. But if they indulge it, it will defeat the very ends of their education. Who can study? Who can pray? Who can walk with God in such a state of mind?

10. This requirement is applicable to all persons in all circumstances, and at all times.

And now, beloved, will you put this sin away? Shall it be from this moment the fixed purpose of your hearts, in the strength of God to overcome it forever? Will you confess it, and repent of it as a sin before God? Will you be as much ashamed of it as you would be of committing adultery, or being guilty of theft? Will you consider it as really disgraceful, in the sight of God, and as injurious to the interests of his kingdom, as other sins and abominations are? Do, I beseech you, spread this whole subject, in tears of deep repentance, before the Lord. Put it away from you forever. Let the deep repose, and patience, and gratitude of your soul shed a balmy, and a holy influence on all around you.

[Back to Top](#)

The Promises- No.'s 1 - 5

Lectures XI & XII

May 22 - July 17, 1839

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

I. I shall preface what I have to say upon this subject with several preliminary remarks, with regard to the promises of the Scripture.

II. Show the design of the promises.

III. Show that they are adequate to that for which they are designed.

IV. Show why they are not fulfilled in us.

LECTURE XI.

May 22, 1839

THE PROMISES-- No. 1

Text.--2 Pet. 1:4: "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

I. I am to make several preliminary remarks upon the nature of the promises.

1. The promises made to the church under the old dispensation belong emphatically to the Christian Church. Thus the promise made to Abraham was designed more for his posterity, and for the Christian Church than for himself. That part of the promise which related to the temporal possession of Canaan never was fulfilled to him. He lived and died "a stranger and sojourner in the land of promise." In Heb. 11:13 we are expressly informed that Abraham did not receive the fulfillment of the promises, but that they

belonged especially to Christians under the New Testament dispensation. "These all died in faith not having received the promises--but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth," i.e. Abraham and the patriarchs died without receiving the fulfillment of the promises. Again, verses 39-40, --"And these all, having obtained a good report, through faith, received not the promises; God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." So the New Covenant in Jer. 31:31-34: Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord;) but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more, every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. Also, Jer. 32:39-40: --"And I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever for the good of them, and of their children after them; and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me."

Also, Ezek. 36:25-27: --"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."

And numerous other kindred promises, made to the church under the Old Testament Dispensation, belong particularly to the Church under the Christian Dispensation. Consequently the Apostle in Heb. 8:8-12 maintains that the covenant in Jer. 31:31-32 respects particularly the Gospel Dispensation. --"Behold the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a

new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

2. The promises made to the Church as a body, belong to individuals of the Church. The Church is composed of individuals, and the promises are of no avail, any further than there is an individual application of them.

3. Promises made to the Patriarchs, and Individuals, under the Old Testament Dispensation, as well as under the new, belong to all individuals, in every age and land, under similar circumstances. Thus we find the inspired writers recognizing the principle, every where, in their writings, in the use they make of the promises. As an illustration, see Heb. 13:5 -- "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." If you turn to Gen. 28:15, you will see that the promise which the Apostle applies to all Christians, was originally made to Jacob, on his way to Padanaram. "And behold I am with thee, and will keep thee, in all places, whither thou goest, and I will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, till I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." So in Heb. 13:6 -- the Apostle continues, "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." This also is quoted from Ps. 56:4, 11, -- "In God I have put my trust; I will not fear what man can do unto me."

Let these serve as specimens of the manner in which inspired writers make an application of the promises. In the experience of every Christian, it is manifest that the Spirit of God makes the same application of the promises to their minds. And thus the promises are a kind of common property to the saints. Who has not been edified, and refreshed in reading the biographies of highly spiritual men; by observing the copious use of the promises which the Spirit of God makes in refreshing the souls of the saints.

4. The promises made to Israel and Judah, in the Old Testament, are promises made to the whole Christian Church, both Jews and Gentiles. Thus the Church of Christ is called the "Israel of God." And the Apostle expressly affirms that "they are not all Israel which are of Israel." But this fact is abundantly confirmed, that the true Israel of the Scriptures, is the true Church of God, in every age--to whom, collectively and individually, all the promises of the Bible belong.

5. The promises mean all they say; in other words, they are to be interpreted by the same rules by which we interpret the commandments. e.g. the promise in Deut. 30:6, --"And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live," is to be interpreted by the same rule by which we interpret the commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul." So the promises in Ezek. 36:25-26 --"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh," is to be understood as implying just as much as the commands in Ezek. 18:30-31 --"Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, and make you a new heart, and a new spirit." So also the promise, "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them," is to be construed as meaning just as much as the commands, "walk in my statutes," and "keep my commandments" mean.

6. We never keep the commandments, only as we take hold of the promises. By this I mean, that grace alone enables us, from the heart, to obey the commandments of God. It is, therefore, only when we lay hold of the promise, by faith, and receive its fulfillment in ourselves, that we really, in heart, obey the commandments of God; e.g. we never love the Lord our God, according to the first great commandment, only as we lay hold on, and receive the fulfillment of some such promise as this: "I will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live."

7. The promises are held out to all who will believe them.
8. The promise of spiritual blessings cannot be fulfilled to us, without the exercise of faith on our part. This is naturally impossible.
9. The promises cannot be believed, unless they are known to exist. This is self evident.
10. They cannot be believed, unless their application is understood.
11. Promises of particular blessings cannot be believed, without a general confidence in the character and truth of God. Our confidence in any specific promise of any being, must depend upon our confidence in his truth, willingness and ability. Thus if a man come to God to plead any promise, it is indispensable, in the outset, for him to believe that "God is, and that he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him."
12. There are promises in the Bible of all kinds of blessings, suited to all our wants and circumstances, temporal and spiritual.
13. There are promises suited to all classes and conditions of men.
14. There are promises suited to all possible states of mind.

Upon these last thoughts I shall have occasion to enlarge under another head.

15. Some of the promises are without any condition, expressed or implied. The fulfillment of these does not depend, in any degree, upon our own agency.

The covenant made with Noah is an example of this kind. "While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

16. There is, however, almost always some condition, at least, implied in every promise--a condition which though not expressed, arises out of the nature of the case; e.g. should I promise to pay a sum of money, for value received--here, although no condition is expressed, yet it is plain that the individual must consent to receive it. So if a testator leave a legacy to an heir, the terms of the bequest may be absolute, and without condition, yet it is always implied, that the heir believe that a bequest was made, and take

the necessary steps to enter into the possession. So with the promises of God. Many of them appear to be absolute, because there is no expressed condition. But a condition is implied, viz. that we believe the promise, and are willing to receive the proffered blessing.

17. Multitudes of the promises of God are made upon expressed conditions. Thus the promises in Ezek. 36:25-27 --"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them," seem to be expressed in full, without any condition. Yet in the 37th verse this condition is expressed --"I will yet be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them, saith the Lord." So in James 1:5 you find this promise --"If any of you lack wisdom let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." It seems to be expressed without condition; but in the sixth verse the condition is expressly annexed --"But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering," and we are informed that without faith it shall not be fulfilled.

In Matt. 7:7 you have another illustration of the same principle -- "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you." Here asking (of course in faith) is made the condition of receiving.

18. I have already said that many of the promises are made to particular states of mind, and applicable only to persons in that state, e.g.

(1) There are promises made to the impenitent sinner. Isa. 55:7 -- "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Now the conditions of these promises are that the sinner "forsake his way" and "return unto the Lord." Without the fulfillment of this condition, the sinner can never receive the benefit of the promise. In Isa. 1:18 there is a promise to the sinner -- "Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be like wool." And in the 19th verse the

condition is expressed, "if ye be willing and obedient."

(2) Again, there are promises to the backslider. As in Hosea 11:7-9. "And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they (the prophets) called them to the Most High, none at all will exalt him. How shall I give thee up Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? My heart is turned within me -- my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim, for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee, and I will not enter into the city." And in chapter 14:4-9: "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine, the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon. Ephraim shall say, what have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him; I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found. Who is wise and he shall understand these things? prudent and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them. Also in Jer. 3:12, 15, 22, "Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you, for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep mine anger forever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers, under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the Lord. Turn, O backsliding children, for I am married unto you, and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion. And I will give you pastors according to my heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." In both of these passages the conditions lie upon the face of the promises.

(3) Again there are promises especially to weak believers. Isa. 41:10-14 -- "Fear thou not for I am with thee, be not dismayed for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea I will help thee; yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Behold all they that were

incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded, they shall be as nothing and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee. They that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not: I will help thee. Fear not thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel, I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." Also Isa. 35:3-10: --"Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense, he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing, for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And an high way shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon--it shall not be found there--but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Also Isa. 40:29-31 --"He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint."

(4) Again there are promises to those who are spiritually blind, and in darkness. Isa. 42:7. " To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house." Also verse 16 --"I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known, I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

(5) Again there are promises to those that are tempted. 1 Cor. 10:13 --"God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye

are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." 2 Pet. 2:9 --"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." -- Ps. 34:17-19 -- "The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all."

(6) Again there are promises to those who are struggling to overcome sin, and are weighed down with a sense of guilt. Matt. 11:28-29 -- "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

(7) There are promises to those who are seeking for sanctification. Matt. 5:6: --"Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled." Isa. 55:1-3 --"Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; Come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." 1 Thess. 5:23-24 -- "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." See also Jer. 31:31-34 --"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord;) But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man

his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying; Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Also Ezek. 36:25-27: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."

(8) There are also promises to those who fear future relapses into sin. Psalm 121 is a specimen of these--"I will lift up mine eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord who made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved; he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper; the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil; he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in, from this time forth, and even forevermore." Ps. 37:31--"The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide."

(9) Again there are promises to those who are seeking divine influence.

Luke 11:11-13: --"If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone, or if he asks a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Rev. 21:6-- "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." And 22:17 --"And the Spirit, and the bride say, Come, And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst, come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

That the water here mentioned is the divine influence is evident from Isa.12:3 --"Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." John 4:10, 14 --"Jesus said unto her [the woman of Samaria]

If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." "Whosoever shall drink of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life." Also John 7:37-39. "Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive."

(10) There are promises to those who pray for their friends. Luke 11:5-9 _"Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." One thing taught in this passage is that we may come and expect to receive blessings for our friends. So in Matt. 15:22-28 -- "And behold a woman of Canaan cried unto him saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered, and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord help me! But he answered, and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman great is thy faith. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour." Although in this, and the last quoted passage, encouragement is held out to perseverance in prayer, yet it is especially taught that perseverance in prayer for our friends is indispensable to secure the blessing.

(11) There are promises to those who pray for the Church. Every promise in the Bible that relates to its future prosperity, is held out to all who will pray for the Church.

(12) Again there are promises so general in their nature as to cover all our necessities, temporal and spiritual. Let Mark 11:24 stand as a specimen of this class of promises --"Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Of this class of promises, that cover all our desires, I remark,

(a) That we must desire right things, that is, i.e. as will glorify God.

(b) It is implied that we desire them for right reasons, i.e. that we have a benevolent, and not a selfish design in wishing to obtain them.

(c) That the suppliant should be under a divine influence, in his request, and that his desire should be begotten by the Holy Spirit. None but the highly spiritual will ever rightly understand and apply this class of promises.

(13) There are promises to parents for their children. Isa. 44:3 --"I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring." Now this promise is as express to every Christian parent, as it was to any parent that ever belonged to the Church of God. The Apostle expressly informs us in Eph. 2, that the Gentiles are made fellow heirs with the Jews, and inheritors of the same promises. So that if this promise could ever have been claimed and appropriated by a Jew, it can be, and ought to be so appropriated by every Gentile.

(14) Promises are made to persons under all kinds of trials and afflictions. These promises are so numerous that I need not quote any of them.

(15) Again there are promises to widows, and to the fatherless. Ps. 68:5 --"A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in

his holy habitation." Jer. 49:11 --"Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widows trust in me." Hosea 14:3 --"In thee the fatherless shall find mercy." This class of promises is also numerous.

(16) Again there are promises to persons in all the stations and relations of life. Let these suffice as specimens of the vast multitudes of promises in their application to all classes of persons. You who read your Bibles know, that I have quoted only a few under each head, of the great multitude of promises that are made to each of these particular classes; and that I might easily continue to an indefinite extent the quotation of promises, to all conditions of persons in all the stations and relations of life.

I must defer the remaining heads of this discourse till my next lecture.

LECTURE XII.

June 5, 1839

THE PROMISES--No. 2

Text.--2 Pet. 1:4: "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

In continuing this subject, I am to show,

II. The design of the promises.

The design of the promises, as stated in the text, is to make us partakers of the divine nature. I will state what I do not, and what I do understand, by being made partakers of the divine nature.

1. I do not understand, that we are to be made partakers of the spiritual essence or natural attributes of God. For this would,

- (1) Destroy our personal identity.

- (2) It is naturally impossible, as it would be, in effect, making us divine beings.
- (3) There is no such change promised in the Bible.
- (4) Such a change would not be a moral, but a physical change.
- (5) The promises have no tendency to change our constitution--to destroy our personal identity--and make our spiritual existence identical with that of God.

I do understand our being made partakers of the divine nature, to mean,

2. That we are to be made partakers of the moral nature, or attributes and perfections of God. By this I mean, that the moral perfections of God cause the like moral perfections in us--so that the same exercises, in kind, that are in the divine mind, are, by the Spirit, through the promises, begotten in our minds. In other words, that the exhibition of the moral character, nature and attributes of God, as exhibited by the Spirit, transforms us into the same image. Thus the Apostle expresses it, in 2 Cor. 3:18 --"We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." The Bible everywhere abounds with declarations and representations to this effect. It represents us as participating deeply, in his exercises, both of holiness and of happiness. I will quote a few of the many passages that might be given to sustain this position.

- (1) We are called partakers of his holiness--Heb. 12:10 --"For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his HOLINESS."
- (2) We are made partakers of his love. Rom. 5:5: "And hope maketh not ashamed, because the LOVE of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."
- (3) We are called partakers of his fulness. John 1:16 --"And of his FULNESS have all we received, and grace for grace." By this I understand that the graces in Christians, are answerable to the graces in Jesus Christ, i.e. that the Christian graces are the same in kind, that existed in the Son of God.

(4) We are partakers of His joy: Matt. 25:21 --"Enter thou into the JOY of thy Lord." John 15:11 --"These things have I spoken unto you, that my JOY might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." John 17:13 --"And these things I speak in the world, that they might have my JOY fulfilled in themselves."

(5) We are made partakers of His rest. Ps. 95:11 --"Unto whom I swear in my wrath, that they should not enter into my REST." Ps. 116:7 --"Return unto thy REST, O my soul." Matt. 11:28,29 --"Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you REST. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find REST unto your soul." Heb. 3:11 --"So I swear in my wrath, that they shall not enter into my REST." Heb. 4:1,3,9,11 --"Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his REST, any of you should seem to come short of it. For we which have believed, do enter into REST. There remaineth, therefore, a REST for the people of God. Let us labor, therefore, to enter into that REST."

(6) We are made partakers of His peace: John 14:27: "PEACE I leave with you, my PEACE I give unto you." John 14:33 --"These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have PEACE." Phil. 4:7 --"And the PEACE of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Col. 3: 15 --"And let the PEACE OF GOD rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body."

(7) We are made partakers of His happiness. Ps. 36:7,8 --"How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God. Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy PLEASURES." Ps. 16:11 --"Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy: at thy right hand there are PLEASURES FOREVERMORE."

Let these serve as specimens of the scripture representations on this subject. By a careful examination of the Bible, it will be found that every feature of the moral nature and character of God is begotten in the Christian, by the provisions of the gospel.

3. A state of entire sanctification is also included in the idea of being made partakers of the divine nature. The principal proof of this, I shall examine when I come to show, under the next head, that the promises are adequate to that for which they are designed. But here I would suggest the following considerations, in support of the position, that entire sanctification is included in being made partakers of the divine nature.

(1) If the saints are ever sanctified, it is plain that it must be done through the influence of the promises, including the whole revealed will of God. That the truth, and especially the truth contained in the promises, is the Spirit's grand and indispensable instrument for the saint's sanctification, no reader of the Bible can deny.

(2) If they are not sanctified in this life, there is no reason from the Bible to believe that they ever will be sanctified. The provisions made for the sanctification of the Church, whether adequate or inadequate, are for this life: and I know of no reason to believe, that these means will follow them into eternity, to change their characters there.

(3) In Eph. 4:11-13 we have the following declaration --"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Now here the perfecting of the saints is said to take place under this ministry, and these are the means by which this work is actually accomplished, until they come "unto a PERFECT man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Where is this ministry to be exercised? This work is to be completed in the same world in which the ministry is exercised--the ministry of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

(4) If the gospel has not provided for the entire and permanent sanctification of the saints, then no such provision is made anywhere that we know of.

(5) But if the gospel has made such provision, then sanctification must take place in this life, for it is in this life that the gospel must do its

work.

(6) I recently saw a letter which had a remark to this effect, "that she [the writer] had seen so much of the depravity of her nature, that she believed she could not be wholly sanctified, except by the sickle of death." Perhaps the form of expression here is somewhat singular; but the idea is a common one. Many believe that death is to complete the work of sanctification. It has been a common remark, that one great reason why we should be willing to die, is, that by death we shall get rid of sin. Now I would ask, do any of the inspired writers ever urge this as a reason for being willing to die--that by death, or at death, we shall be rid of sin? "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord," says John; "Yea, saith the Spirit, for they shall rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." Now it is manifest, that that from which they rest follows them. Does John here mean to say that men rest from their sins, and that their sins follow them?

I cannot but think, that one reason, and the prime reason for thinking that death only can terminate our sins, is that the bodily appetites are supposed to be in themselves sinful; and that every excitement of men's constitutional propensities is in itself a sin. This opinion would naturally lead to the conclusion that the destruction of the body, and the annihilation of the bodily appetites alone, could free us from sin. I do not suppose that we have any promise in the gospel, or any means that can make a physical or constitutional change in soul or body. And those who believe that the change required is a constitutional one, would naturally conclude, that death, and not the promises is the means of our sanctification.

III. I am to show that the promises are adequate to the effect ascribed to them.

It appears to me that the reason why so much doubt is entertained upon the subject of the entire sanctification of the saints in this life is, that the grand distinction insisted upon in the Bible, between the Old and New Covenants is overlooked--that because saints under the Old Testament were not perfect, it is inferred that they will not be under the New--that inasmuch as the legal dispensation was not able entirely and permanently to sanctify saints, it is inferred that the Gospel Dispensation cannot sanctify them, even when administered by the Holy Ghost. If I understand the Bible, the difference

between the two dispensations, and covenants is exceedingly great--that what was lacking under the Old Covenant, is abundantly supplied by the New--that the New Covenant was designed to secure what the Old required, but failed to secure. Because the Old Covenant made nothing perfect, it was therefore set aside, and the New introduced, founded upon better promises.

In order to show distinctly the difference between the two covenants, I will lay before you the scripture declarations of the peculiarities of each. By thus contrasting them step by step, you will be able to see whether the promises are adequate to the perfecting of the saints.

I am to show that the first, or Old Covenant was the law written on the tables of stone. This was the substance of the covenant, to which was added the Ceremonial Law. Ex. 34:27,28-- "And the Lord said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel. And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, and the ten commandments." Deut. 9:9-15: When I was gone up into the mount, to receive the tables of stone, even the tables of the covenant which the Lord made with you, then I abode in the mount forty days and forty nights; I neither did eat bread nor drink water: And the Lord delivered unto me two tables of stone, written with the finger of God: and on them was written according to all the words which the Lord spake with you in the mount, out of the midst of the fire, in the day of the assembly. And it came to pass, at the end of forty days and forty nights, that the Lord gave me the two tables of stone, even the tables of the covenant. And the Lord said unto me, Arise, get thee down quickly from hence; for thy people which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt have corrupted themselves; they are quickly turned aside out of the way which I commanded them; they have made them a molten image. Furthermore the Lord spake unto me, saying, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiff-necked people: Let me alone, that I may destroy them, and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of thee a nation mightier and greater than they. So I turned, and came down from the mount, and the mount burned with fire; and the two tables of the covenant were in my two hands." Heb. 9:4 --"Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod, that budded, and the tables of the covenant." These, with many other passages, that might be quoted, show what we are to understand by the first or Old Covenant. It should

be known that the words covenant and testament mean the same thing, and are only different translations of the same original word.

I will now show what we are to understand by the New Covenant. Jer. 31:31-34--"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord;) But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Jer. 32:39,40 --"And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Heb. 8:8-12: "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." Ezek. 36:25-27: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." Here, then, we have the two covenants distinctly spread before us.

I will now refer you to those passages which set them in contrast; and point out,

step by step, wherein they differ, as laid down in the Bible itself.

1. The Old Covenant was mere law, to which was added a typical representation of the gospel. Heb. 10:1 --"For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices, which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect."

The second or New Covenant is the writing of this law in the heart.

The first said "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind and strength."

The New, as promised in Jer. 31:31-34, is the fulfillment of what the Old required. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord;) But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Heb. 8:8-12: "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." Here, then, it is plain that the New is the fulfillment, in the heart, of what the Old required, and of all that the Old required.

2. The Old Covenant required perfect obedience on pain of death. Deut. 27:26: "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them: and all the people shall say, Amen." Deut. 28:15: "But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes, which I command thee this day, that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee." Gal. 3:10: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

The New Covenant is the CAUSING God's people to render perfect obedience. Ezek. 36:25-27: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them ." Heb. 8:8-11 --"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest." Jer. 32:39,40-- "And I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for ever for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me."

Now it should be observed that the New Covenant is not a promise, but it is the thing promised; i.e. the promise itself is not the New Covenant, but the state of mind produced by the Spirit of God writing the law in their hearts, and CAUSING them "to walk in his statutes and keep his judgments and do

them." The "new heart," and the "new spirit"--these are the New Covenant itself, and the promise of this New Covenant is quite another thing. The New Covenant and the promise differ as a promise and its fulfillment differ. The New Covenant is a fulfillment of this promise. Jer. 31:31-- "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah." Here is the promise of a covenant to be made. Now what is the covenant to be made? This is it, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." It cannot be too distinctly understood that the New Covenant is neither law nor promise, but the very spirit required by the law produced in the heart by the Holy Ghost.

3. The Old Covenant required a holy heart. Ezek. 18:31-- "Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

The New is the giving of this holy heart. Ezek. 36:26: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." Jer. 31:31-34 "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord;) But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

4. Obedience was enforced under the Old Covenant by penal sanctions. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." The New is the production of this obedience in the heart, by the Spirit of God. Ezek. 36:27: "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." Jer. 31:31-34 "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and

with the house of Judah; Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord;) But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." and Heb. 8:8-11 "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest."

5. The Old Covenant promised life only upon the conditions of perfect and perpetual obedience. Lev. 18:5: --"Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments; which if a man do, he shall even live in them; I am the Lord." Ezek. 20:11,13,21: "And I gave them my statutes, and shewed them my judgments, which if a man do he shall even live in them." "But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and my sabbaths they greatly polluted: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them." "Notwithstanding, the children rebelled against me: they walked not in my statutes, neither kept my judgments to do them, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; they polluted my sabbaths: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish mine anger against them in the wilderness." Luke 10:28: "And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." Rom. 10:5: "For Moses describeth the

righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them." Gal. 3:12: "And the law is not of faith: but, the man that doeth them shall live in them."

The New is the producing of this perfect and perpetual obedience. That it is perfect see Deut. 30:6: "And the Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live." Ezek. 36:25: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." Jer. 50:20: "in those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve." 1 Thess. 5:23-24: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." Jer. 24:7: "And I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart." Jer. 33:8: "And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me." That it is perpetual, see Ezek. 36:27: "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." Jer. 32:39-40: "And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me forever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." 1 Thess. 5:23,24: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." It has been objected, that this last is a mere prayer, and may not be answered; but the 24th verse promises "will do it."

Now if this covenant is to be everlasting, so that "they shall fear him for ever," that "they shall not depart from him" --if to cleanse the Church from "all her idols," "from ALL iniquities, and ALL sins," so that when her "iniquities are sought for, NONE shall be found" --if to "give her a new heart and a new spirit," and "cause her to walk in his statutes" --if "to sanctify her

wholly, body, soul, and spirit, and preserve her blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus"--if these are not perfect and perpetual obedience, I know not in what terms such obedience could be expressed.

It has been objected by some, that the promises in the Old Testament were made to Jews, and applied only to the Jews. I answer, it is plain, that these promises respected the whole Church under the New Covenant dispensation, and that the New Covenant included the Gentile nations. The Christian Church is the Israel of God, as I have shown in a former lecture.

June 19, 1839

THE PROMISES--No. 3

Text.--2 Pet. 1:4: "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

In continuing the contrast between the Old and New Covenants, I remark,

6. The Old Covenant left men to the exercise of their own strength. The New is the effectual sanctification by the Holy Spirit. Ezek. 36:25-27: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will PUT MY SPIRIT WITHIN YOU, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." Gal. 3:14: "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT through faith." I need not quote the numerous promises which sustain this point. But here let me say that this is one of the grand distinctions between the Old and New Covenants, that the New Covenant is the effectual indwelling of the Holy Spirit, producing the very temper required by the law, or Old Covenant. There is a grand and mighty difference between the Old and New Covenants in this respect; and let it be forever understood, that the difference does not lie merely, or mainly in the fact that the New Covenant

is a fuller revelation than the Old, which brings me to say,

7. The Old was a mere outward covenant, written upon tables of stone--the mere "letter that killeth." The New is an inward covenant. It is the indwelling of the Spirit of God, writing the law in the heart, begetting and maintaining the very obedience required by the Old Covenant. If this be overlooked, the New Covenant is thrown away. And herein is the great error of the Church, that they make the Old and New Covenants substantially the same thing, while, in fact, the Old Covenant was the mere requirement of that of which the New Covenant is the fulfillment, by the indwelling and effectual influences of the Spirit of God.

8. The Old Covenant had properly two parties. We find both the parties recognized in Ex. 19:8: "And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord;"--and 24:3-8: "And Moses came, and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do. And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt-offerings of oxen unto the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basins; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said, will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words." This covenant had no surety. But the New Covenant unites the parties in a mediator, who is also the surety of the New Covenant. Heb. 7:22: "By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament." Now observe the Old has no surety pledged for its fulfillment, while the New has the most ample surety pledged for the fulfillment of every jot and tittle of it.

9. The Old Covenant, I have said, was broken. Jer. 31:32: "Which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord." Now this was the grand reason why this covenant was set aside. Heb. 8:7: "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have

been sought for the second." 7:11, 18, 19: "If, therefore, perfection were by the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?" "For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before, for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God." But the New Covenant shall not be broken by those who receive it. The great difficulty with the Old Covenant was, that it had not sufficient efficiency to secure holiness. And if the New Covenant is not holiness, wherein is it better than the Old? In Heb. 8:6, it is said, "But now hath he [Christ] obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises."

But see the tenor of the covenant itself. The reason why it was not faultless, was because it did not secure obedience. This was the very reason why God found fault with it, and introduced a new one which consisted in obedience. See again Heb. 8:7-11: "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For, finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest." Jer. 31:31-34: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord;) But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And

they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Jer. 32:39, 40: "And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me forever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, THAT THEY SHALL NOT DEPART FROM ME." Ezek. 36:26: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." Ezek. 11:19-20: "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you: and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh; That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God." Jer. 24:7: "And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart." To these I might add many other passages to the same effect.

10. The Old Covenant was designed to develop sin. Rom. 5:20: "Moreover, the law entered, that the offence might abound: but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Rom. 7:8-13: But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, WROUGHT IN ME ALL MANNER OF CONCUPISCENCE. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, SIN REVIVED, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, TAKING OCCASION BY THE COMMANDMENT, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, WORKING DEATH in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. Now the design of the Old Covenant, as declared in these texts, was not to make men holy, i.e. it was not expected to make men holy, but to develop their real character--to bring out their depravity to their own observation, and thus convict and condemn them, rather than make them holy and justify them. Read the New Covenant again, Jer. 31:31-34 "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will

make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord;) But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Jer. 32:39-40: "And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from me." Jer. 50:20: "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve." Ezek. 36:25-27: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." Rom. 6:1-14: "What shall we say, then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. Knowing that Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto

God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of righteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." Rom. 7:4-6: "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." Rom. 8:2: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Gal. 5:16-18: "This I say, then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." I continue to quote these texts, and to write them out, that you may read them attentively in the different connections in which they occur in this discourse. I wish you, by all means, to consider them attentively in all the different connections in which I quote them, and see if they prove the points for which they are quoted.

Now I ask you, beloved, if these texts do not prove that the New Covenant is the death of sin, in opposition to the Old, which is the "STRENGTH OF SIN" 1 Cor. 15:56: "The STRENGTH of sin is the law." Now observe again, that the New Covenant is not an outward precept, nor an outward promise, nor any outward thing whatever, but an inward holiness wrought by the Spirit of God--the very substance and spirit of the law written in the heart by the Holy Ghost. Hence in Rom. 6:1-14, persons that are baptized by the Holy Ghost are said to be "dead," "crucified," "buried," &c. I have just quoted it, but consult it again. "What shall we say, then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by

baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. Knowing that Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of righteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." Rom. 7:4-6: "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." Rom. 8:2: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Gal. 5:16-18: "This I say, then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." Now what do these passages mean, if they do not teach a death to sin? And this certainly is not spoken of a future state of existence; but is affirmed of saints in this world. If these passages do not contain an account of a state of entire sanctification, I believe there are none in the Bible that contain such an account, either in reference to this world, or heaven itself.

Again, if these passages do not speak of a state of entire sanctification, then there are none that speak of a state of entire depravity. If to be "dead in

trespasses and sins" is not a state of total depravity, then I do not know that the doctrine of total depravity is taught in the Bible. But if to be dead in sin is total depravity, then to be dead to sin must be total or entire holiness.

Now by what rule of biblical interpretation can this conclusion be denied or evaded?

11. The Old Covenant was the ministration of death, but the New of righteousness and life. 2 Cor. 3:6-16: "Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the Spirit: for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses, for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away; how shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious. Seeing, then, that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: and not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless, when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away." Here we have the two covenants beautifully contrasted by the Apostle--the Old as working spiritual death, and ending in eternal death--the New as consisting in righteousness and eternal life.

12. The Old Covenant was only a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. Gal. 3:24: "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." But the New Covenant is the reign of Christ in the heart. Jer. 31:31-34: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith

the Lord;) But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Jer. 32:39-40: "And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Ezek. 36:25-27: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." Col. 1:27: "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." 1 John 4:4: "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." Rom. 8:9: "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Gal. 4:6: "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." Gal. 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Rom. 8:10-11, 16: "And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead, dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." Phil. 1:19: "For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." Here observe that the Old Covenant was designed to strip us of self-righteousness, and show us our need of Christ--to develop our selfishness and enmity--and our entire

helplessness and dependence upon a foreign influence to incline us to holiness; and thus preparing the way for our acceptance of Christ as an indwelling and reigning Savior. Then when the Old Covenant, as a schoolmaster, has brought us to Christ, the New enters. In other words--Christ enters the soul, takes up His residence there--writes the law of love in the heart--takes away the stony heart of flesh--makes the New Covenant with the soul--and sheds His divine influence over the entire moral being. Now if as much as this is not taught in these scriptures, and in various other parts of the Bible, what is taught? And if these texts are to be set aside, and explained away after the common manner of disposing of Scripture testimony on this subject, what doctrine or truth may not be expunged from the Bible?

July 3, 1839

THE PROMISES--No. 4

Text.--2 Pet. 1:4: "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

In resuming the subject of the contrast between the Old and New Covenants, I remark,

13. The Old Covenant was the strength of sin. 1 Cor. 15:56: "THE STRENGTH OF SIN IS THE LAW." In this passage, and in others, the Apostle plainly teaches that the Old Covenant, or law, strengthened depravity, instead of annihilating it. But the New is represented as the death of sin. Ezek. 36:25-29: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from ALL YOUR UNCLEANNES." Rom. 6:1-14: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are DEAD to sin, LIVE any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as

were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his DEATH? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into DEATH; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should WALK IN NEWNESS OF LIFE. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. Knowing this, that our OLD MAN IS CRUCIFIED with him, that the body of SIN MIGHT BE DESTROYED, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that IS DEAD IS FREED FROM SIN. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: knowing that Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he DIED UNTO SIN once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye yourselves to be DEAD indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For SIN SHALL NOT HAVE DOMINION OVER YOU: FOR YE ARE NOT UNDER THE LAW, BUT UNDER GRACE. Rom. 7:4-6: "Wherefore, my brethren, ye are also become DEAD to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit UNTO DEATH. But now we are delivered from the law, that being DEAD wherein we were held; that we should serve in NEWNESS OF SPIRIT, and not in the oldness of the letter." Gal. 5:16-18: "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, YE ARE NOT UNDER THE LAW." Now as I have before remarked, if to be dead to sin be not entire holiness, then to be dead in sin is not entire depravity.

14. The Old Covenant made nothing perfect. Heb. 7:19: "For the LAW MADE NOTHING PERFECT, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God." Heb. 9:9: "Which WAS a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices that

COULD NOT make him that did the service PERFECT, as pertaining to the conscience." Heb. 10:11: "And every priest standeth daily ministering, and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which CAN NEVER TAKE AWAY SINS." It is abundantly taught in this epistle that Abraham, and the other Old Testament saints did not receive the promises; i.e. they did [not] receive the fulfillment of the promises. The promises were made to them, or rather through them, to the Christian Church. But it is expressly said that they did not receive the fulfillment of the promises. Of the long list of saints mentioned in chapter 11 of this epistle, it is said, verse 13, "These all died in faith, NOT HAVING RECEIVED THE PROMISES." And in verses 39, 40, it is said: "And these all having obtained a good report through faith RECEIVED NOT THE PROMISE: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."

The New Covenant is perfection itself. Lest this should be doubted, it may be well to inquire what we understand by Christian Perfection. Has God anywhere required perfection in the Bible? If so, where? Does his law require perfection? If not, what part of the Bible does? And if his law does not require perfection, why does it not? Is it not manifestly an imperfect law? And how can it be said that the "law is HOLY, JUST and GOOD"?

But it probably will not be doubted that God's law is perfect, and that entire conformity to it is perfection itself. Now what does this law require?

(1.) Not that we should love God as much as we should be under obligation to love him, had we a perfect knowledge of all our relations. If the law required this, it would be more than any saint on earth or in heaven, or any angel in heaven could perform. None but an infinite mind can perceive all the relations that exist between God and ourselves, and between ourselves and our fellow men.

(2.) It does not require the same degree of love that we might have rendered, had we never abused our powers by sin. If it did there is not a saint on earth or in heaven that could obey the law. The law is directed to us as we are; and it says to every individual as he is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all THY heart, and with all THY soul, and with all THY strength,"--not with all the strength thou mightest have had, hadst thou never sinned. Perfection would be as impossible to saints in heaven as to saints on earth, did God require the same

strength of affection that might have been rendered had our powers never been debilitated by sin.

(3.) Nor does the law require the same love that might be rendered, had we as much knowledge of God as we might have gained if we had always improved our time in the acquisition of knowledge. If this were required of the saints, there is not a saint in heaven that is or ever will be perfect; for there is not one that has as much knowledge as he might have possessed had he always improved his time and talents in its acquisition. What is lost in these respects is lost forever. And God no more requires us to make up the deficiency than he requires us to recall past time. Repentance for all the past, and perfect obedience in the future, with such powers as we have, is all that the law or the gospel requires. "THOU shalt love the Lord thy God with all THY heart, and with all THY soul, and with all THY strength." This is the Old Covenant. I have before said that it made nothing perfect.

I now add that the New Covenant is perfection itself. Jer. 31:31-34: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them saith the Lord;) But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. Heb. 8:8-12: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws in their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother,

saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their iniquities will I remember no more. Ezek. 36:25-27: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." Deut. 30:6: "And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God WITH ALL THINE HEART, and WITH ALL THY SOUL, that thou mayest live." Rom. 8:1-4: "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me FREE from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law MIGHT BE FULFILLED IN US, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Now if you look into the promise of the covenant in Jeremiah, you will see that it is just this--a promise to write the Old Covenant in the heart. It should be remembered, that the words old covenant and law are synonymous terms. And when God promises to write the law in the heart, he promises that the Old Covenant shall be written in the heart.

Now if the Old Covenant or Law required perfection, (and if it did not there is no requirement of perfection in the Bible,) the promise in Jeremiah is that this same perfection shall exist in the soul. And in the quotation from Rom. 8:4, it is expressly asserted that this was the object of the atonement of Christ. Now it does appear to me that the argument in favor of entire sanctification may be settled to a demonstration, by looking at what the Old Covenant required, and recognizing that as the highest perfection that God requires of man, and then seeing that this Old Covenant is to be written in the heart by the Spirit of God. If, when the Old is fulfilled in the heart, men are not perfect in the Bible sense of that term, we may hope in vain to understand what perfection is.

15. The Old Covenant gendered to bondage. Gal. 4:21-31: "Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that

Abraham had two sons; the one by a bond-maid, the other by a free woman. But he who was of the bond-woman was born after the flesh; but he of the free woman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which GENDERETH TO BONDAGE, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice thou barren that barest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not; for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bond-woman and her son: for the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bond-woman, but of the free. Here the Apostle represents all men under the law as being in a state of slavery and rendering merely the service of fear. But the New Testament is liberty itself. Gal. 5:1: "Stand fast, therefore, in the LIBERTY wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." John 8:32-36: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you FREE. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house forever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you FREE, ye shall be FREE indeed." Rom. 6:14: "For SIN SHALL NOT HAVE DOMINION OVER YOU; FOR YE ARE NOT UNDER THE LAW, BUT UNDER GRACE." Gal. 4:2-6: "But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in BONDAGE under the elements of the world: but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to REDEEM THEM that were under the law, that we might receive the ADOPTION OF SONS. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father." Isa. 61:1: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek: he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to PROCLAIM LIBERTY to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are

bound." Rom. 8:21: "Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the GLORIOUS LIBERTY of the children of God." 1 Cor. 8:9: "But take heed, lest by any means this LIBERTY of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak." 2 Cor. 3:17: "Now the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is LIBERTY." Gal. 5:13: "For, brethren, ye have been called unto LIBERTY; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."

16. The Old Covenant produced only outward morality, while it aggravated the sin of the heart. Matt. 23:25: "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye make clean the OUTSIDE of the cup and of the platter, but WITHIN THEY ARE FULL OF EXTORTION AND EXCESS." Rom. 7:8: "But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, WROUGHT IN ME ALL MANNER OF CONCUPISCENCE." The New Covenant is the purifying of the heart. Jer. 31:31-34: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord;) but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. Ezek. 36:25-27: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." Deut. 30:6: "And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live."

17. The Old Covenant had only a shadow of the Gospel. Heb. 10:1: "For the law having a SHADOW of good things to come and not the very image of

the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect." The New is the inwrought effect of the gospel. Let it be understood that the New Testament is not the Gospel itself; but is that which is to be effected by the Gospel. The New Testament and the Gospel are by no means to be confounded the one with the other. The New Testament or Covenant is that work in the heart which is wrought by the Holy Ghost, by the instrumentality of the Gospel. Most professors of religion, in speaking of the New Testament, mean by it the book containing the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles and the Apocalypse. Now these are not the New Testament; for the New Testament and Covenant, you understand, are the same thing. These books are the Gospel. And, as I have said, the Gospel is only the means by which God makes the New Covenant with the soul, or by which he inclines the soul to close in with, and obey the Old Covenant. Now the whole object of God in the Gospel is not to abrogate the Old Covenant, but to bring men into obedience to it; i.e. to be perfectly conformed to the law of love. The Gospel is as distinct from the New Covenant as the means are distinct from the end. And for an individual to suppose he has received the New Covenant because he has the Gospel in his hands, or because he lives under the Gospel dispensation, is a dangerous and fatal error. A man may live under the Gospel, may understand and believe many of its truths, and yet the Gospel may never have been so fully received by him, as effectually and permanently to have written the Old Covenant or law in his heart.

It has been said that regeneration is all that is included in the promise of the New Covenant, and that every real Christian has received this New Covenant. Now if this be so, in what sense did not Abraham and the Old Testament saints receive the promises and their fulfillment? Were they not regenerated? See Heb. 11:13: "These all died in faith, NOT HAVING RECEIVED THE PROMISES." Also verses 39, 40: "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, RECEIVED NOT THE PROMISE: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." Now here many of the most distinguished saints under the Old Testament dispensation are mentioned by name, and it is expressly said of every one of them, that they "died in faith," but "had not received the promises." It is not meant that they had not heard the promises, for to them the promises were given. It must therefore mean, that they did not receive

their fulfillment. But who will doubt that they were regenerated? Now I cannot resist the conviction that to suppose regeneration to be the receiving of the New Covenant or New Testament, in the sense in which it is promised in the passages [I have] so often quoted, is a great and dangerous error. It appears to me that the Bible abundantly teaches that these promises are made to believers and not to unbelievers--that they are made to the Church, and not to the world, and that it is after we believe that we are to be sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Eph. 1:13: "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also AFTER THAT YE BELIEVED, YE WERE SEALED WITH THAT HOLY SPIRIT OF PROMISE." I have been ready sometimes to ask, can it be possible that those who maintain that the promise in Jeremiah means nothing more than regeneration, have thoroughly considered what they say and whereof they affirm?

18. The condition of the Old Covenant was perfect obedience to law. I have so often quoted the passages to prove this, that I need not here repeat them. The condition of the New Covenant is faith in Christ. Gal. 3:14: "That the blessing of Abraham, might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit THROUGH FAITH." Now it is naturally impossible that the New Covenant should be received, or the Old written in the heart upon any other condition than faith. Without confidence or faith there can be no love; and there cannot be genuine faith that does not produce love.

These are only a few of the exceeding great and precious promises of which the Apostle speaks in the text. Every student of the Bible knows that I might extend this examination indefinitely, and write a volume as large as the Bible itself, should I quote all the promises, and remark upon them only to a limited extent. Some of them I have quoted over and over again for the purpose of showing their particular bearing upon the different propositions I have laid down. Those which I have quoted are only specimens of the promises, and designed only as illustrations of the truth that the promises are sufficient to accomplish the great work of making us partakers of the divine nature. The Lord willing, I design ere long to take up a more direct examination of the question whether entire sanctification is attainable in this life, and enter more into detail than would be proper in these discourses on the promises. In my next, I design to present some reasons why the promises

are not fulfilled in, and to us.

In the mean time, I wish to call your attention to what I regard as a settled truth, viz: that the doctrine of sanctification is so spiritual a subject that no mind will understand it that is not in a truly and highly spiritual state. No man ever understood discourses on regeneration, and especially on the evidences of regeneration, and the exercises of a regenerated heart, who had not himself been regenerated. Nor will a man understand any course of reasoning on the subject of sanctification, who has not experience on that subject. By this I do not mean, that he may not have sufficient intellectual perception to understand some things about it. But I do mean that he will not understand the fullness with which the Bible teaches that doctrine until his spiritual perceptions are made clear and penetrating; e.g. no man ever believed that Jesus was the Christ who was not born of God. It is expressly asserted in the Bible that "whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God" and that "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." Now it is not intended in this passage that a man may not settle the abstract question to some extent, as a matter of science and evidence respecting the divinity of Christ. But it is intended that none but a spiritual mind can have any knowledge of Christ as God. And to me it seems plain that the more spiritual any truth is, the more certainly it will be misunderstood by any but a spiritual mind; for the natural man discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned. The utmost that I expect to do by any thing that I can say, and by any scriptures that can be quoted, with minds not in a truly spiritual state, is so far to convince their understanding as to convict their heart of being wrong, and thus to bring them to search after the true light.

July 17, 1839

THE PROMISES--No. 5

Text.--2 Pet. 1:4: "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

In some of my last lectures, I examined a few of the promises, with the design of showing that they are sufficiently full and explicit to cover the whole ground of

our necessities; and that they afford us abundant means of entire conformity to the divine nature or image--that we have only to realize in our own experience the fullness of the promised blessing, and to believe and receive all that is actually promised, in order to know by our own blessed experience, what it is to be made partakers of the divine nature. I might extend this examination of the promises to almost any length, as every attentive reader of the Bible knows. I have only quoted such specimens of the different classes of promises, as seem to me to afford a fair illustration of the extent and fullness of the salvation promised in the Gospel.

According to my plan, I am now to show,

IV. Some of the reasons why the promises are not fulfilled in and to us.

1. They are overlooked in a great measure by the Church. They seem as a body not to know that there are any such promises as these in the Bible. Now as the fulfillment of a promise must depend upon our knowing, understanding, and believing it, there is a very obvious reason why to multitudes the promises are never fulfilled.

2. Many who know that such promises are in the Bible, do not at all understand their application. I was amazed, not long since, to hear a minister contend, that the promise of the New Covenant, which I have so often quoted, was made to the Jews--that inasmuch as Israel and Judah are mentioned, we had no right to apply the promise to any but the Jews. He seemed entirely to overlook the fact that these promises were made to the Israel of God, and more especially to the Christian Church than to the Jewish Church. Now it is perfectly manifest that where such ignorance as this prevails (and it does very extensively prevail in the Christian Church) that there is a natural reason why the promises are not fulfilled--are not pleaded, believed, and applied by the Church to their own case. Therefore they are as ineffectual to them as the Gospel provisions are to sinners who starve to death with the Gospel feast before them.

3. Another reason why they are not fulfilled to many is, they will not believe the promises mean all they say. They reason thus: as a matter of fact, say they, the Christian Church is not wholly sanctified and never has been--that very few, if any, believers in Christ have ever been wholly sanctified in this life. Therefore, as a matter of fact, either they do not mean

to promise entire sanctification, or God has not kept his word. They therefore suffer themselves to fritter away the meaning of the promises. Now if the objection that the promise cannot mean entire sanctification, because, as a matter of fact, entire sanctification has not taken place in the Church, be good for anything, it must amount to this--that nothing more is promised in the New Covenant than the Church have actually realized. For the whole force of the objection lies in this, that if God has not fulfilled all that he promised, then he has forfeited His word. Therefore, the New Covenant does not mean entire sanctification; but these promises of the New Covenant, and all the promises which I have quoted, mean nothing more than the Church has actually realized. Now if this objection amounts to anything, it is this--that nothing more is promised than has been fulfilled--that the Gospel has done for the Church all that it can do in this world--and that every Christian has actually been at every moment just as holy as there was any provision for him to be. Now the first absurdity involved in this objection is that it would make the promises mean more or less to different individuals, just according to the measure of grace which each one has had. For according to the objection, if the promise has not been fulfilled, then God has broken his word. And if one Christian has had more holiness than another, it must be because God has promised more to one than to another. For in this objection, let it be remembered, it is contended that he has fulfilled all His promises.

A second absurdity is, it assumes that these promises are without any condition, or that the condition has been complied with by every Christian. For certainly it would not be assumed that God had violated his promises, if he intended to promise entire sanctification, unless it were assumed either that they are without condition, expressed or implied, or that the condition had been complied with. But these promises are all made on conditions, either expressed or implied. They are to be recognized, and pleaded, and believed. The conditions are often expressed along with the promises; and when not expressed, are always implied. The conditions are not arbitrary, but there is a natural necessity that they should be understood, and believed, and a personal application made of them, as the indispensable means of getting that state of mind that constitutes the divine image or nature in man.

It is indeed a shorthand method of frittering away the promises of God, to overlook the conditions upon which they are made, and contend that they can

mean no more than has been actually realized by the Church, because on any other supposition, God has not performed his word. Now the reason, and a sufficient reason, why entire sanctification has not been realized by the Church, is that she has not believed and applied these promises according to their real import.

I don't know how to leave this objection without saying it is truly ridiculous. Upon the principle assumed in the objection, there is no promise in the Bible that has become due that can be or ought to be pleaded by Christians, inasmuch as the promises must be already fulfilled, else God has violated his word.

But to what I have said, it may be objected--that the New Testament times have really come--that the New Covenant has been actually made with the Church--and that those who have actually received it have not been entirely sanctified. To this I reply--that the Church may have received more or less of the New Covenant precisely according to their understanding of the fullness of the promised blessings, and their faith in the promises. When God had promised the New Covenant, he said, "Nevertheless I will be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." Now it is nowhere asserted in the Bible that the New Testament, or Covenant, has been fully received, although the time has come when it is offered to the Church. Under the New Covenant dispensation, it is promised that the fullness of the Gentiles shall turn to the Lord, and that the Jews themselves shall be converted and receive this covenant. Now the fact that the Church has not actually received the blessing of sanctification, no more proves that that blessing is not fully promised in the New Covenant, than the fact that the Jews and Gentiles have not been converted, proves that no such thing is promised. It is certain that the promises are not fulfilled in regard to the world's conversion, for the very reason that the Church and the world have not believed and applied these promises. The same is true of the New Covenant blessing of sanctification. This blessing has been received to a very limited extent by the Church because she has neglected to believe and apply the promise.

4. Another reason why the promises are not fulfilled in us, is that we often fail to search out the one that is applicable to our circumstances. There are promises adapted to all our circumstances and states of mind, as I have before shown. No one will answer our purpose for the time being, but the

one that is applicable to our state of mind. I have often been struck with this, in endeavoring to help anxious souls out of their difficulties. After inquiring as clearly as I was able into their state of mind, I have presented one, and another, and another of the promises, and found that they would instantly perceive that these promises did not exactly meet their case. But when the Spirit of the Lord directed to the selection of the right promise, I have often been amazed and delighted to see how instantly they would recognize it as exactly suited to their case--as made to one exactly in their state of mind--as meeting them where they are, and affording them just the aid they needed. It is often most refreshing to see with what a grasp the mind in such a state will lay hold upon such a promise, and how, in a moment, it becomes as an "anchor to the soul, sure and steadfast," and how easily the mind when anchored down upon such a promise, can look out upon the storm that rages without, and smile through tears of joy. It is one of the great and sweet employments of the ministry, to search out and apply the blessed promises to the different states of mind in which their people are--to feed the lambs and sheep with food suited to their age and spiritual health; and he is surely but ill-instructed in the oracles of God, who has not sufficient spiritual discernment, experience, and knowledge of the Bible, and of the laws of the human mind, to know how to search out the real state of different persons, and apply the promises that belong to them. It is a most divine employment, and if ministers were much better fitted for it, than they are, the weak ones of the flock would soon be strong.

5. Another reason is that we do not anchor down in naked faith upon the promises. We are waiting for some state of mind to precede the exercise of faith, which we suppose must be had before we are at liberty to lay hold on the promise. And often the very state of mind which we suppose must precede the exercise of faith, is to be the effect of faith, and can only be produced by it. When I speak of anchoring down upon a promise in naked faith, I mean that we should take the promise and believe it, as a matter of fact, as the word of God, as infallible truth, entirely irrespective of any state of mind in which we may be at the time. Take an illustration of what I mean. A young man not long since, had been for a long time anxious, and going to one and another, and inquiring into their experience, and how they obtained the blessing. When one had told him, he would think, now I must get just into that state of mind and then I shall have the blessing. And when

another had related his experience, he would strive to imitate that; and so he went from one to another, but all in vain. Finally he came to this conclusion, that what the Bible said about Christ Jesus were matters of fact, that there he would begin by taking these things as facts--that he would not inquire about this or that man's experience, but would take the facts about Christ Jesus and the promise as certain truths. Now this is what I call naked faith. This immediately brought him into the state of mind after which he had been seeking, and which, it seems, he expected in some degree at least, to realize before he exercised faith in the promises. Now if we ever expect to receive the fulfillment of the promises, we must not wait for appearances or any indications that God is about to fulfill his promises, but must anchor right down upon them in naked faith because they are the word of God.

6. Again, we do not receive them as belonging to us, as in the case that I have mentioned, where one supposed that the promise of the New Testament was made only to the Jews. Now multitudes seem never to have understood the promises made to individuals and to the Church under the Old Covenant, as belonging still more emphatically to the Church and to individuals under the Christian dispensation. They seem entirely to have overlooked the fact that Christ and his apostles always treated the promises of the Old Testament, as more emphatically belonging to Christians under the New dispensation. Now here is a sufficient reason for their not receiving the fulfillment of the promises, that they do not understand them as made to themselves. Consequently they do not believe nor apply them.

7. It does not seem to be generally understood, that the promises mean all that they say--that they are to be interpreted by the same rules by which the commandments, and other parts of scripture are to be interpreted, e.g. the promise "The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul," does not seem to be understood to mean as much as the command "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength." It is a matter of amazement and grief that so many individuals, who will contend for the literal meaning of the commandments, will fritter away the promises when the same terms are used, as meaning infinitely less, than the language in the commandments means. Just as if an infinitely bountiful God meant less by the promises of grace than by the requirements of justice. If that man is to be accounted least in the kingdom

of God who shall teach men to cast away one of the least of the commandments of God, what shall be said of him who not only casts away himself, but teaches others to cast away the promises of God? Were this the place, it could be easily shown, that it has been a common thing with those who have written against the doctrine of entire sanctification, in this life, to interpret the promises by a very different rule from that which they applied to the commandments. Now I would humbly ask where is their authority for doing this? Is not such a course manifestly a violation of the Word of God?

8. Another reason is, we are so prone to limit their meaning to our own experience, or to the experience of others whom we esteem to be eminent saints. How common is it for persons to inquire, if these promises mean this, why did not President Edwards or his wife, or Mrs. Isabella Graham, or Dr. Payson understand them and experience their fulfillment? Now we are apt to suffer such cases as these to stumble us, by assuming that they understood and applied the promises in all their length and breadth. It should be understood that no man's experience is the standard of truth. We are not to interpret the Bible by the experience of any man, but bring the experience of every man into the light of the Bible. The plain meaning of the Bible as it reads, is the standard, whatever we may have experienced to the contrary notwithstanding. It is the practice of some men, in these days, when the full meaning of the promises of the gospel is contended for, to reply, by demanding an example. They say, show us an example of a perfect man. To this I reply,

(1) That should such an example be produced, its perfection would not be acknowledged. Christ claimed and really possessed perfection. But his claim was set aside by the religious teachers of his day, and he was considered as a blasphemer, and as one possessed with a devil. I verily believe that examples have been produced, and that some have all along existed in the Church, and now exist, who enjoy the blessing of entire sanctification, as I understand that term, and who nevertheless, have been and still are looked upon, even by the mass of professors of religion, as being so far from a sanctified state, as to render it very doubtful whether they have any religion at all; certainly the most holy persons that I have ever seen have been the most maligned and persecuted, and denounced, even by many of the Church, as being

almost any thing else than what they ought to be. And this is exactly according to the Word of God. "If any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, he shall suffer persecution."

(2) But another answer to this call for an example is, that if no such example were known to us, this would no more prove that they did not exist, than the fact that Elijah did not know that God had reserved seven thousand men, that had not bowed the knee to Baal, proved that they did not exist.

(3) If no such example did exist, or ever has existed, it would prove nothing more than that the gospel has not yet done all for the world and the Church, which it was designed to accomplish. And who, I would humbly ask, believes that it has? Who believes that either the Church or the world has experienced all that the gospel is designed to effect? If no case can indeed be found, where entire sanctification is enjoyed, by any saint, it certainly does not prove that the promises mean no more than is enjoyed, but only that they are not believed, and the fullness of their meaning realized in the experience of the Church.

9. Another reason why the promises are not fulfilled in us is a want of perseverance. The Bible insists largely upon the importance of perseverance in prayer. The case of the "woman of Canaan" is recorded in the 15th of Matthew; and that of the unjust judge in the 18th of Luke, and many other instances recorded in the Bible, set the importance of perseverance in prayer in a strong light. It is often the case, that individuals will pray with confidence for blessings for a short time; but becoming discouraged because the blessing does not come, or supposing perseverance to be unnecessary and that the blessing will come in its time without it, they cease their efforts and wrestling, and, in this respect, restrain prayer before God. Now it is very often the case, that perseverance is naturally indispensable to our obtaining the blessing--that nothing else can prepare our minds to receive it; and it is often the case that it cannot be granted, but through our own agency and protracted and agonizing efforts. Some obstacle may be, to be overcome, either within or without ourselves, that can be overcome in no other way. As Christ said on a certain occasion, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."

10. Again, we hold on too long, i.e. we do not go from promise to promise, taking hold on them as they rise one above the other. Now it is manifest to those who have experience on the subject, that the promises are adapted to all possible states of mind, from the lowest degree of grace, and from the lowest depths of despondency, step by step, up to the highest degrees of holy confidence and triumph of which the human mind is capable. It often comes to pass, that when individuals have taken hold on some of those promises, designed to reach the Christian in his most languid state, such as "He giveth power to the faint, and to him that hath no might he increaseth strength." "The bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench till he bring forth judgment unto victory" that here he rests, and being comforted by these promises he does not proceed to take hold on promises suited to his state of mind as he rises, and thus rise quite out of the murky regions of his unbelief and selfishness, but contents himself with hanging upon that one, or those of that class, without rising any higher. It is impossible that a believer should remain stationary. He must go from strength to strength, or he will certainly insensibly decline. The promises are like a ladder that reaches from earth to heaven; and the cry continually is, come up higher, come up higher, and unless the mind is taken up with viewing the heights still above, and what is still to be attained, it is apt to become giddy with looking down upon those below, and dwelling upon its own attainments, and being lifted up with pride, falls into the condemnation of the devil.

11. We do not duly consider how intimately God's glory is connected with our receiving all that the promises mean. We are apt to be taken up with a sense of our unworthiness, and be discouraged by a consideration of it, and not duly to consider that this very unworthiness would render it exceedingly honorable to God to give us the fullness of his grace, and wholly to transform us into his own image. I love to contemplate the grace of God as manifested in Paul--once a Saul--a raging persecutor, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the infant Church--afterwards so changed by the grace of God as to become the wonder of the world in his remarkable resemblance of the Son of God.

God's glory is his reputation or renown. And if to bestow great and transforming grace upon the children of men who are in the image of hell, is calculated to convey a high idea of the patience, forbearance, goodness and

moral omnipotence of God, then certainly his glory is intimately connected with our receiving the full meaning and power of his promises.

12. We do not sufficiently consider the importance of our becoming living illustrations of the power and grace of God. There should be among Christians, a holy ambition, each one to become a living, standing illustration of the full meaning of the promises, and of the provisions of the gospel to transform the soul into the divine image and make it a partaker of the divine nature. Who that has read the life of Mrs. President Edwards, has not been encouraged and edified and strengthened to press after higher attainments in holiness when they have seen what grace can do and what it actually has done, even in modern times, to transform and elevate the soul. Now as we prize the glory of God--as we desire to do good to the Church, instead of being satisfied with small attainments, we should reach after the highest measure of grace, and try the full strength and intent of the promises, and ask God to give us for his own glory all that he meant to promise--that the unbelief of the Church may be rebuked, and that we might so illustrate in our own experience the fullness of gospel salvation, that the frittering away of the promises and paring them down to the legal experience of the Church in her present state may be done away forever.

13. Another reason is the concealing the grace of God which we actually have received, either through the suggestion of Satan that we shall lose the present blessing, or through fear that we shall be thought egotistical and proud, if we declare what God has done for our souls. Says the Psalmist, "I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart. I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation. I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great congregation." And when he had been brought up from the horrible pit of miry clay, and his feet set upon a rock, his goings established, and a new song put into his mouth, he said, "Many shall see it and shall fear, and shall trust in the Lord." Christ has said that "men do not light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that it may give light to all that are in the house." "Even so," he adds, "let your light so shine that men may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

Now it is not enough that we should merely behave ourselves aright, but we should be prompt, and plain, and simple-hearted in ascribing all our good

works to the grace of God within us, else ourselves and not God will have the glory in the estimation of men. If we conceal the lovingkindness of the Lord, if we are ashamed, or afraid, or for any cause neglect to give him glory and tell what the Spirit hath done for our souls, we may expect that to overtake us which was spoken by the prophet, "If ye will not hear and if ye will not lay it to heart to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings."

14. A voluntary humility may prevent us from receiving the fulfillment of the promises. Many individuals seem afraid to hope or expect to attain to any but the lowest measures of grace, on account of their great unworthiness. They feel as if it would be aspiring and getting out of their place to ask for the children's bread, and therefore suppose themselves to be doing God service, in consenting to live upon the crumbs under the table. They read of the attainments of others, but ah! they think, these are not such great sinners as themselves. They thus dishonor the grace of God, by somehow imagining that it was because they were not so great sinners that they have been so highly exalted. In other words, they insult the grace of God by accounting for the attainments of those of whom they read, upon the score of justice rather than grace--supposing that it was because they were not so ill-deserving as themselves. Now what is this but wicked and shocking unbelief, depreciating the grace of God, and ascribing that to justice which is only the result of infinite grace--and besides, a most self-righteous keeping down in the dust, by a most God-dishonoring idea that our worthiness and not unworthiness is to recommend us to the grace of God? Now it should be forever understood that worthiness recommends us to the justice and not to the grace of God, and that our deep unworthiness, while it lays us under the condemning sentence of justice, recommends us to the grace of God. Let no one therefore suppose himself to be pleasing God, when he voluntarily consents to grovel in the lowest attainments, when he ought to rise into the full sunlight of God's countenance, and to be filled with all the fullness of God.

15. Another reason is a God-dishonoring unbelief, and a blasphemous putting in of but, and if, when pleading the promises of God, which imply insincerity on the part of God in making the promises, e.g. Christ has said "God is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him than parents are to give good gifts to their children." Suppose we pray for the

Holy Ghost, and preface and conclude the petition by saying, "if it be thy will," &c. Now wherever there is an express promise, to put in an if in this way, is to call in question the sincerity of God. Where he has made no conditions, we are to make none, unless we would be guilty of adding to or subtracting from his word.

16. Another difficulty is, very few have ever learned how to use the promises. They have so little faith in them as not to select them, nor have [they] committed them to memory, nor arranged them in any order in their own minds. And to them, the weapons of their spiritual warfare are about as useless as if they were locked up in an armory. Now the promises of God should be so pondered, selected, arranged, and remembered, as to be ever ready at hand, that the one that is needed may be presented at any time to quench the fiery darts of the wicked. To understand how to use the promises of God is a science of vast extent, and it requires the highest exercise of the human faculties, always to be able to seize upon the one we need, for our own or for others edification and support. I regard this as one of the principal qualifications of ministers. We need to know how so to apply the promises of grace, as to bring the Church from her low estate to those heights to which the promises were designed to elevate her.

17. Another reason is that the ministry to a great extent, are frittering away instead of applying the promises of God to the help and edification of the Church. My soul is often sick to see how the promises are understood, and how they are explained away, and the Church robbed of its heritage, and the sheep starved to death by those who are set to feed the flock of God.

18. Another reason is, we regard iniquity in our hearts. If any sin is cherished there, if any lust is spared, if any unholy indulgence is pleaded for or defended, or pride or sin of any kind, the Lord will not hear us. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

19. Another reason is, a disposition to defer the fulfillment of the promises to the Millennium. In my apprehension, this is the very reason why the Millennium has not already come, because the Church are waiting for the effect to precede the cause. The Millennium will be the fulfillment of these promises. Before they can be fulfilled they must be believed and pleaded. But the Church seems to be waiting for the Millennium first to come, and then they will lay hold of the promises. How long shall the Church thus act?

How long shall the promises that are conditioned in their very nature upon our faith, remain a dead letter in the Bible because the Church is waiting for their fulfillment before they are believed?

20. Many are doubting whether these promises are to be fulfilled until we get into eternity, e.g. of the promise of the New Covenant it is said by some that no time is specified when it shall be fulfilled, and consequently we know not that we have a right to expect the blessing until we arrive at heaven. Now to this a multitude of answers might be given. But at present I will only say,

(1) That a promise in which no time for its fulfillment is either expressed or implied is void and a ridiculous mockery. Should I promise to pay A.B. twenty-five dollars without saying anything at all of the time, then he may call upon me at any time, for my obligation is considered as on demand. But if I should say at some FUTURE time, without specifying when, it would be void, as the time would never come when it would be considered as due. This is true of the promises of God. When a promise is made in the present tense it is always due or may at any time be pleaded--if at a future time, it is not due until that time arrives. If a promise should be found (of which there is no instance in the Bible) in which no particular future time is expressed or implied, that promise must from its nature be a mere nullity: For faith being the condition, it is plain that the condition can never be fulfilled because there is nothing on which it can rest, it being impossible to ascertain whether the time is come or when it will come that the promise was intended to be fulfilled. If it be said, as in the promise of the New Covenant, that, "after those days,"--"at that time," &c. evidently referring to some particular future time when the promise should be fulfilled--at that time it becomes due, and ever after that time it may be pleaded as a promise in the present tense. The particular time referred to in such cases may be learned in general by the connection in which the promise stands, or by reference to other parts of scripture: e.g.; Many things are promised to be fulfilled "in the latter day,"--"at the end of the world or Jewish age," &c. From the Bible, it is abundantly evident that the latter day is the gospel day--that the end of the world when by the phrase is meant the end of the Jewish state, is

also the commencement of the Christian dispensation, and that all the promises of blessings to be bestowed "in the last days" are now to be regarded as in the present tense, to be fulfilled at any time and to anyone who will believe them. This is undeniably the understanding of the Apostle, when, in Hebrews, he quotes the promise of the New Covenant from Jeremiah, as a promise to be fulfilled at the coming of Christ, who was the mediator of the New Covenant. Now the coming of Christ was the particular time at which the promise made by Jeremiah, and so often repeated in the prophets was to be considered as due, and forever after treated as a promise in the present tense. Christ's coming did not of itself secure the fulfillment of the promise, irrespective of our own faith and agency, but it pointed out the time when the Church was to look for its fulfillment, and when its fulfillment should depend upon their pleading it in faith.

(2) If there be no particular time in which the promises of God are to be fulfilled, I mean those of them that are in the future tense, then we can no more receive their fulfillment in heaven than we can here. For without a new revelation informing us that the time has come, we can never lay hold on them as due,--we cannot believe and receive their fulfillment. If the promise is evidently future, and no time is expressed or implied, when it shall be fulfilled, when we have been in heaven myriads of ages, we shall no more be able to lay hold on the promise as due, nor so far as I can see, be any more certain that the time for its fulfillment is not yet future, than we are now.

21. Another reason why the promises are not fulfilled in us is, we are unwilling on some accounts to have them fulfilled. Such as a fear of disgrace, being called fanatics, perfectionists or something else of the kind, that we dread. Lest we should have to abandon some particular indulgence, lust, or favorite pursuit. Now it often happens, that we would be very willing to have the blessing of sanctification, if it did not imply the actual giving up of sin, under every form. Many are praying for that blessing who are after all holding on to some form of sin.

22. Selfishness in our motives. Under one form and another, selfishness is often lurking in our applications to the throne of grace for promised

blessings. God cannot be deceived in this. And unless our eye be single our whole body cannot be full of light.

23. Our experience of the inefficacy of prayer, such as we have so often offered in selfishness, operates as a discouragement, and we come to God in the peevishness of unbelief. We have so often come to God in our selfishness and pleaded his promises, overlooking the wickedness of our motives, that we are ready to conclude either that we have misunderstood the promises altogether--that the time has not come for their fulfillment, or for some reason our prayers cannot prevail, and therefore we do not expect to receive the blessing. We are straitened by our wants, and cry to God, but it is in the anguish of unbelief, and we are of course denied.

24. Presumptuous misapplication of a promise. e.g.: The promise, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," is so misapplied and misunderstood that we become presumptuous, and depart from him instead of his departing from us. So the promise in James, "If a man lack wisdom let him ask of God and it shall be given him," is sometimes so misunderstood as to lead persons to expect wisdom without research.

25. Persons often tempt God, in asking the fulfillment of a promise without performing its conditions.

I might mention a great many other reasons, but these must suffice. And now I must close this discourse by saying, that I cannot tell you how much I felt shocked, when the question came fully up whether the grace of God was sufficient as a matter of fact for the entire sanctification of Christians in this life, and it was flatly denied. The question in this shape had never come fairly and fully before my mind as a subject of distinct consideration till the last winter of my residence in N. Y. And I can never express my astonishment and grief when I found that men standing high in the Church of God flatly denied it. I have often asked myself, is it possible that these brethren can be of the opinion that if a man should believe and realize in his own experience the full meaning of the promises, and all that the gospel and the grace of God can do for a man in this world, that he would not be entirely sanctified? I would humbly ask, where is there one among them that has tried the experiment? It is no answer to this to turn around and inquire, have you received the fullness of the promise? Are you sanctified? For if I have not, and if there were not a man on earth that has, that does not at all change the meaning of the promise, nor prove that they are not

sufficient to produce entire sanctification, so long as it is true that every one of them must confess that they have never received or hardly begun to receive all that they themselves admit the promises mean.

[Back to Top](#)

Being In Debt

Lecture XIII

July 31, 1839

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 13:8: "Owe no man any thing."

In discussing this subject I design to show:

I. The meaning of the text.

II. That to be in debt is sin.

III. The duty of those who are in debt.

I. I am to show the meaning of the text.

The meaning of this text, like most others, is to be learned from a careful examination of the verses in its connection. The Apostle begins the chapter by enforcing the duty of obedience to civil magistrates.

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive unto themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same. For he is the minister of God unto thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

Wherefore ye must be subject not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For, for this cause pay ye tribute also, for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing."

They are the servants of God, employed for your benefit. You are therefore to pay them tribute; i.e. give them the support which their circumstances require.

In the light of this and various other passages of scripture, I have often wondered how it was possible that any person could call in question the duty of obeying civil magistrates. Or how they could call in question the right and duty of magistrates to inflict civil penalties, and even capital punishment, where the nature of the case demands it. Certainly this passage recognizes their right and their duty "to execute wrath" upon transgressors, as the servants and executioners of God's vengeance.

"Render therefore to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, viz: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

From this connection, it is evident that the Apostle designed to teach, that whenever we come to owe a man, we should immediately pay him. And not suffer any debt or obligation to rest upon us undischarged.

"Owe no man any thing, but to love one another." Here the Apostle recognizes the truth that love is of perpetual obligation. And that this obligation can never be so canceled or discharged as to be no longer binding. He recognizes no other obligation except love with its natural fruits as being, in its own nature, of perpetual obligation.

In respect to this obligation, all that we can do is to fulfill it every moment, without the possibility of so fulfilling it, as to set aside the continued obligation to love.

But we are to owe no man any thing else but love. We are to "render to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, honor to whom honor."

I understand the text, then, simply to mean, let no obligation but that of love with its natural fruits, which is, from its very nature, a perpetual obligation, rest upon you undischarged.

I am aware that some modern critics maintain that this passage should have been rendered indicatively. But such men as Doddridge and Henry, Barnes and Prof. Stuart, are of the opinion that its imperative rendering is correct. And all are agreed that the doctrine of this text, as it stands, is plainly a doctrine of the Bible.

Here the question arises, what is it to owe a man in the sense of this text? I answer,

1. If you employ a laborer, and do not stipulate the time and terms of payment, it is taken for granted that he is to be paid when his work is done, and to have the money. If you hire him for a day, and nothing is said to the contrary, he cannot demand his pay till his day's work is done. Till then you owe him nothing. The same is true if you hire him for a week, or a month, or a year. When the time which he is to labor is stipulated, and nothing is said about the time and terms of payment, you owe him nothing, i.e. nothing is due till his time has expired. Then you owe him, and then you are bound to pay him, and pay him the money. But if the time was not specified which he was to labor, he may break off at any time, and demand pay for what he has done. Or if the time of payment was expressed or understood, whenever it arrives, you then owe him, and are bound to pay him agreeably to the understanding.
2. The same is true if you hire a horse, or any other piece of property. If you hire it for a specified time, and nothing is said of the conditions of payment, the understanding is that you are to pay when the time for which the property was hired has expired. It then becomes a debt. Then you are to pay, and pay the money. If there were any other understanding, fixing the time and terms of payment, you do not owe the man until the specified conditions are complied with.
3. The same is true if you purchase any piece of property. If nothing is stipulated to the contrary, the understanding is that you are to pay the cash, at the time you receive the property. At that time, and neither before nor after, you are expected to pay the purchase money.

We do not properly owe an individual until we are under an obligation to pay him. Whenever he has a right to demand the pay, we have no right to withhold it.

There may be such a thing as contracting a prospective debt, giving your obligation to become due at a certain time. But then you do not properly owe, because you are under no obligation to pay till it becomes due. But whenever it becomes due you are bound immediately to pay it.

II. I am to show that it is a sin to be in debt.

1. Because it is a direct violation of the command of God. This text is just as binding as any command of the decalogue. And a violation of it is a setting aside the command of Jehovah, as much as to commit adultery or murder. It is not to be regarded merely as a piece of advice given by the Apostle, but as a direct, and positive, and authoritative command of God.

2. It is unjust to be in debt. If your creditor has a right to demand payment, you certainly have no right to withhold it. If it is due it is a contradiction to say that it is not unjust for you not to pay. It is a contradiction, both in terms, and in fact, to say that you owe a man, and at the same time are guilty of no injustice in refusing or neglecting to pay him. It is as much injustice as stealing, and involves the same principle. The sin of stealing consists in the appropriating to ourselves that which properly belongs to another. Therefore whenever you withhold from any man his due, you are guilty of as absolute an injustice, as if you stole his property.

3. It is sin, because it is falsehood. I have already shown that you do not properly owe a man till it becomes due. It becomes due when and because there is a promise on your part expressed or implied, that you will pay it at that time. Now you cannot violate this promise without being guilty of falsehood.

4. If what has just been said is true, it follows that men should meet their contracts, as they would avoid the grossest sin. They are bound to avoid being in debt--to meet and fulfill their engagements, as much as they are bound to avoid blasphemy, idolatry, murder or any other sin. And a man who does not pay his debts is no more to be accounted an honest man, than he who is guilty of any other heinous crime.

5. If a professor of religion is in debt, he is a moral delinquent, and should be accounted and treated as a subject of Church discipline.

OBJECTION.--It may be said, I cannot avoid being in debt. I answer to this,

That if you cannot pay, you could have avoided contracting the debt, and were bound to do so.

Do you reply, I really needed the thing which I purchased?

I ask, were your necessities so great that you would have been justified, in your estimation, in lying or stealing to supply them? If not, why have you resorted to fraud? The same authority that prohibits lying or stealing, prohibits your owing a man. Why, then, do you violate this commandment of God, any more than the other? Is it not because a corrupt public sentiment, has rendered the violation of this commandment less disgraceful than to violate these other commands of God? Why did you not resort to begging instead of running in debt? Better far to beg than to run in debt. Begging is not prohibited by any command of God, but being in debt is prohibited. True, it is disgraceful to beg. But a God-dishonoring public sentiment has rendered it far less so to be in debt. And does not this account for your shameless violation of this command of God?

Do you say again, I have been disappointed. I expected to have had the money; I made the contract in good faith, and expected to meet it at the time. But others owe me and do not pay me, therefore I am unable to pay my debts. To this I reply,

You should have contracted with that expressed condition. You should have made known your circumstances, and the ground of your expectation in regard to being able to pay at the time appointed. In that case, if your creditor was willing to run the risk, of your being disappointed, the fault is not yours, as you have practiced no injustice or deception. But if your contract was without condition, you have taken upon yourself the risk of disappointment, and are not guiltless.

But here it may be said again, nearly the whole Church are in debt, and if subject to discipline, who shall cast the first stone? I reply,

(1) If it be true that the Church is so extensively in debt, no wonder that the curse of God is upon her.

(2) Again, it may be true that a Church may be so generally involved in any given sin as to make that sin a difficult subject of discipline, because each man knows that he himself is guilty, and must in his turn submit to the same discipline. But when this is true of any Church, it is a shameless abomination for the members of that Church to attempt to hide themselves under the admitted fact that nearly all the Church are involved in the guilt of it.

Now rest assured that when any sin becomes so prevalent that it cannot, and is not made, in that Church, a subject of discipline, God himself will sooner or later take up the rod, and find means to discipline, and that effectually, such a Church.

III. I am to state the duty of those who are in debt.

1. They are bound to make any sacrifice of property or time, and indeed any sacrifice that it is possible for them to make, to pay their debts.

Here it may be asked again, does the law of love permit my creditor to demand a sacrifice of me? If he loves me as he does himself, why should he require or even allow me to make a sacrifice of property to pay what I owe him? I reply:

(1) If any one is to make a sacrifice or suffer loss, it is the debtor and not the creditor. It will almost certainly be some damage to him to be disappointed in not receiving his due. It may so disarrange his affairs, and break in upon his calculations as to occasion him great damage. Of this he is to be the judge.

(2) Your sacrifice may be necessary not only to prevent his loss, but to enable him, to meet his contracts, and thus prevent his sin. His confidence in your veracity may have led him to contract prospective debts, and by not paying him, you not only sin yourself, but cause him to sin.

(3) The refusal of one to make a sacrifice to pay his debts, may involve many others, in both loss and sin. A. owes B., B. owes C., and C. owes D., and so on in a long chain of mutual dependencies. Now if there be a failure in the first or any other link of this chain, all below it are involved in loss and sin. Now where shall this evil be arrested?

Suppose you hold the place of C. A. refuses to make a sacrifice to pay B.,

and B to pay you. Shall you sin because they do, and involve your creditor in loss and sin? No. Whatever others may do, you are bound to pay your debts. And unless your creditor voluntarily consents to defer the time of payment, you are bound to pay him at any sacrifice.

2. Persons that are in debt should not contract new debts to pay old ones. It is the practice of some when they get involved, to keep up their credit, by borrowing of one to pay another. Their meeting and canceling the last debt, depends altogether upon the presumption, that they shall be able to borrow the money of some body else. When they have borrowed of one they will keep him out of his pay as long as possible without losing their credit. And then, instead of making a sacrifice of property sufficient to discharge the obligation, they borrow from B to pay A, and from C to pay B, and thus, perhaps, disappoint and disoblige a dozen men by not paying them exactly at the time agreed, instead of at once stopping short, and parting with what they have, at any sacrifice, to pay the debt.

I do not say that a man should not in any case borrow of one man to pay another. But this I say, that as a general thing, such practices are highly reprehensible. Still, if a debt becomes due, and you have not the money at hand, but are certain that at a given time you shall have it, I do not suppose it wrong for you to borrow and pay this debt, with the understanding that you pay this borrowed money at the time specified. But to borrow money with no other prospect of an ultimate payment than that you can borrow again, and thus keep up your credit from time to time, is wicked.

3. Those who are in debt have no right to give away the money which they owe. If you are in debt, the money in your hands belongs to your creditor, and not to you. You have no right, therefore, "to be generous till you are just." You have strictly no more right to give that money away than you have to steal money to give away.

But here it should be particularly understood what is and what is not to be accounted as giving money away; e.g. it is not giving away your money to pay the current expenses of the congregation to which you are attached. Your proportion of the current expenses of the congregation or Church to which you belong is impliedly, if not expressly contracted by you. You cannot withhold it any more than the payment of any other debt.

The same may be said of the support of ministers and foreign missionaries, and all for whose support the faith of the Church is pledged. It seems to be a common, but erroneous understanding of professors of religion, that what are more generally called their secular debts or obligations are binding, and are to be discharged of course. But that their obligations, expressed or implied, to religious institutions are not so absolutely binding; and of course they can give nothing, as they express it, to these objects until their debts are paid. Now, beloved, you ought to know that to the support of the institutions of religion, you are pledged, both virtually and actually, by your profession, and that these are your most sacred debts, and are thus to be considered and discharged by you. I beseech of you not to consider the meeting and canceling of such demands as these in the light of a gift,—as if you were making God a present instead of discharging a solemn debt. I have been astonished to find that the pecuniary embarrassments of the few past years have so far crippled the movements of the great benevolent societies for want of funds; and that Missionaries, for whose support the faith and honor of the Church were pledged, should be so far cut short of their necessary supplies, under the pretense that the Church must pay her secular debts before she could discharge her high and sacred obligations to them, and the work in which they are engaged.

4. A person who is in debt has no right to purchase for himself or family things not absolutely essential for their subsistence. Things that might lawfully be purchased and used under other circumstances become unlawful when you are in debt.

A creditor has no right to deprive you of necessary food and indispensable raiment, or of your liberty. To do so would put it out of your power ever to pay. But you have no right to indulge in any thing more than the necessities of life, while your debts are unpaid. To do so is as unlawful as it would be to steal to purchase unnecessary articles.

REMARKS.

1. From what has been said, it is plain that the whole credit system, if not absolutely sinful, is nevertheless so highly dangerous that no Christian should embark in it.

Since the preaching of this sermon, this remark has been censured as a rash one.

A rash remark! Let the present history and experience of the Church say whether the credit system is not so highly dangerous that the man who will venture to embark in it is guilty of rashness and presumption. When has religion for centuries been so generally disgraced, as by the bankruptcy of its professors within the last few years? And how many millions of money are now due from Church members to ungodly men that will never be paid? Rash! Why this is the very plea of the Church, that they can do nothing for the support of the gospel, because they are so much in debt. Is there no danger of any man's getting in debt who attempts to trade upon a borrowed capital? Indeed it is highly dangerous, as universal experience shows.

And what is the necessity, I pray, for Christians to embark in so dangerous an enterprise, and one that so highly jeopardizes the honor or religion? Is it because the necessities of life can be procured in no other way? Is it because the institutions of religion demand it? Religion sustains a greater loss through the debts and bankruptcies of Christians, than it ever gains by their prosperity.

But the credit system, as it now prevails and has prevailed, is useless, and worse than useless; e.g. suppose the consumers of merchandise, instead of anticipating their yearly crops and yearly income and running in debt with the expectation of paying from these, were to take a little pains to reverse this order of things and be a year beforehand, paying down for what they purchase, and having the income of each year beforehand, so as to contract no debts. In this case the country merchants, giving no credit, but receiving ready pay, would be able to pay down on the purchase of their goods from the wholesale dealer--the wholesale dealer would pay down to the importer--the importer to the manufacturer--and the manufacturer to the producer.

Now any man can see that many millions a year would be saved to this country in this way. The manufacturer could afford an article cheaper for ready pay--and so could the importer--and the wholesale dealer--and each one in his turn, down to the consumer. Every one could sell cheaper for ready pay, as no risk would be run, and business could be done with much greater convenience and safety. Thus an entire rejection of the credit system, in its present form, and an adoption of the system of ready pay would afford to the consumer every article so much cheaper as to save millions of dollars every year. And I do not apprehend that there is in reality any serious difficulty in so reversing the whole order of business.

At another time I may more particularly examine the credit system in its foundation and various ramifications, and the nature and tendencies of the prevailing system of doing business on borrowed capital. But at present I can only say, as I have said, that, waiving the question whether it is absolutely sinful in itself, it is too highly dangerous to be embarked in by those who feel a tender solicitude for the honor and cause of Christ.

2. That if in any case the present payment of debts is impossible, your duty is to regard your indebtedness as a sin against God and your neighbor--to repent, and set yourself with all practicable self-denial, to pay as fast as you can. And unless you are laying yourself out to pay your debts, do not imagine that you repent either of your indebtedness or any other sin. For you are impenitent, and a shameless hypocrite rather than a Christian, if you suffer yourself to be in debt, and are not making all practicable efforts to do justice to your creditors.

3. If payment is possible, by any sacrifice of property on your part, sin is upon you, till you do pay. There is a wicked custom among men, and to a considerable amount in the Church, of putting property out of their hands, to avoid a sacrifice in the payment of their debts.

As an instance take the elder whom I mentioned in a former lecture, who confessed to me that "he was avoiding the sacrifice of his property, in the payment of his debts, by finesse of law."

4. The lax notions and practices of the world, and of the Church upon this subject, are truly abominable. It has come to pass, that a man may not only be considered a respectable citizen, but a respectable member of the Church, who suffers himself to be in debt--who has judgments and executions against him, and who resorts not only "to finesse of law to avoid the payment of his debts," but who practices the most palpable frauds against both God and man, by putting his property out of his hands to avoid meeting his just responsibilities.

O shame, on the Church, and on these professors of religion. Some of them will even go to an unconverted lawyer for advice in this iniquitous business, and lay open before his unconverted heart, their shameless iniquity. Alas, how many lawyers are thus led to call in question the whole truth of the Christian religion; and over these dishonest professors, they stumble into hell. And until the Church will rise up and wash her hands, and cleanse her garments from this iniquity, by banishing such persons from her communion, the cause of Christ will not cease

to bleed at every pore.

5. Some persons take the ground, that not to meet their contracts and pay their debts when they become due, is not sinful, on account of the general understanding of businessmen upon such subjects. To this I answer,

(1) There is no understanding among businessmen that debts are not to be paid when they become due. Among that class of men the nonpayment of a debt, always involves a disgrace, and a wrong, even in their own estimation.

(2) Let the public sentiment be what it might among businessmen, still the law of God cannot be altered, and by this unchanging law it is a sin to be in debt. And as "sin is a disgrace to any people," it is both a sin and a shame to be in debt.

6. The rule laid down in this text is applicable, not only to individuals, but to corporations, and nations, and all bodies of men assuming pecuniary responsibilities.

7. It is dishonest and dishonorable, to hire or purchase an article and say nothing about payment till afterwards.

8. The violation of this law, is working immense mischief in the Church, and in the world. It is truly shocking to see to what an extent the Church is involved in debt, and Church members are engaged in collecting debts of each other, by force of law. The heart burnings, and bitterness that exist among Church members on account of the nonpayment of their debts to each other, are awfully great and alarming.

Besides all this, in what light does the Church appear before the world--as a mass of moneymakers, and speculators, and bankrupts--shuffling and managing through finesse of law, to avoid the payment of their debts?

I could relate facts within my own knowledge, and many of them too, that would cause the cheek of piety to blush. Alas, for the rage, and madness of a speculating, moneymaking, fraudulent Church!

9. There is great reason to believe that many young men, in the course of their education, involve themselves in debts, that so far eat up their piety as to render them nearly useless all their days. I would sooner be twenty-five years in getting

an education, and paying my way, than involve myself in debt to the Education Society or in any other way.

How many young men there are, who are in debt to the Education Society, and who are dealing very loosely with their consciences, on the subject of payment. Because the Education Society do not press them right up, they let the matter lie along from time to time--increase their expenditures, as their income may increase, instead of practicing self-denial, and honestly discharging their obligations to the Society.

10. I cannot have confidence in the piety of any man, who is not conscientious in the payment of his debts. I know some men who are in debt, and who spend their time and their property, in a manner wholly inconsistent with their circumstances; and still make great pretensions to piety. They are active in prayer meetings--take a conspicuous place at the communion table--and even hold a responsible office in the Church of Christ, and yet they seem to have no conscience about paying their debts.

I believe it is right, and the duty of all churches and ministers to exclude such persons from the communion of the Church. And were it generally done, it would go far to wipe away the stains that have been brought by such persons upon the religion of Jesus Christ. I do not see why they should be suffered to come to the communion table, any more than whoremongers, or murderers, or drunkards, or Sabbath breakers, or slave-holders.

11. There must be a great reformation in the Church upon this subject, before the business class of ungodly men will have much confidence in Religion. This reformation should begin immediately, and begin where it ought to begin, among the leading members of the Church of Christ. Ministers and Church Judicatories should speak out upon the subject--should "cry aloud and spare not, but lift up their voice like a trumpet and show Israel his transgressions and the house of Jacob their sins."

And now beloved, are any of you in debt? Then sin is upon you. Rise up, and show yourselves clean in this matter, I beseech you. Make every effort to meet and discharge your responsibilities. And beware that in attempting to pay your debts, you do not resort to means that are as highly reprehensible as to be in debt.

12. Let no one complain, and say that instead of preaching the gospel I am discussing mere business transactions. The truth is, that the gospel is to regulate the business transactions of the world. Religion is a practical thing. It does not consist in austerities, prayers, and masses, and monkish superstitions, as Papists vainly dream. If religion does not take hold of a man's business operations--if it does not reform his daily life and habits, of what avail is it? Until in these respects your practice is right, you cannot expect to enjoy the influences of the Holy Spirit. You cannot grow in holiness any further than you reform your practice.

The perceptive part of the gospel therefore, is to be spread out in all its detail before you. And when you find it "convinces you of sin," I beg of you not to turn around, and say that this is preaching about business, and not about religion. What is business but a part of religion? A man that does not consider it so in practice, has no religion at all.

And now, dearly beloved, instead of suffering your heart to rise up and resist what I have said, will you not as I have often requested, go down upon your knees, and spread this whole subject before the Lord? Will you not inquire wherein you have erred, and sinned, and make haste to repent, and reform your lives?

[Back to Top](#)

The Holy Spirit of Promise

Lecture XIV

August 14, 1839

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Gal. 3:14: "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

This text teaches us:

I. That the blessing of Abraham has come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.

II. It teaches what this blessing is.

III. That it is to be received by faith.

Before I conclude what I wish to say upon the promises, I will notice the relation which the New Covenant sustains to the Covenant made with Abraham. And I am to show:

I. That the blessing of Abraham has come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.

In the 12th chapter of Genesis, we have the first mention of the covenant which God made with Abraham. In the last clause of the third verse it is said, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." In Gen. 17:4, it is written, "As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations," Verse 7, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee;" and 18:18, the same promise is noticed again; and 22:18, "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," and 26:4, the same words are repeated.

Now it should be remembered in regard to the covenant made with Abraham, that there were two things promised. Temporal Canaan or Palestine was promised to the Jews or natural descendants of Abraham. There was also a blessing promised through Abraham to all the nations of the earth. This covenant was not only made with Abraham, but, through his seed, as we shall see, with all the nations of the earth. This was a spiritual blessing, and that which the text says has come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.

I will quote several other passages to show that this spiritual blessing was intended for, and has come on the Gentiles. In Rom. 4:13, it is said, "For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith." and verse 16, "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed: not to that only which is of the law, but to that which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all." This epistle to the Romans was written to the Gentiles. And the Apostle here expressly affirms that the Gentiles who had faith are of the seed of Abraham, and that he is the father of us all.

Gal. 3:7, 9, 14, 29. "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Here again it is manifest that the Apostle in writing to the Gentiles, expressly includes them in the covenant made with Abraham, and affirms that if they are Christians, then they are "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." And 4:28, he says "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise." Here then he affirms that the Gentiles are as absolutely within the promise made to Abraham as Isaac was. In Eph. 2:12-22, we have it declared in full that the Gentiles inherit all the promises of spiritual blessings made to Abraham and the fathers--that there is no distinction in this respect between Jews and Gentiles, that all who have faith are entitled to the promises of spiritual blessings. "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometime were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us: Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for

to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby; And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God, And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; In whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. I might quote many more passages to the same import, but these must suffice.

II. I am to show what this blessing is.

1. It is not merely a promise that Christ should be of his seed, for the Apostle affirms in Gal. 3:16, 19 that the promise was made to Christ through Abraham. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds as of many, but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgression, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator." And in the text it is said "that the blessing might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ." This blessing then promised was not Christ himself, but some promise to Christ, and through Christ to all the nations of the earth.

2. The text informs us that this blessing promised to Abraham, and to his seed, and through Christ his seed, to all the nations of the earth, is the Holy Spirit. This is the grand thing upon which the prophets and the inspired writers seem to have had their eye all along under the old dispensation. And by a careful examination of the scriptures, it will be found that the promises are one unbroken chain from Abraham to Christ, and even to the time when the canon of the scripture was complete, everywhere pointing out this particular blessing. It was promised sometimes in figurative language, where the Spirit of God is represented as water. But in most instances the prophets have spoken without a figure and promised the Spirit by name. Isa. 32:15, "Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest."--and 44:3, "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry

ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring;" and 59:21, "As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever." Jer. 31:33, "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people." and 32:40, "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Ezek.11:19, "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh;" and 36:27, "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them;" and the text; "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Acts 1:4, 5, "And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptised with water; but ye shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." John 7:38, 39, "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)" and 16:7, 13: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come." and 14:16, 17: "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." A careful examination of these passages will show what the great blessing under the eye of inspiration was. The great thing promised to Abraham as affirmed in the text, and in these passages

which I have now quoted, with numerous other passages that might be quoted, demonstrate that the great thing promised was the Holy Spirit. This was the spiritual blessing that belonged to all nations, while temporal Canaan belonged only to the Jews. In Eph. 1:13, the Holy Spirit is expressly called the "Holy Spirit of promise."

III. This blessing is to be received by faith.

1. This is expressly asserted in the text. "That we might receive the promise of the Spirit THROUGH FAITH." In the second verse of this same chapter the Apostle inquires, "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of FAITH?" John 7:38-39 Christ says, "He that BELIEVETH ON ME, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that BELIEVE ON HIM should receive." Other passages might be quoted to the same effect.

2. It is a natural impossibility that it should be received but by faith. This will be manifest if we inquire

(1) into the nature of faith.

(2) what it is to receive the Holy Ghost.

The three elements of faith are,

(a) An intellectual perception of the truth.

(b) A realization of the truth.

(c) That trust or confidence of the heart that yields all our voluntary powers up to the control of truth. These are the essential elements of faith.

(3) To receive the Holy Spirit is to take him for our Parakletos, our Comforter, Guide, Instructor. Now it is manifest on the very face of it, that the Holy Spirit can only be received by the mind, by that act which constitutes faith. Perception of the truth, is not itself faith. A realization of the truth is not itself faith. Though both these are indispensable to its existence, yet faith itself is an act of the will--a trust--a confiding in--a yielding up of the whole being to the influence of truth. Faith then is the yielding up of our voluntary powers to the

guidance, instruction, influences and government of the Holy Spirit. This is receiving him, and this is the only possible way in which he can be received. The mere perception of truth respecting him is not faith, nor is it a receiving of him. For the truth respecting Him may be perceived, and often has been perceived and yet rejected. Nor is a realization of the truth respecting him, however deep and intense, either faith or a receiving of him. But when his offers of guidance are perceived and realized, faith is that act of the mind that lays hold upon these offers--that yields up the whole being to His influences and control.

REMARKS.

1. The Abrahamic covenant is not abolished. Nor is it yet fulfilled to all the world. It has been supposed by some that the Abrahamic covenant was fulfilled at the coming of Christ, and was then abolished. This notion arises out of the mistaken opinion that Christ was the particular blessing promised. But it has been shown that Christ was not the thing promised, but that the promise was made to him, and through him to all the nations of the earth. This covenant then is not abrogated nor set aside, nor can it be till all the nations of the earth are blessed by the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. And it is manifest that this covenant not only concerns all the nations of some one generation, but extends its provisions to the end of time.

2. This promise made to Abraham, and all those others founded upon it and promising the same things, are now due, i.e. the time has come when they are to be considered as promises in the present tense. They may now be claimed by the Church for themselves and for all the nations of the earth. These promises were not due in Abraham's day. They were promises to him and to all the Old Testament saints of future good. And it is expressly said of Abraham and of the Old Testament saints that they "all died in faith not having received the promises but having seen them afar off." And again in Heb. 11:39, 40, "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise; God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." Here it is plainly declared that these promises are due to us and available to us in a higher sense than they were to Abraham and the Old Testament saints.

3. The New Covenant so often quoted, and so largely dwelt upon, is the

fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant to those who receive it. It consists in the Holy Spirit taking up his abode in the heart and writing his law there. Let it be understood then that the New Covenant sustains the same relation to the Abrahamic Covenant that the fulfillment of a promise does to the promise itself. The Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant are not identical, but the one is the fulfillment of the other.

4. This blessing of the Holy Spirit is to be received at once, by faith, irrespective of all works. No work whatever, performed without his influences prepares us, in the least degree, to receive him, or at all puts us in more favorable circumstances in respect to our salvation or sanctification.

5. All preparation on our part to receive him and all delay, however earnest we may suppose ourselves to be in seeking and preparing to receive his influences, are only self-righteousness and rebellion--a vain and God provoking attempt to get grace by works and to purchase by our Pharisaical efforts the gift of the Holy Ghost. It does seem to be one of the most difficult things in the world, for the self-righteous spirit of man to understand the simplicity of Gospel faith. He is continually seeking salvation and sanctification by works of law without being aware of it.

6. I have already said that since the seed has come, to whom the promise was made, i.e. Christ, that we are to regard the promise of the universal effusion of the Holy Spirit, as a promise in the present tense, to be so understood, and pleaded, and its present fulfillment urged by the Church. Until the Church come to understand this as a promise actually made to all nations and as having actually become due, and now to be received and treated by them as a promise in the present tense, the Millennium will never come.

When God had promised the restoration of Israel, after seventy years' captivity in Babylon, it is said that Daniel learned by books, i.e. by the prophets, that the captivity should continue but seventy years. At the end of the seventy years therefore he set his face, by prayer and supplication with sackcloth and ashes, to the Lord for the fulfillment of his promise. And he wrestled with God until he prevailed.

When God had expressly promised to Elijah that if he would go and show himself to Ahab he would send rain upon the earth, he regarded the promise, after he had shown himself to Ahab, as in the present tense, as he had a right to

do. But he did not expect the fulfillment without prayer. But on the contrary he gave himself to mighty wrestlings with God, and did not leave his knees until the cloud was seen to arise that watered all the land.

So God in the promise of the outpouring of his Spirit in Ezek. 36:25, 27 has added in the 37th verse, "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." Now the Church are praying, and have been for a long time, for the Millennium to come, and for the fulfillment of this promise. But let me inquire. Do they understand these as promises now due, which they have a right to plead in faith for all the nations of the earth? It would seem as if they supposed the promise still future, and do not understand that a promise which is due at some specified future time, is ever after that time, to all intents and purposes, a promise in the present tense. And until it is so regarded, and treated, and plead, and the requisite means used for its accomplishment, it can never be fulfilled. Christians seem to pray as if they supposed it questionable whether God's time had come to convert the world. They ask him to do it in his own time and way, &c. Now it should be understood that he has bound himself by a promise to give his Spirit to all the nations of the earth, when the seed to whom the promise was made had come, and prepared the way for the bestowment of the blessing. Now God says, he "will be inquired of by the house of Israel." It is not enough that some one, or some few should understand these promises aright, and plead them. A few can never use a sufficient amount of means to bring about their fulfillment. They must be understood by Christians generally, in their proper import and as being now due, and they must resolve not to hold their peace, nor give God rest until he makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth. They must insist upon their fulfillment now, and not consent that it should be put off any longer. Hundreds of millions have gone to hell since these promises have become due, and should have been so regarded and pleaded and means used for their fulfillment. How long shall the Church make it an act of piety and think themselves submitting to the will of God, in letting these promises rot in their Bible while God is waiting to fulfill them, and commanding them not to give him rest until he does fulfill them?

7. The Old Testament saints were saved not by works of law, but by faith in the covenant made with Abraham. In other words Abraham himself together with all that were saved before and after him, under the Old Testament dispensation, were saved by faith in Christ. The ceremonial law was a shadow of the Gospel, and it is expressly said in Gal. 3:8 that, "the Scripture foreseeing that God would

justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying in thee shall all nations be blessed." Here then this covenant with Abraham is called the Gospel, a preaching before or foretelling the Gospel to Abraham. The difference then between the old dispensation and the new, does not lie in the fact that under the old dispensation the saints were saved by works, while under the new they are saved by grace. All that ever were saved were saved by grace through faith in Christ. But under the old dispensation the Holy Ghost was neither promised nor enjoyed to such an extent as he is promised and enjoyed under the new dispensation. The thing that Abraham and the Old Testament saints did not receive was that measure of the Holy Spirit which constitutes the New Covenant, and produces the entire sanctification of the soul.

8. Finally. Every individual Christian may receive and is bound to receive this gift of the Holy Ghost through faith at the present moment. It must not be supposed that every Christian has of course received the Holy Ghost in such a sense as it is promised in these passages of Scripture or in any higher sense than he was received by the Old Testament saints who had actually been regenerated and were real saints, of whom it is said, that "they all died in faith not having received the promises." Now it would seem as if there were thousands of Christians who have not received the promises on account of their ignorance and unbelief. It is said that "after we believe we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." Now beloved the thing that we need is to understand and get hold of this promise to Abraham, and through Abraham to Christ, and through Christ and by Christ to the whole Church of God. Now remember it is to be received by simple faith in these promises. "Be it unto thee according to thy faith." "For it is written the just shall live by faith."

[Back to Top](#)

The Covenants

Lecture XV

August 28, 1839

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Heb. 8:13."In that he saith, 'A new covenant,' he hath made the first old.
Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away."

The more experience I have in preaching the gospel, the more ripe are my convictions, that ministers take it for granted their hearers are much better instructed on religious Subjects than most of them really are. They therefore take many things for granted as already understood by their hearers, of which in reality they are ignorant. This sometimes exposes them to misconceptions of what they hear, and often throws them into an unsettled state of mind in regard to the truths they may have heard, so many things having been assumed of which they have no knowledge. From some remarks I have heard, I have thought, that what I have said on the subject of the covenants, has been liable to misconstruction, for want of a somewhat more fundamental examination of the subject of covenants than has been contained in any of my lectures.

In this text and the context, Paul is speaking of the setting aside of the Old Covenant, and the introduction of the New.

In discoursing upon the subject I design to show:

I. What is implied in a covenant.

II. The different kinds of covenants.

III. Some of the principal covenants of God with men.

IV. Which of them are set aside, and in what sense they are set aside.

V. That the New Covenant is the accomplishment of what was proposed by the preceding covenants.

I. I am to show what is implied in a covenant.

1. A mutual promise between two or more parties. A promise of one party not consented to by the other, is not a covenant but a promise. To be a covenant the promise must be mutual.

2. The promise must be made by lawful persons, i.e. they must be, of suitable age, of a sound mind, not lunatics or idiots; and be so circumstanced that it is lawful for them to enter into the proposed covenant. Persons may, in certain circumstances, contract a covenant for their heirs, or those whom they represent. In all such cases, those whom they represent are equally bound with themselves. Thus parents can covenant in respect to their estates binding their heirs. And thus Abraham could covenant with

God in relation to himself and his posterity.

3. A covenant is not only a mutual promise by lawful persons but it must be to do a lawful thing. Persons cannot covenant and bring themselves under an obligation to do a thing that is unlawful, or of immoral tendency. In other words such a covenant is void, and can be no covenant at all. No courts of law or equity--nor will the tribunal of God, hold such covenants as of any validity whatever.

II. The different kinds of covenants.

1. With respect to the covenants wherein the parties are equal, i.e. where one party is under no special obligation to the other, but where each has an equal right to canvass and dictate the terms of the covenant--this is one kind of covenant and is called by Greek grammarians *suntheke*. No covenant of this kind, of course, exists between God and his creatures.

2. Where one has the right to dictate the terms of the covenant to the other, and where the parties sustain to each other the relation of sovereign and subject. This kind of covenant is called *diatheke*, and is synonymous with the Hebrew word *berith*. Covenants of this kind are the same as laws, institutions, and ordinances of government. All government implies a mutual promise between the sovereign and subjects--a promise of protection on his part and of obedience on theirs. Therefore all laws, ordinances, and institutions dictated by the sovereign and consented to by the subjects, are properly covenants between the parties.

3. Another important distinction which should be made in regard to covenants is,

(1) Where persons covenant to do what they were under previous obligation to do on the ground of natural right or justice. This kind of covenant can never be dissolved by the consent of parties, because they were under obligation to do what they engaged to do previously to any promise.

(2) Where parties covenant to do what was not before obligatory, but the whole obligation arises out of their mutual promise. This kind of covenant may be dissolved by the consent of all parties. In regard to those laws and institutions which require only what is obligatory on

the principles of natural justice, they cannot be repealed or set aside by either or by both parties, e.g. the law of God requiring his creatures to love him with all the heart can never be repealed by him, or its obligation in any way dispensed with, because it is plainly right in itself, and a dictate of natural justice. Those laws and institutions which are of a ceremonial character, and are not in their own nature obligatory, may be set aside at any time, at the will of the lawgiver. Let it be understood then, that in the sense of *diatheke*, all laws, institutions and ordinances are covenants, and imply the mutual consent of the sovereign and subjects, and mutual obligations devolve upon each. In this sense the laws and ordinances of God are covenants.

III. I will notice some of the covenants of God with men.

1. The Adamic covenant, or the covenant made with Adam. This must have been in substance the moral law, as epitomized by the Savior in the two great commandments. The test of this covenant was the refusing the forbidden fruit. If he abstained wholly from this fruit, it was sufficient evidence that his love to God was supreme, and that he regarded the authority of God above the indulgence of his constitutional appetites. But if he partook of this fruit it was conclusive evidence, that his regard to God was not supreme; but that the indulgence of appetite was with him superior to the authority of God. That this was properly a covenant and consented to by Adam, is manifest from the fact, that for a time he obeyed it.

This was strictly and properly a covenant of works, and proposed to save him on the ground of his perfect and perpetual obedience to God.

2. Passing by the covenant with Noah, I notice the covenant made with Abraham, as recorded in the 12, 15, and 17 chapters of Genesis. This was a covenant of grace in opposition to the Adamic covenant. It proposed a new way of salvation. Salvation by works of the law had become impossible, as Adam and all his posterity had disobeyed the law. God therefore, in the Abrahamic covenant, proposed to save mankind by grace through faith. The substance of this had been intimated to Adam immediately after the fall, and was, no doubt, understood and embraced by all the saints from Adam to Abraham. We find Abel offering a sacrifice in faith, and his sacrifice was typical of the Atonement of Christ. This covenant, made more fully with Abraham, is said by the Apostle in Gal. 3:8 to be the gospel: "And the

scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed." That it was a covenant of grace in opposition to a covenant of works is evident from the passage just quoted, and from the 16th verse of the same chapter: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds as of many, but as of one, 'And to thy seed,' which is Christ." Also from Rom. 4:13, 16: "For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not unto Abraham, or his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be of grace; to the end the promise might be sure to the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all." These and many other passages show that this covenant with Abraham was a gracious, in opposition to a legal, covenant or a covenant of works.

We have an account of the solemn ratification of this covenant, according to the custom of those times by dividing beasts and the parties passing between the pieces, in Gen. 15:8-12, 17: "And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? And he said unto him, take me an heifer of three years old, and a she-goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another; but the birds divided he not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. And when the sun was going down a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and lo, a horror of great darkness fell upon him. And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces." Here the lamp is the symbol of the divine presence. In the 17th chap. we have an account of the seal's being added to the covenant to which Abraham fully consented on his part, by circumcising himself and all the males of his household. This covenant was made with Abraham and with all believers in the God of Israel whether Jews or Gentiles. If they would receive this covenant they were to acknowledge his authority by affixing its seal to themselves and all the males of their household. Thus the proselytes to the Jew's religion, before they were allowed to eat of the Passover, were required to be circumcised with all their males. Ex. 12:48, 49: "And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his

males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. One law shall be to him that is home born, and to the stranger who sojourneth among you."

3. The Sinai covenant, or the law given at Mount Sinai. It appears that all the laws and ordinances given at Mount Sinai taken together, made up this covenant. In the following passages the Ten Commandments are called the covenant. Heb. 9:4: "Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant--"; Ex. 34:28, "And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments." Deut. 9:9, 11, 15: "When I was gone up into the mount, to receive the tables of stone, even the tables of the covenant which the Lord made with you, then I neither did eat bread nor drink water. And it came to pass at the end of forty days and forty nights, that the Lord gave me the two tables of stone, even the tables of the covenant. So I turned and came down from the mount, and the mount burned with fire; and the two tables of the covenant were in my hands."

These commandments however were only a part of the covenant as other passages clearly show, Heb. 9:18-20 compared with Ex. 24:3-8.

"Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined upon you." "And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do. And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace-offerings of oxen unto the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basins; and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people; and they

said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words." In these passages we learn that every precept of the law was included in the Sinai covenant. In the passage quoted above from Ex. we have a solemn ratification of this covenant, which is mentioned also in the passage quoted from Hebrews. As these are nowhere called two covenants, and as the law upon the two tables had already been given and was so important in its nature, and is so often itself called the covenant, I conclude that all the laws given at Mt. Sinai were included in this covenant. Upon this covenant I remark:

(1) That it did not set aside the Abrahamic covenant, and introduce again the covenant of works. This is asserted and fully argued by Paul in Gal. 3:17-19: "And this I say, That the covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred years after, cannot disannul, that it should become of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator." Some have understood the Sinai covenant as united with the covenant of Abraham in such a sense as to make the whole a covenant of works. Now there can be no greater mistake than this, as is evident from the whole drift of the Apostle's reasoning in the 4th chapter of Romans and the 3d chapter of Galatians.

(2) This covenant or dispensation was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ instead of being a covenant of works: Gal. 3:24, "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." The moral precepts were to convict us of sin, and cut us off from self-righteous efforts and expectations; and the whole system of sacrifices and types were a shadow of the gospel, or a typical representation of good things to come, i.e. of the great blessings of the gospel of Christ. All those who were saved under this dispensation were saved by faith in the atonement of Christ, as dimly shadowed forth in this typical dispensation. That all the ancient patriarchs were saved by faith is perfectly certain from the whole

Bible, and is particularly declared in the 11th chapter of Hebrews.

(3) This covenant became a stumbling block to the Jews by being mistaken by the great mass of them for a covenant of works. They were so earthly and sensual as to overlook the spiritual truth taught by those ordinances, and to understand conformity to them to entitle them to salvation on the ground of their own works.

(4) Thus failing to secure the sanctification, and consequently the salvation of the people, God foretold, and published at various times, and expressly by Jeremiah, that at a certain future time he would make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and Judah, i.e. with the whole Church of God. Which brings me to remark:

4. That the New Covenant mentioned in Jeremiah was according to the words and tenor of it to consist in writing the moral law in the hearts of his people. By the moral law I mean the moral precepts, as comprised and summed up by our Savior in the two great precepts on which, he affirms, hang all the law and the prophets. Jer. 31:31-34: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws in their inward parts, and write them in their hearts; and will be their God and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more." On this I remark:

(1) This covenant implied,

(a) so full a revelation of God,

(b) so much of the Holy Spirit

(c) such an efficacious dispensation, as to beget true holiness of heart in the people of God. The substance of this promise of the

New Covenant is to be found in a great many places in the Old Testament, and from the quotation of it by the Apostle in his epistle to the Hebrews, we learn when this promise of the New Covenant became due--and that the New Covenant dispensation was actually introduced by the first publishers of the Gospel. To my mind, it seems plain, that the day of Pentecost was regarded by Christ and the Apostles as the commencement of the new dispensation. Christ seems to intimate to His disciples that that was the occasion on which the promise of His Father, so often repeated, and which they had heard of him should be fulfilled.

(2) This writing the law in the heart, is called a covenant, because it implies, in the fullest manner, the consent of him who enters into this covenant with God. As the writing this law in the heart consists in begetting the spirit and temper required by the law, it implies of course the fullest consent on the part of him who receives it.

(3) I have said the promise of this covenant became due at the day of Pentecost. The extent to which it has been fulfilled, and will be fulfilled, has depended, and will continue to depend upon the extent to which it is understood, believed, and embraced by the Church. From the nature of the case, it is a covenant to be made with individuals. No one can receive it but by faith. And as the promise is now due, it is the privilege and duty of every soul to lay hold on full salvation.

IV. I am to show which of the covenants are set aside, and in what sense.

1. The Adamic, or covenant of works, is set aside as a method or condition of salvation. As a rule of duty it is not and cannot be set aside. The particular test of the forbidden fruit given to Adam is of course nothing to us. But the substance of the covenant, the requisition, i.e. perfect love to God and men, is not and cannot be set aside, because it is a covenant of that kind where the thing to be performed is right in itself, and obligatory on the ground of natural justice.

2. The Abrahamic covenant is not done away. I waive the question in respect to that part of it that promised the temporal blessing or the land of Canaan to the Jews, and speak of infinitely the most important part of the covenant, which promised a spiritual blessing through Abraham and his

seed to all the nations of the earth, and of which particular blessing or rest, temporal Canaan was only a type. That this part of the covenant is not abolished is evident.

(1) From the reasonings of the Apostle in the fourth chapter of Romans, and third chapter of Galatians. He shows most fully that the promise made to Abraham is yet to be fulfilled both to Jews and Gentiles. And there are a great many other passages that teach the same truth.

(2) Because it is not yet fulfilled. It was actually made through Abraham and his seed, i.e. Christ, with all the nations of the earth. And from the very nature of it, it cannot be fulfilled until the end of time. In my last lecture I said it was never fulfilled in its fullest sense to Abraham, but is to be fulfilled in a fuller sense to Christians under the present dispensation.

(3) Because the New Covenant spoken of in Jer. is only the carrying out and fulfillment of the covenant made with Abraham, as the Apostle asserts in Gal. 3:14: "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

3. The covenant of Sinai is in one sense abolished; in another sense it still remains. It should be understood, that the covenant of Sinai was a collection of statutes and ordinances, making up as a whole the means of salvation by grace through faith. As the Apostle says in Heb. 10:1: "For the law having a shadow of good things to come," &c. From this and other passages, as well as from the nature of the case, it is manifest, that the old or Sinai covenant is to be regarded as a peculiar method of teaching the substantial truths of the gospel--a still further and more perfect foretelling of the gospel than had been made to Abraham.

Now this covenant as a dispensation--as a method of teaching the gospel--as the means of sanctification and salvation, is set aside to give place to the reality or antitype--the fuller and more perfect revelation by Jesus Christ and his Apostles, of which truth, the typical dispensation was only a shadow.

But the moral precepts of this covenant, i.e. those precepts that require what is right in itself, and are obligatory in the nature of things, remain still as a rule of

duty in full force. This must be, of course, as the precepts are of the nature of that kind of covenants that cannot be abolished at the pleasure of either or both parties. Nothing is of more importance, than that we should clearly understand in what sense the Old Covenant is done away, and in what sense it is not done away. Those precepts that are typical and ceremonial are now of course not to be observed at all, as the revelation of Jesus Christ, and the coming of the great Antitype has rendered their observance useless and worse than useless. But that the whole substance of the moral precepts, and those that are obligatory on the ground of natural justice, are still binding and of full force and authority, is manifest.

(1) From the nature of the case. It is impossible that these should cease to be binding, for God has no right to dispense with their obligation. These precepts whether found among the Ten Commandments or among the precepts recorded by Moses, are of perpetual obligation, because they belong to the race and are obligatory in the nature of things. Their obligation grows out of, and rests upon the unalterable nature and relations of moral beings. Were this the place, it would be easy to take up these commands, one by one, and show that they have their foundation in the nature and necessities of man and can never be dispensed with, while the world stands. Especially should I like to show this in respect to the two commands respecting the Sabbath and marriage. I mention these two merely because some have doubted whether these were of perpetual obligation. But to me it seems that this subject may be made as clear as sunlight, that these together with all the other commands of the Decalogue, and some other precepts of the Old Covenant are of perpetual obligation, e.g. such as this, "Thou shalt not deliver unto his master him that is escaped from his master unto thee," &c. I must not however enter into this subject in this place, but content myself with saying,

(2) That the Bible and especially the New Testament every where recognizes all the moral precepts, as of perpetual obligation. Hear what the Apostle says in Rom. 13:9: "For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Here he recognizes the

eternal obligation of the moral precepts. This together with the whole of the New Testament, proves conclusively that the moral precepts are as a rule of duty by no means done away, but the strictest obedience to them is every where insisted upon.

(3) If they were repealed, neither sin nor holiness could exist at all. Without a rule of duty, no obedience can of course exist. Consequently if the moral law is abolished, there is no sin or holiness in the universe.

V. The New Covenant is the accomplishment of what was proposed by the preceding covenants.

The thing proposed by the preceding covenants was the sanctification and salvation of man. Now that the New Covenant consists in the accomplishment of this end is evident from the words of the covenant itself. Jer. 31:31-34: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord;) But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." The thing here promised is sanctification or the writing of the law in the heart. If therefore obedience to law be sanctification, then this is the blessing proposed in this promise of the New Covenant. So far then from the moral law being done away, the New Covenant is nothing else than real obedience to the law. This exactly accords with what the Apostle says in Rom. 8:3-4: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

REMARKS.

1. The two covenants contrasted by the Apostle, in his epistle to the Hebrews, as the Old and New Covenants,--the first and second covenants, &c., are the Sinai

covenant and the one promised in Jer. The Apostle does not here allude to the covenant with Adam or with Abraham. By reading the covenant it will be evident that the covenants contrasted are the Sinai covenant or that which was made with the people when God led them out of the land of Egypt, and the covenant in Jer. 31:31-34, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord;) But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Heb. 8:7-13; "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For, finding fault with them, he saith, Behold the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be my people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away."

In Heb. 9: 18-20 above quoted, he speaks expressly of this covenant, and so refers to the Old Testament, as to render it certain that it was the law given at Sinai, and not the covenant of Abraham of which he was speaking.

2. The New Covenant and the Abrahamic covenant sustain to each other the relation of a promise to its fulfillment. As I said in my last, and have repeated in this lecture, the New Covenant is nothing more or less than the carrying out and

fulfilling the covenant made with Abraham.

3. In the light of this subject, the mistake into which those have fallen who maintain that the Abrahamic covenant is repealed may be seen. They confound the Abrahamic with the Sinai covenant, and suppose that the new dispensation abolishes both together. This appears to me to be a sad mistake.

4. From this subject may be seen the error of some of the modern Perfectionists who seem to suppose that the old dispensation, or Sinai covenant, was a covenant of works. They do not seem to understand that it was only a method of carrying out and accomplishing the promises of grace first intimated to Adam immediately after the fall and more fully afterwards confirmed to Abraham. This, as a system of means for the sanctification and salvation of men, has been set aside to give place to a fuller revelation and to the dispensation of the Holy Ghost under the Gospel, retaining at the same time in all its strength, as a rule of duty, the obligation of all the moral precepts. The persons to whom I allude have manifestly mistaken the sense in which the Old Covenant is done away, and understood even the moral precepts to be so abrogated as to be no longer binding. And they seem to be very happy in the idea of being wholly discharged from the obligation of the moral law. Before them the door of licentiousness is fully open, and imagining themselves, as some of them do, to be led by the Spirit to trample upon the great commands of the Decalogue, they most richly deserve and are likely to receive the execration of God and man.

5. The gospel dispensation is not itself the New Covenant, but simply the means of it. The New Covenant, as I have fully shown in my past lectures, consists in the writing of the law in the heart. This is done by the Spirit through the instrumentality of the gospel.

The design of this lecture is merely to guard against the impression that the moral law only is to be regarded as the Old Covenant, as in quoting passages in my former lectures, to show what the Old Covenant was, I confined myself, if I mistake not, to those that spoke of the Ten Commandments as constituting that covenant, without particularly noticing the other parts of the covenant. This I did because my main design in those lectures was to dwell upon that part of the Old Covenant which was to be written by the New Covenant in the heart.

Nothing is more important than that the Church should have just and comprehensive views of the covenant dealings of God with his people. It cannot

be too distinctly understood that the Adamic covenant, or covenant of works, is still binding as a rule of duty, but is not the condition of salvation. Also that all the covenants of God with the Church have had for their grand object the bringing of man into a state of complete conformity to the law, under which man was originally placed, and under which he must be placed to all eternity.

With respect to this New Covenant, I remark in a word--that the promise of it has been due for more than eighteen hundred years, and I would solemnly ask, shall it lie in your Bibles till they rot and your souls sink down to hell before you lay hold on the salvation from sin which it promises?

[Back to Top](#)

The Rest of Faith- No.'s 1 & 2

Lectures XVI & XVII

September 11, 1839

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

LECTURE XVI.

Text.--Heb. 3:19 & 4:1."So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."

The following is the order in which I will direct your attention.

I. Inquire of whom the Apostle is speaking in this text, and into what it is said they could not enter.

II. Why they could not enter in.

III. Show that temporal Canaan was typical of the rest of faith.

IV. What is implied in this rest.

V. How we may seem to come short of it.

VI. How we may take possession of it.

I. I am to inquire of whom the Apostle is speaking and into what they could not enter.

In this connection the Apostle is speaking of the Jews; and that into which they could not enter was temporal Canaan, as is evident from the context.

II. Why they could not enter in.

It is asserted in the text, that they could not enter into Canaan, because of unbelief. The Jews had arrived upon the borders of the promised land. And Moses deputed a number of individuals as spies, and sent them to spy out the land. They went up and surveyed the land, and returned bringing some of the fruits of the land, and represented to the children of Israel, that it was an exceeding good land, but that it was impossible for them to take possession of it--that the towns and cities were walled up to heaven--that the country was inhabited by giants--and that therefore they were utterly unable to take possession of the land.

In this testimony all the spies agreed except Caleb and Joshua. This discouraged the people and produced a rebellion that prevented that generation from taking possession of Canaan. Their confidence in divine assistance was utterly shaken,

and their unbelief prevented any such attempt to take possession of the land, as would otherwise have been made with complete success. The bringing up of the evil report, by those who were sent out to reconnoiter, and their failing to encourage and lead forward the people, were the means of that generation being turned back, and utterly wasted in the wilderness. God was so incensed against them for their want of confidence in his help, and of his ability, and willingness to give them possession, that he "swore in his wrath, that they should not enter into his rest."

III. Show that temporal Canaan was typical of the rest of faith.

It is plain from the context that the Apostle supposes the land of Canaan to have been typical of the rest of faith. The land of Canaan was to have been their rest after their perilous journey from Egypt. In this land they were to have been secure from the power of all their enemies round about. He concludes the third chapter of this epistle, by asserting that "they could not enter into this rest because of unbelief." And he begins the fourth chapter, by exhorting the Jews, to whom he was writing "to fear lest a promise being left them of entering into rest" [the rest of faith,] "any should seem to come short of it." And in the third verse he affirms, that "we who have believed do enter into rest."

IV. What is implied in this rest.

1. Not a state of spiritual indolence.

2. Not waiting for God to do his own work, and ours too. Some people seem to be waiting for God, and to have such an idea of his sovereignty as to throw upon him the responsibility of doing not only that which belongs to him, but that also which belongs to themselves. They seem to forget that holiness in man is his own act, and talk as if God would make men holy without the proper and diligent exercise of their own powers. Others are waiting for God to convert their children, and their neighbors, and the world, without any instrumentality of theirs, affirming that God can, and will do his own work, in his own way, and in his own time. Thus entirely overlooking the fact, that when God works, he works by means. This is anything but a right view of the subject, and that is anything but faith which leads to these views, and to this course of conduct; and this state of spiritual indolence, and this waiting for God are any thing but gospel rest. Faith always implies a diligent and constant use of means. Faith respects not only

the fact that God will do thus and thus, but also recognizes the fact that he will do it by the appointed means. Consequently true faith in God leads to any thing but the neglect of employing the suitable instrumentality to effect the desired object.

3. The rest of faith does not imply that the Church is to be sanctified, and the world converted, without the diligent and effectual cooperation of those who are coworkers with God.

4. Nor rest from labors of love.

5. Nor rest from watchfulness. Nor from any of those holy exertions that are indispensable to guard against our enemies in this state of trial, and while in an enemy's country. Nor does it imply any cessation from a diligent use of all the means of instruction, and of grace, both for our own and others' edification, and salvation.

6. Nor the casting off responsibility, and the giving ourselves up to be drifted in any direction, by the tides of influence which surround us.

7. Nor does it imply an exemption from temptation. Christ was tempted in all points like as we are. And from our circumstances in this world, it is impossible that we should not continue to be the constant subjects of temptation, from the world, the flesh and the devil. Nor does it imply exemption from all heaviness and distress of mind. Christ was in heaviness. Paul had great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart on account of his brethren. And Peter in his general epistle to the saints says, "Now are we in heaviness through manifold temptations." Nor does it imply exemption from severe trials and mental conflicts, for these things may always be expected while we are in the flesh. And the gospel plainly teaches that to us it is given, not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for his sake. But gospel rest does imply,

1. A complete cessation from all our own selfish works, the end of which is to promote our own interests, temporal or eternal.

2. It implies a cessation from all self-righteous efforts. By self-righteous efforts, I mean,

- (1) All attempts to recommend ourselves to God by our own

works.

(2) All efforts to avoid punishment, or escape from the wrath of God by any efforts of our own.

(3) All those things which originate in our own convictions, and are performed in the strength of our own resolutions without being influenced thereto by the love of God in our heart.

3. This rest implies a state of mind that feels no necessity for attempting anything in our own strength. There is a state of mind, which perhaps is better known by experience than described by words, in which an individual feels pressed with a necessity of doing something, and every thing in a manner which shall be acceptable to God. And yet, on account of his unbelief, he feels agonized with the thought that he is in no such sense strengthened by the Spirit of God, as shall, as a matter of fact, enable him, and cause him to do that which his convictions of duty demand of him. This is a distracting restless state of mind, and the exact opposite of the rest of faith. Faith so leans upon God, as to bring the mind into a state of sweet repose and confidence that God will help, and that there is no necessity for making any efforts in our own strength.

4. It implies exemption from all the carefulness induced by unbelief on every subject. Faith reposes in God for time and for eternity, for direction, and help, and provisions in temporal as well as spiritual matters. It excludes all carefulness, in the proper sense of that term, on every subject.

5. It implies exemption from the fear of death, and hell. Faith produces that perfect love that casteth out fear--the fear of future want--of the judgments of God--that we shall be overcome by our enemies spiritual or temporal--and of all that fear that hath torment.

6. It implies an exemption from a sense of condemnation. "There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit."

7. A rest from the reproaches of conscience. In a state of unbelief, conscience often inflicts grievous wounds upon the peace of the soul.

But when we take possession of the rest of faith, the conscience is as quiet as a lamb.

8. It implies an exemption from being afflicted or distressed with the occurrences of life. The soul is able to meet with calmness and sweetness that which would otherwise throw the mind into a state of the utmost agitation and distress. By this I do not mean, as I have said above, that individuals will have no trials; but that this state of mind will enable them to pass through their trials with a composed and heavenly temper. Mrs. President Edwards says of herself, that for some years there were two trials which she thought she should be unable to bear. One was the loss of her husband's confidence, and ill treatment from him--the other was the loss of the confidence and respect of the people of the town in which they lived. But when she entered fully into the rest of faith, she declares, that it did not appear to her, as if those things could, in the least, affect her happiness or disturb the repose of her mind. It appeared to her as if she were as far above being discomposed by anything that could occur in the providence of God, as the sun is high above the earth--that to be treated with the utmost disrespect by her husband--to be cast out by the people of the town to perish in the snow, would not break up the deep tranquillity and repose of her mind in God.

9. It implies exemption from the dominion of temptation. I have said, that in this life, we may always as a thing of course expect more or less temptation. But this rest is a state of mind in which temptation will not prevail. It will assail us, and make a greater or less impression upon our minds, i.e. it will in a greater or less degree agitate and ruffle our feelings in proportion to the strength of our faith.

10. Finally, and in a word, it implies exemption from the strength and dominion of sin in all its forms. The case supposed by the Apostle in the seventh chapter of Romans, to illustrate the influence of law over one who is carnal and sold under sin, is a striking exemplification of that state of slavery to lust and passion in which great multitudes, both in and out of the Church, are. And the striking transition from that state of mind into that described in the eighth chapter, exactly illustrates what I mean by an individual passing from a state of slavery

and sin into a state of liberty and rest.

V. How we may seem to come short of it.

The word rendered seem here does not imply what is commonly meant by the English term seem, as if the coming short were only in appearance and not in fact. But from the manner in which it is rendered in other passages, it is manifest that it means to express the actual coming short, as if the Apostle had said, "lest any of you should be seen to come short of it."

1. We may fail of entering into this rest by mistaking its nature, and thinking we have it while we have not. Many have seemed to suppose that it consists in spiritual indolence, or in such an exemption from responsibility as would give the mind up to be drifted without resistance in any direction in which the corrupt currents of this world might drive it. They seem to get the idea that all things are lawful to them in such a sense, that almost any kind of indulgence is consistent with spiritual purity, and the love of God. Gospel rest, to them, is the mere casting off of responsibility--a lolling and wallowing in their own filthy indulgences.

2. Many fail to enter into this rest, by not realizing that there is any such state. They seem not to know any thing about the tranquilizing effects of faith, and that state of deep repose in God which those enjoy who have taken possession of the promised rest. They seem to suppose that the Christian warfare consists in that mental conflict which they are conscious is going on within themselves, with their hearts and consciences. They are conscious of a continual mutiny being kept up between the conflicting powers of their own minds, which they express by saying they are constantly sinning and repenting, by which nothing more can be meant than that their hearts and consciences are at fearful war with each other. They appear to be utter strangers to the sweet peace and repose of mind which results from a harmony of the powers of their own mind, where their conscience and their heart are at one. Understanding from the Bible that their warfare is to continue through this life, and mistaking their inward conflicts for the Christian warfare, they take it for granted that no such rest as that of which I have spoken, exists.

3. Many fail to enter into this rest because they think it belongs exclusively to heaven. Now that this rest will be more perfect in heaven than it is on

earth is undeniably true. But it is the same in kind, on earth as in heaven, just as holiness is. Now if persons do not become holy on earth, how should they hope to be holy in heaven? And if this rest be not begun on earth, it will never be enjoyed in heaven.

4. Many come short of this rest by supposing that the world, the flesh and Satan put the attainment of it utterly out of the question. It is amazing to see how little of the gospel is understood and received by the Church. It would seem that in the estimation of the great mass of the Church, the gospel itself has made no adequate provision for the entire sanctification of men in this world of temptation. Just as if God were unable to overcome these enemies in any other way than by snatching his children out of their reach; and that Christ came not so much to destroy the works of the devil in this world, as to drive his people out of it and get them off from his ground--that he destroys the flesh because he is unable to overcome it--and that he will burn up the world because he is unable to prevent its leading his people into sin. Now it does appear to me that God's glory demands, that the battle should be fought, and the victory won in this world. The Apostle plainly represents us, under the grace of God, as not only conquerors but "more than conquerors." And he certainly has but a very limited knowledge of the Bible, or of the grace of God who can assume that the world, the flesh, and Satan are too strong for Christ so that he cannot save his people from their sins.

5. Ignorance of the power of faith is another reason why persons do not enter into this rest. They do not understand that as a matter of fact, faith in the existence, power, goodness, providence and grace of God--that unwavering confidence in all he does and says, would in its own nature as a thing of course, bring them into the rest of which I am speaking.

Suppose a ship should be bestormed at sea, that all on board is confusion, dismay, and almost despair--the ship is driven by a fierce tempest upon a lee shore. Now suppose that in the midst of all the uncertainty, racking, and almost distracting anxiety of the passengers and crew, a voice should be heard from heaven, they knowing it to be the voice of the eternal God, assuring them that the ship should be safe--that not a hair of their heads should perish--and that they should ride out the storm in perfect safety. It is easy to see that the effect of this announcement upon different minds would

be in precise proportion to their confidence in its truth. If they believed it, they would by no means throw up the helm, and give themselves up to indolence and let the ship drive before the waves, but standing, every man at his place, and managing the ship in the best manner possible, they would enjoy a quiet and composed mind in proportion to their confidence that all would be well. If any did not believe it, their anxiety and trouble would continue of course, and they might wonder at the calmness of those who did; and even reproach them for not being as anxious as themselves. You might see among them every degree of feeling from the despair and deep forebodings of utter unbelief, up to the full measure of the entire consolation of perfect faith. Now the design of this illustration is to show the nature of faith, and to demonstrate that entire confidence in God naturally hushes all the tumults of the mind, and settles it into a state of deep repose--that it does not beget inaction, presumption or spiritual indolence any more than the revelation of which I have spoken, would beget inattention to its management on board the ship.

6. Another reason is, many are discouraged by the misrepresentations of the spies who have been sent to spy out the land. It is a painful and really an alarming consideration, that so many of those who are leaders in Israel, and who are supposed by the Church to have gone up and reconnoitered the whole land of spiritual experience, that almost with united voice they should return to the Church, and represent that we are unable to go up and possess the land. Of all those that were sent by Moses to spy out the land only two had any faith in the promise of God, whereas all the rest united in their testimony that they were unable to possess the land. And that rest was unattainable to them in this life. So it appears to me in these days. Those that are appointed to direct and encourage the people, by first acquainting themselves thoroughly with the ground to be possessed, and then carrying to the people the confidence of faith, encouraging them, not only by the promises of God, but by their own experience and observation, that the land may be possessed--instead of this they bring up an evil report, discourage the hearts of the people of God, maintain that the grace of God has made no sufficient provisions for their taking possession of the land of holiness in this life, that the world, the flesh and the devil are such mighty Anakims as that to overcome them is utterly out of the question, and that no hope remains, only as we flee from their territories and get out of the world the

best way we can. Now I greatly fear that will happen to them which came upon the spies in the days of Moses. They were driven back, and their carcasses fell in the wilderness. God swore in his wrath, that they should not enter into his rest. And not only they, but that entire generation who were deceived by them, and who could not enter in because of unbelief, were wasted away and died without rest in the wilderness. How many generations of the Church of God shall thus be wasted away in the wilderness of sin! How long will generation after generation of spies continue to bring up their evil report, discouraging the hearts, and confirming the unbelief of the people, and effectually preventing their taking possession of that rest which remains for the people of God!

7. Many are discouraged by the present and past attainments of Christians. They are constantly stumbled by the consideration that holy men of former and present times have known so little of full gospel salvation. They might just as reasonably let the past and present state of the world shake their confidence in the fact that the world will ever be converted. And indeed, whether they are aware of it or not, I suppose they have as much confidence in the one as in the other. They seem not to be aware of the fact that they are full of unbelief in regard to the world's conversion, while they are sensible that they have no confidence in the attainableness of rest from all their sins in this life. The reason why they are sensible of unbelief in the one case and not in the other is, the one is placed before them as a present duty, in attempting to perform which they experience the chilling influence of unbelief--while the other is a thing which they have never tried to do, and which they do not understand to be their duty to do. Consequently a want of confidence in respect to this, is not the object of the mind's attention. Certainly a state of mind that can be discouraged by the past or present history of the Church, would of course feel the same discouragement, and have the same reason for discouragement, in regard to the world's conversion.

8. Others fail to take possession of this rest on account of the ignorance of the real attainments of the ancient and modern saints. They have taken but little pains to examine carefully into the history of eminent saints either ancient or modern, and of course do not know what the grace of God has actually done for men.

9. Many fail from a regard to their reputation. They have so much fear of being called heretics, fanatics, perfectionists or some other opprobrious name, that they resist the Spirit and truth of God.

10. Pride and prejudice prevent a careful and honest examination of the subject. I have been amazed, and I might add ashamed, to witness the great ignorance of the Bible, and of the real merits of this question, in the articles that have appeared in the different periodicals of the present day. They have reminded me of the conduct of Dr. Hill in the late General Assembly, when the discussion of the question of slavery came up. He arose and read certain passages of scripture, with as much assurance as if he supposed they had been overlooked by the abolitionists--as if he supposed it would be entirely manifest that these scriptures were a "Thus saith the Lord" in the face of all abolitionism. He afterwards intimated that he was master of the subject, and seemed not to understand that all his arguments and scriptures, and grounds of objection had often been weighed in the balance and found wanting. Now just so it has appeared to me when I have read the various articles that have appeared of late against the attainableness of entire sanctification in this life. The least I could say, would be in the words of President Edwards, that "they have not well considered the matter."

11. Many fail because they are too proud to confess their ignorance and want of spirituality, and put themselves in the attitude of inquirers. A vast many individuals are not aware of their own ignorance and want of spirituality, and many who are convinced of their ignorance and their destitution of spirituality, seem to think it indispensable to their usefulness to conceal their defects and to keep up the appearance, at least, of sound knowledge and sound piety. And some, how many I cannot say, have adopted it as a principle not to speak much of their own experience in the divine life.

12. Many are ashamed to be taught by the ignorant, though spiritual Christians. There are perhaps but few among ministers and Church officers who might not take some most useful and salutary lessons from some obscure female or other unnoticed person in the Church. Unless a man is willing to sit at the feet of any spiritual child of God, he is never likely to know what that rest is that remaineth for the people of God.

13. Pride of learning and dependence upon their own powers of criticism,

have done and are doing much to shut the learned world out of faith. There is a great tendency in a certain class of minds to substitute their own reasonings for faith, to believe what they can establish by reasoning and argument, and to hold as fanatical or doubtful any depth of spirituality that they cannot fathom by their "inch of line." Nor do they seem aware that the confidence which they have in those things which they cannot establish by reason, is not faith in the truth of God, but a leaning to their own understanding. God's testimony is to be set aside unless it is backed up and established by their own profound reasonings and criticisms.

14. Another reason is many settle down into a stereotyped orthodoxy and are opposed to all advances in religious knowledge and experience.

15. Others fail because they are waiting and struggling for some preparation before they go up and take possession of the land. They do not understand that they are immediately to enter into this rest by faith. They are waiting for certain feelings and views to prepare them to exercise faith, not knowing that these very views and feelings are the effects of faith. Thus they expect the effect to precede the cause.

16. Others fail through sheer carelessness. The Apostle exhorts the Church to take heed in this matter, and certainly without attention and inquiry this rest will not be attained.

VI. How we may take possession of it.

This rest is to be possessed at once by anchoring down in naked faith upon the promises of God. Take the illustration which I have already given, viz: the ship at sea. Suppose she were dashing upon the rocks, and a voice from heaven should cry out, "Let go your sheet anchor and all shall be safe." Suppose they believed that. With what confidence and composure would they let go the anchor, understanding it to be certain that it would bring them up and that they should ride out the storm. Now this composure of mind, any one may see, might and would be entered upon at once by an act of naked faith. Just so there are no circumstances in which men are ever placed, where they may not enter into rest at once by anchoring down in naked faith upon the promises of God. Let the first six verses of the 37 Psalm be an illustration of what I mean. "Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity: For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in

the Lord and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday." Now suppose an individual to be borne down by the persecution of his enemies, or to be so situated in his temporal circumstances as not to know what he should do for bread. Let him take hold upon these promises, and peace and rest would flow in upon his mind, and light and joy would spring up like the sun breaking through an ocean of storm.

Take the promise in Isa. 42:16. Suppose the soul to be surrounded with darkness, perplexity, and doubt, with regard to the path of duty, or with regard to any other matter--borne down under a weight of ignorance, and crushed with a sense of responsibility, however deep his agony and his trials may be. Hark! Hear Jehovah saying, "I will bring the blind by a way that they know not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them and not forsake them." Now who does not see that faith in this promise would make the soul in a moment as quiet as a weaned child. It would at once become as calm as an ocean of love.

Take Isa. 41:10-14. Suppose a soul to be under circumstances of great temptation from the world, the flesh and the devil, and ready to exclaim, "my feet are slipping, and I shall fall into the hand of my enemies, I have no might against this host. All my strength is weakness, and I shall dishonor my God." Hark again! Hear the word of the Lord. "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded; they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel: I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. What is here but an ocean of consolation to a mind that has faith?

Now what wait ye for. Anchor right down upon these promises. They can give

you instant rest. Nothing but faith is wanting to put you in possession of it. And nothing else than faith can do you any good. There is no need of going around, or waiting to come at this rest by degrees. It is to be entered upon at once. The land may be possessed now in the twinkling of an eye.

I designed to have added several remarks, but as I intend to pursue this subject at another time, I will defer them till then.

LECTURE XVII.

September 25, 1839

THE REST OF FAITH--No. 2

Text.--Heb. 3:19 & 4:1."So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."

Upon these words I remark:

1. That this rest, into which they could not enter, had been expressly promised to them.
2. That though no condition was expressly annexed to this promise, yet faith as a condition was necessarily implied; for if they had no confidence in the promise, they would of course neglect the necessary means to gain possession of the promised land.
3. Unbelief rendered the fulfillment of the promise impossible, in as much as it prevented their going up and taking possession when commanded to do so.
4. In my last, I showed that the land of Canaan was typical of spiritual rest or the rest of faith.
5. This spiritual rest is expressly promised, and it is said that some must enter therein, yet faith is an indispensable condition to its fulfillment.

These remarks prepare the way for the discussion of the two following propositions:

I. That faith instantly introduces the soul into a state of rest.

II. That unbelief renders the rest of the soul impossible.

I. Faith instantly introduces the soul into a state of rest.

1. This is evident from the nature of faith. Faith is the confidence of the heart in the truth of God. It is a resting, a repose of the mind in God. Faith is that state of mind in which every thing is confidently committed to the wisdom and goodness of God. Faith is either satisfied with what we at present have, and is a confidence that this is best for us, and most for God's glory; or it trusts in God to make such changes in our circumstances and in our allotments as shall be most for his glory and our interest.

2. Faith implies such a confidence as to exclude all anxiety about our own interest for time or eternity. It is a confidence that God both knows, and is concerned to supply all our wants--that he is both able and willing to be and do to us, and for us, all that our souls and bodies need. It therefore excludes all anxiety in regard to our present or future interests whether for time or for eternity.

3. Faith is that confidence in God's wisdom and goodness that prefers to have, and to be denied whatever seems good in his sight. It chooses by all means that God should mete out our changes, order our affairs, and dispose of every thing concerning us. Faith would by no means consent to have any thing otherwise than according to the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

4. Faith finds in Christ all the necessities of soul and body amply provided for. It takes right hold on Christ as "our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification and our redemption." Faith sees the meaning of such expressions as these in the gospel, and lays fast hold on them, and so appropriates them to its own circumstances and necessities as to feel no more trouble about its own destiny, than a man who stands on everlasting rock will doubt its strength to support him. Thus faith, from its own nature, puts carefulness and inquietude entirely out of the question.

II Unbelief renders the rest of the soul impossible.

1. This is evident from the nature of unbelief. Unbelief is not the mere absence of faith. It is distrust--the refusal of the heart to trust in the truth, wisdom, providence and grace of God. Consequently, in unbelief, the soul can find nothing on which to rest for a moment. It is not satisfied with its present circumstances, because there is no confidence in the wisdom and goodness of him who appointed them.

2. Unbelief renders it impossible for the mind to feel any security against future ills, temporal or spiritual.

3. There is nothing in a state of unbelief that can support the mind amid the necessary vicissitudes of life. God's government is moving on upon a vast scale, and extends not only through immensity, but throughout eternity. Now it is self-evident that in the administration of such a vast system of providences, innumerable things will occur, that minds like ours cannot understand at present, and the design of which we are utterly unable to see. Nor would it be possible for God, in our present state, and with our present knowledge, to explain things so as to possess our minds with all the reasons for his conduct. With infinitely more ease, could a parent engaged in the most extensive worldly business in which any man was ever engaged, explain to a child two years old the reason of his movements. The child has such confidence in his parent, that he needs not to know the reason of any thing he does. But suppose the child had no confidence in the wisdom and goodness of his parent, and still had knowledge enough to understand that in ten thousand ways his own inclination might be thwarted by the administration of his father's providence. This would naturally and certainly keep his mind in a state of continual vexation. So, under the government of God, it is impossible that we should not pass through a constant series of vicissitudes and changes which will continue to vex and fret the mind that is in the exercise of unbelief. Suppose the holy angels had not confidence in God. What think you would be the state of mind into which they would be thrown by all the sin and misery they behold in this world?

4. In unbelief the soul finds nothing to satisfy its desires. Having no communion with, or resting in God, its very nature is such that nothing in the universe can satisfy it. It has no such friend as it feels itself to need. The soul naturally feels that it needs a friend with the attributes of a God. It knows full well that all earthly friends, however faithful, are yet frail, and

utterly unable to be to them all they need. There is no portion but God that can satisfy the soul. The experience and observation of every day, teach, that, multiply earthly goods without end, and the soul is as far and even farther from being satisfied than at the first. The more of any finite good the soul obtains, the more does it realize its wants, and either grasps and heaves with convulsive longings after more, or feeling the utter insufficiency of any finite good, it loathes them all. God is the only possible satisfying portion of the soul, and it is as impossible that the soul should find a resting place except in God, as that a dove should rest in mid-heaven, with weary wing, without a place upon which to rest the sole of her foot. Unbelief then is the soul's refusal to settle down and rest upon the infinite wisdom, goodness, truth and grace of God. It is the soul's refusal to bathe in the ocean of his love--to bask in the sunlight of his countenance--to rest sweetly and composedly in his hand, and hide under the cover of his wing. Consequently,

5. The soul in unbelief has no sufficient barrier against the power of temptation. Lust rages, and of course reigns while unbelief is in the heart. The soul without faith has no perception of those higher motives that lift its desires and affections above sensible objects. And in this state, the mind is given over to the reigning power of the flesh, and the gratification of sense becomes the soul's supreme object of pursuit. Thus the soul becomes the slave of the body. The spiritual eye being shut, and the bodily eye open, the whole being grovels in the dust like a brute. While the soul is chained down to this miserable earth, it languishes, and groans, and hopes, and ever hopes in vain for future or present good to satisfy its immortal cravings. Being thus delivered up to the power of temptation, it wallows in its own filth, and is even ashamed of its own deformity. It loathes itself, and abhors every thing else. A universal feeling of distrust, and enmity, and hell, keep it continually on the rack.

6. I said that in unbelief, the soul was of course, delivered over to the reigning power of lust. The mind must be under the influence of motives of some kind. If unbelief prevails, no motive from eternity--from heaven--no voice or truth of God--no spiritual or elevating considerations will call the attention of the mind, and elevate its aims, and hopes, and efforts. The whole spiritual world being annihilated in the estimation of such a mind, and the world of sense being that alone from which such a mind receives

impressions, all the motives under which it acts or in such a case can act, being those derived from sensible objects, it will be influenced by such considerations as might affect the beasts.

7. Another reason why unbelief renders the rest of the soul impossible is this. Where there is any degree of spiritual light, the conscience is quickened to keep the distrustful mind in a state of perpetual disquietude.

8. Unbelief delivers the soul over to a train of emotions, exercises, and affections, which constitute essential misery. The soul that distrusts the wisdom, goodness, and providence of God, will as a thing of course, be greatly soured by the providences of God, and misanthropized by the conduct of men. To such a mind everything goes wrong. Understanding and believing nothing of God's great plan of government, the universe seems to such a mind as little else than a general chaos or ocean of confusion and misery. And being supremely selfish, it is continually rasped and outraged by the selfish collisions of clashing interests with which it is surrounded. To trust in man, it cannot, and feels that it has no reason. To trust in God, it will not, and consequently it has no place of repose in the world.

9. Unbelief therefore plunges the mind into an ocean of storms, and keeps it there. Ignorant of the past--uncertain of the future--a prey to lust and passion--without hope and without God--to rest is impossible.

REMARKS.

1. Both faith and unbelief are volitions, and are therefore in the highest sense within our reach, i.e. we are in the highest and most absolute sense voluntary in their exercise. It is utterly absurd to say that we are unable to exercise either faith or unbelief. Faith is the mind's acceptance of the truth of God. Unbelief is the mind's rejection of that truth.

2. Faith is indispensable, in moral beings, to all virtue and all holiness in all worlds. Were it not for their confidence in God, how soon would the angels be stumbled at his providence and fall into rebellion. How many myriads of things does God find it necessary to do, the reasons and wisdom of which they cannot at present understand. Faith therefore is as indispensable to their virtue and happiness as to ours.

3. We can see why God has taken so much pains to inspire faith. The great object

of all his dispensations, and all his works and ways is to make himself known, and thereby secure the confidence of intelligent creatures. Knowing that their virtue and eternal happiness depend on this, he spares no pains, nay he did not hesitate to give his only begotten and well beloved Son, to secure the confidence of his creatures in his love.

4. We see that unbelief is the most shocking and abhorrent wickedness. Suppose that children should refuse to trust their parents, and casting off all confidence in their goodness and providence, they should refuse all obedience except the reasons for every thing were satisfactorily explained--that neither the wisdom or justice of any requirement or prohibition could be admitted without being made plain in all their relations to their comprehension--that the parent could be trusted for nothing, but that all was distrust and of course murmuring, uncertainty and discontent. Who does not see that any family under the influence of unbelief, would present an image of bedlam, and would be an epitome of hell? What parent would not consider himself insulted in the highest degree, and feel the utmost certainty that his family were ruined, if unbelief should come to be the prevailing principle of action? We naturally feel in the highest degree insulted and outraged, whenever our veracity is called in question. And you can scarcely anger men sooner than to suffer even an incredulous look to advertise them that you doubt their word. And what is there more shocking and offensive among dearest friends than to discover among those we love a want of confidence in us? Let every husband and wife--let every parent and child--every friend that is susceptible of the feelings of humanity, rise up and bear witness. Say, is there any thing within the whole circle of disgusting and agonizing considerations that is capable of inflicting a deeper wound upon your peace, than a discovery of a want of confidence in those you love? It is an arrow dipped in deadly poison. It is unmingled gall. Now how infinitely abominable must unbelief be in the sight of God. What! his own offspring cast off confidence in their heavenly Father! Virtually accusing him of lying and hypocrisy, and proudly disdaining all comfort, and impiously and ridiculously insisting upon every thing being made plain to their understanding so that they can see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and thrust their hand into the wound in their Savior's side, or they will not believe. How must it grieve the heart of God to see such a state of things as this existing in his family? Distrust, and consequent confusion reigning all around, and no painstaking on his part, prevails to secure confidence, and hush the tumultuous elements of conflicting mind to rest.

5. You can see why unbelief is so anathematized in the Bible, as that awful sin against which God has unmasked all the batteries of heaven. The reason is, it is at once the foundation, and implies the whole aggregate of all abominations. It breaks the power of moral government--shuts out the peace of God--lets in the infernal brood of all the abominable passions of earth and hell upon the soul.

6. You who do not enter into the rest of faith may understand your present character and your prospects. Remember that you are in the exercise of this greatest of all infernal sins. Unbelief is the sin and the misery of hell. It is the sin and misery of earth. Why do you harbor such an infernal monster in your bosom? It is as hideous and frightful as the Apocalyptic beast with seven heads and ten horns, and as full of curses as the seven last plagues.

7. How strange that unbelief is so seldom reckoned as sin. When professors of religion and impenitent men are enumerating their sins, they almost never consider unbelief as the foundation and cause of all their other sins. In confessing their sins to God, if at all sensible of unbelief, they seem to whine over it as a calamity, rather than confess and mourn over it as a crime. While this is so, and unbelief is neither understood nor repented of as a sin, there is no prospect of a reconciliation between God and the soul.

8. Faith is the most simple and easy exercise of the mind conceivable. It is one of the earliest and most frequent exercises of the human mind. It is one of the first exercises that we witness in little children. Confidence in those around them seems to be as natural to them as their breath. The admirable simplicity, sincerity, and confidence of little children in their parents and those around them, are truly affecting, and afford a beautiful illustration of the wisdom and goodness of God. This confidence which is so natural to them is indispensable to their well-being in almost every respect. Now confidence in God differs nothing in kind, so far as the philosophy of mind is concerned, from confidence in parents. While the little child knows nothing of its wants, present or future, nothing of its dangers, and has no idea of any other wants than what its parents can supply, it rests in peace, confiding in its earthly friends for all its necessities. But as soon as he learns how little confidence can be placed in men, and that its necessities are far-reaching beyond the power of any human arm, its confidence in its parents can no longer keep the soul at rest. Hence:

9. For those who will not believe there can be no remedy. Salvation to them is a natural impossibility. Under the wings of unbelief are congregated and sheltered

the whole brood and catalogue of the miseries of earth and hell. Nothing but faith can be a remedy for their accumulated evils. At the bidding of faith the whole congregation of abominations break up and are scattered to the winds of heaven. But to the influence of nothing else can the mind yield itself up, that will relieve its anxieties, dissipate its forebodings, and lull it into sweet repose upon the bosom of the blessed God.

10. How few have faith enough to enter into rest. In my last I assigned several reasons why the Church does not enter into the rest of faith. It is perfectly obvious upon the very face of the Church that very few of her members have entered into rest. They are filled with nearly the same cares and anxieties as other men. This is a great stumbling block to the world, and they often inquire what is religion worth? They see their professedly Christian friends, as restless, and fretful, and uneasy as themselves. What then, they inquire, can religion be?

11. The great mass of the Church have just conviction enough to make them even more miserable than worldly men. They have so much conviction of sin, and of the reality of eternal things, as to render it impossible for them to enjoy the world, and, having no faith, they do not enjoy God. Consequently they are really destitute of all enjoyment, and are the most miserable of all the inhabitants of earth; i.e. their inward unhappiness is great, often beyond expression or endurance. They are so miserable themselves, as to make all around them unhappy. I know a woman who is little else than a bundle of disquietudes. I scarcely ever saw her five minutes in my life without her falling into a complaining strain of herself or somebody else. Every thing and every body are wrong. And whenever any one thinks she is wrong, it is because they do not understand her. I have several times thought, it might well be said of her, she is of all women most miserable. It would seem that she cannot be made to see that the whole difficulty lies in her unbelief, but full of uneasiness about the present, and forebodings as to the future, blaming every body, and blamed by every body, she seems to be afloat upon an ocean of darkness and storms.

12. It seems almost impossible to make those who are filled with unbelief understand what is the nature of their difficulty. They often have so much conviction as to think that they believe. You tell them to believe, they tell you they do believe. They seem not to discriminate at all between intellectual conviction, and the repose of the heart in the truth.

13. You can see the desperate folly, wickedness, and madness of infidelity.

Infidels seem to imagine that if they can get rid of the impression of the truths of Christianity, can persuade themselves that the Bible is not true--and thus shake off their fears and sense of responsibility, they shall be happy. O fools and blind. What utter madness is in such conclusions as these! For in exact proportion to their unbelief is their desperate and incurable misery. An immortal mind with all its immortal wants and desires, launched upon the ocean of life and crowded forward without the possibility of annihilation--covered with complete ignorance and darkness with regard to the past--a veil of impenetrable midnight stretched over all the future--winds and waves roaring around him--rocks and breakers just before him--no helm--no compass--no star of hope--no voice of mercy--nowhere to rest--no prospect of safety--not a point in the wide universe on which the mind can repose for a moment. Considered in every point of view, infidelity is the consummation of madness, of folly, and of desperate wickedness.

14. If you, to whom this rest is preached, fail to enter in because of unbelief, a future generation will enter in. The Apostle says, "It remains that some must enter in." The promise in regard to the Church that some generation shall enter in is absolute. As it respects individuals, whether you or your children, or some future generation shall enter in, must depend upon your or their exercise of faith. The contemporaries of Moses did not enter into temporal Canaan because of their unbelief but the next generation took possession of it through faith.

[Back to Top](#)

Affections and Emotions of God

Lecture XVIII

October 9, 1839

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Hosea, 11:8. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? my heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together."

In discoursing upon this text I design to show,

I. That God is a moral agent.

II. That He really exercises all the affections and emotions ascribed to Him in the Bible.

III. That it is a real and great grief to Him to abandon sinners to death.

IV. That they really compel Him to do so.

I. I am to show, that God is a moral agent, i.e. that he possesses and exercises the powers of moral agency; intelligence, will, conscience and all those susceptibilities that lay the mind open to the full force of motives. That he is such an agent, I infer,

1. From the fact that man was created in his image; and we know from consciousness that we possess and exercise the powers of moral agency. The image of God in which man was created, could not possibly have related to his moral character, for moral character is not a subject of creation. If by moral character is intended any thing that is praise or blameworthy, it is absurd nonsense to say that it can be the subject of creation. It may be induced by moral means or moral considerations, as I suppose moral character always is produced in man whenever there is any holiness in him, and in this sense man's character may be the subject of creation. But, that it should be the subject of creation in the same sense in which the nature of man is created is certainly impossible.

2. If God be not a moral agent, he can have no moral character. In other words, he could be neither praise nor blameworthy. For certainly none but a moral agent can have moral character--can deserve praise or blame.

3. If God be not a moral agent he cannot possess a rational happiness, i.e. he could possess none of that happiness which arises out of a virtuous character.

4. If not, he is not a proper object of love, or worship, or obedience. And certainly a moral agent like man has no right to obey or worship any but a moral being.

5. If not, it is impossible that moral agents like men, should love, or worship, or obey him, when they come to know him.

6. The works of creation afford incontestable evidence that God possesses and exercises, not only the attributes of a moral agent, but that these attributes are absolutely infinite in extent.
7. Both the moral and providential governments of God prove unanswerably the same truth.
8. The Scriptures every where, in every variety of form, represent God as a moral agent. And scarcely a single thing asserted of him, in the Scriptures, could be true, unless he is a moral agent.

II. God really exercises all the affections ascribed to him in the Bible.

1. This must be so from the very laws of his being.
2. The Bible ascribes love, hatred, anger, repentance, grief, compassion, indignation, abhorrence, patience, long-suffering, joy and every other affection and emotion of a moral being, to God. Upon these Scriptures, I remark,
 - (1) He must feel, or he is not virtuous. Virtue cannot consist in the mere abstractions of the intellect, but belongs to the heart. And an intellect without moral feeling cannot be virtuous.
 - (2) He must feel towards every thing according to its nature or character or he is not virtuous.
 - (3) He is able to consider, at one and the same time, the nature and character of all events, and being infinite, is able to feel towards every thing in existence, precisely according to its nature, character, and relations.
 - (4) It is his duty to exercise these feelings in kind and degree just suited to every thing that exists.
 - (5) His holiness consists in this and in nothing else--in regarding every thing according to its real nature and character. Were it otherwise, instead of being holy, and an object of praise and love, he would be wicked and not worthy of our praise or love.

(6) All these states ascribed to him in the Bible must be the real exercises of his mind, as they are only the natural and necessary modifications of love that must certainly exist under the circumstances in which he is placed. There really are in the universe, objects that ought to excite his mind, and if he is love, must excite all the affections and emotions ascribed to Him.

III. It is a real and great grief to God to abandon sinners to death.

1. This is evident from the fact that it really ought to be a great grief to God to give the wicked up to eternal death. It is really a great evil. And it is impossible that benevolence should not regard it as such. And if there really exist a necessity for it, it must notwithstanding be regarded as a great evil.

2. It really must be a great grief to God if he is love. It is impossible that it should not be. And it is a contradiction to affirm that God is love, and yet that he is not grieved with the necessity of taking such a course with sinners.

3. The Bible declares it in many ways. See the text. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? my heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." Here the language is plainly that of a father who finds himself under the necessity of giving up and expelling from his family a froward son as less evil than to suffer him, by his example, to ruin all the rest. In this text God expresses himself as not only exercising the feelings of a father, but as exercising the feelings of intense grief, as if he had said, "I have done all that in me lies to reclaim and save you, and oh, how shall I give you up? My heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together!" As if God were standing before the sinner in the attitude of a father and really overcome with excessive grief. There are many other passages of scripture that plainly declare the same truth.

4. All his works imply it. Every thing that God has made in the universe demonstrates his intense desire to promote the happiness of his creatures. And so much pains certainly could not be taken by any mind to promote the happiness of others without being grieved with the necessity of giving them up to ruin.

5. His grace manifested in the Atonement, is the highest possible demonstration that he has all the feelings ascribed to him in the Bible, and in an infinite degree. Did he not really love sinners, could he make so great a sacrifice to save them? Were he not angry at sin--were he not infinitely just and inflexible in maintaining the principles of his government, could he have given his Son to die as their substitute, rather than pardon them without an Atonement? We certainly should consider it the highest possible evidence of love in a human being to give himself or his son to die for us.

IV. Sinners really compel God to give them up.

I know that this statement is very diverse from the common opinions of men, for they argue merely from the omnipotence of God that he can save them if he will. And they never ask the question whether under all the circumstances of the case, he can wisely will to save them. Under this head, I remark,

1. That since God has created you moral agents, and placed you under a moral government, making you responsible for the right exercise of your powers of moral agency, he has no right to set aside your liberty and treat you inconsistently with the nature he has given you.
2. If he had a right and should actually set aside your liberty, in doing this he would render your salvation naturally impossible; for salvation without virtue is absurd, and virtue without free-agency is a contradiction. So that you cannot possibly be saved unless you can be induced by the considerations of the gospel to love and serve God.

Here it may be objected, that in the parable of the marriage the king is represented as ordering his servants to go out and compel people to come in. But this is only a moral compulsion--such a degree of argument and persuasion, that, as it were, constrains the sinner to come without at all interfering with his freedom.

3. There certainly is a point beyond which forbearance in God would be no virtue, and where further arguments and persuasions and efforts to save them would be entirely inconsistent with the honor, and dignity, and glory of God, and consequently with the rights and well-being of the universe. Beyond this point then, God cannot and ought not to go. If he sacrifices his own character, he sacrifices with it the holiness and happiness of all other

beings, as their holiness and happiness must depend upon their confidence in him. It is easy to see therefore, that the conduct of sinners imposes the necessity upon God of giving them up to damnation as the least of two evils. If they take such an attitude, as they often do, as to render it unwise in him to pursue them any further with offers of grace, he must either give them up and save the universe of holy beings, or he must give up his character and thereby abandon the entire universe to ruin.

REMARKS.

1. It is a great and ruinous error to suppose that the declarations of scripture, with regard to the moral feelings of God are mere accommodations to human weakness.

(1) Because it is denying the nature of God.

(2) It is denying his whole moral character.

(3) It is representing him as a hypocrite.

He professes such feelings, and what shall we say if he does not possess them? When he professes to love his creatures, are we to understand that he does not really love them, but that he merely acts as we do when we love? But why does he act so? How are we to understand him as feeling? If this language does not mean what it says, what does it mean? He really ought to exercise benevolence, and he professes to exercise it. And are we to be told that his professions are a mere empty boast--an accommodation to human weakness? But it probably will not be denied that He really loves. If this be admitted, then all the other affections and emotions ascribed to him, must necessarily be exercised by him. They are the very modifications that ought and must exist in view of the objects presented to the mind of God. So that if God does not really exercise these affections and emotions, he is not only a hypocrite, but is in all other respects infinitely far from his duty. If therefore it be maintained, that the moral feelings ascribed to God, are mere accommodations to human weakness, it must also be denied that God is love or benevolence. And that to deny this is a ruinous and damning error needs no proof.

2. To maintain that the representations of the moral feelings of God in the Bible are only accommodations to human weakness, is to represent him as a mere intellect or abstraction, and consequently destitute of every thing that ought to or

can engage our love.

3. It is cutting off all possible sympathy between us as moral beings and God. If God be not a moral being with moral attributes and feelings, we can have no sympathy with him--can neither know, nor love, nor worship him any more than we could Juggernaut.

4. It is to render all true religion impossible. The man that has an idea that these declarations are mere accommodations to human weakness, can certainly have no true knowledge of God, and consequently no true religion. If God be not what the Bible represents him to be, then what is he, and who knows him? If these are not his real feelings then we are infinitely mistaken about his character. If these are not his feelings and this his character, then we know not what they are.

5. If these are not the real feelings of God, then we have no true revelation of God. If these passages of scripture do not mean what they say, it is impossible for us to tell what they do mean. And if God has not, in these passages, discovered to us the real state of his heart, we know nothing of his heart. But the truth is, that these passages speak the same language with all his works. It is plain that his works and word are one continuous and complete system of revelation. And the same great gushing heart of love is everywhere manifest. And to maintain that the Bible declarations instead of meaning what they say, are mere accommodations to human weakness, amounts to the affirmation that all God's ways, and works, and word are a stupendous system of hypocrisy and deception.

6. The representing of the scriptures as an accommodation to human weakness, is an overlooking and denying a principal design of the incarnation of Christ. One of the grand objects Christ had in view was to reveal to us the heart of God. Now that which we see in Christ, are the very feelings of the mind of God. Did Christ exercise these feelings in reality, then God exercises them, and so does every other holy mind, that has a knowledge of the same facts.

7. But it may be objected that we ought not to ascribe human feelings to God. I answer, we ought to ascribe feelings the same in kind to God, that holy men have. Wicked human feelings are by no means to be ascribed to God. But holiness in men is just what it is in God.

8. But again it is objected that God is not man that he should repent. I reply, that

repentance may mean emotions of sorrow, or it may mean a change of mind. God never changes his mind, but often, nay always, exercises emotions of sorrow; for objects that ought and must excite these emotions, in a holy mind, are always present before him.

9. Again it is objected, that if these things are so, God cannot be happy. I answer that all these feelings ascribed to God, when combined are perfect happiness. I don't know how to make this plainer than by borrowing an illustration from the prismatic colors produced by the sun's rays. Let a pencil of the sun's rays be thrown upon a prism, and, as you doubtless know, the rays will be so refracted as to exhibit all the colors that exist in nature. Now when these rays are separated, it is found that none of them are white, yet when combined their brightness is ineffable. Just so with the feelings of God. Separate his moral feelings, and no class of them would be unmingled happiness, yet when combined they are infinite happiness.

10. Again it is objected that this view of the subject really implies change in God. I answer, No. For God has always known and felt what he now knows and feels. He has no new knowledge. All events have been eternally present to him. He has always known, and felt, and enjoyed just what he now knows, and feels and enjoys.

11. God enters fully into all the relations between himself and his creatures. I mean that he enters into these relations with all his heart and all his soul. He is feelingly alive to them all. It should ever be remembered that he is not a mere abstraction, an intellect without volition, emotion or sympathy. But his feelings are infinitely intense. So that every object in the universe, every creature, every want, every woe, every sorrow, and every joy, enkindle in his mind just that feeling in kind and degree, which the nature of the thing is calculated to excite.

12. In Christ he has the most perfect sympathy with us. From many parts of scripture, it is manifest that one great design of the incarnation was to create a sympathy between God and men. Having been in the flesh, Christ has been "tempted in all points like as we are." He was made perfect by suffering and temptation, so as to be able to succor all those that suffer and are tempted.

13. It is objected that if God really exercises anger, he is wicked. I answer, No. His anger is a benevolent anger. It is not selfish or malicious or a disposition unjustly to inflict pain. But it is the holy indignation of a good and gracious

sovereign against those who would injure the interests, disturb the tranquility, and mar the happiness of his obedient subjects.

14. This view of God's character is that which renders God acceptable to creatures like us. We have the advantage of approaching him knowing that he has the feelings and heart of a father. A guilty son knows that a father's heart can be reached, when the bosom of a stranger could not be approached or moved by his tale of woe. And however guilty this son may be, if he knows that his father is good, he is assured that in his heart, he shall find a powerful advocate to plead his cause. So a wandering rebellious sinner, may, like a returning prodigal, approach God with the certainty that a father's heart, and a father's love will yearn over him, and if it be within the reach of possibilities, will save him from deserved destruction.

15. They don't know God who don't conceive of him as a moral being, exercising in reality those feelings ascribed to him in the Bible. Indeed if they conceive any thing else of God, they are as far as possible from knowing the true God, and might as well worship Juggernaut as the being whom they call God. He is a moral agent to all intents and purposes, exercising perfectly in kind, and infinitely in degree, all the affections and emotions of a moral being. As such we can form rational, though inadequate conceptions of him--can approach him with confidence--can sympathize with him in his efforts of benevolence. Our minds can commune with his mind--and our hearts beat in unison with his heart. We can enter into his desires and purposes, and efforts, and in short, we can be assimilated to him. But make any thing else of God, and we do not, cannot, ought not to love or worship or obey him.

16. How aggravated in God's sight must sin appear, to induce him with such feelings as he has to give his own offspring up to eternal death. We can conceive of a father banishing forever a beloved son, because his depravity has become so great, that his banishment from the family becomes indispensable. Yet the conduct of that son must be very aggravated to induce a father to do this, and to justify in the estimation of the other members of the family such a course. So sin, in its tendency and in its contagious nature, must be an abominable thing to induce a God who could give his own son to die for sinners, after all to give them up to go to hell.

17. The depravity that can wear out such love as this, and actually carry matters so far as to compel God to send the very sinners for whom Christ died to hell, in

order to preserve the universe of moral beings from destruction, must be horribly great. Sinners, think what you do. God has made you voluntary agents, and made it an unalterable law of your being, that you shall be free, and responsible for the use of your freedom. And now, in the exercise of this liberty, you place God under circumstances where with all his love, he is obliged to send you to hell as a less evil than to let you go unpunished.

18. How strongly will the universe approve of the dealings of God in destroying sinners forever. When all that he has done and suffered for them shall pass in full review in the solemn judgment before the assembled universe--his providential kindness--the giving of his Son--the influences of his Spirit--all his long suffering shall be subjects of distinct consideration. What a spirit of most deep and perfect acquiescence will be felt by all the holy, when the Judge pronounces the sentence: "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

19. It will be a delightful consideration to God and all the saints, that God has done all the nature of the case admitted, to save sinners and they would not be saved.

20. From this and many other texts, it appears that God feels compelled, and actually does give sinners up. And now remember that when he feels constrained to do this by you, your case is as hopeless as if you were already in hell. And remember that you are in danger of it every moment that you persist in impenitence. Nay, perhaps some of you are already given up. If so I have no expectation that either this or any other sermon that I could preach to you would do you any good.

Finally. Let all who have sinned, and who are sensible of their guilt, return immediately to God. Take the parable of the prodigal son, and consider well the thrilling truths there communicated.

And now I conjure you, to conceive of God as he really is, a being who not only knows but pities, and deeply yearns over you with all the feelings of a heart of infinite sensibility. Go pour out your tears, your prayers, your confessions, your souls before him; and his heart shall rejoice over you, and his soul be moved for you to do you infinite good.

[Back to Top](#)

Legal and Gospel Experience

Lecture XIX

October 23, 1839

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Ps. 40:1-3."I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord."

Many of the Psalms should be regarded as inspired diaries, and as such they are most important way-marks to the Christian. The diaries of other men may mislead us. But when we find our experience to accord with that of inspired men, and with those parts of their experience which were recorded by the Spirit of God, we may be sure that we are in the same path in which they traveled to heaven. The 119 Psalm, together with many others, are manifestly of this character. They are as if the Psalmist had set up way-marks all along the pathway to heaven, and by recording his own experiences as on the milestones along the way, had given us the advantage of being certain whether or not we are in the way that inspired men have trodden.

I regard the text as an instance of this kind, wherein the Psalmist, after having passed through severe trials of mind, records both his trials, and deliverance for the benefit of all succeeding ages.

I will discuss this subject in the following order.

I. Inquire what we are to understand by the horrible pit of miry clay.

II. Show what is implied in waiting patiently for the Lord.

III. Show what is implied in being brought up out of the horrible pit of miry clay.

IV. What is implied in having his goings established.

V. Notice the consequences of this experience.

I. What we are to understand by the horrible pit of miry clay.

It should be observed that this is certainly figurative language. It cannot be supposed that the Psalmist had literally fallen into a pit of clay. But he had been in circumstances that might be aptly represented by this analogy. Although language is figurative, it must have a meaning. And generally it is not at all difficult but exceedingly easy to understand figurative language. The figure here used implies,

1. That he had been placed in circumstances of extreme difficulty and danger from which he could not extricate himself.
2. That his efforts to help himself only increased his distress and danger. This is certainly implied in the figure he uses--"a horrible pit of miry clay." Now every one knows, that if a man were thrown into a pit of miry clay, his struggles to extricate himself would only sink him deeper in the mire, and render his circumstances more and more desperate. Whatever else this figure teaches, we must not overlook the fact, that the Psalmist had been placed in circumstances where all his struggles and efforts to extricate himself had but made the matter worse.
3. It implies that his condition was desperate and horrible, like that of a man who wandering in a solitary desert, had fallen into a deep pit of miry clay, beyond the reach and almost beyond the hope or possibility of aid.

Commentators have had numerous conjectures with regard to the Psalmist's meaning in these verses. It were worse than useless to recapitulate them. It is possible that something connected with his worldly circumstances might have been under his eye, when the Psalmist wrote these verses. But to me it appears plain that he designed to describe his own experience, first in a state of legal bondage, and then his passage from that state into the liberty of the Gospel. This language is so perfectly suited to such an experience, that probably no one who has had this experience will doubt that this was his design. This experience is familiar to all those, and only to those, who have passed from legal bondage to the liberty of faith. It appears to me to describe the same experience in a more condensed form as that in the seventh chapter of Romans. The latter part of the seventh contrasted with some of the first verses in the eighth chapter, appear to

me to exhibit an experience similar to the one before us.

A selfish soul, whether a backslider or an impenitent sinner, when attempting to serve God is really guilty, and is condemned for every act, and every attempt to serve God, while in a wrong state of heart. The law requires pure and perfect love, and every selfish act and effort is the direct opposite of the requirements of the law. Whether from hope or fear, whether from the lashings of conscience or any other consideration than love, he attempts obedience, he is condemned, and the law utters its thunders, and holds him guilty, and worthy of eternal death.

Now it often comes to pass that backsliders and the unconverted, for they are both actuated by the same motives, and are equally under condemnation, it often comes to pass I say, that they have too much conviction to be at all satisfied with anything they do, and yet they are too much distressed to do nothing. They see and feel themselves condemned even for their prayers, and yet they will cry for mercy. They drive in this and that direction, and lay hold on every shrub or bush within their reach to pull themselves out of the pit, and yet their guilt and condemnation is increasing every moment they live. They read, and pray, and go to meeting, and stay at home, and think, and meditate, and seek, and strive, and yet they see and feel themselves condemned for all their striving and efforts, because supreme selfishness is at the bottom of them all. Such a soul finds itself ready to resolve and re-resolve, and heap up resolutions almost without end, but his resolutions are yielding as air before every breath of temptation, because they are made in the face of an antagonist principle. And selfishness is found to sweep away as a dam of sand all those resolutions and efforts, by which an attempt is made to withstand its influence. The truth is that in all such cases, selfishness is at the foundation of all those resolutions and efforts, and while the heart is in this state nothing but a dreadful delusion can keep the mind from seeing that it is in a horrible pit of miry clay--that turn which way it will--that do what it may, while selfishness remains, the guilt is increased by every act, and the soul is sinking more and more deeply under condemnation and wrath at every step. This is truly a desperate situation. To give up effort, the soul in this state will not, and to make such kinds of efforts is worse than useless, in as much as every one of them is sin, and increasing his condemnation. In this state of mind, for an individual to praise the Lord is entirely out of the question.

It appears to me that no figure could more perfectly describe a state of total bondage than this. Convicted of sin, yet having no love to God--influenced by

fear and not by faith or love, struggling and agonizing, yet sinking deeper in guilt and condemnation every moment. This is indeed a horrible pit of miry clay.

II. What is implied in waiting patiently for the Lord.

1. Not an indolent sitting still. A man under these circumstances will do any thing but sit still.

2. Not such a waiting as is consistent with leaving the matter and employing the time and thoughts about something else. This certainly will not, cannot be. Nor is any such thing intended in this text.

3. Not a consenting to a postponement of an answer to our requests. A soul in this state is in too much trouble, and feels that it cannot and has no right to be willing to remain for one hour longer in that situation. I have often thought that the translation of this passage was calculated to make, and had actually made, in many instances, an impression directly contrary to the truth. By waiting patiently many seem to understand a kind of indifference and carelessness about the result. Now the original expresses a state of mind the exact opposite of this, and implies,

(1) A constant looking to God--waiting on the Lord as a criminal condemned to die would wait anxiously and constantly at the door of one who had the power of pardon.

(2) An earnest, agonizing, and intense looking or waiting upon the Lord. The translation would exactly have expressed the idea had it said "I waited agonizingly or intensely for the Lord." In the original it reads in waiting I waited, which is one of the forms of expressing a superlative, and implies in this connection a steady yet vehement attitude of supplication.

4. Waiting patiently for the Lord implies a holding on and a refusing to be denied. Like that of Jacob when he said, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." This state of mind is frequently described in the Bible. In the parable of the loaves, and the importunate widow, the necessity and power of a persevering state of mind are set in a striking light.

5. It implies a sense of being shut up to God for help--a full and ripe conviction of the mind that our circumstances are desperate unless God

undertake our case. The Psalmist seems to have waited only upon God.

6. It implies a ripe conviction of the voluntariness of his sin, and consequently the horribleness of his situation. He did not look upon his circumstances as calamitous, and a misfortune but as desperate wickedness. A man never sees the truly horrible nature and desperateness of his circumstances, until he sees that his voluntary selfishness is the only reason why he does not yield full and instantaneous obedience to God. And that this selfishness having grown with his growth, and strengthened with his strength, is sinking him every instant in the horrible pit of miry clay, and despite his resolutions, is sweeping him as with a flood to the depths of hell.

7. It implies so much hope that he should be heard as to encourage prayer. Like a man that had fallen into a pit lifting up his voice again and again, if peradventure some passerby might hear his wailing and be attracted to the spot to afford him help.

I do not think this waiting upon the Lord implies an anchoring down in faith upon the promises of God, for this would at once remove the anguish of the mind. But it means rather the cry of distress almost despairing, and yet so much hope remaining as to encourage a vehement crying to the Lord.

If it be objected that God answers none but the prayer of faith, it should be remembered that there is a sense in which he hears and answers other prayers than these. He hears the cry of the little ravens, and the young lions when they lack for food. And Christ, when on earth, heard and answered the prayer of devils when they pleaded that they might not be sent out of the country, but might be suffered to go into the herd of swine. God's ear is always open to the cry of distress, and where there is no good reason why he should not, he may and doubtless does often hear, and in some sense answer the prayer of those whose moral character he abhors. I do not believe that God has anywhere laid himself under an obligation to answer any but the prayer of faith. And yet I cannot doubt that he often hears the cry of souls in distress and brings deliverance to those in legal bondage.

III. Show what is implied in being brought up out of the horrible pit.

This is an affecting figure. The language is peculiar. God is here represented as having his attention arrested by some distant cry of distress. A soul has fallen

into a horrible pit, and lifts up his voice and cries. "Help! O God, help!" But receiving no answer he cries again. "Help! O my God, help!" Here God's attention is arrested. The cry comes into his ear. He is represented as stooping down--"he inclined unto me." He is represented as inclining in the direction of the cry, and holding himself in the attitude of intense listening. Again the cry breaks upon his ear, "Help! O my God, help!" And then hastening as upon the wings of the wind, he bows the heavens and comes down, and lifts the soul up from the horrible pit of miry clay. This language implies,

1. Deliverance from that state of mind in which all his efforts were selfish and sinful--a breaking up of the influence of self upon the mind, and filling it with love, so as to give it the consciousness that it really rendered acceptable service to God. While under legal influence, he felt continually that his services were not accepted or acceptable--that they could not and ought not to be accepted by a holy God--that his best services were selfishness and rendered it more and more impossible for God to justify and save him.
2. It implies being placed upon firm footing, where he could serve God with a conscious soundness and firmness of heart--being conscious that he was influenced by love and not by fear, and that his heart was fixed and sincere and full of the love of God. Thus the power of legal considerations over the mind was broken.
3. This expresses the experience of a soul who is led to lay hold on Christ by faith. His feet are set upon the rock Christ. Faith that produces love breaks the yoke of bondage, of selfishness, of death, and admits the soul at once into the rest and liberty of joy, and faith, and love. If any of you have passed through this state of mind, you do not need that I should say any thing to make you understand it; and if you have not, say what I would, you would understand but very little about it.

IV. What is meant by having his goings established.

This is also a figure. He is represented as being set upon a rock, not to slip immediately off, or to be swept off by the first wave of temptation, but as having his footsteps established upon the rock. This implies,

1. That his faith had a permanency and stability that worked by love and

prevented his falling again under condemnation. I know that he says in the latter part of this same Psalm, "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me so that I am not able to look up." But this does not imply that he had really fallen into sin again, but that a sense of his old sin had laid him exceedingly low before God. This is a familiar occurrence to all those whose feet are so established as to abide in the faith of the gospel. They often have so great a sense of their former guilt as to produce the greatest loathing and make them cry out, "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me so that I am not able to look up." This does not however imply that they have present doubts of their acceptance with God, or feel a sense of present condemnation, or that their hearts are not right with God. It implies rather the contrary state of mind. When their former sin is the object of their thoughts, they are almost overcome with a sense of their exceeding vileness. But as soon as their thoughts return, and God becomes the object of contemplation their hearts are full of love and joy and peace.

2. It implies, that he was so upheld by grace that he found himself able to go forward in the service of God without being brought under the influence of fear and legal motives, and thus again entangled with the clay.

V. The consequences of this experience.

1. A new song was put into his mouth. He could now praise God. I have said that a man under legal influences cannot praise God. The attempt is mockery as every one knows who has been in this state. Praise is therefore a new song to the soul who has passed into gospel liberty.

2. Another consequence of this change was manifest: "Many," he says, "shall see it." Yes the very countenance of such a soul is changed, so that at first flush you would see that he was out of the pit. Instead of that despondency, and anguish, and guilt, which overspread the whole mind there is a sweet calm, a glow, a joy, a peace, a heaven in the very countenance. Everyone can see it.

I once knew an infidel whose only and beloved daughter was in great distress of mind. He observed it and became exceedingly anxious about her, and was proposing to send her out of the city to divert her mind, and restore her former gaiety of disposition. At this crisis he was prevailed upon, by a pious lady in his family, to let his daughter attend an anxious meeting. She came,

gave her heart to God and returned in great peace. As soon as her father saw her the next morning, he was struck with the change in her countenance. It was so manifest as almost to overcome him. He said to his wife, that their daughter was greatly altered, and cried out to his daughter with tears, "O you cannot love me anymore if you have given your heart to Christ." I have seen many cases where the change was so great in the very countenance as to tell the whole story more forcibly than any words could do, and it might well be said "they looked unutterable things."

3. Others "shall fear." When such a great change occurs in any soul, backsliders and impenitent sinners are alarmed. It brings God and eternity near to them. It produces an awe that no preaching could do. It is a matter of fact, a real, living illustration of the power of the gospel and of God. How many times have I known such a change to alarm a whole household, and in some instances a whole neighborhood.

4. It results in their trusting in the Lord. This is a common case. When one passes through this great change, it first alarms, then encourages and brings many to fear and trust in the Lord.

REMARKS.

1. Great multitudes of souls are in the horrible pit of miry clay. From my own observation, I am convinced that the great mass even of those who are called the most pious in the churches, are in a state of legal bondage, and have gone no further in religion than to find themselves in a state of almost continual condemnation. They have conviction enough to make them miserable. They are driven and dragged by their consciences and the law of God--are struggling and resolving, but are under the influence of so much selfishness as to be continually crying out, as in the case supposed by the Apostle in the seventh of Romans, "When I would do good, evil is present with me." "I find a law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity." "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

2. They seem not to expect to get out of this state. The seventh of Romans has been so perverted as to be a great stumbling block to many souls in this state of mind. They seem to understand the Apostle as speaking of himself as he was at the time he wrote the epistle. And thinking it not to be expected that they should advance further than an inspired Apostle did, they get the idea that they must and

shall live and die in that state. I have often thought it was most unhappy that the seventh and eighth chapters were separated. If persons would read attentively the whole of the seventh and eighth chapters in their connexion, they might see the drift of the Apostle's reasoning. I apprehend he merely supposed a case for the purpose of contrasting the influence of the law and of the gospel upon the mind. Now whether this is so or whether he spoke of his own experience, it is certain that the same individual who in the seventh chapter is represented as being under the bondage of law, of sin, and death, is in the beginning of the eighth chapter represented as being brought into an entirely different and opposite state of mind. The same individual who could complain in the seventh chapter as being in such horrible bondage, as being a slave sold under sin, could break forth in the beginning of the eighth chapter and say, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

3. They do not take a course that can ever bring them out. They are striving to get grace by works of law, instead of taking hold at once by naked faith upon the promises of God.

4. They form no right conception of the state of mind in which they may be when the power of lust and every temptation shall be broken. They expect therefore to live and die in the pit of their own filthy lusts. And if they do so die, they are sure to go to hell.

5. Many are in the horrible pit, but are fast asleep. They are dreaming that they are awake and they are fancying themselves upon the rock, while they are almost suffocated in the mire of their own filth, and are ready to sink down to hell.

6. Will you consider how much more inexcusable you are for remaining in this pit one moment than the Psalmist was? There are thousands of promises now that had never been written in those days. It is now also the dispensation of the Spirit. You are surrounded with so much more light, have such a full and perfect revelation, and indeed are so circumstanced in every respect as to render you infinitely guilty for remaining there one moment.

7. Those who are delivered will abound in praise. Their hearts and lips are full of praise. It is a new song. Praise is as natural as their breath. That has happened to them which is foretold in the prophet, "He shall appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified."

Sometimes I have known those under legal bondage, [to] rebuke those who were full of praise reminding them that they had something else to do--that they had better be praying for sinners than praising and rejoicing. But let all such persons remember that this new song of praise often does more on the one hand to rouse the careless to fear, and on the other to encourage the desponding to hope, than could be effected by any other means.

8. From this subject we can see how it may be known who are delivered--they who have "the new song in their mouth, even praise to our God."

9. You can see the importance and the effect of testifying your joy before the Church and the world. The Psalmist says, "I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation; I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great congregation."

10. Many may wonder and despise, and perish. Nevertheless let all who have experienced the loving-kindness of the Lord, say with the Psalmist in another place, "Come all ye that fear the Lord, and I will tell you what he has done for my soul."

[Back to Top](#)

**How to Prevent Our Employments
from Injuring Our Souls**

Lecture XX

November 6, 1839

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 12:11: "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord."

In remarking upon this subject, I design to show:

I. That idleness is inconsistent with religion.

II. That all persons are bound to pursue some lawful employment.

III. That they are to be diligent in their calling whatever it is.

IV. How to prevent employments, either secular or spiritual, from becoming a snare to the soul.

I. Idleness is inconsistent with religion.

1. Because it is wholly inconsistent with love to God. Whoever loves God with all his heart, will certainly set himself to do the will of God, and will no more be idle than God will be idle.

2. It is wholly inconsistent with love to man. The love of our race will certainly lead us to exert ourselves to promote their happiness.

3. Idleness can result only from selfishness. A man must love his own ease supremely to be idle in a world like this.

4. Idleness is sponging out of the community in which we live. A man that does not earn his bread--who does not contribute as much to the happiness and good things of the world, as he consumes--who lives upon the common stock without contributing his share, is a drone. If he is not engaged in some employment that promotes the well-being of man, he is subtracting continually from the common stock of blessings, and sponging from the universe of God.

5. Idleness is injustice. This follows from what has just been said. A man has no more right to live by sponging than he has to live by stealing. Indeed it involves the same principle.

6. It is absolute and downright disobedience to God. God as much forbids idleness as he does theft or murder, and a man or a woman can no more be religious without pursuing some employment by which God may be glorified and the world benefited, than an habitual drunkard can be

religious.

II. All persons are bound to pursue some lawful employment.

This is a plain inference from what has already been said.

But what is a lawful employment? This is an all-important question, in answer to which I observe,

1. To be lawful, an employment must not be injurious to our own best interests, or the best interests of mankind.
2. Speculation is not a lawful employment. To embark in uncertain speculations involves in it the principle of gambling, and is eminently the spirit of gambling. It is a game of chance, where one of the parties must gain and the other lose, and where selfishness stalks abroad naked to grasp every man's wealth without blushing.
3. To be lawful, an employment must not be selfish. All selfishness is sin. And every employment however lawful it may be in itself, is rendered unlawful by being selfishly pursued.
4. To be lawful there must not be too much or too little of it. A business lawful in itself may become unlawful when too much is undertaken or too little is performed, so that on the one hand a man is crushed, or on the other he is idle; but,
5. To be lawful, a business must be useful, i.e. it must be such an employment as is calculated in its nature to benefit mankind.
6. To be lawful, a business must be suited to your capacity. You cannot lawfully employ yourself in that for which you are not fitted. By this I do not mean, that you are to be perfectly qualified for the transaction of any business, before you can lawfully engage in it, but that you should be as well or better fitted for that particular employment than any other.
7. To be lawful, it must be that employment to which you are called of God. You are to be wholly the Lord's, and to consult his will in all things--and never to be engaged in any employment to please yourself or promote your own separate or private interest. You are bound therefore to submit yourself to the direction of the Lord in all things, and to select no employment for

life, or for any length of time but under the direction of God.

It is generally admitted, that ministers are to be specially called of God to the work of the ministry. But all men are to be equally devoted to God, and all employments are to be pursued equally for the glory of God. Every faculty, every day, and moment of all men are to be devoted to the Lord. And all men are equally bound to consult the will of God in the selection and pursuit of their employments. And no man can give himself up to employments to which he is not called of God, or to which he does not really believe himself to be called of God, without thereby apostatizing from the service of God. Now every one of you would say that if a minister should select the ministry to please himself he would lose his soul. This is equally true of every other employment.

8. To be lawfully employed, you must engage in that in which you can be most useful. It is not enough that you render yourself useful in some degree, you are bound to be engaged in that employment in which you can, (all things considered,) do the most good. A man might render himself useful as a peddler but if he can be more useful in some other employment he is bound to prefer it.

9. That only is a lawful employment which can honestly and reasonably be pursued, for the glory of God. Every kind and degree of business that cannot, with an enlightened conscience, be solemnly engaged in and transacted for the glory of God, carries its own condemnation on its very front.

10. No business is lawful that is not, as a matter of fact, engaged in and pursued with the supreme desire to know and glorify God therein.

11. No business is lawful which is inconsistent with the highest degree of spirituality. I mean that only which consists with entire holiness of heart and life is a lawful employment. Any thing that Jesus Christ, or an apostle would not engage in under the circumstances is really unlawful for every body else.

III. Men are to be diligent in their calling.

1. This is implied in the text. The text is commonly quoted as if it read, "Be diligent in business." This is not the way in which it reads, though this is

plainly implied in it ,and its real meaning.

2. It is also plainly implied in the law of God.

3. The necessities of the world require it. There is enough for every man to do. And no man has any right to be idle or dilatory in his calling.

4. Every degree of slothfulness is injurious to yourself in many ways.

5. It is also injurious to those with whom you are immediately connected. They have a right to expect the diligent use of your powers in promoting their common interests.

6. Every degree of slothfulness in you is injurious to the world at large, and to the universe, inasmuch as there is just so much less of real good in the universe for every moment's idleness in which you indulge.

7. It is a bad example in you to be idle for a day or an hour or to be in any manner negligent or slothful in your employment. Its tendency is to produce universal idleness which would ruin the universe.

8. You are bound to do all the good you can in every way, both to the bodies and souls of men, and this obligation is entirely inconsistent with any degree of slothfulness.

IV. How to prevent secular or spiritual employments from being a snare to the soul.

It has come to be a subject of almost universal complaint, that our employments lead us away from God. Men complain of their cares, and having so much business on their hands as to secularize their spirit--blunt the edge of devotional feeling--and more or less insensibly, but certainly to draw off their hearts from God. And those who are engaged in intellectual and even spiritual occupations, such as teachers of science and teachers of religion, are by their employments apt to fall into an intellectual and hardened frame of mind, and to wander far from God. It seems to be understood that there is a kind of necessity in the case, and that we are naturally unable to attend to the various duties and callings incidental to our relations in this world without secularizing our spirit, and annihilating a devotional state of mind. Now to suppose there is any necessity for this result is to charge God foolishly. He has never placed us here surrounded

with these necessities to be a snare and a curse to us. On the contrary, all the employments that are strictly lawful, instead of being a snare, are indispensable to the highest development of our powers, and to the growth and consummation of our piety. The whole difficulty lies in the abuse of a thing eminently wise and good. That the facts are according to the general complaint cannot be doubted. Men really are ensnared by their employments. But why? Many seem to suppose that the only way to maintain a spiritual frame of mind is by a total abstraction from those employments, in which it seems to be necessary for men to engage in this world. It was this conceit that led to the establishment of nunneries and monasteries, and to all those fanatical and odious seclusions from society that have abounded among the Papists. The truth is that the right discharge of our duties to God and man, as things are, is indispensable to holiness. And voluntary seclusion from human society and abstracting ourselves from those employments by which man may be benefited, are wholly inconsistent with the principles and spirit of the Christian religion. So did not Christ nor the Apostles. They were eminently active, zealous and useful, in promoting the glory of God and the good of man, in every way in their power. It is a desideratum, therefore, in religion, to understand the secret of making our employments, whatever they are, the means of increasing instead of destroying our spirituality. A great deal needs to be said upon this subject. I can now only say the following things, and may at a future time, if God permit, resume the subject.

1. If you would not that your employment should be a snare to your soul, see to it, that it is not unlawful, i.e. see to it, that it is not an injurious employment--that you are not engaged in that, the natural tendency of which is to injure yourself or your fellowmen.

2. See to it that you do not introduce some unlawful ingredient into a business otherwise lawful, and thus vitiate the whole, and render it a curse to you and those around you, e.g. a man who is an innkeeper. To keep a house of public entertainment is, in itself, lawful and useful. But if a man to increase his profits or to please all classes of people will sell ardent spirits, this is absolutely unlawful, and an abomination in the sight of God, and it introduces an element into his business which vitiates the whole and renders his business a curse to mankind. A merchant perhaps does the same thing. In order to increase his profits or please his customers, he sells tobacco, and other fashionable but injurious narcotics. And while he deals in many things that are useful and important, he does not hesitate to buy

and sell almost any thing upon which he can make a profit. Now if he admits into his business any ingredient that is injurious to the interests of mankind he renders the whole an unlawful business. It demonstrates that he is not and cannot be pursuing his employment from right motives. And it is impossible that he should pursue a business of this kind in a manner that shall be acceptable to God. In other words his business itself is an apostasy from God. God has said, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." Now the principle involved here is, that while a man admits any form of sin whatever to be habitual in his employment, it is rendering all obedience for the time being wholly impossible. He is in the exercise of a spirit which is in itself disobedience to the whole law and a setting aside the authority of God.

3. Be sure that you do nothing selfishly. If you allow selfishness in any of its forms to come in and to have a place in your employments, you are already departed from God, and your business, whether spiritual, intellectual or whatever it may be, has become an abomination to God.

4. See that your business is strictly and properly a lawful one. If it be not in the most proper sense a lawful employment, it will, if persevered in, certainly ruin your soul. To be lawful, I have already said, that it must be some employment that is useful--suited to your capacity--that to which you are called of God--that in which you can become useful--that which can be truly, and honestly, and solemnly dedicated to God, and performed for him--that which as a matter of fact, is thus dedicated to and performed for God--that which is consistent with the highest degree of spirituality, with perfect holiness of heart and life--and such as Christ and the Apostles would engage in under the same circumstances.

5. See that your eye is single, that you have but one great leading motive, and that to glorify God and serve your generation.

6. Consult God at every step of your employment. Do every thing with prayer. Let every day and every hour bear witness that you are transacting every thing for God, and consulting him at every step of your progress. You would no doubt, feel shocked, should you know that a minister went about his preparation for the pulpit without prayer to God. Should he not, on going out to visit his people, pray for divine direction, and when he returned from such visits, should he not spread the whole matter and what

he had done before the Lord--in short should he not take counsel of God in all the departments of his employment, you would feel shocked. And should he become exceedingly hardened and reprobate in his work, and should his employment be the snare and ruin of his soul, you would not wonder, for this would be the very result, that under the circumstances you would anticipate. And it is to be feared that this is the very course, and the very result with multitudes of ministers. Now as every thing is God's, and every man is his, and every employment is to be pursued as much for his glory as the employment of a minister, it follows of course that every person is bound to have as single an eye, to consult God at every step, and to make his employment a subject of daily prayer, as a minister is. And if he does not, he will surely apostatize from God.

7. Be sure to do every thing in a spirit of entire consecration to God. Maintain perpetually, in every thing, a spirit of as entire consecration, as you know and feel that you ought to maintain in the exercises of the Sabbath day. It is impossible that men should ever pursue their employment without ensnaring their souls, until they understand that the business of every day is to be as sacredly devoted to God, and performed in a spirit of as entire consecration to his service as the holy exercises of the Sabbath. This must not only be understood in theory, but must be reduced to practice. The Sabbath must be distinguished from other days only in the peculiarity of its employments. You must cease to suppose that the Sabbath is God's day, and that the week days are yours--that you may serve God one day, and yourself six days in the week. The Sabbath has its specific and appropriate duties. And so have other days. But every day, and every hour, and every employment, and thought, are to be wholly consecrated to God. And until you have habituated yourself to go to your farms, to your shops, or to your merchandise, as to a business that belongs wholly to God, and is to be performed in a spirit of as true devotion as are the duties of your closet or of the sanctuary, your whole employment will be an everlasting snare, and the final ruin of your souls.

8. In short, do nothing, be nothing, buy nothing, sell nothing, possess nothing, do not marry nor decline marriage, do not study nor refrain from study, but in a spirit of entire devotion to God. Consecrate your sleep, your rest, your exercise, your all to God. Learn to do this--practice this, or your employment, whatever it may be, will be the snare and ruin of your soul.

9. But that without which all else will be in vain, is yet to be mentioned. And mark what I say. You must abide in Christ. "Without me," says Christ, "ye can do nothing." Only as you abide in him, by faith, and he in you, will you do any one of the things that have been mentioned in a right spirit. He is your life. He is the bread and water of life. Faith in him is the grand and universal condition of all true virtue and obedience to God.

REMARKS.

1. God calls you to no employment in kind or amount, that is inconsistent with entire holiness of heart and life. Whenever you find therefore that your employment really prevents your walking wholly with God, something is certainly wrong. Either your employment is unlawful in itself, or if in itself a lawful one, it is that to which you are not called, or you have taken too much upon you, or too little, or your motives have become wrong. There is utterly some fault in you. Make a solemn pause then as on the very brink of eternity, and inquire after and remove the stumbling blocks out of the way. If it be a right hand or a right eye give it up in a moment, as you love the ways and dread the wrath of God.

2. God never calls you to any business and withholds the necessary grace for the perfect discharge of your obligations. If grace be sought as it ought to be and constantly will be, while your motives are right, it will not be withheld.

3. But if God calls you to a business and you become selfish in it, it is no longer acceptable to him, and your pursuing it with a selfish heart is an utter abomination to him. I fear it is not an uncommon thing for young men who suppose themselves to be called to the gospel ministry, in the course of their preparation, to become cold, and ambitious, and any thing but holy. And yet they persevere, because they dare not go back, and relinquish their course. They are sensible that they are away from God, but believing themselves to have been called to the work of the ministry, they feel as if they must go forward, partly lest they should lose their reputation with men, and partly because they fear the displeasure of God, while they know that as a matter of fact, their hearts are not right with him. And thus they go through their classical studies, hoping that when they enter upon theology, their studies will be of such a character as to make them holy. But coming as they do, in such a state of heart, to the study of theology, they are only hardened more rapidly than before. But finding this to be the case does not deter them from going forward. They think that now they must

make up their opinion on various points of doctrine, and that when they have settled all these things, and entered upon the active duties of the ministry, then they shall be aroused to a better state of feeling. But the hardening process still goes on. So that by the time they are through their course their hearts are like the nether millstone. They are all head and no heart--all intellect and no emotion. In this state they come to the active duties of the ministry, and woe to the Church that shall employ one of them. They might as well place a skeleton in their pulpit, for he is but the shadow of a minister, and not the substance. He has the bones but not the marrow and life, and spirit of the Gospel.

4. No man has a right to undertake so much business, for any compensation whatever, as to interfere with his hours of devotion. In cases where persons labor by the day, or month, or year, allowance should always be made in the prices they receive, for sufficient time and opportunity for devotional exercises. They have no right to exact or receive such wages as to render it necessary for them to give up all their time to labor nor ought their employers to expect them to encroach, under any pretense whatever, upon those hours appointed to secret communion with God.

5. There is great danger of a diligence in business, which is inconsistent with fervency of spirit in serving the Lord.

6. From my own observation, I am persuaded that there is a great error in requiring too much study of young men who are preparing for the ministry. There is such a great cry for a learned ministry--so much stress is laid upon a thorough education--and so much competition among Colleges and Seminaries, as to present a great temptation to Instructors to push the intellectual pursuits of young men to the utmost, and even beyond the utmost limit of endurance.

Now while I am in favor of a thorough education, I do not and cannot believe, with the facts as they exist before me, that the great difference in the usefulness of ministers depends on their being learned men in the common acceptance of that term. Human science, by itself, never made a useful minister, and wherever human science is pushed beyond its proper limit, and made to encroach upon the hours and spirit of devotion--wherever the spirit of human science, instead of the Spirit of God, comes to be that fountain at which a man drinks, he may become in the language of men, a great man, but he will never be a good minister. Until there is a great change upon this subject--until the great effort of the teachers is to make their pupils pious as well as learned, and they are more anxious, and

take more pains to effect the former than the latter, our Seminaries can never send out efficient ministers. To require diligence in study, without requiring fervency of spirit--to concern ourselves more that our students have their lessons than that they walk with God--that they commune with Cicero, Horace, and Demosthenes, rather than with God--for us to satisfy ourselves every day in relation to their intellectual progress, and pay little or no attention to the state of their hearts, is an utter abomination, and teachers who do so, whatever other qualifications they may have, are unfit to have the care of young men.

7. When you find yourselves proceeding in any employment without prayer for direction, support, and guidance, you may rest assured that you are selfish, and however diligent you may be, you may know that you are not fervent in spirit serving the Lord.

8. The speculations of the last few years have so secularized the Church as to annihilate her power with God. She has in reality, been engaged in gambling under the pretense of making money for God. In doing this multitudes of leading Church members have involved themselves and the cause of Christ in great embarrassment and disgrace. And it does seem as if they were deranged in their spasmodic efforts to enrich themselves.

9. No amount of money can save or even benefit the world in the hands of a secular Church. If professors of religion had made all the money they have endeavored to make, and did they possess a universe of gold, it would do nothing towards converting the world, while the very spirit and life of the Church is secular, earthly, sensual and devilish.

10. No idle person can enjoy communion with God, for the plain reason, that his idleness is perpetual disobedience to God.

11. The Apostle has commanded that they who will not work (i.e. who are idle) shall not eat. If persons are able to pursue, and can find any employment, by which they can benefit mankind, and are idle, it is no enlightened charity to feed them.

12. If idle persons eat, they cannot digest their food. It is an unalterable law of God, that men shall perform some kind of labor. This is essential to the well-being of their body and mind. Idleness is as inconsistent with health as it is with good morals. So that if men will be idle, they must suffer the penalty of both

physical and moral law.

13. You see from this subject the great importance of training children to habits of industry, and of early imbibing their minds with the spirit of continually doing something that is useful.

14. Every one can do something to glorify God, and in some way benefit mankind. He can labor with his hands, or his head, or his heart--he can work, or teach, or pray, or do something to contribute his share to the common stock of good in the universe. It is the language of a sluggard, to complain that you can do no good. The truth is that if you have a spirit to do good, you will certainly be trying to do good.

15. If we do what we can, however little, it is just as acceptable to God, as if we could do a thousand times as much. "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath and not according to what he hath not." Christ said of the poor widow who cast in her two mites, she has cast in more than the rich, who of their abundance cast in much. It is well if you have a heart to do a great deal more than you are able to do. It is that which you really would do for which Christ gives you credit, and not for that which you are really able to do. It is according to the largeness of your heart, and not according to the weakness of your hands that God will reward you.

16. Not one of the employments that are essential to the highest good of mankind, has any natural and necessary tendency to alienate the heart from God. By this, I do not mean that the perverted state of the human heart, is not such that it is natural for it, being in a state of selfishness, to take occasion to depart from God in these employments. But I do mean, that the real tendency of all these employments, to a mind not given up to selfishness, is to increase and perpetuate the deepest communion with God.

17. There is no excuse for a secular spirit. And, as I have already said, whenever your spirit is secular, your heart is selfish.

18. If you have been called of God to any employment, and have become selfish in it, it has become an abomination to God, and you are bound to abandon it instantly or to renounce your selfishness, and diligently pursue your employment for God. By this, I do not mean that you would do right to abandon the employment to which God has called you, but that if you will not repent, and be

"fervent in spirit serving the Lord," you are as far as possible from pleasing him in pursuing your business selfishly. If God be not with you, in any employment, whether it be study, the ministry, merchandise, farming. or any thing else, if God does not go with you in it you are certainly out of the way, are bound to reform, to turn instantly and wholly to the Lord, and go not a step forward until you have evidence of the Divine acceptance.

19. Lastly, let me ask you solemnly, beloved, have you some employment, in which you are endeavoring, honestly and fervently to glorify God? What is your employment--in what manner do you pursue it--with what design--in what spirit--and what is its effect? Do you as a matter of fact, find yourself walking with God, and does the peace of God rule in your heart? Or is there some ingredient in your business, that vitiates the whole? Are you dealing in some article of death--are you poisoning your fellowmen for the glory of God? Are you a Real-estate or a Multi-caulis speculator? Are you pursuing some scandalous traffic for some selfish purpose?

O that the Lord may search you, and pour the gaze of his eye through and through your inmost soul. And if your hands are clean, may the blessing of the Lord, that maketh rich and addeth no sorrow, be multiplied to you a thousand fold. But if you are out of the way, may he lay his reclaiming, sanctifying hand upon you, and not suffer you to rest till all you have and are, are wholly devoted to the Lord.

[Back to Top](#)

Grieving the Holy Spirit- No.'s 1 & 2

Lectures XXI & XXII

December 4, 1839

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

LECTURE XXI.

Text.--Eph. 4:30."Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

In this discussion, I shall pursue the following order.

I. Show that the Holy Spirit can be, and often is grieved by men.

II. How and when He is grieved.

III. The consequences of grieving the Holy Spirit.

I. The Holy Spirit can be, and often is grieved.

1. The Bible, in this text and in various other texts, represents him as being grieved.
2. God is a moral being, and consequently he has the susceptibilities and feelings of a moral being, and must therefore be grieved with whatever is naturally grievous to a moral being.
3. His entire character is love or benevolence, and therefore he cannot but be grieved with whatever is wrong. But as I have recently published a sermon on the emotions of God, showing that God necessarily exercises the feelings ascribed to him in the Bible, I need not enlarge upon the subject at this time.

II. How and when the Holy Spirit is grieved.

Before I enter upon this head of my discourse, I wish to make several remarks.

1. The great object of the Holy Spirit, as revealed in the Bible, is to sanctify the souls of men. Men are to be saved by "the sanctification of the Spirit through the belief of the truth."
2. He can sanctify men only with the truth. Sanctification is holiness. Holiness is voluntary obedience to God. Voluntary obedience certainly cannot be produced but by the influence of the truth. Hence Christ prays, "Sanctify them through thy truth." The Holy Spirit himself has no other means of sanctifying the soul but truth.
3. A moral agent can resist any and every truth. Moral agency implies power to resist any degree of motive that may be brought to bear upon the mind. Wherever force begins, moral agency ends. Were it possible for motive to force the mind, the forced action would have no moral character

any more than the operations of the physical universe. Action must be free to be moral action. Necessary action is therefore neither virtuous nor vicious. I repeat it then, that moral agency implies the power to resist any and every truth. Whether any man ever did or ever will as a matter of fact, resist all truth, is entirely another question. But certain it is, that men are able to resist the utmost influence that the truth can exert upon them; and therefore have ability to defeat the wisest, most benevolent, and most powerful exertions which the Holy Spirit can make to effect their sanctification.

4. Every moral evil must be counteracted by truth, and can be counteracted in no other way.

5. Whatever, therefore, hinders the truth from producing its sanctifying effect, grieves the Holy Spirit just in proportion to his desire to have it produce that effect.

6. In preaching this sermon, and in all my sermons, I design to be personal in what I say, so far as this is consistent with addressing so many persons at once. I am not one of those who feel as if I should be convicted of wrong, of course, if found to have adapted my discourse to the state of the audience before and around me. I never feel called upon to make an apology for being as personal as I can in "giving to each one a portion in due season." I wish, therefore, my hearers and my readers, to consider me as speaking to them individually. And as I cannot call you by name I beseech you by all that you hold dear, to pause at every step of this part of my discourse and solemnly ask yourselves, "Is it I?" Have I thus grieved the Holy Spirit?

With these remarks, I am prepared to notice some of the many ways in which the Holy Spirit is grieved.

1. By neglecting the truth. Men have the command of their attention and can take up any subject for contemplation they please. If they will not attend to truth they cannot be sanctified nor saved. Now how many of you are employing your thoughts about any thing and every thing else than that truth, which is infinitely important to you and wholly indispensable to your salvation? O, if your neglected Bible were allowed now to speak to you, what an overwhelming testimony would it bear! And when it shall rise up in the judgment against you, of what gross and ruinous neglect will it

convict you! Methinks I can almost hear it crying out to you as you go about in the neglect of it--at one time wooing and beseeching you in the melting accents of eternal love to search it, to be instructed by it, and be saved--at another time it mutters, as you pass through [the] room where it is, its curses against you for neglecting it, or perhaps it cries out to you from some corner of the house, in the language of warning, and expostulation; and yet you heed it not! Of what are you thinking? Would you not be grieved and afflicted, if you should write letters of great importance to some beloved friend of yours, and he should neglect to read and understand them? And do you think that the Holy Spirit has less susceptibility upon this subject than you have?

2. Levity of mind, and conduct, and conversation grieves the Holy Spirit. Levity of conduct would certainly be very unbecoming in the presence of an earthly judge or sovereign. And how much less tolerable is it in the presence of the infinitely holy God? Are you a trifler? And about what are you trifling--and in whose presence--and under what circumstances? Few things in the universe can appear more shocking to one who has any faith in God, than to see a human being whose eternal destiny hangs as upon a moment's point, filled with levity right under the searching gaze of his omniscient judge. Especially does this appear horrible and abominable when we consider the Holy Spirit as wooing, and beseeching, and following you towards the depths of hell, and pleading with constant and earnest importunity that you will turn and live! How can you--how dare you trifle? You would be shocked to see an individual, on trial for his life, trifle just as the judge was about to pronounce sentence upon him. But such conduct, and under such circumstances, would be decency and propriety, when compared with the unutterable abomination of trifling in the presence of the great Jehovah who stands, and commands, and exhorts, and urges, and threatens, and expostulates, and pleads, and, in every way, endeavors to get your solemn attention to the subject of your soul's salvation.

3. The reading of light and trifling publications grieves the Holy Spirit. Woman, Man, dare you spend an hour in defiling your mind with some vain novel or foolish story, when so much truth of infinite weight and importance urges your investigation and instant attention? Can Jesus Christ--can eternal life and death--can the glory of God and the salvation of the souls of men--can the commandments of God be solemnly weighed--can

the blood, and groans, and mercy of Calvary be duly considered, when novels and plays and frivolous reading have gotten possession of your mind? O! you poor, wicked, helpless, loathsome, miserable sinner, what do you mean? No matter whether you are a professor of religion or not. You are a miserable sinner before God, and the law of your own conscience, if you spend your time in such reading. What is your name? Let me visit your chamber, your parlor, or wherever you keep your books. What is here? Byron, Scott and Shakespeare, and a host of triflers and blasphemers of God, and despisers of the Holy Ghost. Are these your companions--these the spirits with whom you commune--this the way in which you spend your time? And you a professor of religion? Do you not know that you are a great hypocrite to neglect your Bible and communion with the Holy Spirit, and give your mind up to communion with such earthly, sensual and devilish works as these?

But do you say I do not profess to be a Christian? Then I reply, you are never likely to be a Christian in such company. You might as well expect to be weaned from habits of intoxication by sitting in the barroom with drunkards or while holding communion with a pipe of brandy, as to expect to become religious surrounded with such companions as these.

4. Vain conversation grieves the Holy Spirit. Christ says, "Let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay, for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." "And, for every idle word that men shall speak they shall give an account thereof in the judgment." In the chapter of which the text is a part, the Apostle warns Christians not to be guilty of "vain conversation and foolish jesting." Would you spend your time in vain and idle conversation, if you knew you had but one hour to live? And perhaps you have not. But suppose you have, are your circumstances those in which it becomes an immortal being to spend his time in vain conversation? Do you not know that God is listening to every word you say? He is pouring the blaze of his eye through your inmost soul, as if he would speak out and rebuke you. Why are you not using your conversational powers in instructing those around you in the way of life? Perhaps those of your own household, and your nearest friends need to be reproved and warned, exhorted and instructed in regard to their salvation. Professor of religion, how do you spend your time, when in the midst of your impenitent friends, and what is your conversation when in the midst of professing Christians? I beg of you to answer to your own heart

and to God. And if you doubt just how you appear to them, will you show them this sermon, and ask them to read this paragraph and then give their candid opinion of what you ought to think of yourself and of your conversation? Now if your conversation has hitherto been vain and trifling or useless, and in any way unbecoming in a Christian, will you immediately repent and confess to those before whom you have laid a stumbling block--confess to the Holy Ghost whom you have grieved, and beseech him to forgive you, and return and take up his dwelling in your heart?

But perhaps you are not a professor of religion. Then I ask, Why are you not? And I add that you probably never will be, unless you make a false profession, if you are in the habit of indulging in vain conversation. Do you expect the Holy Spirit to strive with you, and wait upon you day after day, month after month, and year after year, while you keep up your incessant and senseless babble, regardless of his solemn presence, his awful holiness, and of his great and infinite love and desire to get your serious attention that he may save you?

5. Too much study, I mean too much mental application to those arts and sciences that have no direct reference to the sanctification of your souls, grieves the Holy Spirit. This is particularly a sin of students, into which they are sometimes betrayed by ambition, and into which, at other times, they are almost crowded by their teachers. Their whole mind is swallowed up from day to day in literary and scientific pursuits to the neglect of the solemn calls, and warnings, and strivings of the Holy Spirit. So did not James B. Taylor. With him it was the first and principal thing to obey the calls of the Holy Spirit. This was his determination, and a practical adherence to this rule was the secret of all his piety.

6. Neglect of study grieves the Holy Spirit. Where study is your employment, and you are negligent and attend to less than is consistent with all your other duties, you err quite as much as if you studied too much.

7. Too much business grieves the Holy Spirit. In my last lecture, I spoke of the necessity of diligence in business and the sin of idleness; and also of the danger of engaging in too much business. Suppose your father should visit you on some most important business, and that you should suffer yourself to be so much employed as to be unable to give him any part of your time. This certainly would be entirely inexcusable. But what is this when

compared with the wickedness of being too busy to converse with God?

8. Not business enough grieves the Holy Spirit. Idleness is one of the greatest of sins, and wholly inconsistent, as I showed in my last, with either the spirit or duties of religion.

9. Intemperance of every kind grieves the Holy Spirit. In its largest sense, intemperance is any violation of the laws of life and health, in eating, and drinking, or dress, or exercise, in any thing and every thing that is injurious to the body. Every man is bound to understand, so far as he is able, the structure and laws of his whole being, body and mind, and to conform most rigidly and conscientiously to those laws upon which his health and highest usefulness depend. And yet how many of you are neglecting, and perhaps refusing to give your attention to the examination of the structure and laws of your own being; and in the indulgence of your filthy lusts are injuring your health and beclouding and stupefying your minds, and are following in the footsteps of those "whose god is their belly, whose end is destruction, and who glory in" that which ought to be "their shame."

10. Self-justification grieves the Holy Spirit. Many persons seem to be as anxious to justify their conduct, as if they expected to be saved by their own works, and knew that to be found guilty in any thing were to insure their damnation. They are therefore continually resorting to apologies, and shifts, and self-justifying pleas, either in the way of entirely exculpating themselves from blame in any thing, or at least to bring their blame-worthiness into doubt; so as to be able to say, "if they have done wrong they are sorry." Now it should always be understood, that a spirit of self-justification is but adding insult to injury, first abusing God, and then justifying yourself in it. Such a course as this renders sanctification impossible. Why do you not, at once, break down, confess and forsake your sin? Why do you go about to fritter away your guilt? It is unspeakably great. No human language can sufficiently describe it. No one ever has or can accuse you of half as much as you are guilty of before God. Probably you never were accused of any form of sin, of which in heart and in the sight of God you are not fully guilty. But however this may be, it is certain, and you ought deeply to consider it, that the thousandth part of your real guilt, as it appears in the sight of God has never been named nor told nor conceived of by mortal man. Your iniquities are infinite. They are broader

than the earth, they are high as heaven, they are deep as hell, and black as the midnight of the second death. And why do you justify yourself, or spend your time or breath in making apologies for your sins?

11. Condemning others grieves the Holy Spirit. Perhaps some of you are judging and condemning those around you instead of judging and condemning yourselves. "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

12. Speaking evil of your brethren or of any human being, or even of the devil himself, grieves the Holy Spirit. By evil speaking I do not mean speaking the truth when manifestly called to speak it. But speaking falsehood is always evil speaking, or telling truth in regard to the faults of others, when uncalled for, is also evil speaking. God is love. He exercises infinite benevolence toward all his creatures whether holy or unholy. He is infinitely far from consenting to injustice in any case. And he is infinitely opposed to all injurious treatment of his friends or his foes. He would as fully resent, as sternly rebuke, and as promptly punish injustice done to the devil as to any soul on earth or in heaven. He will not, cannot, connive nor consent to any abusive treatment of the vilest sinners in the universe. You, therefore, as greatly grieve him, when you trifle with the name, the reputation, or the feelings of the wickedest sinner on earth or even the devil in hell, as if you were guilty of the same conduct toward any of his friends. He is infinitely unlike sinful man in this respect. Wicked men will connive at the abuse of their enemies, and even secretly acquiesce in it. But it is infinitely otherwise with God. There is a great and universal mistake upon this subject. There are few if any who do not consider it wicked to speak evil of a brother. But how many there are who throw up the rein when speaking of others than their brethren, and are guilty of absolute railing at and shocking abuse of the enemies of God; and perhaps also of the professed friends of God. Now let me ask, what are your habits in this respect? Woman, when you have company, do you sit down and serve up a

dish of slander? Do you dissect and mangle the character of your neighbor? Man, are you a railer? Have you forgotten that God has said, "Speak evil of no man,"--"be no brawler, but be gentle showing all meekness unto all men"? Ah, but perhaps you are speaking of a political opponent, or of a competitor in business, or some opponent of religious views and practices. You think him very wicked--an enemy of God, of truth, and righteousness, and perhaps think yourself "doing God service" in giving him over to all the curses of reprobation. Now stop! O stop! Pause as upon the brink of eternity! What are you saying? Of whom are you speaking? Of a man "made in the image of God." Suppose he is as bad or even immeasurably worse than you think he is; can the Holy Spirit be otherwise than grieved to hear such language as this? Remember that there is a sense in which all mankind are the children of God. Suppose they do sin and rebel; will this afford an apology think you, in his view, for your abuse of them? I tell you nay. Infinitely far from it! And every time you do it, you grieve and provoke the Holy Spirit. And it is wonderful, that he does not turn away his face from you forever.

13. Evil thinking, as well as evil speaking, grieves the Holy Spirit. God looks at the heart. Your thoughts and the secret movements of your mind, lie open before him. And your words and actions are no otherwise pleasing or offensive in his sight, than as they are the expression of what passes within. You may, therefore, as effectually, and no doubt do more frequently, grieve the Holy Spirit by your thoughts than by your words. All your silent and most secret musings, are distinctly observed, and marked, and pondered by the Holy Spirit. He weighs every thought of your heart in his balance. If you indulge evil, and unkind and unchristian thoughts of any being in the universe, he knows it and is as truly grieved and offended with them, although you may never have given utterance to them, as if they were penciled in sunbeams in every part of the universe. Are you in the habit of taking up a strict scrutiny and searching into the secret thoughts, and purposes, and workings of your mind? O how much you may have grieved the Holy Spirit without scarcely being aware of it. You can see, that if all the thoughts you have entertained, had been spoken out, both God and man might have been grieved and had a just cause of offense. Now remember that to God's ear these thoughts have been as audibly expressed as if spoken in thunder-tones. To God's eye they have been as open, and as black, and as

grievous as if written in letters of darkness upon the very skies. Now do commune with your own heart, and be still, and take up the solemn question: what have I thought as well as what have I said?

14. A disposition to retaliate grieves the Holy Spirit. This temper of mind is as far as possible from the temper of Christ, and is the direct opposite of a state of sanctification. The spirit of Christ would be, to forgive enemies, and those who have injured you, and to labor, and suffer great self-denial for their good. But the spirit of retaliation is earthly, sensual, devilish.

15. Prejudice grieves the Holy Spirit. There are few things more astonishing than that prejudice should be regarded and spoken of as it often is by professors of religion. Prejudice, as the term imports, is to prejudge a case, to make up your mind without hearing both sides of a question. Now, as shameful as the truth is, few things are more disgustingly common than prejudice among professors of religion. Making up their minds that this or that thing is right or wrong, and setting their faces, and using their influence accordingly, deaf and blind to every thing on the other side. Scarcely any thing is more common than to find professors of religion of all denominations, on all the most solemn subjects in regard to men, and measures, and doctrines, in such a state of committal on one side or the other through prejudice as to render it useless to try to approach their mind and possess them of the real truth. And thus they go blindly and often madly forward in fighting against God, and the dearest interests of his kingdom. There is scarcely any thing I have witnessed since I became a professor of religion, at which I have been more frequently shocked, and made to groan in my inmost soul than the exhibition of this wicked spirit. And what is worse than all the rest, this spirit is spoken of by almost all as a calamity rather than a crime. The most unreasonable conduct and the most wicked and persecuting temper seems to be sufficiently excused by saying, "O the individual is under the influence of prejudice." And if peradventure a man gets his eyes open upon any question where he has been in the wrong, he speaks of his former vices and conduct as, in a great measure, excusable on the ground of his having been prejudiced. The truth is that prejudice is one of the most detestable sins that disgraces the Church and grieves the Holy Spirit of God. And now are any of you under its influence? Of course you will say, no, for the very fact that you are implies that you are ignorant of it. But let me ask you, if you are sure that upon every subject, that at

present agitates the Church and the world especially upon those great and leading topics upon which the nation and the world are so much divided: Abolition, Moral Reform, Temperance, Holiness, Revivals of Religion, Measures, Doctrines, &c.--are you sure that you have attended to both sides of the question before you judge? Have you taken sufficient pains to inform yourself in regard to men and measures, and the actual or probable results, to have made up an enlightened and unbiassed judgment in the case? And if not, what do you mean? Why are your feelings enlisted on one side? Why do you use your influence in the manner you do? How do you know but a view of the whole subject would entirely change your views and practice, and cause you to go sorrowing down to your grave because you had been found to fight against God? O! how is the Holy Spirit grieved at the vast amount of prejudice which causes the jangling and misunderstanding and misrule of both the Church and the world.

16. Pride grieves the Holy Spirit. Pride is undue self-esteem, and vanity is the exhibition of it. Nothing is more preposterous and marvelous than human pride; and very few things are at a greater remove from the spirit of Christ. It manifests itself in ten thousand ways; but wherever it exists, it is an effectual barrier against the exhibition or existence even of the spirit of Christ.

17. Ill will grieves the Holy Spirit. This is the direct opposite of benevolence or the spirit and temper required by both the law and the Gospel. Benevolence is good-willing. Malevolence is ill-willing. To will evil to any being under the sun is the opposite of all that is lovely. And how can it be otherwise, than that a God of infinite benevolence, should be grieved with the malevolence of any of his great family? How would a parent feel to see one of his children manifest ill will to others of his offspring? How this would enkindle his grief and indignation! And how must the infinite heart of God glow with grief and indignation when you are found with a spirit of retaliation or revenge rankling in your heart.

18. Every neglect of duty grieves the Holy Spirit. In reading President Edwards' account of his wife's experience, I was struck with a remark to this effect, that when she was in the highest exercise of grace, she was deeply impressed with the fact, that so much of religion consisted in the discharge of relative and social duties. Many people seem to overlook this

part of religion and content themselves with what they call devotion to God. What they mean by devotion is praying, reading the Bible, attending on the exercises of the Sabbath, giving their money to benevolent objects, and such like things, while in their temper they exhibit any thing but the spirit of Christ. Now Christianity wherever it truly exists, will, from its very nature, develop itself to the view of men mainly in its influence in making them discharge all their social and relative duties; and if it be not apparent here it is certain that it does not really exist. There is such a vast amount of negligence among professors of religion as to render it almost certain were there nothing else forbidding in their history that multitudes of them have no religion at all. Some neglect to pay their debts. Not long since I published a sermon on "being in debt," since which I have seen several efforts in some of the religious periodicals to put down or set aside the principles of that sermon, and to remove the pressure from the conscience of the Church and the world in regard to their negligence in this respect. Some have misconceived and of course misrepresented the doctrines of the sermon. Others, by criticisms upon the text, have endeavored to show that it was not a command to abstain from being in debt. It is not now the time or place to reply to those remarks. But I would here simply say that the doctrine of that sermon, that it is a sin to be in debt, is eternal and unalterable truth, whether that particular text prohibits it or not. To deny this is the same absurdity as to say that you may owe a man and be under no obligation to pay him, and the same contradiction as to say that you may neglect or refuse to discharge your obligation without sin. Now what is sin but the violation of an obligation, and what is an obligation but to owe a man? To what then do all such criticisms amount as these to which I have alluded? Do such editors and newspaper-writers expect to set aside the principles of eternal justice, and to persuade mankind that it is not sinful to be in debt or to suffer their obligations to go uncanceled by mere criticisms upon a text? The doctrine of that sermon is true, and self-evident truth, entirely irrespective of its being taught in that or any other text in the Bible. If there were no Bible, that is a truth which must stand forever; and to deny it is a palpable absurdity.

But again let me say that many neglect to do things when and as they ought to be done. Now it is certainly a part of religion to do everything incumbent upon us at the right time and in the right manner, and any and every

negligence in this respect is sin. Have you an appointment to meet a neighbor at a particular hour for the transaction of business; be there at the moment, lest you hinder him and all others associated with you in the affair. Is there an appointment for a Church or any other religious meeting, for worship or the transaction of business; be there at the moment, lest you interrupt or hinder the business or devotion of others. Have you engaged to do any thing for your neighbor or for any man or woman on earth, see that you do it just when and as it ought to be done. And in short, no man can keep a conscience void of offense--no man can fulfill the law of love--no man can abstain from grieving the Holy Spirit but by a most faithful and constant discharge of every duty to God or man.

19. Every form of selfishness grieves the Holy Spirit. I have often taught in my sermons that selfishness and sin are synonymous terms. By selfishness, I have often said that I do not mean the mere desire of your own happiness, for this is natural. It is self love, and not selfishness. But when even this desire becomes supreme, and leads you to sacrifice greater interests, for the sake of promoting your own, this is selfishness; and in whatsoever form it is cherished or exhibited, it is an utter abomination to God. How odious and detestable does selfishness appear to God, when he sees it exercised among his children in their intercourse with each other. If you are a parent, you know how you are grieved and offended, if you see one of your little ones bent upon gratifying himself at the expense of the good or happiness of the rest of your children. Now "if you being evil" are so stung and grieved with such a spirit as this, how much more shall your Heavenly Father be grieved at such an exhibition of selfishness among his children?

But there are so many ways in which the Holy Spirit may be grieved, that I must resume the subject, and also show the consequences of grieving the Holy Spirit in my next.

LECTURE XXII.

December 18, 1839

GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT--No. 2

Text.--Eph. 4:30."Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

In continuing this subject, as proposed in my last, I remark.

20. Refusing or neglecting to confess your sins grieves the Holy Spirit. God has said, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy." And Christ has said, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted," and again, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, first go and be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift."

There can be no forsaking sin without confessing it. And as there can be no repentance without forsaking and no forsaking without confessing, it follows that without confession there is no salvation. It is enough to confess secret sins or sins committed only against God and known only to him, to God. But sins against our fellow men must be confessed to them. And refusing or neglecting to do so is to cover sin, in which case we are expressly informed that we shall not prosper. Many people seem to be afraid to confess their sin, or to have others confess, lest religion should be injured thereby. But this is so far from being true, that it is doubtful whether a case ever occurred in which a full and frank confession of sin committed against a human being was not more honorable than dishonorable to Jesus Christ. The more aggravated the circumstances and the deeper the shame of him who confesses, the more striking and honorable is the contrast between the spirit of Christ and the spirit of the world.

It is said that a certain minister in New England, in the transaction of business with an infidel lawyer, was thrown off his guard and manifested a spirit of anger which led the infidel to boast in his absence that he had always believed that man to be a hypocrite. But they had been separated only a short time before the minister followed the lawyer to his house and made the most humble and heartbroken confession of his sin. This greatly moved and confounded the lawyer, insomuch that he exclaimed with great emotion as soon as the minister has left the house, "Now I know that there is something in the religion of Christ. That spirit is not of this world. It is the very opposite of anything that has its origin on earth."

I doubt not that many persons who feel as if they ought to confess are really afraid to confess, for fear they shall injure religion. I have often heard doubts expressed by wise and good men, in regard to the expediency of confessing sins against our fellow men, so as to have the world or even the Church come into possession of the facts. But with the express declarations of the Bible on this subject what right have we to talk about expediency or in expediency, as if we were wiser than God in regard to the results of doing what he requires? Human expediency would no doubt have concealed the to confess, for fear they shall injure religion. I have often heard doubts expressed by wise and good men, in regard to the expediency of confessing sins against our fellow men, so as to have the world or even the Church come into possession of the facts. But with the express declarations of the Bible on this subject what right have we to talk about expediency or in expediency, as if we were wiser than God in regard to the results of doing what he requires? Human expediency would no doubt have concealed the crimes of Moses and David, the Patriarchs, and the disciples, and Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. But God has recorded them to be read and known of all men. And who does not see and has not felt that this very fact of the inspired writers' recording their own and each other's faults, is a most unequivocal demonstration of their honest humility and Christ-like spirit?

21. Refusing to forsake your sins grieves the Holy Spirit. I have said there is no forsaking sin without confession. I now say there is no forsaking without restitution, where restitution is in your power. Certainly the man who steals your money does not forsake that sin while he keeps it in his pocket, and refuses to return it. There is and can be no forsaking sin until all has been done, that the nature of the case admits to repair whatever injury has been done by it to God or man. It is not enough to resolve to do it no more. And although confession is indispensable, yet confession is not the whole of your duty. You are bound to make restitution as well as confession, and until you do that, God cannot and has no right to forgive you.

Many individuals abound much in confession, while they live on in their abominable course of conduct. Now remember that God has nowhere said, that he who merely confesseth his sins shall find mercy, but he who "confesseth and forsaketh, shall find mercy." And now do some of you stare at me as if I expected, as if God expected, that you would really forsake your

sins and sin no more? Be sure this is demanded and expected of you, and your confessions, if you will not forsake, are an utter abomination. Hear that Deacon pray. Perhaps this is the nine hundred and ninety-ninth time he has confessed his lukewarmness, unbelief, and worldly-mindedness without the shadow of a reformation. What do you mean? Are you insulting God and trying to palm off your confessions upon your Maker? What shallow hypocritical confessions are those that are not followed by reformation! Suppose your neighbors and those indebted to you should attempt to satisfy you with confessing often to you, instead of walking right up to the discharge of their duty. How long think you, would you be imposed upon or suffer yourself to be insulted by such confessions as these?

And how can you help seeing that your confessions under such circumstances are among your greatest sins? Now when you confess again suppose you should tell God the honest truth, and when you have gone through with your confessions say right out, "O God, I pray thee to accept these confessions instead of reformation, for I protest unto thee, I do not seriously intend to reform." You would be shocked at such language as this and so would those that heard you. But who does not know that this is exactly the truth, and nothing but hypocrisy prevents your seeing and saying it right out! O from how many prayer meetings and closets is the Spirit of God grieved utterly away by abundant confessions, when there is no forsaking sin.

22. Every kind and degree of self-indulgence that is inconsistent with life, and health, and piety, grieves the Holy Spirit. Some make a god of their belly; and it is astonishing and lamentable to see to what an extent the flesh is indulged to the ruin of the soul. Even professors of religion suffer themselves to be slaves to appetite and have not religion enough to keep under their bodies to mortify the flesh, or to exercise that dominion over their appetites, lusts, and passions that might be expected even of a heathen philosopher. Some men use tobacco and complain that the habit is so fixed and overpowering that they cannot abstain from its use. Others use alcohol in some of its forms, and others still indulge in the use of tea and coffee and fashionable narcotics, to the permanent injury of their health, and still persuade themselves that these things are essential to their health. And if they feel languid, and debilitated, and experience a temporary diminution of appetite when they have attempted to abstain from them, they imagine that

they cannot do without them. Not understanding as is a matter of fact, that these very symptoms of which they complain, are demonstration that they are permanently injuring their health. Why do you have the headache, when you abstain from tea? Simply because your stomach has been greatly debilitated by its use.

It is astonishing to see the amount of self-indulgence, and that too which is greatly injurious both to body and soul which is practiced even by professors of religion. Multitudes of families seem to be given up to the gratification of their appetites. To get something that is good to eat takes up a great part of their time, employs a great portion of their thoughts, and seems to be the principal object for which they live.

23. Endeavoring to excuse your sins grieves the Holy Spirit. It is very common to see persons racking their ingenuity to find excuses for their sins. Some are pleading inability to do any better than they do--others plead their peculiar circumstances,--and others still their dependence on the Spirit of God. In short there is scarcely any plea to which a proud heart can resort to evade the force of truth, which is not resorted to by many, to appease their consciences, and get away from breaking down their hearts before the Lord. Now it should be understood and remembered forever that a spirit that apologizes for sin is not only one of the most odious forms of iniquity in the sight of God, but is the most hardening and self-destroying process that can be pursued. And in just as far as you resort to any excuses and apologies for your sins you confirm yourselves in those sins, grieve the Holy Spirit, and render your salvation impossible.

24. Procrastination grieves the Holy Spirit. God requires you now to humble yourself before him. And every attitude you take that defers obedience to a future time, is direct disobedience and most provoking to God. It is truly wonderful to see to what extent this spirit is cherished. Many pretend to be waiting God's time, as if he, notwithstanding all his requirements, was not really ready to have them do their duty.

One of the greatest delusions under which men labor, is that at some future time it will be more convenient for them to attend to the claims of God, than at the present. Could you visit hell to-day, and inquire among all the groaning millions of its inhabitants, how they came there, the answer in almost every case would be; procrastination ruined my soul. I never intended

to die in my sins; but on the contrary always intended, at a future but not far distant time, to repent. Millions will tell you that they had purposed from time to time to attend to the salvation of their souls, but had continued to defer it until death plunged his arrow into their hearts and they went to hell.

25. Giving wrong instructions to those who are under conviction, and to professors of religion who are inquiring after sanctification, grieves the Holy Spirit. Multitudes give such instructions as directly to counteract the influences of the Spirit, and thus grieve him away from themselves, and from those whom they attempt to instruct. Remember that you take upon you a fearful responsibility when you attempt to aid the Holy Spirit in conducting the sinner through the labyrinth of his own delusions, and bring him to an acquaintance with Christ. If you tell him one thing while the Spirit tells him another, you will probably ruin his soul, if you do not your own also.

26. Taking sides against God always, of course, grieves the Holy Spirit. "Take heed," said Gamaliel, "lest ye be found even to fight against God." I have already said, that through prejudice, many persons get committed on the wrong side of some important question, and thereby injure their own souls, and the cause of God. Many individuals, on account of personal friendship or personal dislike will take sides against the truth, and plunge their souls into impenetrable darkness. Whenever a question comes up that respects the character or conduct of an intimate friend, or relative, on the one hand, or some enemy on the other, be on your guard lest personal feelings influence you, and you be found to take sides against the truth. Beware lest you shut your eyes against the light, and suffer yourself to be deluded and drawn into an attitude in which God will not go with you. He will have no sympathy with your wrong feelings, nor go with you at all in any of your prejudices. His soul is infinitely upright and honest, and the moment you depart from the same state of mind, your fellowship with him ceases, and a dark cloud hangs between you and the mercy seat. Will you not examine yourselves and see whether something of this kind has not shut you out from God's presence?

27. Remaining in willful ignorance upon any important subject grieves the Holy Spirit. It is amazing to see how many there are who refuse to come to the light on some of the most important subjects that have ever agitated the

Church or the world. How many thousands of professors of religion will not examine the subject of the abolition of slavery,--the subject of moral reform--of sanctification--of physiology, &c. and they seem to remain not in accidental, but in willful ignorance in the midst of all the light that is pouring around them. It is wonderful to see to what an extent ignorance prevails upon so many important questions and especially to witness the manifest resistance of mind indulged in by many when these subjects are brought up.

28. All want of candor in the examination of important questions also grieves the Holy Spirit.

29. The indulgence of feelings of contempt for particular persons, or for their sentiments, and all contemptuous expressions, and all attempts to put down by ridicule, persons, or sentiments, or practices to which we feel opposed, grieves the Holy Spirit. By this I do not mean that things which are really ridiculous may not be treated according to their nature; but that serious and important subjects cannot be treated with contempt or ridicule without grieving the Holy Spirit. Some persons are always disposed to treat all subjects of dress, tight lacing, dietetics, and such like very important subjects, with contempt and ridicule. Now I cannot believe that any person who will indulge in this can enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit. These certainly are feelings with which the Spirit of God can have no sympathy or fellowship whatever.

30. Making direct resistance to the truth whenever it has a personal application to you grieves the Holy Spirit. To general truth, or to particular truth, or to almost any truth that has no direct bearing upon themselves, they will manifest no opposition. But when they perceive that it means them, they manifest the spirit of the Pharisees when they exclaimed, "Thus saying thou reprovest us also."

31. Justifying resistance to the truth on the ground that it is personal grieves the Holy Spirit. I have already said in this discourse, that my object in preaching is to be as personal as I can consistently with the general design of preaching to a popular audience, and as far as possible to "give to every one his portion in due season." And now if any of you feels disposed to complain if I point out the particular way in which you are grieving the Holy Spirit, or because you suppose that I know you to be rebuked for your

particular sin, you are entirely unreasonable. For certainly I do mean and ought to mean to preach about the particular sins of the persons whom I address. Preaching can do you no good except as you feel it to be personal and to mean you. I design to speak in love, but with all plainness, and address myself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. I shall not therefore feel myself convicted of having done wrong, if what I say should be complained of as having a personal application to any one or every one of my hearers, I would that I could so address you that every person should feel that I was telling him all that ever he did.

I say the more on this subject because the impression seems to be almost universal that preaching should not be personal, and consequently a kind of public sympathy is excited if anyone complains that the preaching had a personal application to him. And many individuals, if they are pierced by an arrow of truth, instead of repenting before God, go about and complain as if they thought they were abused. They consider themselves rather as persecuted than as being seriously called upon to repent. Their business seems to be rather to repel an injury, than to confess and forsake a fault. By this I do not mean to justify harsh and abusive language or any unreasonable attacks upon the character or conduct of individuals or classes of men either public or private. But I do mean to say, that if when your faults are pointed out in love, if the reproof is not more public than your sin, or the nature of the case demands, you are so far from having any right to complain, that you may be sure you grieve the Spirit of God, if you do not accept the reproof with all thankfulness of heart.

32. Neglecting his solemn visitations and strivings, and attending to other things, grieves the Holy Spirit. Christ is represented as standing at the door of the heart and knocking, and in another place as waiting until his "head is wet with the dew," &c. It is often truly shocking to see how little attention is paid to the manifest presence and agency of the Holy Spirit in professedly religious families. When they are aware that he is striving with some member of the family, and has come to their house on the solemn errand of eternal salvation, they behave themselves with as little solemnity and pay as little attention to his awful presence and majesty as if he were only a servant of servants. Sometimes even the very individual with whom he is striving and with whom he has taken up a solemn labor to bring him to repentance, will neglect attending to his directions, and suffer almost

anything to divert his attention from the great subject of his own salvation.

33. Suffering your thoughts and time to be swallowed up in business, amusements, or any thing else, until you have settled the question of your unqualified submission to God, grieves the Holy Spirit. No doubt many an individual has grieved the Spirit entirely away by suffering himself to be engaged with his business or amusement, just at the time when his destiny was trembling on a moment's point.

34. Indulging the fear of men rather than of God grieves the Holy Spirit. How many ministers have grieved the Spirit entirely away by fearing men so much as not to declare to them all the counsel of God. And how often is it the case perhaps that some of you are pressed by the Spirit up to the faithful discharge of your duty in warning and reproofing those around, you dare not do it for fear of their ill will, and in the greatness of your unbelief, instead of assigning to yourself the real reason for your negligence, you persuade yourself that faithfulness on your part would do no good.

35. Standing out against any reform grieves the Holy Spirit. The world must be reformed in almost everything before it will be right. And benevolence is waking up to push reform into many departments that disturb the slumbers, and severely run across the lusts, the self-indulgence, the pride, and wickedness of both the Church and the world. There is therefore the greatest danger that these efforts at reformation will find you indulging in some form of sin, and sternly rebuke you. Now I beg of you to be on your guard lest you commit yourself against any manner or degree of reform demanded by the state of the world. As the spirit of reform continues to increase, your danger will increase. And hundreds of thousands, it is to be feared, have already made shipwreck of what little spirituality they had, by suffering themselves to be thrown into a state of opposition to the reforms of the day.

These are some of the ways in which the Holy Spirit is grieved. Let these serve to direct your thoughts to a thorough inquiry in regard to whether in these or in other respects you are grieving the Holy Spirit.

III. The consequences of grieving the Holy Spirit.

1. One of the consequences of grieving the Holy Spirit is to be abandoned

by him. If you continue to grieve the Holy Spirit you may expect him to abandon you forever. God's Spirit will not always strive with man. He gave up the Israelites because they vexed and grieved his Spirit. He abandoned the old world for the same reason. And many individuals, and families, and nations, in every age of the world have been given up because they grieved the Holy Spirit.

2. Spiritual blindness. This follows as a matter of course from the absence of the Spirit's influences. Men are naturally blind and deaf to all the great truths which should sanctify their souls. Not that you have not naturally eyes and ears with which to see and hear were you well disposed, but "having eyes you see not, and ears, you hear not." And being unwilling to retain God in your knowledge you blind your own eyes, and deafen your own ears, and harden your own hearts. And when once the Spirit of God has given you up, your blindness though voluntary is as certain and eternal as your existence.

3. A conscience seared as with a hot iron is another effect of grieving the Spirit. This will naturally follow from your great spiritual blindness. A silent or seared conscience is a state of mind to be infinitely dreaded. For if its voice be silenced you may go on in security crying peace and safety until sudden destruction cometh upon you. It is an unspeakable blessing to have a quick and tender conscience--one that will enforce the slightest obligation with great power. But you should by all means, as you would the murder of your own soul, avoid that which will silence your conscience and hush its warning voice.

4. If God abandon you, you will become the confirmed and complete slave of that sin, whatever it be, on account of which he has given you up. If it be some vile indulgence in some form of intemperance--the love of money--the love of pleasure--passion under any form--or infidelity or error--in short whatever sin has been persevered in until God has given you up or the Holy Spirit departed from you, that sin has become your master. It will chain you like a slave, and rule over you with a rod of iron. It will impose on you its galling yoke until you shall be filled with your own ways. How many cases of this kind have come under my own observation, where persons have tempted God by indulging in some form of sin, until he has given them up to its reigning power; and then how feeble are all their efforts to overcome

it. Their resolutions are as yielding as air. Every breath of temptation carries them away. And finding themselves all weakness and swept away by temptation as with a flood, they throw up the reins, and drive furiously to destruction.

5. If the Holy Spirit abandon you, you may expect God to "send strong delusions upon you that you may believe a lie, that you may be damned because you obey not the truth but have pleasure in unrighteousness." It is said that an "evil spirit from the Lord troubled Saul," and that a "lying spirit" was suffered by the Lord to deceive Ahab to his own destruction. A man who grieves the Holy Spirit--who is hiding away from the light, receives not the truth, but has pleasure in some form of unrighteousness. It is remarkable to see in how many ways the providences of God will help a man, in this state, forward to some fatal delusion. Infidel books or lecturers--universalist ministers or publications--wicked companions and associates--and often times the prince of hell, is suffered to delude and lead such a soul into impenetrable darkness, and destructive delusion.

6. Self-disgrace may be and often is a consequence of being abandoned by the Holy Spirit. It is remarkable to see when an individual has grieved the Holy Spirit, how blind he is in regard to the light in which his conduct is and will be viewed by those around him. If this be your case you will probably go from step to step, beginning perhaps with indulgence in levity--next you will discover an irritable spirit, and show that you have no command of your temper--then a spirit of worldly-mindedness may develop itself--next a spirit of licentiousness may be plainly discerned by those around you--then some form of intemperance may get the mastery of you--then a spirit of exaggeration and perhaps of lying may take possession of your soul--and thus in the midst of your blindness wander on until you find yourself deeply disgraced in the eyes of men, and forever lost in the eye of God.

7. You may be left to inflict the deepest disgrace on your family and friends and perhaps ruin many over whom you have influence. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Men naturally have great influence over each other, and with great facility do "evil communications corrupt good manners," because wicked example so falls in with the corrupt state of the human heart. It is exceedingly easy to influence individuals to sin, because

they are already so inclined to sin. A slight amount of temptation therefore may lead those around you to follow your example, until all together, at last you sink to the depths of hell.

8. If you are a professor of religion, and the Holy Spirit leave you, you will of course greatly wound and dishonor Christ.

9. You may be given up to Satan "to be led captive at his will." I have already adverted to the case of Saul and Ahab as being given up to Satan for their wickedness. Paul speaks of having delivered a certain man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, and it doubtless often occurs when the Spirit of God has left a man, that Satan takes full possession of his heart. Christ seems to teach this in the following language. "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and finding none. Then he saith, I will return into my house whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first." Now here it is plainly taught by Christ himself that when the Holy Spirit has left a man, his heart is like a room swept and garnished waiting to entertain the devil, and that he may be expected to take possession, to exert over him at least sevenfold more influence than ever before.

10. If the Holy Spirit leave you, you may expect to become very insensible and blind in regard to the state of your own soul. You may be left to think that you are engaged in religion, and mistake the silence of your conscience for the peace of God, and the absence of all concern about your soul for a good hope through grace. It doubtless has often occurred and I think I have myself seen cases, where persons seem to have the most undoubting assurance of mind that they were in a gracious state, when their temper and conduct manifest any thing else than the Spirit of Christ. Christ himself represents some as being in such a state of delusion as to carry their false hopes and delusions to the very bar of God. He represents them as saying, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works?" But hear his answer. "Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you. Depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

11. If the Spirit leave you, you will have no heart to offer prevailing prayer,

and if you attempt to pray, you will find that your mouth is shut, and if opened it will only be opened to mock God. And you will find as a matter of fact, that instead of being benefited you are only hardened by engaging in prayer.

12. You will wax worse, and worse if abandoned of God. This may be true of you and still you not observe it, and yet if you will be honest with yourselves, if any of you have grieved the Holy Spirit away, by comparing your recent with your former experience, you may see that you are waxing worse and worse.

13. If the Spirit leave you, your damnation is certain, God has said. "Woe unto them when I depart from them." If left to yourself, remember that you are as certain of being lost as if you had already been a thousand years in hell.

14. If the Spirit abandon you, all things will work together for your destruction. The very means that should make you better will make you worse. The efforts that God makes to save those around you will only confirm you in your sins. In short all God's providences, with all the influences of his grace which surround you will be but so many stumbling blocks to your poor blinded soul. The Sabbath with its cheerful light and solemn stillness, will rise upon you but to harden your heart. "The sound of the Church-going bell,"--the voice of the living preacher--the song of praise--everything in the sanctuary--every thing within and without yourself, will conspire to work out for you an exceeding great and eternal weight of damnation.

REMARKS.

1. To grieve the Holy Spirit is great presumption. You are in danger every moment you persist in it of being given up forever. Remember there is a point, beyond which forbearance in God would not be a virtue. Long suffering as he is, he will bear with you no longer than is consistent with the public good. When the children of Israel had repeatedly grieved the Holy Spirit in the wilderness until they came upon the borders of the promised land, and were commanded to go up and take possession, through unbelief they began to murmur, and went not up. This one instance of rebellion, added to those that preceded it, was too much for divine forbearance. And God is represented as lifting up his hand and taking

a solemn oath "that they should not enter into his rest." Now take heed therefore lest you sin once too much. Are you not convinced from what I have already said that you have often grieved the Holy Spirit? Have you not often done it in many of the ways I have mentioned as well as in innumerable ways I have not mentioned? And now dare you do it again? If you do it may be found to be true that you have grieved the Spirit once too much to be forgiven.

2. From this subject you can see the great forbearance of God. How many of you have grieved the Holy Spirit for days and for months and perhaps for years! How wonderful that God should spare you. He sent his ministers--his written word--his providences, and to no effect. Finally he came himself by his own Spirit, and has been abused by you in a thousand ways. And even now perhaps you are indulging some sin that grieves him almost beyond endurance. If you persist you do it at the peril of your soul.

3. You see how to account for the blindness of great multitudes of professors of religion. Many of you can see how to account for your own hardness and blindness of mind, both you who are in and you who are out of the Church.

4. You see why so many persons often pray for the influences of the Holy Spirit and yet do not receive his influences. It may be and doubtless often is because they have grieved him entirely away.

5. Again it may be, and doubtless often is true that many pray for the Holy Spirit who are continually grieving him by the indulgence of some lust or by the neglect of some duty, or in some way doing that or indulging that which is so offensive to the Holy Spirit that he will not abide with them.

6. You can see from this subject, that the Holy Spirit when he comes to many is like the "wayfaring man, that tarrieth but for a night." His visits are short and far between. The fact is their lives, and tempers, and habits are such, that for them to dwell with God or he with them is out of the question.

7. Many ministers seem to have grieved him away. Their ministry seems to be entirely barren. They preach, and pray, and perform other duties without unction, and of course without success. And while they continue their round of efforts, it is plain to the spiritual members of their Church that they have not the Holy Spirit. Their conversation during the week is not in heaven. Their preaching on the Sabbath has in it any thing but the spirit, power and demonstration of the

Gospel.

Sometimes they seem to be sensible that they have grieved the Spirit. Some years since, a young man who had been several years in the ministry came to me for advice, saying that he had grieved the Holy Spirit when studying theology, since which time he had never enjoyed his presence, consequently his ministry was barren. His soul was shut out from God, and he felt that he must abandon the ministry, as God had rejected him in consequence of his sin. A Christian brother, some months since, related to me another fact, worthy of all consideration by ministers of the gospel. An elderly minister made this confession in a revival of religion, into the midst of which he was providentially brought. Said he, "When I was young and for years after I entered the ministry, the Spirit of God was with me. A divine unction attended my preaching. I was instrumental in promoting several revivals of religion. But finally on account of pecuniary considerations I was led to change my field of labor. For this the Spirit departed from me. After this my ministry was barren and my soul was as the barren heath. The heavens became brass over my head and the earth iron under my feet. Thus many years have passed over me. Still the Spirit of the Lord has not returned."

8. This subject will enable us to account for the present state of so great a number of the professed ministers of Christ. The barrenness of their ministry--the worldliness of their spirit--their bitterness, and jangling, and prejudice, and every thing that so much wounds and disgraces Christ.

9. Let us all take warning lest any of us while we think we are standing, should suddenly and hopelessly fall. Beloved, let us walk softly before the Lord, and look narrowly into all our ways. Let us see wherein we have been and are grieving the Holy Spirit.

And now let us all go down upon our knees, and confess our infinite guilt, in having, in so many ways and for so long a time, grieved the Holy Spirit, "whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption."

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In

the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1840
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Lectures I. - IX. [Sanctification- No.'s 1 - 9](#)
- Lectures X. & XI. [Unbelief- No.'s 1 & 2](#)
- Lecture XII. [Blessedness of Benevolence](#)
- Lecture XIII. [A Willing Mind Indispensable to a Right Understanding of Truth](#)
- Lecture XIV. [Death to Sin](#)
- Lecture XV. [The Gospel the Savor of Life or of Death](#)
- Lecture XVI. [Christians the Light of the World](#)
- Lecture XVII. & XVIII. [Communion with God](#) - No.'s 1 & 2
- Lecture XIX. [Temptations Must Be Put Away](#)
- Lecture XX [Design or Intention Constitutes Character](#)
- Lecture XXI. [Confession of Faults](#)

Lecture XXII. [Weakness of Heart](#)

Lecture XXIII. [A Single and an Evil Eye](#)

Lecture XXIV. [Salvation Always Conditional](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Sanctification- No.'s 1 - 9

Lectures I - IX

January 1 - April 22, 1840

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

from "The Oberlin Evangelist" Publication of Oberlin College

In discussing the subject of Sanctification, I design to pursue the following order.

I. Define the meaning of the term sanctification.

II. What I understand by entire sanctification.

III. Notice the distinction between entire and permanent sanctification.

IV. Show what is not implied in entire sanctification.

V. What is implied in entire sanctification.

VI. Show that this state is attainable in this life.

VII. Answer some objections.

VIII. Show when it is attainable.

IX. How it is attainable.

LECTURE I.

January 1, 1840

SANCTIFICATION- No. 1

by the Rev. Charles G. Finney

Text.--1 Thess. 5:23-24: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it."

It will be seen at once, that this outline is sufficiently extensive to fill a large volume, should I protract the discussion as I easily and perhaps profitably might. And at best it will occupy several lectures. My design is to condense what I have to say as much as possible, and yet preserve sufficient perspicuity. I shall endeavor not to be tedious. And yet I hope to be understood, and to be able to "commend myself to every man's conscience in the sight of God." I will now,

I. Define the term Sanctification.

Here let me remark, that a definition of terms in all discussions is of prime importance. Especially is this true of this subject. I have observed that almost without an exception those who have written on this subject dissenting from the views entertained here, do so upon the ground that they understand and define the terms, Sanctification and Christian Perfection, differently from what we do. Every one gives his own definition, varying materially from each other and from what we understand by the terms. And then they go on professedly opposing the doctrine as inculcated here. Now this is not only utterly unfair, but palpably absurd. If I oppose a doctrine inculcated by another man I am bound to oppose what he really holds. If I misrepresent his sentiments "I fight as one that beateth the air." I have been amazed at the diversity of definitions that have been given to the terms Christian Perfection, Sanctification, &c.; and to witness the diversity of opinion as to what is, and what is not, implied in these terms. One objects wholly to the use of the term Christian Perfection, because in his estimation it implies this and that and the other thing, which I do not suppose are at all implied in it. Another objects to our using the term Sanctification, because that implies, according to his understanding of it, certain things that render its use improper. Now it is no part of my design to dispute about the use of words. I must however use some terms; and I ought to be allowed to use Bible language, in its Scriptural sense as I understand it. And if I should sufficiently explain my meaning and define the sense in which I use the terms, this ought to suffice. And

I beg that nothing more nor less may be understood by the language I use than I profess to mean by it. Others may, if they please, use the same terms and give a different definition of them. But I have a right to hope and expect if they feel called upon to oppose what I say, that they will bear in mind my definition of the terms, and not pretend, as some have done, to oppose my views while they have only differed from me in their definition of the terms used, giving their own definition varying materially and I might say infinitely from the sense in which I use the same terms, and then arraying their arguments to prove that according to their definition of it, Sanctification is not really attainable in this life when no one here or any where else, that I ever heard of pretended that in their sense of the term, it ever was or ever will be attainable in this life, and I might add, or in that which is to come.

Sanctification is a term of frequent use in the Bible. Its simple and primary meaning is a state of consecration to God. To sanctify is to set apart to a holy use-- to consecrate a thing to the service of God. A state of sanctification is a state of consecration or a being set apart to the service of God. This is plainly both the Old and the New Testament use of the term.

II. What is entire Sanctification.

By entire sanctification, I understand the consecration of the whole being to God. In other words it is that state of devotedness to God and his service, required by the moral law. The law is perfect. It requires just what is right, all that is right, and nothing more. Nothing more nor less can possibly be Perfection or entire Sanctification, than obedience to the law. Obedience to the law of God in an infant, a man, an angel, and in God himself, is perfection in each of them. And nothing can possibly be perfection in any being short of this, nor can there possibly be any thing above it.

III. The distinction between entire and permanent Sanctification.

That a thing or a person may be for the time being wholly consecrated to God, and afterwards desecrated or diverted from that service, is certain. That Adam and "the angels who kept not their first estate" were entirely sanctified and yet not permanently so is also certain.

By permanent sanctification, I understand then a state not only of entire but of perpetual, unending consecration to God.

IV. What is not implied in entire Sanctification.

As the law of God is the standard and the only standard by which the question in regard to what is not, and what is implied in entire Sanctification is to be decided, it is of fundamental importance that we understand what is and what is not implied in entire obedience to this law. It must be apparent to all that this inquiry is of prime importance. And to settle this question is one of the main things to be attended to in this discussion. The doctrine of the entire sanctification of believers in this life can never be satisfactorily settled until it is understood. And it cannot be understood until it is known what is and what is not implied in it. Our judgment of our own state or of the state of others, can never be relied upon till these inquiries are settled. Nothing is more clear than that in the present vague unsettled views of the Church upon this question, no individual could set up a claim to having attained this state without being a stumbling block to the Church. Christ was perfect, and yet so erroneous were the notions of the Jews in regard to what constituted perfection that they thought him possessed with a devil instead of being holy as he claimed to be. It certainly is impossible that a person should profess this state without being a stumbling block to himself and to others unless he and they clearly understand what is not and what is implied in it. I will state then what is not implied in a state of entire sanctification, as I understand the law of God. The law as epitomized by Christ, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself," I understand to lay down the whole duty of man to God and to his fellow creatures. Now the questions are what is not, and what is implied in perfect obedience to this law? Vague notions in regard to these questions seem to me to have been the origin of much error on the subject of entire sanctification. To settle this question it is indispensable that we have distinctly before our minds just rules of legal interpretation. I will therefore lay down some first principles in regard to the interpretation of law, in the light of which, I think we may safely proceed to settle these questions.

Rule 1. Whatever is inconsistent with natural justice is not and cannot be law.

Rule 2. Whatever is inconsistent with the nature and relations of moral beings, is contrary to natural justice and therefore cannot be law.

Rule 3. That which requires more than man has natural ability to perform, is inconsistent with his nature and relations and therefore is inconsistent with natural justice, and of course is not law.

Rule 4. Law then must always be so understood and interpreted as to consist with the nature of the subjects, and their relations to each other and the law-giver. Any interpretation that makes the law to require more or less than is consistent with the nature and relations of moral beings, is a virtual setting aside of law or the same as to declare that it is not law. No authority in heaven or on earth can make that law, or obligatory upon moral agents, which is inconsistent with their nature and relations.

Rule 5. Law must always be so interpreted as to cover the whole ground of natural right or justice. It must be so understood and explained as to require all that is right in itself, and therefore immutably and unalterably right.

Rule 6. Law must be so interpreted as not to require any thing more than is consistent with natural justice or with the nature and relations of moral beings.

Rule 7. Of course laws are never to be so interpreted as to imply the possession of any attributes or strength and perfection of attributes which the subject does not possess. Take for illustration the second commandment "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Now the simple meaning of this commandment seems to be that we are to regard and treat every person and interest according to its relative value. Now we are not to understand this commandment as expressly or impliedly requiring us to know in all cases the exact relative value of every person and thing in the universe; for this would imply the possession of the attribute of omniscience by us. No mind short of an omniscient one can have this knowledge. The commandment then must be so understood as only to require us to judge with candor of the relative value of different interests, and treat them according to their value so far as we understand it. I repeat the rule therefore. Laws are never to be so interpreted as to imply the possession of any attribute or strength and perfection of attributes which the subject does not possess.

Rule 8. Law is never to be so interpreted as to require that which is naturally impossible on account of our circumstances. E.g.: The first commandment. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, &c." is not to be so interpreted as to require us to make God the constant and sole object of attention, thought, and affection, for this would not only be plainly impossible in our circumstance but manifestly contrary to our duty.

Rule 9. Law is never to be so interpreted as to make one requirement inconsistent with another; e.g.: if the first commandment be so interpreted that we are required to make God the only object of thought, attention, and affection, then we cannot obey the second commandment which requires us to love our neighbor. And if the first commandment is to be so understood that every faculty and power is to be directed solely and exclusively to the contemplation and love of God, then love to all other beings is prohibited and the second commandment is set aside. I repeat the rule therefore. Laws are not to be so interpreted as to conflict with each other.

Rule 10. A law requiring perpetual benevolence must be so construed as to consist with and require all the appropriate and essential modifications of this principle under every circumstance; such as justice, mercy, anger at sin and sinners, and a special and complacent regard to those who are virtuous.

Rule 11. Law must be so interpreted as that its claims shall always be restricted to the voluntary powers. To attempt to legislate over the involuntary powers would be inconsistent with natural justice. You may as well attempt to legislate over the beatings of the heart as over any involuntary mental actions.

Rule 12. In morals, actual knowledge is indispensable to obligation. The maxim, "*ignorantia legis non excusat*"-- ignorance of the law excuses no one, applies in morals to but a very limited extent. That actual knowledge is indispensable to moral obligation, will appear,

(1.) From the following Scriptures:

James 4:17, "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Luke 12:47-48, "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.; and to whom men have committed much, of them they will ask the more." John 9:41, "Jesus said unto them, if ye were blind, ye should have no sin; but now ye say, we see; therefore your sin remaineth." In the first and second chapters of Romans, the Apostle reasons at large on this subject. He convicts the heathen of sin, upon the ground that they violate their own conscience,

and do not live according to the light they have.

(2.) The principle is every where recognized in the Bible, that an increase of knowledge increases obligation. This impliedly, but plainly recognizes the principle that knowledge is indispensable to, and commensurate with obligation. In sins of ignorance, the sin lies in the ignorance itself, but not in the neglect of what is unknown. A man may be guilty of present or past neglect to ascertain the truth. Here his ignorance is sin. The heathen are culpable for not living up to the light of nature; but are under no obligation to embrace Christianity until they have the opportunity to do so.

Rule 13. Moral laws are to be so interpreted as to be consistent with physical laws. In other words, the application of the moral law to human beings, must recognize man as he is, as both a physical and intellectual being; and must never be so interpreted as that obedience to it would violate the laws of the physical constitution, and prove the destruction of the body.

Rule 14. Law is to be so interpreted as to recognize all the attributes and circumstances of both body and soul. In the application of the law of God to human beings, we are to regard their powers and attributes as they really are, and not as they are not.

Rule 15. Law is to be so interpreted as to restrict its obligation to the actions, and not to the nature, or constitution of moral beings. Law must not be understood as extending its legislation to the nature, or requiring a man to possess certain attributes, but as prescribing a rule of action. It is not the existence or possession of certain attributes which the law requires, or that these attributes should be in a certain state of perfection, but the right use of all these attributes as they are, is what the law is to be interpreted as requiring.

Rule 16. It should be always understood that the obedience of the heart to any law, implies and includes general faith, or confidence in the lawgiver. But no law should be so construed as to require faith in what the intellect does not perceive. A man may be under obligation to perceive what he does not; i.e.: it may be his duty to inquire after, and ascertain the truth. But obligation to believe with the heart, does not attach until the intellect obtains a perception of the things to be believed.

Now, in the light of these rules, let us proceed to inquire,

1. *What is not, and,*

2. *What is implied in perfect obedience to the law of God, or in entire sanctification.*

1. Entire sanctification does not imply any change in the substance of the soul or body, for this the law does not require, and it would not be obligatory if it did, because the requirement would be inconsistent with natural justice. Entire sanctification is the entire consecration of the powers, as they are, to God. It does not imply any change in them, but simply in the use of them.

2. It does not imply any annihilation of constitutional traits of character, such as constitutional ardor or impetuosity. There is nothing certainly, in the law of God that requires such constitutional traits to be annihilated, but simply that they should be rightly directed in their exercise.

3. It does not imply the annihilation of any of the constitutional appetites, or susceptibilities. It seems to be supposed by some, that the constitutional appetites and susceptibilities, are in themselves sinful, and that a state of entire sanctification would imply their entire annihilation. And I have often been astonished at the fact that those who array themselves against the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life, assume the sinfulness of the constitution of men. And I have not been a little surprised to find that some persons who I had supposed were far enough from embracing the doctrine of physical depravity, were, after all, resorting to this assumption to set aside the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life. But let us appeal to the law. Does the law any where, expressly or impliedly, condemn the constitution of man, or require the annihilation of any thing that is properly a part of the constitution itself? Does it require the annihilation of the appetite for food, or is it satisfied merely with regulating its indulgence? In short, does the law of God any where require any thing more than the consecration of all the appetites and susceptibilities of the body and mind, to the service of God?

In conversing with a brother, upon this subject, not long since, he insisted that a man might perpetually obey the law of God and be guilty of no actual

transgression, and yet not be entirely sanctified: for he insisted that there might be that in him which would lay the foundation for his sinning at a future time. When questioned in regard to what that something in him was, he replied, "that which first led him to sin at the beginning of his moral existence." I answered that that which first led him to sin, was his innocent constitution, just as it was the innocent constitution of Adam, to which the temptation was addressed, that led him into sin. Adam's innocent constitutional appetites, when excited by the presence of objects fitted to excite them, were a sufficient temptation to lead him to consent to prohibited indulgence, which constituted his sin. Now just so it certainly is with every human being. This constitution, the substance of his body and soul, cannot certainly have any moral character. But when these appetites which are essential to his nature and have no moral character in themselves are excited, they lead to prohibited indulgence, and in this way every human being is led into sin. Now if a man cannot be entirely sanctified until that is annihilated which first occasioned his sin, it does not appear that he ever can be entirely sanctified while he possesses either body or soul. I insist upon it, therefore, that entire sanctification does not imply the annihilation of any constitutional appetite or susceptibility, but only the entire consecration of the whole constitution as it is, to the service of God.

4. Entire sanctification does not imply the annihilation of natural affection or resentment. By this I mean that certain persons may be naturally pleasing to us. Christ appears to have had a natural affection for John. By natural resentment I mean, that, from the laws of our being, we must resent or feel opposed to injustice or ill treatment. Not that a disposition to retaliate or revenge ourselves is consistent with the law of God. But perfect obedience to the law of God, does not imply that we should have no sense of injury or injustice, when we are abused. God has this, and ought to have it, and so does every moral being. To love your neighbor as yourself does not imply, that if he injure you, you feel no sense of the injury or injustice, but that you love him and would do him good, notwithstanding his injurious treatment.

5. It does not imply any degree of unhealthy excitement of mind. Rule 13 lays down the principal that moral law is to be so interpreted as to be consistent with physical law. God's laws certainly do not clash with each other. And the moral law cannot require such a state of constant mental excitement as will destroy the physical constitution. It cannot require any

more mental excitement and action than is consistent with all the laws, attributes, and circumstances of both soul and body, as stated in rule 14.

6. It does not imply that any organ or faculty is to be at all times exerted to its full strength. This would soon exhaust and destroy any and every organ of the body. Whatever may be true of the mind, when separated from the body, it is certain, while it acts through a material organ, that a constant state of excitement is impossible. When the mind is strongly excited, there is of necessity a great determination of blood to the brain. A high degree of excitement cannot long continue, certainly, without producing inflammation of the brain, and consequent insanity. And the law of God does not require any degree of emotion, or mental excitement, that is inconsistent with life and health. Our Lord Jesus Christ does not appear to have been in a state of continual excitement. When he and his disciples had been in a great excitement for a time, they would turn aside "and rest awhile."

Who, that has ever philosophized on this subject, does not know that the high degree of excitement which is sometimes witnessed in revivals of religion, must necessarily be short, or that the people must become deranged. It seems sometimes to be indispensable, that a high degree of excitement should prevail for a time, to arrest public and individual attention, and to draw people off from other pursuits, to attend to the concerns of their souls. But if any suppose that this high degree of excitement is either necessary, or desirable, or possible, to be long continued, they have not well considered the matter. And here is one grand mistake of the Church. They have supposed that the revival consists mostly in this state of excited emotion, rather than in conformity of the human will to the will of God. Hence, when the reasons for much excitement have ceased, and the public mind begins to grow more calm, they begin immediately to say that the revival is on the decline; when, in fact, with much less excited emotion, there may be vastly more real religion in the community.

Excitement is often important and indispensable. But the vigorous actings of the will are infinitely more important. And this state of mind may exist in the absence of highly excited emotions.

7. Nor does it imply that the same degree of emotion, volition, or intellectual effort, is at all times required. All volitions do not need the same strength. They cannot have equal strength, because they are not produced

by equally powerful reasons. Should a man put forth as strong a volition to pick up an apple, as to extinguish the flames of a burning house? Should a mother, watching over her sleeping nursling, when all is quiet and secure, put forth as powerful volitions, as might be required to snatch it from the devouring flames? Now, suppose that she was equally devoted to God in watching her sleeping babe, and in rescuing it from the jaws of death. Her holiness would not consist in the fact that she exercised equally strong volitions, in both cases; but, that in both cases, the volition was equal to the accomplishment of the thing required to be done. So that persons may be entirely holy, and yet continually varying in the strength of their affections, according to their circumstances-- the state of their physical system-- and the business in which they are engaged.

All the powers of body and mind are to be held at the service and disposal of God. Just so much of physical, intellectual, and moral energy are to be expended in the performance of duty as the nature and the circumstances of the case require. And nothing is further from the truth, than that the law of God requires a constant, intense state of emotion and mental action on any and every subject alike.

8. Entire sanctification does not imply that God is to be at all times the direct object of attention and affection. This is not only impossible in the nature of the case, but would render it impossible for us to think of or love our neighbor or ourselves: Rule 9.

Upon this subject in a former lecture, I used the following language. The law of God requires the supreme love of the heart. By this is meant, that the mind's supreme preference should be of God-- that God should be the great object of its supreme love and delight. But this state of mind is perfectly consistent with our engaging in any of the necessary business of life-- giving to that business that attention-- and exercising about it all those affections and emotions which its nature and importance demand.

If a man love God supremely, and engage in any business, for the promotion of his glory, if his eye be single, his affections and conduct are entirely holy, when necessarily engaged in the right transaction of his business, although for the time being, neither his thought or affection are upon God.

Just as a man who is supremely devoted to his family may be acting

consistently with his supreme affection, and rendering them the most important and perfect service, while he does not think of them at all. As I have endeavored to show, in my lecture on the text, "Make to yourselves a new heart, and a new spirit," I consider the moral heart to be the mind's supreme preference. As I there stated, the natural, or fleshy heart, is the seat of animal life, and propels the blood through all the physical system. Now there is a striking analogy between this and the moral heart. And the analogy consists in this, that as the natural heart, by its pulsations diffuses life through the physical system; so the moral heart, or the supreme governing preference of the mind is that which gives life and character to man's moral actions; (e.g.,) suppose that I am engaged in teaching Mathematics. In this, the supreme desire of my mind is to glorify God, in this particular calling. Now in demonstrating some of its intricate propositions, I am obliged, for hours together, to give the entire attention of my mind to that object. Now, while my mind is thus intensely employed in this particular business, it is impossible that I should have any thoughts directly about God, or should exercise any direct affections, or emotions, or volitions towards him. Yet if, in this particular calling, all selfishness is excluded, and my supreme design is to glorify God, my mind is in a sanctified state, even though for the time being, I do not think of God.

It should be understood, that while the supreme preference of the mind has such efficiency, as to exclude all selfishness, and to call forth just that strength of volition, thought, affection, and emotion, that is requisite to the right discharge of any duty, to which the mind may be called, the heart is in a sanctified state. By a suitable degree of thought, and feeling, to the right discharge of duty, I mean just that intensity of thought, and energy of action, that the nature and importance of the particular duty to which, for the time being, I am called, demand.

In this statement, I take it for granted, that the brain, together with all the circumstances of the constitution are such, that the requisite amount of thought, feeling, &c. are possible. If the physical constitution, be in such a state of exhaustion as to be unable to put forth that amount of exertion which the nature of the subject might otherwise demand, even in this case, the languid efforts, though far below the importance of the subject, would be all that the law of God requires. Whoever, therefore supposes that a state of entire sanctification, implies a state of entire abstraction of mind, from every

thing but God, labors under a grievous mistake. Such a state of mind is as inconsistent with duty, as it is impossible, while we are in the flesh.

The fact is that the language and spirit of the law have been and generally are grossly misunderstood, and interpreted to mean what they never did, or can mean consistently with natural justice. Many a mind has been thrown open to the assaults of Satan, and kept in a state of continual bondage and condemnation, because God was not, at all times, the direct object of thought, affection, and emotion; and because the mind was not kept in a state of most perfect tension, and excited to the utmost at every moment.

9. Nor does it imply a state of continual calmness of mind. Christ was not in a state of continual calmness. The deep peace of his mind was never broken up, but the surface or emotions of his mind were often in a state of great excitement, and at other times in a state of great calmness. And here let me refer to Christ, as we have his history in the Bible, in illustration of the positions I have already taken, e.g. Christ had all the constitutional appetites and susceptibilities of human nature. Had it been otherwise, he could not have been "tempted in all points like as we are;" nor could he have been tempted in any point as we are, any further than he possessed a constitution similar to our own. Christ also manifested natural affection for his mother, and for other friends. He also showed that he had a sense of injury and injustice, and exercised a suitable resentment when he was injured and persecuted. He was not always in a state of great excitement. He appears to have had his seasons of excitement and of calm,-- of labor and rest,-- of joy and sorrow, like other good men. Some persons have spoken of entire sanctification as implying a state of uniform and universal calmness, and as if every kind and degree of excited feeling, except as the feelings of love to God are excited, were inconsistent with this state. But Christ often manifested a great degree of excitement when reproofing the enemies of God. In short his history would lead to the conclusion that his calmness and excitement were various, according to the circumstances of the case. And although he was sometimes so pointed and severe in his reproof, as to be accused of being possessed of a devil, yet his emotions and feelings were only those that were called for and suited to the occasions.

10. Nor does it imply a state of continual sweetness of mind without any indignation or holy anger at sin or sinners. Anger at sin is only a

modification of love. A feeling of justice, or a desire to have the wicked punished for the benefit of the government, is only another of the modifications of love. And such feelings are essential to the existence of love, where the circumstances call for their existence. It is said of Christ that he was angry. He often manifested anger and holy indignation. "God is angry with the wicked every day." And holiness, or a state of sanctification, instead of being inconsistent with, always implies the existence of anger, whenever circumstances occur, which demand its exercise: Rule 10.

11. It does not imply a state of mind that is all compassion, and no feeling of justice. Compassion is only one of the modifications of love. Justice, or a desire for the execution of law, and the punishment of sin is another of its modifications. God and Christ, and all holy beings, exercise all those affections and emotions that constitute the different modifications of love, under every possible circumstance.

12. It does not imply that we should love or hate all men alike, irrespective of their value, circumstances, and relations. One being may have a greater capacity for happiness, and be of much more importance to the universe than another. Impartiality and the law of love require us not to regard all beings and things alike; but all beings and things according to their nature, relations and circumstances.

13. Nor does it imply a perfect knowledge of all our relations: rule 7. Now such an interpretation of the law, as would make it necessary, in order to yield obedience, for us to understand all our relations, would imply in us the possession of the attribute of omniscience; for certainly there is not a thing in the universe to which we do not sustain some relation. And a knowledge of all these relations, plainly implies infinite knowledge. It is plain that the law of God cannot require any such thing as this; and that entire sanctification or entire obedience to the law of God therefore implies no such thing.

14. Nor does it imply perfect knowledge on any subject. Perfect knowledge on any subject, implies a perfect knowledge of its nature, relations, bearings and tendencies. Now as every single thing in the universe sustains some relation to and has some bearing upon every other thing, there can be no such thing as perfect knowledge on any one subject, that does not embrace universal or infinite knowledge.

15. Nor does it imply freedom from mistake on any subject whatever. It is maintained by some that the grace of the gospel pledges to every man perfect knowledge, or at least such knowledge as to exempt him from any mistake. I cannot stop here to debate this question, but would merely say the law does not expressly or impliedly require infallibility of judgment in us. It only requires us to make the best use of all the light we have.

16. Nor does entire sanctification imply the knowledge of the exact relative value of different interests. I have already said in illustrating rule 7, that the second commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;" does not imply that we should, in every instance, understand exactly the relative value and importance of every interest. This plainly cannot be required, unless it be assumed that we are omniscient.

17. It does not imply the same degree of knowledge that we might have possessed, had we always improved our time in its acquisition. The law cannot require us to love God or man as well as we might have been able to love them, had we always improved all our time in obtaining all the knowledge we could, in regard to their nature, character, and interests. If this were implied in the requisition of the law, there is not a saint on earth or in heaven that is or ever can be perfect. What is lost in this respect is lost, and past neglect can never be so atoned for as that we shall ever be able to make up in our acquisitions of knowledge, what we have lost. It will no doubt be true to all eternity, that we shall have less knowledge than we might have possessed, had we filled up all our time in its acquisition. We do not, cannot, nor shall we ever be able to love God as well as we might have loved him, had we always applied our minds to the acquisition of knowledge respecting him. And if entire sanctification is to be understood as implying that we love God as much as we should, had we all the knowledge we might have had, then I repeat it, there is not a saint on earth or in heaven, nor ever will be, that is entirely sanctified.

18. It does not imply the same amount of service that we might have rendered, had we never sinned. The law of God does not imply or suppose that our powers are in a perfect state; that our strength of body or mind is what it would have been, had we never sinned. But it simply requires us to use what strength we have. The very wording of the law is proof conclusive, that it extends its demands only to the full amount of what

strength we have. And this is true of every moral being, however great or small.

19. It does not require the same degree of love that we might have rendered, but for our ignorance. We certainly know much less of God, and therefore are much less capable of loving him, i.e. we are capable of loving him with a less amount, and to a less degree than if we knew more of him, which we might have done but for our sins. And as I have before said, this will be true to all eternity; for we can never make amends by any future obedience, or diligence for this any more than for other sins. And to all eternity, it will remain true, that we know less of God, and love him less than we might and should have done, had we always done our duty. If entire sanctification therefore, implies the same degree of love or service that might have been rendered, had we always developed our powers by a perfect use of them, then there is not a saint on earth or in heaven that is or ever will be in that state. The most perfect development and improvement of our powers, must depend upon the most perfect use of them. And every departure from their perfect use, is a diminishing of their highest development, and a curtailing of their capabilities to serve God in the highest and best manner. All sin then does just so much towards crippling and curtailng the powers of body and mind, and rendering them, by just so much, incapable of performing the service they might otherwise have rendered.

To this view of the subject it has been objected that Christ taught an opposite doctrine, in the case of the woman who washed his feet with her tears, when he said, "To whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much." But can it be that Christ intended to be understood as teaching, that the more we sin the greater will be our love and our ultimate virtue? If this be so I do not see why it does not follow that the more sin in this life, the better, if so be that we are forgiven. If our virtue is really to be improved by our sins, I see not why it would not be good economy both for God and man, to sin as much as we can while in this world. Certainly Christ meant to lay down no such principle as this. He undoubtedly meant to teach, that a person who was truly sensible of the greatness of his sins, would exercise more of the love of gratitude, than would be exercised by one who had a less affecting sense of ill-desert.

20. Entire sanctification does not imply the same degree of faith that might have been exercised but for our ignorance and past sin.

We cannot believe any thing about God of which we have no evidence or knowledge. Our faith must therefore be limited by our intellectual perceptions of truth. The heathen are not under obligation to believe in Christ, and thousands of other things of which they have no knowledge. Perfection in a heathen would imply much less faith than in a Christian. Perfection in an adult would imply much more and greater faith than in an infant. And perfection in an angel would imply much greater faith than in a man, just in proportion as he knows more of God than man. Let it be always understood that entire sanctification never implies that which is naturally impossible. It is certainly naturally impossible for us to believe that of which we have no knowledge. Entire sanctification implies in this respect nothing more than the heart's faith or confidence in all the truth that is perceived by the intellect.

21. Nor does it imply the conversion of all men in answer to our prayers. It has been maintained by some that a state of entire sanctification implies the offering of prevailing prayer for the conversion of all men. To this I reply,

(1.) Then Christ was not sanctified; for he offered no such prayer.

(2.) The law of God makes no such demand either expressly or impliedly.

(3.) We have no right to believe that all men will be converted in answer to our prayers, unless we have an express promise to that effect.

(4.) As therefore there is no such promise, we are under no obligation to offer such prayer. Nor does the non-conversion of the world, imply that there are no sanctified saints in the world.

22. It does not imply the conversion of any one for whom there is not an express or implied promise in the word of God. The fact that Judas was not converted in answer to Christ's prayers, does not prove that Christ was not in a state of entire sanctification.

23. Nor does it imply that all those things which are expressly or impliedly promised, will be granted in answer to our prayers, or in other words, that we should pray in faith for them, if we are ignorant of the existence or

application of those promises. A state of perfect love implies the discharge of all known duty. And nothing strictly speaking can be duty of which the mind has no knowledge. It cannot therefore be our duty to believe a promise of which we are entirely ignorant, or the application of which to any specific object we do not understand.

If there is sin in such a case as this, it lies in the ignorance itself. And here no doubt, there often is sin, because there is present neglect to know the truth. But it should always be understood that the sin lies in the ignorance, and not in the neglect of that of which we have no knowledge. A state of sanctification is inconsistent with any present neglect to know the truth; for such neglect is sin. But it is not inconsistent with our failing to do that of which we have no knowledge. James says: "He that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." "If ye were blind," says Christ, "ye should have no sin, but because ye say we see, therefore your sin remaineth."

24. Entire sanctification does not imply the impossibility of future sin. Entire and permanent sanctification does imply the fact, that the sanctified soul will not sin. But the only reason why he will not, is to be ascribed entirely to the sovereign grace of God. Sanctification does not imply, as I have already said, any such change in the nature of the subject, as to render it impossible or improbable that he will again sin. Nay, I do not suppose there is a man upon earth, or perhaps in heaven, who would not fall into sin but for the supporting grace of God.

25. It does not imply that watchfulness, and prayer, and effort, are no longer needed. It is the height of absurdity to suppose that, either in this or any other state of being, there will be no faith called for, or watchfulness against temptation. Just so long as the susceptibilities of our soul exist, temptation in some sense and to some extent must exist, in whatever world we are. Christ manifestly struggled hard with temptation. He found watchfulness and the most powerful opposition to temptation, indispensable to his perseverance in holiness. "Is the servant above his master, or the disciple above his Lord?"

26. Nor does it imply that we are no longer dependent on the grace of Christ, but the exact opposite is implied. A state of entire and permanent sanctification implies the most constant and perfect dependence upon the grace and strength of an indwelling Christ. It seems to have been supposed

by some that entire sanctification implies that something has been done which has so changed the nature of the sanctified soul, that ever after he will persevere in holiness in his own strength. I suppose this to be as far as possible from the truth, and that no change whatever has occurred in the nature of the individual, but simply that he has learned to confide in Christ at every step. He has so received Christ's strength as to lean constantly upon his supporting grace.

27. Nor does it imply that the Christian warfare is ended. I understand the Christian warfare to consist in the mind's conflict with temptation. This certainly will never end in this life.

28. Nor does it imply that there is no more growth in grace. Many persons seem to understand the command "grow in grace," as implying the gradual giving up of sin. They suppose that when persons have done sinning, there is no more room for growth in grace. Now it is said of Christ that he grew in grace, where the same original word is used as in the command. "He increased in stature and in wisdom, and in favor (kariti, grace) with God and man." If growth in grace implies the gradual giving up of sin, then God has commanded men not to give up their sins at once. They must give them up gradually. The truth is that growth in grace implies the relinquishment of sin to begin with. To grow in grace is to grow in the favor of God. And what would the Apostle have said, had he supposed that the requirement to grow in grace, would have been understood by an orthodox Church to require only the gradual relinquishment of their sins? I suppose that saints will continue to grow in grace to all eternity, and in the knowledge of God. But this does not imply that they are not entirely holy, when they enter heaven, or before.

29. Nor does it imply that others will recognize it to be real sanctification. With the present views of the Church in regard to what is implied in entire sanctification, it is impossible that a really sanctified soul should be acknowledged by the Church as such. And with these views of the Church, there is no doubt but sanctified believers would be set at nought, and denounced by the great mass of Christians as possessing any other than a sanctified spirit.

It was insisted, and positively believed by the Jews, that Jesus Christ was possessed of a wicked, instead of a holy spirit. Such were their notions of

holiness, that they no doubt supposed him to be actuated by any other than the Spirit of God. They especially supposed so on account of his opposition to the current orthodoxy, and the ungodliness of the religious teachers of the day. Now, who does not see that when the Church is in a great measure conformed to the world, that a spirit of holiness in any man, would certainly lead him to aim the sharpest rebukes at the spirit and life of those in this state, whether in high or low places. And who does not see that this would naturally result in his being accused of possessing a wicked spirit?

The most violent opposition that I have ever seen manifested to any persons in my life, has been manifested by members of the Church, and even by some ministers of the gospel, towards those whom I believe were among the most holy persons I ever knew. I have been shocked, and wounded beyond expression, at the almost fiendish opposition to such persons, that I have witnessed. I have several times of late observed that writers in newspapers were calling for examples of Christian Perfection or entire sanctification. Now I would humbly inquire, of what use it is to point the Church to examples, so long as they do not know what is, and what is not implied in a state of entire sanctification? I would ask, are the Church agreed among themselves in regard to what constitutes this state? Are any considerable number of ministers agreed among themselves as to what is implied in a state of entire sanctification? Now does not everybody know that the Church and the ministry are in a great measure in the dark upon this subject? Why then call for examples? No man can possess this state without being sure to be set at nought as a hypocrite, and a self-deceiver.

30. It is not implied in this state that the sanctified soul will himself always at the time be sure that his feelings and conduct are perfectly right. Cases may occur in which he may be in doubt in regard to the rule of duty; and be at a loss, without examination, reflection, and prayer, to know whether in a particular case he has done and felt exactly right. If he were sure that he understood the exact application of the law of God to that particular case, his consciousness would invariably inform him whether or not he was conformed to that rule. But in any and every case where he has not a clear apprehension of the rule, it may require time and thought, and prayer, and diligent inquiry to satisfy his mind in regard to the exact moral quality of any particular act or state of feeling; e.g. A man may feel himself exercised with strong indignation in view of sin. And he may be brought into doubt

whether the indignation, in kind or degree, was not sinful. It may therefore require self-examination and deep searching of heart to decide this question. That all indignation is not sinful is certain. And that a certain kind and degree of indignation at sin is a duty, is also certain. But our most holy exercises may lay us open to the assaults of Satan. And he may so turn our accuser as for a time to render it difficult for us to decide in regard to the real state of our hearts. And thus a sanctified soul may be "in heaviness through manifold temptations."

31. Nor does it imply the same strength of holy affection that Adam may have exercised before he fell, and his powers were debilitated by sin. It should never be forgotten that the mind in this state of existence, is wholly dependent upon the brain and physical system for its development. In Adam, and in any of his posterity, any violation of the physical laws of the body, resulting in the debility and imperfection of any organ or system of organs, must necessarily impair the vigor of the mind, and prevent its developing itself as it otherwise might have done. It is therefore entirely erroneous to say that mankind are or can be, in this state of existence, perfect in as high a sense as they might have been had sin never entered the world, and had there been no such thing as a violation of the laws of the physical constitution. The law of God requires only the entire consecration of such powers as we have. As these powers improve our obligation is enlarged, and will continue to be to all eternity. For myself, I have very little doubt that the human constitution is capable of being very nearly, if not entirely renovated or recovered from the evils of intemperance, by a right understanding of, and an adherence to the laws of life and health. So that after a few generations the human body would be nearly if not entirely restored to its primitive physical perfection. If this is so, the time may come when obedience to the law of God, will imply as great strength and constancy of affection as Adam was capable of exercising before the fall. But if on the other hand, it be true that any injury of the physical constitution can never be wholly repaired-- that the evils of sin in respect to its effect upon the body, are, in some measure at least, to descend with men to the end of time, then no such thing is implied in a state of entire sanctification, as the same strength and permanency of holy affection in us that Adam might have exercised before the fall.

32. Nor does it imply the formation of such holy habits as shall secure

obedience. Some have said that it was absurd to profess a state of entire sanctification, on the ground that it implies not only obedience to the law of God, but such a formation and perfection of holy habits as to render it certain that we shall never again sin. And that a man can no more tell when he is entirely sanctified, than he can tell how many holy acts it will take to form holy habits of such strength that he will never again sin. To this I answer,

(1.) The law of God has nothing to do with requiring this formation of holy habits. It is satisfied with present obedience. It only demands at the present moment the full devotion of all our powers to God. It never in any instance complains that we have not formed such holy habits as to render it certain that we shall sin no more.

(2.) If it be true that a man is never wholly sanctified until his holy habits are so fixed as to render it certain that he will never sin again, then Adam was not in a state of entire sanctification previously to the fall, nor were the angels in this state before their fall.

(3.) If this sentiment be true, there is not a saint nor an angel in heaven so far as we can know, that can with the least propriety profess entire sanctification; for how do they know that they have performed so many holy acts as to have created such habits of holiness as to render it certain that they will never more sin?

(4.) Entire sanctification does not consist in the formation of holy habits, nor at all depend upon this. Both entire and permanent sanctification are based alone upon the grace of God in Jesus Christ. And perseverance in holiness is to be ascribed alone to the influence of the indwelling Spirit of Christ, instead of being secured by any habits of holiness which we have or ever shall form.

33. Nor does it imply exemption from sorrow or mental suffering.

It was not so with Christ. Nor is it inconsistent with our sorrowing for our own past sins, and sorrowing that we have not now the health and vigor, and knowledge, and love, that we might have had, if we had sinned less; or sorrow for those around us-- sorrow in view of human sinfulness, or

suffering. These are all consistent with a state of entire sanctification, and indeed are the natural results of it.

34. Nor is it inconsistent with our living in human society-- with mingling in the scenes, and engaging in the affairs of this world. Some have supposed that to be holy we must withdraw from the world. Hence the absurd and ridiculous notions of papists in retiring to monasteries, and convents-- in taking the veil, and as they say, retiring to a life of devotion. Now I suppose this state of voluntary exclusion from human society, to be utterly inconsistent with any degree of holiness, and a manifest violation of the law of love to our neighbor.

35. Nor does it imply moroseness of temper and manners. Nothing is farther from the truth than this. It is said of Xavier, than whom, perhaps, few holier men have ever lived, that "he was so cheerful as often to be accused of being gay." Cheerfulness is certainly the result of holy affections-- and sanctification no more implies moroseness in this world than it does in heaven.

Before I proceed to the next head of my discourse, (having said these things, and given these rules of interpretation so that you can apply the principle to many things I have not time to notice) I wish to make the following remark.

In all the discussions I have seen upon this subject, while it seems to be admitted that the law of God is the standard of perfection, yet in defining what constitutes Christian perfection or entire sanctification, men entirely lose sight of this standard, and seldom or never raise the distinct inquiry; what does obedience to this law imply, and what does it not imply. Instead of bringing every thing to this test, they seem to lose sight of it. On the one hand they bring in things that never were required by the law of God of man in his present state. Thus they lay a stumbling block and a snare for the saints, to keep them in perpetual bondage, supposing that this is the way to keep them humble, to place the standard entirely above their reach. Or, on the other hand, they really abrogate the law, so as to make it no longer binding. Or they so fritter away what is really implied in it, as to leave nothing in its requirements, but a kind of sickly, whimsical, inefficient sentimentalism, or perfectionism, which in its manifestations and results, appears to me to be any thing else than that which the law of God requires.

LECTURE II.

January 15, 1840

SANCTIFICATION- No. 2

by the Rev. Charles G. Finney

Text.--1 Thess. 5:23-24: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it."

I come now to show,

IV. What is implied in entire Sanctification.

Under this head, I shall refer to and repeat some things (as I have already done) which I said a number of months since in my lectures on the law of God.

1. Love is the sum of all that is implied in entire Sanctification. But I may and should be asked what is the kind of love implied? I shall consider the kind of love to be exercised towards God.

(1.) It is to be love of the heart, and not a mere emotion. By the heart I mean the will. Emotions, or what are generally termed feelings, are always involuntary states of mind, and no further than they are indirectly under the control of the will, have they any moral character; i.e. they are not choices or volitions, and of course do not govern the conduct. Love, in the form of an emotion, may exist in opposition to the will; e.g. we may exercise emotions of love contrary to our conscience and judgment, and in opposition to our will. Thus the sexes often exercise emotions of love towards those to whom all the voluntary powers of their mind feel opposed, and with whom they will not associate. It is true, that in most cases, the emotions are with the will. But they are sometimes, nay often opposed to it.

Now, it is a voluntary state of mind that the law of God requires; i.e. it lays its claims upon the will. The will controls the conduct. And it is,

therefore, of course, the love of the heart or will that God requires.

(2.) Benevolence is one of the modifications of love which we are to exercise towards God. Benevolence is good will. And certainly we are bound to exercise this kind of love to God. It is a dictate of reason, of conscience, of common sense, and of immutable justice, that we should exercise good and not ill-will to God. It matters not whether he needs our good will or whether our good or ill-will can in any way affect him-- the question does not respect his necessities, but deserts.

(3.) Another modification of this love, is that of complacency or esteem. God's character is infinitely good. We are therefore bound, not merely to love him, with the love of benevolence; but to exercise the highest degree of complacency in his character. To say that God is good and lovely is merely to say that he deserves to be loved. If he deserves to be loved, on account of his goodness and love, then he deserves to be loved in proportion to his goodness and loveliness. Our obligation, therefore is infinitely great to exercise toward him the highest degree of the love of complacency of which we are capable. These remarks are confirmed by the Bible, by reason, by conscience and by common sense.

(4.) Another modification of this love is that of gratitude. As every moral being is constantly receiving favors from God, it is self-evident that love in the form of gratitude is universally obligatory.

(5.) Another peculiarity of this love which must, by no means, be overlooked, is that it must be disinterested; i.e. that we should not love him for selfish reasons. But that we should love him for what he is-- with benevolence; because his well-being is an infinite good-- with complacency; because his character is infinitely excellent-- with the heart; because all virtue belongs to the heart. It is plain, that nothing short of disinterested love is virtue. The Savior recognizes and settles this truth, in Luke 6:32-34: "For if ye love them who love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again." These words epitomize the whole doctrine of the

Bible on this subject, and lay down the broad principle, that to love God, or any one else, for selfish reasons, is not virtue.

(6.) Another peculiarity of this love is that it must be in every instance supreme. Any thing less than supreme love to God, must be idolatry. If any thing else is loved more, that is our God.

I have been surprised to learn that some understand the term supreme in a comparative sense, and not in a superlative sense. They suppose therefore that the law of God requires more than supreme love. Webster's definition of supreme and supremely is "in the highest degree," "to the utmost extent." I understand the law to require as high a state of devotion to God, of love and actual service as the powers of body and mind are capable of sustaining.

Observe, that God lays great stress upon the degree of love. So that the degree is essential to the kind of love. If it be not supreme in degree it is wholly defective and in no sense acceptable to God.

I will now consider the kind of love to be exercised towards our fellow men.

(1.) It must be the love of the heart, and not mere desire or emotion. It is very natural to desire the good of others-- to pity the distressed-- and to feel strong emotions of compassion towards those who are afflicted. But these emotions are not virtue. Unless we will their good, as well as desire it, it is of no avail. James 2:15, 16: "If a brother or a sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be you warmed and filled;' notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?"

Now here the Apostle fully recognized the principle, that mere desire for the good of others, which of course will satisfy itself with good words instead of good deeds, is not virtue. If it were good willing, instead of good desiring, it would produce corresponding actions; and unless it is good willing, there is no holiness in it.

(2.) Benevolence to men is a prime modification of holy love. This is included in what I have said above, but needs to be expressly stated and explained. It is a plain dictate of reason, of conscience, of common

sense, and immutable justice, that we should exercise good will towards our fellow men-- that we should will their good, in proportion to its relative importance-- that we should rejoice in their happiness, and endeavor to promote it, according to its relative value in the scale of being.

(3.) Complacency towards those that are virtuous is another modification of holy love. I say towards those that are virtuous, because while we exercise benevolence towards all, irrespective of their character, we have a right to exercise complacency towards those only who are holy. To exercise complacency towards the wicked is to be as wicked as they are. But to exercise complacency in those that are holy, is to be ourselves holy.

(4.) This love is to be in every instance equal. By equal I do not mean that degree of love which selfish beings have for themselves; for this is supreme. There is a grand distinction between self-love and selfishness. Self-love is that benevolence to self or regard for our own interest, which its intrinsic importance demands. Selfishness is the excess of self-love: i.e. it is supreme self-love-- it is making our own happiness the supreme object of pursuit, because it is our own. And not attaching that importance to other's interests, and the happiness of other beings, which their relative value demands. A selfish mind is therefore in the exercise of the supreme love of self.

Now the law of God does not require or permit us to love our neighbor with this degree of love, for that would be idolatry. But the command, "to love our neighbor as ourselves," implies

(a) That we should love ourselves less than supremely, and attach no more importance to our own interests and happiness than their relative value demands-- so that the first thing implied in this command is that we love ourselves less than supremely, and that we love our neighbor with the same degree of love which it is lawful for us to exercise towards ourselves.

(b) Equal love does not imply that we should neglect our own appropriate concerns, and attend to the affairs of others. God has appointed to every man a particular sphere in which to act, and

particular affairs to which he must attend. And this business, whatever it is, must be transacted for God and not for ourselves. For a man, therefore, to neglect his particular calling under the pretence of attending to the business of others, is neither required or permitted by this law.

Nor are we to neglect our own families, and the nurture and education of our children, and attend to that of others. "But if any provide not for his own, especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." To these duties we are to attend for God. And no man or woman is required or permitted to neglect the children God has given them, under the pretence of attending to the families of others.

Nor does this law require or permit us to squander our possessions upon the intemperate, and dissolute, and improvident. Not that the absolute necessities of such persons are in no case to be relieved by us, but it is always to be done in such a manner as not to encourage, but to rebuke their evil courses.

Nor does this law require or permit us to suffer others to live by sponging out of our possessions, while they themselves are not engaged in promoting the good of men.

Nor does it require or permit us to lend money to speculators, or for speculating purposes, or in any way to encourage selfishness.

(c) But by equal love is meant, as I have said, the same love in kind and degree, which it is lawful for us to exercise towards ourselves. It is lawful, nay, it is our duty to exercise a suitable regard to our own happiness. This is benevolence to self, or what is commonly called self-love. The same, both in kind and degree, we are required to exercise to all our fellow men.

(5.) Another feature of holy love is that it must be impartial; i.e. it must extend to enemies as well as friends. Else it is selfish love, and comes under the reprobation of the Savior, in the passage before quoted, Luke 6:32-34: "For if ye love them who love you what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same," &c.

Now observe that this test must always be applied to the kind of love we

exercise to our fellow men, in order to understand its genuineness-- God's love is love to enemies. It was for his enemies that he gave his Son. Our love must be the same in kind-- it must extend to enemies, as well as friends. And if it does not, it is partial and selfish.

2. Entire Sanctification implies, entire conformity of heart and life to all the known will of God however it may be made known-- to both physical and moral law so far as they are known.

3. It implies such a perfect confidence in him as to be willing that all events should be at his sovereign disposal-- such a confidence as to preclude all carefulness and undue anxiety about ourselves or our friends, our temporal or eternal interests, the interests of the Church or of the world. Let me be understood. I am as far as possible from supposing a state of entire Sanctification is inconsistent with the greatest desire, and most earnest and prevailing wrestlings with God for blessings, both spiritual and temporal upon ourselves and the world. But I suppose that a soul in a state of entire conformity to the will of God, will never so distrust his providence and grace as to be thrown into a state of feverish anxiety about any event. It will, on all occasions, most sweetly acquiesce and rejoice in the will of God, in whatever way that will is revealed.

4. Entire Sanctification implies a supreme disposition to glorify and serve God-- that this is the ruling principle of our life-- that we live for no lower or other end than this-- that all other things that we desire are esteemed as a means to this end-- that life and health, and food and raiment, and houses and furniture, and every thing else that we possess are regarded by us as a means to this one great absorbing end, the Glory of God.

5. It implies that the principle of love should have such energy as to control every design and action directly or indirectly.

6. It implies an abiding sense of the presence of God. From what I have already said, you will understand me of course not to mean that God is the direct object of thought, attention and affection, but that there should be such a sense of his presence at all times as to have an important bearing upon our whole lives. Every one knows by his own experience, what it is to have a kind of sense of the presence of a person, who is not at the time the direct object of our thoughts. A man in the presence of an earthly prince, or

of an august court, under the eye of a human judge, would be continually awed, and restrained, and affected with a kind of sense of where he was, and in whose presence, and under whose eye he was acting although his mind might be so intensely employed in the transaction of business as not at all to make the judge or prince the object of direct thought, attention, or affection. In this sense, I suppose a sanctified soul will have an abiding sense, at all times and places, of the presence of God. And when the mind is withdrawn from necessary pursuits, it will naturally return to God, and be sensible of His presence in a vastly higher sense than this. It will be so impressed, and melted, and affected, by His presence as can never be expressed in words, but as a matter of experience is familiar to all those who walk with God.

7. It does imply deep and uninterrupted communion with God. But here let me correct a mistake into which, as I think, some have fallen. Many seem to recognize nothing as communion with God except that sweet peace and joy, and flowing, and glowing love that the soul often experiences in seasons of communion. But God no doubt often has seasons of intercourse and communion with the soul and with the sanctified soul, in which he reminds it of past sins and follies. And in order to keep it in a sanctified state he gives it such a view of its past history as to fill it with unutterable shame, and self-abhorrence, and contempt. Now persons are apt to conceive of this state of mind as a state of darkness, & to conceive of themselves as being under the hidings of God's countenance, when in fact they are never perhaps more thoroughly in the light than at such seasons. They are never perhaps nearer to God than on such occasions. To be sure their thoughts are not occupied with those sweet and heavenly visions that fill the mind with joy. Yet they are occupied with considerations of no less importance and no less indispensable to continuing them in a state of holiness, than those sweet truths which at other times so greatly rejoice them.

8. It implies a greater dread of offending God than of any other evil. This is implied in supreme love. It is a contradiction to say that we love God supremely, and yet do not dread offending Him so much as we dread some other evil. If we love Him more than any earthly friend, we shall dread to offend Him more than that friend. If we love Him more than we do ourselves, we should dread offending Him more than we do that evil should befall ourselves. If he is dearer to us than our own souls we should dread

remaining in sin more than we should dread the loss of our souls.

9. It does imply the subjugation of all our appetites and passions to the will of God. I have already said that the sin of Adam consisted in preferring the gratification of his appetites to the will of God. This is the sin of all men. This is the substance and the history of selfishness. Now entire obedience to the law of God does imply that no appetite or susceptibility of body or mind shall be gratified in opposition to the known will of God. But on the other hand, that "the whole body, soul and spirit" shall be held in a state of entire consecration to God.

10. It implies the strictest employment of our time in the acquisition of knowledge, and a consecration of what we already know to the service of God.

In my last lecture, I said that the legal maxim, "Ignorance of the law excuses no one," is true in morals to but a limited extent, and that actual knowledge is indispensable to obligation under the government of God. This I think was sufficiently proven by a reference to scripture testimony. I also said that in sins of ignorance, the sin consisted in the ignorance itself, and not in the non-performance of that of which the mind has no knowledge.

Now to avoid mistake, it is important to remark here that ignorance of our duty is always a sin where we possess the means and opportunities of information. In such cases, the guilt of the ignorance is equal to all the default of which it is the occasion. Strictly speaking the duty to do a thing does not and cannot attach until the mind has a knowledge of that thing. Yet if the means of knowledge are within reach of the mind, the guilt is just as great as all the default of which this ignorance is the occasion. So that courts of law do not inflict injustice in holding all the subjects of a government responsible for knowing the law, where the means of knowledge are within their reach. Although they are not in form pronounced guilty for their ignorance, & punished for the specific offence, but on the contrary are held responsible for breaches of those laws of which they had no knowledge, yet in fact no injustice is done them, as their ignorance in such cases really deserves the punishment inflicted.

To this it may be objected that God, under the old dispensation treated sins of ignorance as involving less guilt than sins committed against knowledge. To

this I reply,

He did so. And the reason is very obvious. The people possessed but very limited means of information. Copies of the law were very scarce and utterly inaccessible to the great mass of the people. So that while He held them sufficiently responsible to engage their memories to retain a knowledge of their duty and to search it out with all diligence, yet it is plain that He held them responsible in a vastly lower sense than He does those who have higher means of information. The responsibility of the heathen was less than that of the Jews-- that of the Jews less than that of Christians-- and that of Christians in the early ages of the Church, before the canon of scripture was full and copies multiplied, much less than that of Christians at the present day.

11. It implies the complete annihilation of selfishness under all its forms, and a practical and hearty recognition of the rights and interests of our neighbor. Let me point out in a few particulars what the law of God prohibits and what it requires in these particulars, as stated in a former lecture.

(1.) It prohibits all supreme self-love, or selfishness. The command, "love thy neighbor as thyself," implies, not that we should love our neighbor supremely, as selfish men love themselves; but that we should love ourselves, in the first place, and pursue our happiness, only according to its real value, in the scale of being. But I need not dwell upon this; as it will not probably be doubted, that this precept prohibits supreme self-love.

(2.) It prohibits all excessive self-love: (i.e.) every degree of love, that is disproportioned to the relative value of our own happiness.

(3.) It prohibits the laying any practical stress upon any interest, because it is our own.

(4.) It prohibits, of course, every degree of ill will, and all those feelings that are necessarily connected with selfishness.

(5.) It prohibits apathy and indifference, with regard to the well being of our fellow men. But;

(6.) It requires the practical recognition of the fact, that all men are

brethren-- that God is the great Parent-- the great Father of the universe-- that all moral agents, every where , are his children-- and that he is interested in the happiness of every individual, according to its relative importance. He is no respecter of persons. But so far as the love of Benevolence is concerned, He loves all moral beings, in proportion to their capacity of receiving, and doing good. Now the law of God evidently takes all this for granted; and that "God hath made of one blood all nations of men, to dwell on all the face of the earth."

(7.) It requires that every being, and interest should be regarded and treated, by us, according to their relative value; (i.e.) that we should recognize God's relation to the universe-- and our relation to each other-- and treat all men as our brethren-- as having an inalienable title to our good will, and kind offices-- as citizens of the same government-- and members of the great family of God.

(8.) It requires us to exercise as tender a regard to our neighbor's reputation, interest, and well-being, in all respects, as to our own-- to be as unwilling to mention his faults, as to have our own mentioned-- to hear him slandered as to be slandered ourselves. In short, he is to be esteemed, by us, as our brother.

(9.) It justly reprobates any violation of the great principle of equal love, as rebellion against the whole universe. It is rebellion against God, because it is a rejection of his authority-- and selfishness, under any form, is a setting up of our own interests, in opposition to the interests of the universe of God.

12. Entire Sanctification implies a willingness to exercise self-denial, even unto death, for the glory of God and good of man, did they require it. The Apostle teaches us that "we ought to be willing to lay down our lives for the brethren," as Christ laid down his life.

LECTURE III.

January 29, 1840

SANCTIFICATION- No. 3

by the Rev. Charles G. Finney

Text.--1 Thess. 5:23-24: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it."

We have now arrived at a very important point in the discussion of this subject, and I beg your patient attention. Having shown,

- 1. What I mean by the term sanctification;*
- 2. What entire sanctification is;*
- 3. The difference between entire and permanent sanctification;*
- 4. What is not implied, and*
- 5. What is implied in entire sanctification;*

I am next, according to my plan to show,

VI. That entire sanctification is attainable in this life.

1. It is self-evident that entire obedience to God's law is possible on the ground of natural ability. To deny this is to deny that a man is able to do as well as he can. The very language of the law is such as to level its claims to the capacity of the subject, however great or small that capacity may be. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." Here then it is plain, that all the law demands, is the exercise of whatever strength we have, in the service of God. Now, as entire sanctification consists in perfect obedience to the law of God, and as the law requires nothing more than the right use of whatever strength we have, it is of course, forever settled that a state of entire and permanent sanctification is attainable in this life on the ground of natural ability.

2. The provisions of grace are such as to render its actual attainment in this life, the object of reasonable pursuit. It is admitted that the entire and permanent sanctification of the church is to be accomplished. It is also admitted that this work is to be accomplished "through the sanctification of the Spirit and the belief of the truth." It is also universally agreed that this work must be begun here; and also that it must be completed before the soul

can enter heaven. This then is the inquiry, Is this state attainable as a matter of fact before death; and if so when, in this life, may we expect to attain it? It is easy to see that this question can be settled only by a reference to the word of God. And here it is of fundamental importance that we understand the rules by which scripture declarations and promises are to be interpreted. I have already given several rules in the light of which we have endeavored to interpret the meaning of the law. I will now state several plain common sense rules by which the promises are to be interpreted. The question in regard to the rules of biblical interpretation is fundamental to all religious inquiry. Until the church are agreed to interpret the scriptures in accordance with certain fixed and undeniable principles, they can never be agreed in regard to what the Bible teaches. I have often been amazed at the total disregard of all sober rules of biblical interpretation. On the one hand the threatenings, and on the other the promises, are either thrown away or made to mean something entirely different from that which was intended by the Spirit of God. I have much to say on this subject, and design, the Lord willing, to make the rules of biblical interpretation the subject of distinct inquiry at another time. At present, I will only mention a few plain, common sense, and self-evident rules for the interpretation of the promises. In the light of these, we may be able to settle the inquiry before us, viz: whether the provisions of grace are such as to render entire and permanent sanctification, in this life, an object of reasonable pursuit.

(1.) The language of a promise is to be interpreted by a reference to the known character of him who promises, where this character is revealed and made known in other ways than by the promise itself, e.g.

(a) If the promisor is known to be of a very bountiful disposition, or the opposite of this, these considerations should be taken into the account in interpreting the language of his promise. If he is of a very bountiful disposition, he may be expected to mean all that he seems to mean in the language of his promise, and a very liberal construction should be put upon his language. But if his character is known to be the opposite of bountifulness, and that whatever he promised would be given with great reluctance, his language should be construed strictly.

(b) His character for hyperbole and extravagance in the use of language should be taken into the account in interpreting the promises. If it be well understood that the promisor is in the habit of using extravagant language--to say much more than he means, this circumstance should in all justice be taken into the account in the interpretation of the language of his promises. But on the other hand, if he be known to be an individual of great candor, and to use language with great circumspection and propriety, we may freely understand him to mean what he says. His promise may be in figurative language and not to be understood literally, but in this case even, he must be understood to mean what the figure naturally and fully implies.

(c) The fact should be taken into the account, whether the promise was made deliberately or in circumstances of great but temporary excitement. If the promise was made deliberately, it should be interpreted to mean what it says. But if it were made under great but temporary excitement, much allowance is to be made for the state of mind, which led to the use of such strong language.

(2.) The relation of the parties to each other should be duly considered in the interpretation of the language of a promise; e.g. the promise of a father to a son admits of a more liberal and full construction than if the promise were made to a stranger, as the father may be supposed to indulge a more liberal and bountiful disposition towards a son than towards a person in whom he has no particular interest.

(3.) The design of the promisor in relation to the necessities of the promisee or person to whom the promise is made, should be taken into the account. If it be manifest that the design of the promisor was to meet the necessities of the promisee, then his promise must be so understood as to meet these necessities.

(4.) If it be manifest that the design of the promisor was to meet the necessities of the promisee, then the extent of these necessities should be taken into the account in the interpretation of the promise.

(5.) The interest of the promisor in the accomplishment of his design,

or in fully meeting and relieving the necessities of the promisee, should be taken into the account. If there is the most satisfactory proof aside from that which is contained in the promise itself, that the promisor feels the highest interest in the promisee, and in fully meeting and relieving his necessities, then his promise must be understood accordingly.

(6.) If it is known that the promisor has exercised the greatest self-denial and made the greatest sacrifice for the promisee, in order to render it proper or possible for him to make and fulfill his promises, in relation to the relieving his necessities, the state of mind implied in this conduct, should be fully recognized in interpreting the language of the promise. It would be utterly unreasonable and absurd in such a case to restrict and pare down the language of his promise so as to make it fall entirely short of what might reasonably be expected of the promisor, from those developments of his character, feelings, and designs, which were made by the great self-denial he has exercised and the sacrifices he has made.

(7.) The bearing of the promise upon the interests of the promisor should also be taken into the account. It is a general and correct rule of interpretation, that when the thing promised has an injurious bearing upon the interest of the promisor and is something which he cannot well afford to do, and might therefore be supposed to promise with reluctance, the language in such a case is to be strictly construed. No more is to be understood by it than the strictest construction will demand.

(8.) But if on the other hand the thing promised will not impoverish or in any way be inimical to the interests of the promisor, no such construction is to be resorted to.

(9.) Where the thing promised is that which the promisor has the greatest delight in doing or bestowing; and where he accounts it "more blessed to give than to receive;" and where it is well known by other revelations of his character, and by his own express and often repeated declarations, that he has the highest satisfaction and finds his own happiness in bestowing favors upon the promisee, in this case the most liberal construction should be put upon the promise, and he is to be

understood to mean all that he says.

(10.) The resources and ability of the promisor to meet the necessities of the promisee, without injury to himself, are to be considered. If a physician should promise to restore a patient to perfect health, it might be unfair to understand him as meaning all that he says. If he so far restored the patient as that he recovered in a great measure from his disease, it might be reasonable to suppose that this was all he really intended, as the known inability of a physician to restore an individual to perfect health might reasonably modify our understanding of the language of his promise. But when there can be no doubt as to the ability, resources, and willingness of the physician to restore his patient to perfect health, then we are, in all reason and justice, required to believe he means all that he says. If God should promise to restore a man to perfect health who was diseased, there can be no doubt that his promise should be understood to mean what its language imports.

(11.) When commands and promises are given by one person to another, in the same language, in both cases it is to be understood alike, unless there is some manifest reason to the contrary.

(12.) If neither the language, connection, nor circumstances, demand a diverse interpretation, we are bound to understand the same language alike in both cases.

(13.) I have said, we are to interpret the language of law so as to consist with natural justice. I now say, that we are to interpret the language of the promises so as to consist with the known greatness, resources, goodness, bountifulness, relations, design, happiness, and glory of the promisor.

(14.) If his bountifulness is equal to his justice, his promises of grace must be understood to mean as much as the requirements of his justice.

(15.) If he delights in giving as much as in receiving, his promises must mean as much as the language of his requirements.

(16.) If he is as merciful as he is just, his promises of mercy must be as liberally construed as the requirements of his justice.

(17.) If "he delighteth in mercy," if Himself says "judgment is his strange work," and mercy is that in which he has peculiar satisfaction, his promises of grace and mercy are to be construed even more liberally than the command and threatenings of his justice. The language in this case is to be understood as meaning quite as much as the same language would in any supposable circumstances.

(18.) Another rule of interpreting and applying the promises which has been extensively overlooked is this, the promises are all "yes and amen in Christ Jesus." They are all founded upon and expressive of great and immutable principles of God's government. God is no respecter of persons. He knows nothing of favoritism. But when He makes a promise, He reveals a principle of universal application to all persons in like circumstances. Therefore the promises are not restricted in their application to the individual or individuals to whom they were first given, but may be claimed by all persons in similar circumstances. And what God is at one time, He always is. What He has promised at one time or to one person, he promises at all times to all persons under similar circumstances. That this is a correct view of the subject is manifest from the manner in which the New Testament writers understood and applied the promises of the Old Testament. Let any person with a reference Bible read the New Testament with a design to understand how its writers applied the promises of the Old Testament, and he will see this principle brought out in all its fulness. The promises made to Adam, Noah, Abraham, the Patriarchs, and to the inspired men of every age, together with the promises made to the church, and indeed all the promises of spiritual blessings,--it is true of them all, that what God has said and promised once, He always says and promises, to all persons and at all times, and in all places, where the circumstances are similar.

Having stated these rules, in the light of which we are to interpret the language of the promises, I will say a few words in regard to when a promise becomes due, and on what conditions we may realize its fulfillment. I have said some of the same things in the last volume of the Evangelist. But I wish to repeat them in this connection, and add something more.

(1.) All the promises of sanctification in the Bible, from their very

nature necessarily imply the exercise of our own agency in receiving the thing promised. As sanctification consists in the right exercise of our own agency, or in obedience to the law of God, a promise of sanctification must necessarily be conditioned upon the exercise of faith in the promise. And its fulfillment implies the exercise of our own powers in receiving it.

(2.) It consequently follows, that a promise of sanctification, to be of any avail to us, must be due at some certain time, expressed or implied in the promise: for if the fulfillment of the promise implies the exercise of our own agency, the promise is a mere nullity to us, unless we are able to understand when it becomes due, or at what time we are to expect and plead its fulfillment.

(3.) A promise in the present tense is on demand. In other words, it is always due, and its fulfillment may be plead and claimed by the promisee at any time.

(4.) A promise due at a future specified time, is after that time on demand, and may at any time thereafter be plead as a promise in the present tense.

(5.) A great many of the Old Testament promises became due at the advent of Christ. Since that time they are to be considered and used as promises in the present tense. The Old Testament saints could not plead their fulfillment to them; because they were either expressly or impliedly informed, that they were not to be fulfilled until the coming of Christ. All that class of promises, therefore, that became due "in the last days," "at the end of the world," i.e. the Jewish dispensation, are to be regarded as now due or as promises in the present tense.

(6.) Notwithstanding these promises are now due, yet they are expressly or impliedly conditioned upon the exercise of faith, and the right use of the appropriate means by us, to receive their fulfillment.

(7.) When a promise is due, we may expect the fulfillment of it at once or gradually, according to the nature of the blessing. The promise that the world shall be converted in the latter day, does not imply that we are to expect the world to be converted at any one moment of time; but

that the Lord will commence it at once, and hasten it in its time, according to the faith and efforts of the church. On the other hand, when the blessing promised may in its nature be fulfilled at once, and when the nature of the case makes it necessary that it should be, then its fulfillment may be expected whenever we exercise faith.

(8.) There is a plain distinction between promises of grace and of glory. Promises of glory are of course not to be fulfilled until we arrive at heaven. Promises of grace, unless there be some express or implied reason to the contrary, are to be understood as applicable to this life.

(9.) A promise also may be unconditional in one sense, and conditional in another; e.g. promises made to the church as a body may be absolute and their fulfillment be secure and certain, sooner or later, while their fulfillment to any generation of the church or to any particular individuals of the church, may be and must be conditioned upon their faith and the appropriate use of means. Thus the promise of God that the church should possess the land of Canaan was absolute and unconditional in such a sense as that the church, at some period, would and certainly must take possession of that land. But the promise was conditional in the sense that the entering into possession, by any generation, depended entirely upon their own faith and the appropriate use of means. So the promise of the world's conversion, and the sanctification of the church under the reign of Christ, is unconditional in the sense, that it is certain that those events will at some time occur, but when they will occur--what generation of individuals shall receive this blessing, is necessarily conditioned upon their faith. This principle is plainly recognized by Paul in Heb. 4:6, 11: "Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief;" "Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief."

I come now to consider the question directly, and wholly as a Bible question, whether entire and permanent sanctification is in such a sense attainable in this life as to make its attainment an object of rational pursuit.

Let me first, however, recall your attention to what this blessing is. Simple obedience to the law of God is what I understand to be present, and its

continuance to be permanent sanctification. The law is and forever must be the only standard. Whatever departs from this law on either side, must be false. Whatever requires more or less than the law of God, I reject as having nothing to do with the question.

It will not be my design to examine a great number of scripture promises, but rather to show that those which I do examine, fully sustain the position I have taken. One is sufficient, if it be full and its application just, to settle this question forever. I might occupy many lectures in the examination of the promises, for they are exceedingly numerous, and full, and in point. But as I have already given several lectures on the promises, my design is now to examine only a few of them, more critically than I did before. This will enable you to apply the same principles to the examination of the scripture promises generally.

1. I begin by referring you to the law of God, as given in Deut. 10:12: "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul." Upon this passage I remark:

(1.) It professedly sums up the whole duty of man to God--to fear and love Him with all the heart, and all the soul.

(2.) Although this is said of Israel, yet it is equally true of all men. It is equally binding upon all, and is all that God requires of any man in regard to Himself.

(3.) Obedience to this requirement is entire sanctification.

See Deut. 30:6: "And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live." Here we have a promise couched in the same language as the command just quoted. Upon this passage I remark:

(1.) It promises just what the law requires. It promises all that the first and great commandment any where requires.

(2.) Obedience to the first commandment always implies obedience to the second. It is plainly impossible that we should "love God, whom we have not seen," and "not love our neighbor whom we have seen."

(3.) This promise, on its very face, appears to mean just what the law means--to promise just what the law requires.

(4.) If the law requires a state of entire sanctification, or if that which the law requires is a state of entire sanctification, then this is a promise of entire sanctification.

(5.) As the command is universally binding upon all and applicable to all, so this promise is universally applicable to all who will lay hold upon it.

(6.) Faith is an indispensable condition to the fulfillment of this promise. It is entirely impossible that we should love God with all the heart, without confidence in Him. God begets love in man, in no other way, than by so revealing Himself as to inspire confidence,--that confidence which works by love. In Rules 10 and 11, for the interpretation of the promises, it is said, that "where a command and a promise are given in the same language, we are bound to interpret the language alike in both cases, unless there be some manifest reason for a different interpretation." Now here, there is no perceivable reason why we should not understand the language of the promise as meaning as much as the language of the command. This promise appears to have been designed to cover the whole ground of the requirement.

(7.) Suppose the language in this promise to be used in a command, or suppose that the form of this promise were changed into that of a command. Suppose God should say as He does elsewhere, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul;" who would doubt that God designed to require a state of entire sanctification or consecration to Himself. How then are we to understand it when used in the form of a promise? See Rules 14 and 15 "If his bountifulness equal his justice, his promises of grace must be understood to mean as much as the requirements of his justice." "If He delights in giving as much as in receiving, his promises must mean as much as the language of his requirements."

(8.) This promise is designed to be fulfilled in this life. The language and connection imply this: I "will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all

thy soul."

(9.) This promise as it respects the church, at some day, must be absolute and certain. So that God will undoubtedly, at some period, beget this state of mind in the church. But to what particular individuals and generation this promise will be fulfilled must depend upon their faith in the promise.

2. See Jer. 31:31-34: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt, (which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith the Lord;) but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Upon this passage, I remark:

(1.) It was to become due, or the time its fulfillment may be claimed and expected, was at the advent of Christ. This is unequivocally settled in Heb. 8:8-12, where this promise is quoted at length as being applicable to the gospel day.

(2.) This is undeniably a promise of entire sanctification. It is a promise that the "law shall be written in the heart." It means that the very temper and spirit required by the law shall be begotten in the soul. Now if the law requires entire sanctification or perfect holiness, this is certainly a promise of it; for it is a promise of all that the law requires. To say that this is not a promise of entire sanctification, is the same absurdity as to say, that perfect obedience to the law is not entire sanctification; and this last is the same absurdity as to say that something more is our duty than what the law requires; and this again is to say that the law is imperfect and unjust.

(3.) A permanent state of sanctification is plainly implied in this promise.

(a) The reason for setting aside the first covenant was, that it was broken: "Which my covenant they brake." One grand design of the New Covenant is, that it shall not be broken, for then it will be no better than the first.

(b) Permanency is implied in the fact, that it is to be engraven in the heart.

(c) Permanency is plainly implied in the assertion, that God will remember their sin no more. In Jer. 32:39, 40, where the same promise is in substance repeated, you will find it expressly stated that the covenant is to be "everlasting;" and that He will so "put his fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from Him." Here permanency is as expressly promised as it can be.

(d) Suppose the language of this promise to be thrown into the form of a command. Suppose God to say, "Let my law be within your hearts, and let it be in your inward parts, and let my fear be so within your hearts that you shall not depart from me. Let your covenant with me be everlasting." If this language were found in a command, would any man in his senses doubt that it meant perfect and permanent sanctification? If not, by what rule of sober interpretation does he make it mean any thing else when found in a promise? It appears to be the most profane trifling, when such language is found in a promise, to make it mean less than it does when found in a command. See Rule 17.

(4.) This promise as it respects the Church, at some period of its history, is unconditional, and its fulfillment certain. But in respect to any particular individuals or generation of the church, its fulfillment is necessarily conditioned upon their faith.

(5.) The church, as a body, have certainly never received this new covenant. Yet doubtless multitudes, in every age of the Christian dispensation, have received it. And God will hasten the time when it

shall be so fully accomplished, that there shall be no need for one man to say to his brother, "Know ye the Lord, for all shall know Him from the least to the greatest."

(6.) It should be understood that this promise was made to the Christian church and not all to the Jewish church. The saints, under the old dispensation, had no reason to expect the fulfillment of this and kindred promises to themselves, because their fulfillment was expressly deferred until the commencement of the Christian dispensation.

(7.) It has been said, that nothing more is promised than regeneration. But were not the Old Testament saints regenerated? Yet it is expressly said that they received not the promises. Heb. 11:13, 39, 40: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." Here we see that these promises were not received by the Old Testament saints. Yet they were regenerated.

(8.) It has also been said that the promise implied no more than the final perseverance of the saints. But I would inquire, did not the Old Testament saints persevere? And yet we have just seen, that the Old Testament saints did not receive these promises in their fulfillment.

3. I will next examine the promise in Ezek. 36:25-27: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them." Upon this I remark:

(1.) It was written within nineteen years after that which we have just examined in Jer. It plainly refers to the same time and is a promise of

the same blessing.

(2.) It seems to be admitted, nor can it be denied, that this is a promise of entire sanctification. The language is very definite and full. "Then," referring to some future time when it should become due, "will I sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean." Mark the first promise is, "ye shall be clean." If to be "clean" does not mean entire sanctification, what does it mean?

The second promise is, "from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you." If to be cleansed "from all filthiness and all idols," be not a state of entire sanctification, what is?

The third promise is, "a new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and will give you a heart of flesh." If to have a "clean heart," a "new heart," a "heart of flesh," in opposition to a "heart of stone,"--be not entire sanctification, what is?

The fourth promise is, "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments to do them."

(3.) Let us turn the language of these promises into that of command; and understand God as saying, "Make you a clean heart, a new heart, and a new spirit; put away all your iniquities, all your filthiness, and all your idols; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them." Now what man in the sober exercise of his senses, would doubt whether God meant to require a state of entire sanctification in such promises as these? The rules of legal interpretation, would demand that we should so understand Him. Rule 5: "The interest of the promisor in the accomplishment of His design or in fully meeting and relieving the necessities of the promisee, should also be taken into the account. If there is the most satisfactory proof, aside from that which is contained in the promise itself, that the promisor feels the highest interest in the promisee, and in fully meeting and relieving his necessities, then his promise must be understood accordingly."

If this is so, what is the fair and proper construction of this language when found in a promise. I do not hesitate to say that to me it is

amazing that any doubt should be left on the mind of any man whether, in these promises, God means as much as in his commands couched in the same language; e.g. Ezek. 18:30, 31: "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" Now that the language in the promise under consideration, should mean as much as the language of this command, is demanded by every sober rule of interpretation. And who ever dreamed, that when He required His people to put away all their iniquities, He only meant that they should put away a part of their iniquities?

(4.) This promise respects the church, and it cannot be pretended that it has ever been fulfilled according to its proper import, in any past age of the church.

(5.) As it regards the church, at a future period of its history, this promise is absolute, in the sense that it certainly will be fulfilled.

(6.) It was manifestly designed to apply to Christians under the new dispensation, rather than to the Jews under the old dispensation. The sprinkling of clean water and the outpouring of the Spirit, seem plainly to indicate that the promise belonged more particularly to the Christian dispensation. It undeniably belongs to the same class of promises with that in Jer. 31:31-34, Joel 2:28, and many others, that manifestly look forward to the gospel day as the time when they shall become due. As these promises have never been fulfilled, in their extent and meaning, their complete fulfillment remains to be realized by the church as a body. And those individuals and that generation will take possession of the blessing, who understand and believe and appropriate them to their own case.

4. I will next examine the promise in the text, 1 Thess. 5:23, 24: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." Upon this I

remark:

- (1.) That according to Prof. Robinson's Lexicon, the language used here is the strongest form of expressing perfect or entire sanctification.
- (2.) It is admitted, that this is a prayer for and a promise of entire sanctification.
- (3.) The very language shows, that both the prayer and the promise refer to this life, as it is a prayer for the sanctification of the body as well as the soul; also that they might be preserved, not after, but unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- (4.) This is a prayer of inspiration, to which is annexed an express promise that God will do it.
- (5.) It is, from the necessity of the case, conditioned upon our faith, as sanctification without faith is naturally impossible.
- (6.) Now if this promise, with those that have already been examined, do not honestly, and fully, settle the question of the attainability of entire sanctification in this life, it is difficult to understand how any thing can be settled by appeal to scripture.

There are great multitudes of promises to the same import, to which I might refer you, and which if examined in the light of the foregoing rules of interpretation, would be seen to heap up demonstration upon demonstration, that this is a doctrine of the Bible. Only examine them in the light of these plain, self evident principles, and it seems to me, that they cannot fail to produce conviction.

I will not longer occupy your time in the examination of the promises, but in my next will mention several other considerations in support of this doctrine.

LECTURE IV.

February 12, 1840

SANCTIFICATION- No. 4

by the Rev. Charles G. Finney

Text.--1 Thess. 5:23-24: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it."

Having examined a few of the promises in proof of the position, that a state of entire sanctification is attainable in this life, I will now proceed to mention other considerations in support of this doctrine.

5. Christ prayed for the entire sanctification of saints in this life. "I pray not," He says, "that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil of the world." He did not pray that they should be kept from persecution or from natural death, but He manifestly prayed, that they should be kept from sin. Suppose Christ had commanded them to keep themselves from the evil of the world; what should we understand him to mean by such a command?

6. Christ has taught us to pray for entire sanctification in this life; "Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." Now, if there is entire sanctification in heaven, Christ requires us to pray for it on earth. And is it probable that He has taught us to pray for that which He knows never can be or will be granted?

7. The Apostles evidently expected Christians to attain this state in this life.--See Col. 4:12: "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." Upon this passage I remark:

(1.) It was the object of the efforts of Epaphras, and a thing which he expected to effect, to be instrumental in causing those Christians to be "perfect and complete in all the will of God."

(2.) If this language does not describe a state of entire sanctification, I know of none that would. If "to be perfect and complete in all the will of God," be not Christian perfection, what is?

(3.) Paul knew that Epaphras was laboring to this end, and with this expectation; and he informed the church of it in a manner that evidently showed his approbation of the views and conduct of

Epaphras.

8. That the Apostles expected Christians to attain this state is further manifest, from 2 Cor. 7:1: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness, in the fear of God."

Now does not the Apostle speak in this passage as if he really expected those to whom he wrote "to perfect holiness in the fear of God?" Observe how strong and full the language is, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit." If "to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and all filthiness of the spirit, and to perfect holiness," be not entire sanctification, what is? That he expected this to take place in this life, is evident from the fact, that he requires them to be cleansed from all filthiness of the flesh as well as of the spirit.

9. All the intermediate steps can be taken. Therefore, the end can be reached. There is certainly no point in our progress towards entire sanctification, where it can be said, we can go no further. To this it has been objected, that though all the intermediate steps can be taken, yet the goal can never be reached in this life, just as five may be divided by three, ad infinitum, without exhausting the fraction. Now this illustration deceives the mind that uses it, as it may the minds of those who listen to it. It is true that you can never exhaust the fraction in dividing five by three, for the plain reason that the division may be carried on, ad infinitum. But in the case of entire sanctification, all the intermediate steps can be taken; for there is an end, or state of entire sanctification; and that too, at a point infinitely short of infinite.

10. That this state may be attained in this life, I argue from the fact that provision is made against all the occasions of sin. Men sin only when they are tempted. And it is expressly asserted that in every temptation provision is made for our escape. Certainly if it is possible for us to escape without sin, under every temptation, then a state of entire and permanent sanctification is attainable.

11. Full provision is made for overcoming the three great enemies of our souls; the world, the flesh, and the devil.

(1.) The world--"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith." "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Christ."

(2.) The flesh--"If ye walk in the Spirit, ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh."

(3.) Satan--"The shield of faith shall quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." "And God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly."

Now all sober rules of Biblical criticism require us to understand the passages I have quoted, in the sense I have quoted them.

12. It is evident from the fact, expressly stated, that abundant means are provided for the accomplishment of this end. Eph. 4:10-16: "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men, and cunning craftiness, where by they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love." Upon this passage, I remark:

(1.) That what is here spoken of is plainly applicable only to this life. It is in this life that the apostles, evangelists, prophets and teachers exercise their ministry. The means, therefore, are applicable, and so far as we know, only applicable to this life.

(2.) The Apostle here manifestly teaches that these means are designed, and adequate to perfecting the whole Church as the body of Christ, "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge

of the Son of God, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Now observe--

(a.) These means are for the perfecting of the saints, till the whole Church, as a perfect man, "has come to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." If this is not entire sanctification, what is? That this is to take place in this world, is evident from what follows. For the Apostle adds, "that we henceforth," (i.e. after arriving at this perfection,) "be no more tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive."

(3.) It should be observed that this is a very strong passage in support of the doctrine, inasmuch as it asserts that abundant means are provided for the sanctification of the Church in this life. And as the whole includes all its parts, there must be sufficient provision for the sanctification of each individual.

(4.) If the work is ever to be effected, it is by these means. But these means are used only in this life. Entire sanctification then must take place in this life.

(5.) If this passage does not teach a state of entire sanctification, such a state is no where mentioned in the Bible. And if believers are not here said to be wholly sanctified by these means, and of course in this life, I know not that it is any where taught that they shall be sanctified at all.

(6.) But suppose this passage to be put in the language of a command, how should we understand it? Suppose the saints commanded to be perfect, and to "grow up to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," could any thing less than entire sanctification be understood by such requisitions? Then by what rule of sober criticism, I would inquire, can this language used in this connection, mean any thing less than I have supposed it to mean?

13. God is able to perform this work in and for us. Eph. 3:14-19: " For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." Upon this passage I remark:

(1.) Paul evidently prays here for the entire sanctification of believers in this life. It is implied in our being "rooted and grounded in love," and being "filled with all the fulness of God," to be as perfect in our measure and according to our capacity, as He is. If to be filled with the fulness of God, does not imply a state of entire sanctification, what does?

(2.) That Paul did not see any difficulty in the way of God's accomplishing this work, is manifest from what he says in the 20th verse--"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, &c."

14. The Bible no where represents death as the termination of sin in the

saints, which it could not fail to do, were it true that they cease not to sin until death. It has been the custom of the Church, for a long time, to console individuals, in view of death, by the consideration, that it would be the termination of all their sin. And how almost universal has been the custom in consoling the friends of deceased saints, to mention this as a most important fact, that now they had ceased from sin. Now if death is the termination of sin in the saints, and if they never cease to sin until they pass into eternity, too much stress never has been or can be laid upon that circumstance; and it seems utterly incredible that no inspired writer should ever have noticed the fact. The representations of scripture are all right over against this idea. It is said, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for they rest from their labors, and their works to follow them." Here it is not intimated that they rest from their sins, but from their good works in this life; such works as shall follow, not to curse but to bless them. The representations of scripture are that death is the termination of the saint's suffering and labors of love, for the good of men and the glory of God, in this world. But no where in the Bible is it intimated that the death of a saint is the termination of his serving the devil.

But if it be true that Christians continue to sin till they die, and death is the termination, and the only termination of their sin, it seems to me impossible that the scripture representations on the subject should be what they are.

15. The Bible representations of death are utterly inconsistent with its being an indispensable means of sanctification. Death is represented as an enemy in the Bible. But if death is the only condition upon which men are brought into a state of entire sanctification, his agency is as important and as indispensable as the influence of the Holy Ghost. When death is represented in the Bible as any thing else than an enemy, it is because he cuts short the sufferings of the saints, and introduces them into a state of eternal glory--not because he breaks them off from communion with the devil! How striking is the contrast between the language of the Church and that of inspiration on this subject! The Church is consoling the Christian in view of death, that it will be the termination of his sins,--that he will then cease to serve the devil and his own lusts. The language of inspiration, on the other hand, is that he will cease, not from wicked but from good works, and labors, and sufferings for God in this world. The language of the Church is that then he will enter upon a life of unalterable holiness--that then, and not

till then, he shall be entirely sanctified. The language of inspiration is, that because he is sanctified, death shall be an entrance into a state of eternal glory.

16. Ministers are certainly bound to set up some definite standard, to which as the ministers of God, they are bound to insist upon complete conformity. And now I would ask, what other standard can they and dare they set up than this? To insist upon any thing less than this, is to turn Pope and grant an indulgence to sin. But to set up this standard, and then inculcate that conformity to it is not, as a matter of fact, attainable in this life, is as absolutely to take the part of sin against God, as it would be to insist upon repentance in theory, and then avow that in practice it was not attainable.

And here let me ask Christians what they expect ministers to preach? Do you think they have a right to connive at any sin in you, or to insist upon any thing else as a practicable fact than that you should abandon every iniquity? It is sometimes said, that with us entire sanctification is a hobby. But I would humbly ask what else can we preach? Is not every minister bound to insist in every sermon that men shall wholly obey God? And because they will not compromise with any degree or form of sin, are they to be reproached for making the subject of entire obedience a hobby? I ask, by what authority can a minister preach any thing less? And how shall any minister dare to inculcate the duty as a theory, and yet not insist upon it as a practical matter, as something to be expected of every subject of God's kingdom?

17. A denial of this doctrine has the natural tendency to beget the very apathy witnessed in the Church. Professors of religion go on in sin, without much conviction of its wickedness. Sin unblushingly stalks abroad even in the Church of God, and does not fill Christians with horror, because they expect its existence as a thing of course. Tell a young convert that he must expect to backslide, and he will do so of course, and with comparatively little remorse, because he looks upon it as a kind of necessity. And being led to expect it, you find him in a few months after his conversion away from God, and not at all horrified with his state. Just so you inculcate the idea among Christians that they are not expected to abandon all sin, and they will of course go on in sin with comparative indifference. You reprove them for their sins, and they will say, "O we are imperfect creatures; we do not pretend to be perfect, nor do we expect we ever shall be in this world."

Many such answers as these will show you at once the God dishonoring and soul-ruining tendency of a denial of this doctrine.

18. A denial of this doctrine prepares the minds of ministers to temporize and wink at great iniquity in their churches. Feeling as they certainly must, if they disbelieve this doctrine, that a great amount of sin in all believers is to be expected as a thing of course, their whole preaching, and spirit, and demeanor, will be such as to beget a great degree of apathy among Christians in regard to their abominable sins.

19. If this doctrine is not true, how profane and blasphemous is the covenant of every church of every evangelical denomination. Every church requires its members to make a solemn covenant with God and with the church, in the presence of God and angels, and with their hands upon the emblems of the broken body and shed blood of the blessed Jesus, "to abstain from all ungodliness and every worldly lust, to live soberly and righteously in this present world." Now if the doctrine of the attainability of entire sanctification in this life is not true, what profane mockery is this covenant! It is a covenant to live in a state of entire sanctification, made under the most solemn circumstances, enforced by the most awful sanctions, and insisted upon by the minister of God standing at the altar. Now what right has any man on earth to require less than this?

And again, what right has any man on earth to require this, unless it is a practical thing?

Suppose when this covenant was proposed to a convert about to unite with the church, he should take it to his closet, and spread it before the Lord, and inquire whether it was right for him to make such a covenant--and whether the grace of the gospel can enable him to fulfill it. Do you suppose the Lord Jesus would reply, that if he made that covenant, he certainly would, and must as a matter of course live in the habitual violation of it, as long as he live, and that His grace was not sufficient to enable him to keep it? Would he in such a case have any right to take upon himself this covenant? No, no more than he would have a right to lie.

20. It has long been maintained by orthodox divines, that a person is not a Christian who does not aim at living without sin--that unless he aim at perfection, he manifestly consents to live in sin; and is therefore certainly

impenitent. It has been, and I think truly, said, that if a man does not in the fixed purpose of his heart, aim at total abstinence from sin, and at being wholly conformed to the will of God, he is not yet regenerated, and does not so much as mean to cease from abusing God.

Now if this is so, and I believe it certainly is, I would ask how a person can aim at and intend to do what he knows to be impossible. Is it not a contradiction to say that a man can intend to do what he knows he cannot do? To this it has been objected, that if true, it proves too much--that it would prove that no man ever was a Christian who did not believe in this doctrine. To this I reply:

(1.) A man may believe in the attainability of and aim at attaining what is really a state of entire sanctification, although he may not call it by that name. This I believe to be the real fact with Christians: and they would much more frequently attain what they aim at, did they know how to appropriate the grace of Christ to their own circumstances. Mrs. President Edwards, for example, firmly believed that she could attain to a state of entire consecration. She aimed at and manifestly attained it, and yet such were her views of physical depravity, that she did not call her state one of entire sanctification. It has been common for Christians to suppose that a state of entire consecration was attainable; but while they believed in physical depravity, they would not of course call even entire consecration, entire sanctification. Mrs. Edwards believed in, aimed at, and attained, entire consecration. She aimed at what she believed was attainable, and nothing more. She called it by the same name with her husband, who was opposed to the doctrine of Christian perfection, as held by the Wesleyan Methodists; manifestly on the ground of his notions of physical depravity. I care not what this state is called, if the thing be fully explained and insisted upon, together with the means of attaining it. Call it what you please, Christian perfection, heavenly mindedness, or a state of entire consecration; by all these I understand the same thing. And it is certain, that by whatever name it is called, the thing must be aimed at to be attained. The practicability of its attainment must be admitted, or it cannot be aimed at.

And now I would humbly inquire whether it is not true, that to preach any

thing short of this is not to give countenance to sin?

21. Another argument in favor of this doctrine is that the gospel, as a matter of fact, has often, not only temporarily but permanently and perfectly overcome every form of sin, in different individuals. Who has not seen the most beastly lusts, drunkenness, lasciviousness, and every kind of abomination, long indulged and fully ripe, entirely and for ever slain by the power of the grace of God? Now how was this done? Only by bringing this sin fully into the light of the gospel, and showing the individual the relation that sin sustained to the death of Christ.

Now nothing is wanting to slay any and every sin, but for the mind to be fully baptized into the death of Christ, and to see the bearings of one's own sins upon the sufferings and agonies and death of the blessed Jesus. Let me state a fact to illustrate my meaning. A habitual and most inveterate smoker of tobacco, of my acquaintance, after having been plied with almost every argument to induce him to break the power of the habit, and relinquish its use, in vain, on a certain occasion, lighted his pipe and was about to put it to his mouth, when the inquiry was started, did Christ die to purchase this vile indulgence for me? He hesitated, but the inquiry pressed him, Did Christ die to purchase this vile indulgence for me? The relation of this conduct to the death of Christ, instantly broke the power of the habit, and from that day he has been free.

I could relate many other facts more striking than this, where a similar view of the relation of a particular sin to the atonement of Christ, has in a moment, not only broken the power of the habit, but destroyed entirely and for ever, the appetite for similar indulgences.

If the most inveterate habits of sin, and even those that involve physical consequences, and have deeply debased the physical constitution, and rendered it a source of overpowering temptation to the mind, can be and often have been utterly broken up, and for ever slain, by the grace of God, why should it be doubted that by the same grace, a man can triumph over all sin, and that for ever.

22. If this doctrine is not true, what is true upon the subject? It is certainly of great importance that ministers should be definite in their instructions, and if Christians are not expected to be wholly conformed to the will of

God in this life, how much is expected of them? Who can say, hitherto canst thou, must thou come, but no further? It is certainly absurd, not to say ridiculous, for ministers to be for ever pressing Christians up to higher and higher attainments, saying at every step you can and must go higher, and yet all along informing them that they are expected to fall short of their whole duty--that they can as a matter of fact, be better than they are, far better, indefinitely better; but still it is not expected that they will do their whole duty. I have often been pained to hear men preach who are afraid to commit themselves in favor of the whole truth; and who are yet evidently afraid of falling short, in their instructions of insisting that men shall stand "perfect and complete in all the will of God." They are evidently sadly perplexed to be consistent, and well they may be, for in truth there is no consistence in their views and teachings. If they do not inculcate, as a matter of fact, that men ought to do and are expected to do their whole duty, they are sadly at a loss to know what to inculcate. They have evidently many misgivings about insisting upon less than this, and they fear to go to the full extent of apostolic teaching on this subject. And in their attempts to throw in qualifying terms and caveats, to avoid the impression that they believe in the doctrine of entire sanctification, they place themselves in a truly awkward position. Cases have occurred in which ministers have been asked, how far we may go, must go, and are expected to go, in depending upon the grace of Christ, and how holy men may be, and are expected to be, and must be, in this life? They could give no other answer to this, than that they can be a great deal better than they are. Now this indefiniteness is a great stumbling block to the Church. It cannot be according to the teachings of the Holy Ghost.

23. The tendency of a denial of this doctrine is, to my mind, conclusive proof that the doctrine itself must be true. Many developments in the recent history of the Church throw light upon this subject. Who does not see that the facts developed in the temperance reformation, have a direct and powerful bearing upon this question? It has been ascertained that there is no possibility of completing the temperance reformation, except by adopting the principle of total abstinence from all intoxicating drinks. Let a temperance lecturer go forth, as an Evangelist to promote revivals on the subject of temperance--let him inveigh against drunkenness, while he admits and defends the moderate use of alcohol, or insinuates, at least, that

total abstinence is not expected or practicable. In this stage of the temperance reformation every one can see that such a man could make no progress; that he would be employed like a child in building dams of sand to obstruct the rushing of mighty waters. It is as certain as that causes produce their effects, that no permanent reformation could be effected, short of adopting the total abstinence principle.

And now if this is true as it respects the temperance reformation, how much more so when applied to the subjects of holiness and sin. A man might by some possibility, even in his own strength, overcome his habits of drunkenness, and retain, what might be called the temperate use of alcohol. But no such thing is possible in a reformation from sin. Sin is never overcome by any man in his own strength. If he admits into this creed the necessity of any degree of sin, or if he allows in practice any degree of sin, he becomes impenitent--consents to live in sin--and is of course abandoned by the Holy Spirit, the certain result of which is, a relapsing into a state of legal bondage to sin. And this is probably a true history of ninety-nine one hundredths of the Church. It is just what might be expected from the views and practice of the Church upon this subject.

The secret of backsliding is that reformations are not carried deep enough. Christians are not set with all their hearts to aim at a speedy deliverance from all sin. But on the contrary are left and in many instances taught to indulge the expectation that they shall sin as long as they live. I never shall forget probably, the effect produced on my mind by reading, when a young convert, in the diary of David Brainerd, that he never expected to make any considerable attainments in holiness in this life. I can now easily see that this was a natural inference from the theory of physical depravity which he held. But not perceiving this at the time, I doubt not that this expression of his views had a very injurious effect upon me for many years. It led me to reason thus, "If such a man as David Brainerd did not expect to make much advancement in holiness in this life, it is vain for me to expect such a thing."

The fact is, if there be any thing that is important to high attainments in holiness, and to the progress of the work of sanctification in this life, it is the adoption of the principle of total abstinence from sin. Total abstinence from sin, must be every man's motto, or sin will certainly sweep him away as a flood. That cannot possibly be a true principle in temperance, that leaves the

causes which produce drunkenness to operate in their full strength. Nor can that be true in holiness which leaves the root unextracted, and the certain causes of spiritual decline and backsliding at work in the very heart of the Church. And I am fully convinced that until Evangelists and Pastors adopt and carry out in principle and practice the principle of total abstinence from all sin, they will as certainly find themselves every few months, called to do their work over again, as a temperance lecturer would who should admit the moderate use of alcohol.

24. Again, the tendency of the opposite view of this subject, shows that that cannot be true. Who does not know, that to call upon sinners to repent, and at the same time to inform them that they will not, and cannot, and are not expected to repent, would for ever prevent their repentance. Suppose you say to a sinner, you are naturally able to repent; but it is certain that you never will repent in this life, either with or without the Holy Ghost. Who does not see that such teaching would as surely prevent his repentance as he believed it? So, say to a professor of religion, you are naturally able to be wholly conformed to God; but it is certain that you never will be in this life, either in your own strength or by the grace of God. If this teaching be believed, it will just as certainly prevent his sanctification as the other teaching would the repentance of the sinner. I can speak from experience on this subject. While I inculcated the common views, I was often instrumental in bringing Christians under great conviction, and into a state of temporary repentance and faith. But falling short of urging them up to a point where they would become so acquainted with Christ, as to abide in Him, they would of course soon relapse again into their former state. I never saw, and can now understand that I had no reason to expect to see, under the instructions which I then gave, such a state of religious feeling, such steady and confirmed walking with God, among Christians, as I have seen since the change in my views and instructions.

Some further considerations under this head, I must defer till my next.

LECTURE V.

February 26, 1840

SANCTIFICATION- No. 5

by the Rev. Charles G. Finney

Text.--1 Thess. 5:23-24: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it."

I might urge a great many other considerations, and as I have said, fill a book with scriptures, and arguments, and demonstrations, of the attainability of entire sanctification in this life.

But I forbear, and at present will urge only one more consideration, a consideration which has great weight in some minds. It is a question of great importance, at least in some minds, whether any actually ever did attain this state. Some who believe it attainable, do not consider it of much importance to show that it has actually been attained. Now I freely admit, that it may be attainable, although it never has been attained. Yet it appears to me that as a matter of encouragement to the Church, it is of great importance whether, as a matter of fact, a state of entire holiness has been attained in this life. This question covers much ground. But for the sake of brevity, I design to examine but one case, and see whether there is reason to believe that in one instance, at least, it has been attained. The case to which I allude is that of Paul. And I propose to take up and examine the passages that speak of him, for the purpose of ascertaining whether there is evidence that he ever attained to this state in this life.

And here let me say that to my own mind it seems plain, that Paul and John, to say nothing of the other Apostles, designed and expected the Church to understand them as speaking from experience, and as having received of that fulness which they taught to be in Christ and in His gospel.

And I wish to say again and more expressly, that I do not rest the practicability of attaining a state of entire holiness at all upon the question, whether any ever have attained it any more than I would rest the question, whether the world ever will be converted upon the fact whether it ever has been converted. I have been surprised, when the fact that a state of entire holiness has been attained, is urged as one argument among a great many to prove its attainability, and that too merely as an encouragement to Christians to lay hold upon this blessing, that objectors and reviewers fasten upon this as the doctrine of sanctification, as if by

calling this particular question in doubt, they could overthrow all the other proof of its attainability. Now this is utterly absurd. When, then, I examine the character of Paul with this object in view, if it should not appear clear to you that he did attain this state, you are not to overlook the fact, that its attainability is settled by other arguments, on grounds entirely independent of the question whether it has been attained or not; and that I merely use this as an argument, simply because to me it appears forcible, and to afford great encouragement to Christians to press after this state.

I will first make some remarks in regard to the manner in which the language of Paul, when speaking of himself, should be understood; and then proceed to an examination of the passages which speak of his Christian character.

- 1. His revealed character, demands that we should understand him to mean all that he says, when speaking in his own favor.*
- 2. The Spirit of inspiration would guard him against speaking too highly of himself.*
- 3. No man ever seemed to possess greater modesty, and to feel more unwilling to exalt his own attainments.*
- 4. If he considered himself as not having attained a state of entire sanctification, and as often, if not in all things, falling short of his duty, we may expect to find him acknowledging this in the deepest self-abasement.*
- 5. If he is charged with living in sin, and with being wicked in any thing, we may expect him, when speaking under inspiration, not to justify, but unequivocally condemn himself in those things.*

Now in view of these facts, let us examine those scriptures in which he speaks of himself and is spoken of by others.

(1.) 1 Thess. 2:10: "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblamably, we behaved ourselves among you that believe." Upon this text I remark:

- (a) Here he unqualifiedly asserts his own holiness. This language is very strong, "How holily, justly, and unblamably." If to be holy, just, and unblamable, be not entire sanctification, what is?

(b) He appeals to the heart-searching God for the truth of what he says, and to their own observation; calling on God and on them also to bear witness, that he had been holy and without blame.

(c) Here we have the testimony of an inspired Apostle, in the most unqualified language, asserting his own entire sanctification. Was he deceived? Can it be that he knew himself all the time to have been living in sin? If such language as this does not amount to an unqualified assertion that he had lived among them without sin, what can be known by the use of human language?

(2.) 2 Cor. 6:3-7: "Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed; but in all things, approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." Upon these verses I remark:

(a) Paul asserts that he gave no offence in any thing, but in all things approved himself as a minister of God. Among other things he did this, "by pureness," "by the Holy Ghost," "by love unfeigned," "and by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." How could so modest a man as Paul speak of himself in this manner, unless he knew himself to be in a state of entire sanctification, and thought it of great importance that the Church should know it?

(3.) 2 Cor. 1:12: "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward." This passage plainly implies the same thing, and was manifestly said for the same purpose--to declare the greatness of the grace of God as manifested in himself.

(4.) Acts 24:16: "And herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." Paul

doubtless at this time had an enlightened conscience. If an inspired Apostle could affirm, that he "always" had a "conscience void of offence toward God and toward men", must he not have been in a state of entire sanctification?

(5.) 2 Tim. 1:3: "I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with a pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day." Here again he affirms, that he serves God with a pure conscience. Could this be, if he was often, and perhaps every day, as some suppose, violating his conscience?

(6.) Gal. 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." This does not assert, but strongly implies that he lived without sin.

(7.) Gal. 6:14: "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." This text also affords the same inference as above.

(8.) Phil. 1:21: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Here the Apostle affirms that for him to live was as if Christ lived in the Church. How could he say this, unless his example, and doctrine, and spirit, were those of Christ?

(9.) Acts 20:26: "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men." Upon this I remark:

(a) This passage, taken in its connection, shows clearly, the impression that Paul desired to make upon the minds of those to whom he speaks.

(b) It is certain that he could in no proper sense be "pure of the blood of all men," unless he had done his whole duty. If he had been sinfully lacking in any grace, or virtue, or labor, could he have said this? Certainly not.

(10.) 1 Cor. 4:16, 17: "Wherefore, I beseech you, be ye followers of

me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every Church." I remark:

(a) Here Paul manifestly sets himself up as an example to the Church. How could he do this, if he were living in sin?

(b) He sent Timotheus to them to refresh their memories, in regard to his doctrine and practice; implying that what he taught in every Church, he himself practiced.

(11.) 1 Cor. 11:1: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." Here Paul commands them to follow him, "as he followed Christ;" not so far as he followed Christ, as some seem to understand it, but to follow him because he followed Christ. How could he, in this unqualified manner, command the Church to copy his example, unless he knew himself to be blameless?

(12.) Phil. 3:17, 20: "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample." "For our conversation is in heaven, from whence we also look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." Here again, Paul calls upon the Church to follow him, and particularly to notice those that did copy his example, and assigns as the reason, "for our conversation is in heaven."

(13.) Phil. 4:9: "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you." The Philippians were commanded to "do those things which they had learned, and received, and SEEN in him." And then he adds, that if they "do those things, the God of peace shall be with them." Now can it be that he meant that they should understand any thing less, than that he had lived without sin among them?

I will next examine those passages which are supposed by some, to imply that Paul was not in a state of entire sanctification.

(14.) Acts 15:36-40: "And some days after, Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have

preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed to Cyprus: and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren, unto the grace of God." Upon this passage I remark:

(a) This contention between Paul and Barnabas was founded upon the fact, that John, who was a nephew of Barnabas, had once abruptly left them in their travels, it would seem without any justifiable reason, and had returned home.

(b) It appears that the confidence of Barnabas in his nephew was restored.

(c) That Paul was not as yet satisfied of the stability of his character, and thought it dangerous to trust him as a traveling companion and fellow-laborer. It is not intimated, nor can it be fairly implied that either of them sinned in this contention.

(d) It sufficiently accounts for what occurred, that they disagreed in their views of the expediency of taking John with them.

(e) Being men of principle, neither of them felt it to be his duty to yield to the opinion of the other.

(f) If either were to be blamed, it seems that Barnabas was in fault, rather than Paul, inasmuch as he determined to take John with him without having consulted Paul. And he persisted in this determination until he met with such firm resistance on the part of Paul, that he took John and sailed abruptly for Cyprus; while Paul choosing Silas, as he companion, was recommended by the brethren to the grace of God, and departed. Now certainly there is nothing in this transaction, that Paul or any good man, or an angel, under the circumstances, need to have been ashamed of, that we can discover. It does not appear, that Paul ever acted more from a regard to the glory of God and the good of religion, than in

this transaction. And I would humbly inquire what spirit is that which finds sufficient evidence in this case to charge an inspired Apostle with rebellion against God? But even admitting that he did sin in this case, where is the evidence that he was not afterwards sanctified when he wrote the epistles?--for this was before the writing of any of his epistles.

(15.) Acts 23:1-5: "And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall; for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people." In this case sinful anger has been imputed to Paul; but so far as I can see, without any just reason. To my mind it seems plain, that the contrary is to be inferred. It appears that Paul was not personally acquainted with the then officiating high priest. And he manifested the utmost regard to the authority of God in quoting from the Old Testament, "Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people"--implying, that notwithstanding the abuse he had received, he should not have made the reply, had he known him to have been the high priest.

(16.) Rom. 7: from the 14th to the 25th verse, have by many been supposed to be an epitome of Paul's experience at the time he wrote the epistle. Upon this I remark:

(a) The connection and drift of Paul's reasoning shows that the case of which he was speaking, whether his own or the case of some one else, was adduced by him to illustrate the influence of the law upon the carnal mind.

(b) This is a case in which sin had the entire dominion, and overcame all his resolutions of obedience.

(c) That his use of the singular pronoun and in the first person, proves nothing in regard to whether or not he was speaking of himself, for this is common with him, and with other writers, when using illustrations.

(d) He keeps up the personal pronoun and passes into the 8th chapter; at the beginning of which, he represents himself or the person of whom he is speaking, as being not only in a different but in an exactly opposite state of mind. Now if the seventh chapter contains Paul's experience, whose experience is this in the eighth chapter? Are we to understand them both as the experience of Paul? If so, we must understand him as first speaking of his experience before and then after he was sanctified. He begins the eighth chapter by saying, "There is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;" and assigns as a reason, that "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus had made him free from the law of sin and death." The law of sin and death was that law in his members, or the influence of the flesh, of which he had so bitterly complained in the seventh chapter. But now it appears that he has passed into a state in which he is made free from this influence of the flesh--is emancipated and dead to the world, and to the flesh, and in a state in which "there is no condemnation." Now if there was no condemnation in the state in which he was, it must have been, either because he did not sin; or, if he did sin, because the law did not condemn him; or because the law of God was repealed or abrogated. Now if the penalty of the law was so set aside in his case, that he could sin without condemnation, this is a real abrogation of the law. For a law without a penalty is no law, and if the law is set aside, there is no longer any standard, and he was neither sinful nor holy. But as the law was not and cannot be set aside, its penalty was not and cannot be so abrogated as not to condemn every sin. If Paul lived without condemnation, it must be because he lived without sin.

To me it does not appear as if Paul speaks of his own experience in the seventh chapter of Romans, but that he merely supposes a case by way of illustration, and speaks in the first person and in the present

tense, simply because it was convenient and suitable to his purpose. His object manifestly was, in this and in the beginning of the eighth chapter, to contrast the influence of the law and of the gospel--to describe in the seventh chapter the state of a man who was living in sin, and every day condemned by the law, convicted and constantly struggling with his own corruptions, but continually overcome,--and in the eighth chapter to exhibit a person in the enjoyment of gospel liberty, where the righteousness of the law was fulfilled in the heart by the grace of Christ. The seventh chapter may well apply either to a person in a backslidden state, or to a convicted person who had never been converted. The eighth chapter can clearly be applicable to none but to those who are in a state of entire sanctification.

I have already said that the seventh chapter contains the history of one over whom sin has dominion. Now to suppose that this was the experience of Paul when he wrote the epistle, or of any one who was in the liberty of the gospel, is absurd and contrary to the experience of every person who ever enjoyed gospel liberty. And further, this is as expressly contradicted in the sixth chapter as it can be. As I said, the seventh chapter exhibits one over whom sin has dominion; but God says, in the sixth chapter and fourteenth verse, "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace."

I remark finally upon the passage, that if Paul was speaking of himself in the seventh chapter of Romans, and really giving a history of his own experience, it proves nothing at all in regard to his subsequent sanctification; for,

(e) If this was his experience at the time he wrote the epistle, it would prove nothing in regard to what afterwards transpired in his own experience.

(f) The eighth chapter shows conclusively, that it was not this experience at the time he wrote the epistle. The fact that the translators have separated the seventh and eighth chapters, as I have before said, has led to much error in the understanding of this passage. Nothing is more certain than that the two chapters were designed to describe not only different experiences, but

experiences opposite to each other. And that both these experiences should belong to the same person at the same time, is manifestly impossible. If therefore Paul is speaking in this connection of his own experience, we are bound to understand the eighth chapter as describing his experience at the time he wrote the epistle; and the seventh chapter as descriptive of a former experience.

Now therefore, if any one understands the seventh chapter as describing a Christian experience, he must understand it as giving the exercises of one in a very imperfect state; and the eighth chapter as descriptive of a soul in a state of entire sanctification. So that this epistle, instead of militating against the idea of Paul's entire sanctification, upon the supposition that he was speaking of himself, fully establishes the fact that he was in that state.

(17.) Phil. 3:10-15: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you." Upon this passage I remark:

(a) Here is plain allusion to the Olympic games, in which men ran for a prize, and were not crowned until the end of the race, however well they might run.

(b) Paul speaks of two kinds of perfection here, one of which he claims to have attained, and the other he had not. The perfection which he had not attained, was that which he did not expect to attain until the end of his race, nor indeed until he had attained the resurrection from the dead. Until then he was not and did not

expect to be perfect, in the sense that he should "apprehend all that for which he was apprehended of Christ Jesus." But all this does not imply that he was not living without sin, any more than it implies that Christ was living in sin when he said, "I must walk today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected." In this Christ speaks of a perfection which he had not attained.

Now it is manifest that it was the glorified state to which Paul had not attained, and which perfection he was pressing after. But in the 15th verse, he speaks of another kind of perfection which he professed to have attained. "Let us therefore," he says, "as many as are perfect, be thus minded;" i.e. let us be pressing after this high state of perfection in glory, "if by any means we may attain unto the resurrection of the dead."

Now it is manifest to my mind, that Paul does not in this passage, teach expressly or impliedly that he was living in sin, but the direct opposite--that he meant to say as he had said in many other places, that he was unblamable in respect to sin, but that he was aspiring after higher attainments, and meant to be aspiring after higher attainments, and meant to be satisfied with nothing short of eternal glory.

In relation to the character of Paul, let me say:

- (a) If Paul was not sinless, he was an extravagant boaster, and such language used by any minister in these days would be considered as the language of an extravagant boaster.
- (b) This setting himself up as an example, so frequently and fully, without any caution or qualification, was highly dangerous to the interests of the Church, if he were not in a state of entire sanctification.
- (c) It was as wicked as it was dangerous.
- (d) His language in appealing to God, that in his life and heart he was blameless, was blasphemous, unless he was really what he professed to be; and if he was what he professed to be, he was in a state of entire sanctification.

(e) There is no reason for doubting his having attained this state.

(f) It is doing dishonor to God, to maintain, under these circumstances, that Paul had not attained the blessing of entire sanctification.

(g) He nowhere confesses sin after he became an Apostle, but invariably justifies himself, appealing to man and to God, for his entire integrity and blamelessness of heart and life.

(h) To accuse him of sin in these circumstances, without evidence, is not only highly injurious to him, but disgraceful to the cause of religion.

(i) To charge him with sin, when he claims to have been blameless, is either to accuse him of falsehood or delusion.

(k) To maintain the sinfulness of this Apostle, is to deny the grace of the gospel, and charge God foolishly. And I cannot but inquire, why is this great effort in the Church to maintain, that Paul lived in sin, and was never wholly sanctified till death?

LECTURE VI.

March 11, 1840

SANCTIFICATION- No. 6

by the Rev. Charles G. Finney

Text.--1 Thess. 5:23-24: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it."

In pursuing this subject, I am

VII. To answer some objections to the doctrine of entire sanctification.

In proceeding to answer some of the more prominent objections to the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life, I will begin with those passages of scripture that are supposed to contradict it.

1. 1 Kings 8:46: "If they sin against thee, (for there is no man that sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives unto the land of the enemy, far or near." On this passage I remark:

(1.) That this sentiment, in nearly the same language, is repeated in 2 Chron. 6:26, and in Eccl. 7:20, where the same original word in the same form is used.

(2.) These are the strongest passages I know of in the Old Testament, and the same remarks are applicable to the three.

(3.) I will quote, for the satisfaction of the reader, the note of Adam Clarke upon this passage, and also that of Barclay, the celebrated and highly spiritual author of "An Apology for the True Christian Divinity." And let me say, that they appear to me to be satisfactory answers to the objection founded upon these passages.

CLARKE: "If they sin against thee."--This must refer to some general defection from truth; to some species of false worship, idolatry, or corruption of the truth and ordinances of the Most High; as for it, they are here stated to be delivered into the hands of their enemies, and carried away captive, which was the general punishment of idolatry; and what is called, ver. 47, acting perversely, and committing wickedness.

"If they sin against thee, for there is no man that sinneth not." The second clause, as it is here translated, renders the supposition, in the first clause, entirely nugatory; for, if there be no man that sinneth not, it is useless to say, IF they sin: but this contradiction is taken away by reference to the original *ki yechetau lak*, which should be translated IF they shall sin against thee: or, should they sin against thee, *ki ein Adam asher lo yecheta*; "For there is no man that may not sin:" i.e. there is no man impeccable, none infallible; none that is not liable to transgress. This is the true meaning of the phrase in various parts of the Bible, and so our translators have understood the original; for, even in the 31st verse of this chapter, they have translated *yecheta*, IF a man TRESPASS; which certainly implies he might or might not do it: and in this way they have translated the same word, IF a soul SIN,

in Lev. 5:1, and 6:2, 1 Sam. 2:25, 2 Chron. 6:22, and in several other places. The truth is, the Hebrew has no mood to express words in the permissive or optative way, but to express this sense it uses the future tense of the conjugation kal.

"This text has been a wonderful stronghold for all who believe that there is no redemption from sin in this life; that no man can live without committing sin: and that we cannot be entirely freed from it till we die. 1. The text speaks no such doctrine, it only speaks of the possibility of every man sinning; and this must be true of a state of probation. 2. There is not another text in the divine records that is more to the purpose than this. 3. The doctrine is flatly in opposition to the design of the gospel; for Jesus came to save his people from their sins, and to destroy the works of the devil. 4. It is a dangerous and destructive doctrine, and should be blotted out of every Christian's creed. There are too many who are seeking to excuse their crimes by all means in their power; and we need not embody their excuses in a creed, to complete their deception, by stating that their sins are unavoidable."

BARCLAY: "Secondly--Another objection is from two places of scripture, much of one signification. The one is, 1 Kings 8:46: For there is no man that sinneth not. The other is Eccl. 7:20: For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

"I answer: 1. These affirm nothing of a daily and continual sinning, so as never to be redeemed from it; but only that all have sinned, or that there is none that doth not sin, though not always, so as never to cease to sin; and in this lies the question. Yea, in that place of the Kings he speaks within two verses of the returning of such with all their souls and hearts; which implies a possibility of leaving off sin. 2. There is a respect to be had to the seasons and dispensations; for if it should be granted that in Solomon's time there were none that sinned not, it will not follow that there are none such now, or that it is a thing not now attainable by the grace of God under the gospel. 3. And lastly, This whole objection hangs upon a false interpretation; for the original Hebrew word may be read in the Potential Mood, thus, There is no man who may not sin, as well as in the Indicative;

so both the Old Latin, Junius, and Tremellius, and Votablus, have it; and the same word is so used, Psalm 119:11: Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee, in the Potential Mood, and not in the Indicative; which being more answerable to the universal scope of the scriptures, the testimony of the truth, and the sense of almost all interpreters, doubtless ought to be so understood, and the other interpretation rejected as spurious."

(4.) Whatever may be thought of the views of these authors, to me, it is a plain and satisfactory answer to the objection founded upon these passages, that the objection might be strictly true under the Old Testament dispensation, and prove nothing in regard to the attainability of a state of entire sanctification under the New. What, does the New Testament dispensation differ nothing from the Old in its advantages for the acquisition of holiness? If it be true that no one under the comparatively dark dispensation of Judaism, attained a state of entire and permanent sanctification, does that prove such a state unattainable under the Gospel? It is expressly stated in the Epistle to the Hebrews, that "the Old Covenant made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did." Under the Old Covenant, God expressly promised that He would make a new one with the house of Israel in "writing the law in their hearts," and in "engraving it in their inward parts." And this New Covenant was to be made with the house of Israel, under the Christian dispensation. What then do all such passages in the Old Testament prove in relation to the privileges and holiness of Christians under the New Testament?

(5.) Whether any of the Old Testament saints did so far receive the New Covenant by way of anticipation, as to enter upon a state of entire and permanent sanctification, it is not my present purpose to inquire. Nor will I inquire, whether, admitting that Solomon said in his day, that "there was not a just man upon the earth that liveth and sinneth not," the same could with equal truth have been asserted of every generation under the Jewish dispensation.

(6.) It is expressly asserted of Abraham and multitudes of the Old Testament saints, that they "died in faith, not having received the promises." Now what can this mean? It cannot be that they did not

know the promises, for to them the promises were made. It cannot mean that they did not receive Christ, for the Bible expressly asserts that they did,--that "Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day,"--that Moses, and indeed all the Old Testament saints, had so much knowledge of Christ, as a Savior to be revealed, as to bring them into a state of salvation. But still they did not receive the promise of the Spirit as it is poured out under the Christian dispensation. They did not receive the light, and the glory of the Christian dispensation, nor the fulness of the Holy Spirit. And it is asserted in the Bible, that "they without us," i.e. without our privileges, "could not be made perfect."

2. The next objection is founded upon the Lord's Prayer. In this, Christ has taught us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Here it is objected that if a person should become entirely sanctified, he could no longer use this clause of this prayer, which it is said, was manifestly designed to be used by the Church to the end of time. Upon this prayer I remark:

(1.) Christ has taught us to pray for entire and permanent sanctification, "Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven."

(2.) He designed that we should expect this prayer to be answered, or that we should mock God, by asking what we did not believe was agreeable to His will, and that too, which we know could not consistently be granted; and that we are to repeat this insult to God as often as we pray.

(3.) The petition for forgiveness of our trespasses it is plain, must apply to past sins, and not to sins we are committing at the time we make the prayer; for it would be absurd and abominable to pray for the forgiveness of a sin which we were then in the act of committing.

(4.) This prayer cannot properly be made in respect to any sin of which we have not repented; for it would be highly abominable in the sight of God, to pray for the forgiveness of a sin of which we did not repent.

(5.) If there be any hour or day in which a man has committed no actual sin, he could not consistently make this prayer in reference to that hour or that day.

(6.) But at that very time, it would be highly proper for him to make this prayer in relation to all his past sins, and that too although he may have repented of and confessed them, and prayed for their forgiveness, a thousand times before.

(7.) And although his sins may be forgiven, he ought still to feel penitent in view of them,--to repent of them both in this world and in the world to come, as often as he remembers them. And it is perfectly suitable, so long as he lives in the world, to say the least, to repent and repeat the request for forgiveness. For myself, I am unable to see why this passage should be made a stumbling block; for if it be improper to pray for the forgiveness of past sins of which we have repented, then it is improper to pray for forgiveness at all. And if this prayer cannot be used with propriety in reference to past sins, of which we have already repented, it cannot properly be used at all, except upon the absurd supposition, that we are to pray for the forgiveness of sins which we are now committing, and of which we have not repented. And if it be improper to use this form of prayer in reference to all past sins of which we have repented, it is just as improper to use it in reference to sins committed to-day or yesterday, of which we have repented.

3. Another objection is founded on James 3:1, 2: "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." Upon this passage I remark:

(1.) The term rendered masters here, may be rendered teachers, critics, or sensors, and be understood either in a good or bad sense. The Apostle exhorts the brethren not to be many masters, because if they are so they will incur the greater condemnation; "for," says he, "in many things we offend all." The fact that we all offend is here urged as a reason why we should not be many masters; which shows that the term masters is here used in a bad sense. "Be not many masters," for if we are masters, "we shall receive the greater condemnation," because we are all offenders. Now I understand this to be the simple meaning of this passage; do not many [or any] of you become sensors, or critics, and set yourselves up to judge and condemn others. For

inasmuch as you have all sinned yourselves, and we are all great offenders, we shall receive the greater condemnation, if we set ourselves as censors. "For with what judgment ye judge ye shall judge, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

(2.) It does not appear to me that the Apostle designs to affirm any thing at all of the present character of himself or of those to whom he wrote; nor to have had the remotest allusion to the doctrine of entire sanctification, but simply to affirm a well established truth in its application to a particular sin; that if they became censors, and injuriously condemned others, inasmuch as they had all committed many sins, they should receive the greater condemnation.

(3.) That the Apostle did not design to deny the doctrine of Christian perfection or entire sanctification, as maintained in these lectures, seems evident from the fact that he immediately subjoins, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man and able also to bridle the whole body."

4. Another objection is founded upon 1 John 1:8: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Upon this I remark:

(1.) This verse is immediately preceded by the assertion that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." Now it would be very remarkable, if immediately after this assertion, the Apostle should mean to say that it does not cleanse us from all sin, and if we say it does we deceive ourselves. But if this objection be true, it involves the Apostle in as palpable a contradiction as could be expressed.

(2.) If the Apostle meant to say that we deceive ourselves, if we suppose ourselves to be in a state of entire sanctification, his assertion in the next verse is truly another wonderful contradiction. "If," he continues, "we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." In another place he says, "all unrighteousness is sin." Now, if it be true that God is really just to forgive and cleanse us from all unrighteousness or from all sin, and "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us"--not shall, but actually does cleanse us,--"from all sin;" how remarkable it would be,

if, between two such assertions as these, the Apostle meant to be understood to teach, that if we say His blood cleanseth us from all unrighteousness, we deceive ourselves!

(3.) But the tenth verse shows plainly what the Apostle meant, for he merely repeats what he had said in the eighth verse: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar."

This then is the meaning of the whole passage. If we say that we are not sinners, i.e. have no sin to need the blood of Christ, that we have never sinned, and consequently need no Savior, we deceive ourselves. For we have sinned, and nothing but the blood of Christ cleanseth us from sin. And now, if we will not deny but confess that we have sinned, "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." "But if we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

5. It has been objected to the view I have given of Jer. 31:31-34, that if that passage is to be considered as a promise of entire sanctification, this proves too much. Inasmuch as it is said, "they shall all know the Lord from the least to the greatest," therefore, says the objector, it would prove that all the Church has been in a state of entire sanctification ever since the commencement of the New Testament dispensation. To this objection I answer:

(1.) I have already, I trust, shown that this promise is conditioned upon faith, and that the blessing cannot possibly be received but by faith.

(2.) It is doubtless true that many have received this covenant in its fulness.

(3.) A promise may be unconditional or absolute, and certain of a fulfillment in relation to the whole Church as a body, in some period of its history, which is nevertheless conditional in relation to its application to any particular individuals or generation of individuals.

(4.) I think it is in entire keeping with the prophecies to understand this passage as expressly promising to the Church a day, when all her members shall be sanctified, and when "holiness to the Lord shall be written upon the bells of the horses." Indeed it appears to be

abundantly foretold that the Church as a body shall, in this world, enter into a state of entire sanctification, in some period of her history; and that this will be the carrying out of these promises of the New Covenant, of which we are speaking. But it is by no means an objection to this view of the subject, that all the Church have not yet entered into this state.

It has been maintained, that this promise in Jer. has been fulfilled already. This has been argued--

(1.) From the fact that the promise has no condition, expressed or implied, and the responsibility therefore, rests with God.

(2.) That the Apostle, in his Epistle to the Hebrews quotes it as to be fulfilled at the advent of Christ. Now to this I answer:

It might as well be argued that all the rest of the promises and prophecies relating to the gospel day were fulfilled, because the time had come when the promise was due. Suppose it were denied that the world would ever be converted, or that there ever would be any more piety in the world than there has been and is at present; and when the promises and prophecies respecting the latter day glory, and the conversion of the world, should be adduced in proof, that the world is to be converted, it should be replied that these promises had already been fulfilled--that they were unconditional--and that the advent of the Messiah, was the time when they became due. But suppose, that in answer to this, it should be urged that nothing has ever yet occurred in the history of this world that seems at all to have come up to the meaning of these promises and prophecies--that the world has never been in the state which seems to be plainly described in these promises and prophecies--and that it cannot be that any thing the world has yet experienced is what is meant by such language as is used in the Bible, in relation to the future state of the world. Now suppose, to this it should be replied, that the event has shown what the promises and prophecies really meant--that we are to interpret the language by the fact--that as the promises and prophecies were unconditional, and the gospel day has really come when they were to be fulfilled, we certainly know, whatever their language may be, that they meant nothing more than what the world has already realized? This would be

precisely like the reasoning of some persons in relation to Jer. 31:31-34. They say--

(a) The promises are without condition.

(b) The time has come for their fulfillment. Therefore the world has realized their fulfillment, and all that was intended by them; that the facts in the case settle the question of construction and interpretation; and we know that they never intended to promise a state of entire sanctification, because as a matter of fact no such state has been realized by the Church. Indeed! Then the Bible is the most hyperbolical, not to say ridiculous book in the universe. If what the world has seen in regard to the extension and universal prevalence of the Redeemer's kingdom, is all that the promises relating to these events really mean, then the Bible of all books in the world, is the most calculated to deceive mankind. But who, after all, in the exercise of his sober sense, will admit any such reasoning as this? Who does not know, or may not know, if he will use his common sense, that although these promises and prophecies are unconditionally expressed, yet that they are as a matter of fact really conditioned upon a right exercise of human agency, and that a time is to come, when the world shall be converted; and that the conversion of the world implies in itself a vastly higher state of religious feeling and action in the Church than has, for centuries, or perhaps ever been witnessed--and that the promise of the New Covenant is still to be fulfilled in a higher sense than it ever has been? If any man doubts this, I must believe that he does not understand his Bible.

Faith, then, is an indispensable condition of the fulfillment of all promises of spiritual blessings, the reception of which involves the exercise of our agency.

Again, it is not a little curious, that those who give this interpretation to these promises imagine that they see a very close connection, if not an absolute identity of our views and those of modern Antinomian Perfectionists. Now it is of importance to remark, that this is one of the leading peculiarities of that sect. They insist that these are promises without condition, and that consequently their own watchfulness, prayers, exertions,

and the right exercise of their own agency, are not at all to be taken into the account in the matter of their perseverance in holiness--that the responsibility is thrown entirely upon Christ, inasmuch as His promises are without condition. The thing that He has promised, say they, is that, without any condition, He will keep them in a state of entire sanctification--that therefore, for them to confess sin, is to accuse Christ of breaking His promises. For them to make any efforts at perseverance in holiness is to set aside the gospel and go back to the law. For them even to fear that they shall sin, is to fear that Christ will tell a lie.

The fact is that this, and their setting aside the moral law, are the two great errors of their whole system. It would be easy to show, that the adoption of this sentiment, that these promises are without condition, expressed or implied, has led to some of their most fanatical and absurd opinions and practices. They take the ground that no condition is expressed, and that therefore none is implied; overlooking the fact, that the very nature of the thing promised, implies that faith is the condition upon which its fulfillment must depend. It is hoped, therefore, that our brethren who charge us with perfectionism, will be led to see that to themselves, and not to us, does this charge belong.

These are the principal passages that occur to my mind, and those I believe upon which the principal stress has been laid by the opposers of this doctrine. And as I do not wish to protract the discussion, I shall omit the examination of other passages, as I design in my future lectures to answer such objections as may seem to be of weight. This I design to do without either the spirit or the form of controversy, noticing and answering such objections as may from time to time occur to my own mind, or as may be suggested by others.

[Objections concluded in our next.]

LECTURE VII.

March 25, 1840

SANCTIFICATION- No. 7

by the Rev. Charles G. Finney

Text.--1 Thess. 5:23-24: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it."

There are many objections to the doctrine of entire sanctification, besides those derived from the passages of scripture I have considered. Some of these objections, are doubtless honestly felt, and deserve to be considered. I will then proceed to notice such of them as now occur to my mind.

6. It is objected that the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life, tends to the errors of modern perfectionism. This objection has been urged by some good men, and, I doubt not, honestly urged. But still I cannot believe that they have duly considered the matter. It seems to me that one fact will set aside this objection. It is well known that the Wesleyan Methodists have, as a denomination, from the earliest period of their history, maintained this doctrine in all its length and breadth. Now if such is the tendency of the doctrine, it is passing strange that this tendency has never developed itself in that denomination. So far as I can learn, the Methodists have been perfectly exempt from the errors held by modern perfectionists. Perfectionists, as a body, and I believe with very few exceptions, have arisen out of those denominations that deny the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life.

Now the reason of this is obvious to my mind. When professors of religion, who have been all their life subject to bondage, begin to inquire earnestly for deliverance from their sins, they have found neither sympathy nor instruction, in regard to the prospect of getting rid of them in this life. Then they have gone to the Bible, and there found, in almost every part of it, Christ presented as a Savior from their sins. But when they proclaim this truth, they are at once treated as heretics and fanatics by their brethren, until, being overcome of evil, they fall into censoriousness; and finding the Church so decidedly and utterly wrong, in opposition to this one great important truth, they lose confidence in their ministers and the Church, and, being influenced by a wrong spirit, Satan takes the advantage of them, and drives them to the extreme of error and delusion. This I believe to be the true history of many of the most pious members of the Calvinistic churches. On

the contrary, Methodists are very much secured against these errors. They are taught that Jesus Christ is a Savior from all sin in this world. And when they inquire for deliverance, they are pointed to Jesus Christ, as a present and all-sufficient Redeemer. Finding sympathy and instruction, on this great and agonizing point, their confidence in their ministers and their brethren, remains and they walk quietly with them.

And here let me say, that it is my full conviction, that there are but two ways in which ministers of the present day can prevent members of their churches from becoming perfectionists. One is, to suffer them to live so far from God, that they will not inquire after holiness of heart; and the other is, most fully to inculcate the glorious doctrine, that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," and that it is the high privilege and the duty of Christians, to live in a state of entire consecration to God.

It seems to me impossible that the tendency of this doctrine should be to the peculiar errors of the modern perfectionists, and yet not an instance occur among all the Methodist ministers, or the thousands of their members, for one hundred years.

I can say, from my own experience, that since I have understood and fully taught the doctrine as I now hold it, I see no tendency among those who listen to my instructions to these errors, while in churches not far distant, where the doctrine which we inculcate here is opposed, there seems to be a constant tendency, among their most pious people to Antinomian perfectionism. How can this be accounted for on any other principle than the one above stated? I can truly say that those persons here, who have been the first to lay hold of the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life, and who give the highest evidence of enjoying this blessing, have been at the farthest remove from the errors of the modern perfectionists. I might state a great many facts upon this subject, but for the sake of brevity I omit them.

But aside from the facts, what is the foundation of all the errors of the modern perfectionists? Every one who has examined them knows that they may be summed up in this, the abrogation of the moral law. And now I would humbly inquire, what possible tendency can there be to their errors, if the moral law be preserved in the system of truth? In these days a man is culpably ignorant of that class of people, who does not know that the "head and front of their offending," and falling, is the setting aside the law of God.

The setting aside the Christian ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper, proceeds upon the same foundation, and manifestly grows out of the abrogation of the law of God. But retain the law of God, as the Methodists have done, and as other denominations have done, who from the days of the Reformation have maintained this same doctrine, and there is certainly no tendency to Antinomian perfectionism.

I have many things to say upon the tendency of this doctrine, but at present this must suffice.

By some it is said to be identical with Perfectionism; and attempts are made to show in what particulars Antinomian Perfectionism and our views are the same. On this I remark:

(1.) It seems to have been a favorite policy of certain controversial writers for a long time, instead of meeting a proposition in the open field of fair and Christian argument, to give it a bad name, and attempt to put it down, not by force of argument, but by showing that it is identical with or sustains a near relation to Pelagianism, Antinomianism, Calvinism, or some other ism, against which certain classes of minds are deeply prejudiced. In the recent controversy between what is called Old and New School Divinity, who has not witnessed with pain the frequent attempts that have been made to put down the New School Divinity, as it is called, by calling it Pelagianism, and quoting certain passages from Pelagius, and other writers, to show the identity of sentiment that exists between them.

This is a very unsatisfactory method of attaching or defending any doctrine. There are, no doubt, many points of agreement between Pelagius and all other orthodox divines, and so there are many points of disagreement between them. There are also many points of agreement between modern Perfectionists and all Evangelical Christians, and so there are many points of disagreement between them and the Christian Church in general. That there are some points of agreement between their views and my own, is no doubt true. And that we totally disagree in regard to those points that constitute their great peculiarities, is, if I understand them, also true.

But did I really agree in all points with Augustine, or Edwards, or

Pelagius, or the modern Perfectionists, neither the good or the ill name of any of these would prove my sentiments to be either right or wrong. It would remain after all, to show that those with whom I agreed were either right or wrong, in order, on the one hand, to establish that for which I contend, or on the other to condemn that which I maintain. It is often more convenient to give a doctrine or an argument a bad name, than it is soberly and satisfactorily to reply to it.

(2.) It is not a little curious, that we should be charged with holding the same sentiments with the Perfectionists; and yet they seem to be mere violently opposed to our views, since they have come to understand the, than almost any other persons whatever. I have been informed by one of their leaders, that he regards me as one of the master builders of Babylon. And I also understand, that they manifest greater hostility to the Oberlin Evangelist than almost any other class of persons.

(3.) I will not take time, nor is it needful to go into an investigation or a denial even of the supposed or alleged points of agreement between us and the Perfectionists. But for the present it must be sufficient to request you to read and examine for yourselves.

With respect to the modern Perfectionists, those who have been acquainted with their writings, know that some of them have gone much further from the truth than others. Some of their leading men, who commenced with them and adopted their name, stopped far short of adopting some of their most abominable errors; still maintaining the authority and perpetual obligation of the moral law, and thus have been saved from going into many of the most objectionable and destructive notions of that sect. There are many more points of agreement between that class of Perfectionists and the orthodox Church, than between any other class of them and the Christian Church. And there are still a number of important points of difference, as every one knows who is possessed of correct information upon this subject.

I abhor the idea of denouncing any class of men as altogether and utterly wrong. I am well aware that there are many of those who are termed Perfectionists, who as truly abhor the extremes of error into which many of that name have fallen, as perhaps do any persons living.

7. Another objection is, that persons could not live in this world, if they were entirely sanctified. Strange! Does holiness injure a man? Does perfect conformity to all the laws of life and health, both physical and moral, render it impossible for a man to live? If a man break off from rebellion against God, will it kill him? Does there appear to have been any thing in Christ's holiness, inconsistent with life and health? The fact is, that this objection is founded in a gross mistake in regard to what constitutes entire sanctification. It is supposed by those who hold this objection, that this state implies a continual and most intense degree of excitement, and many of those things which I have shown in my first lecture, are not at all implied in it. I have thought, that it is rather a glorified than a sanctified state, that most men have before their minds whenever they consider this subject. When Christ was upon earth, He was in a sanctified but not a glorified state. "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master." Now what is there in the moral character of Jesus Christ, as represented in His history, aside from His miraculous powers, that may not and ought not to be fully copied into the life of every Christian? I speak not of His knowledge, but of His spirit and temper. Ponder well every circumstance of His life that has come down to us, and say, beloved, what is there in it, that may not, by the grace of God, be copied into your own. And think you, that a full imitation of Him in all that relates to His moral character would render it impossible for you to live in this world?

8. Again, it is objected against our professing a state of entire sanctification, on the ground that it not only implies present obedience to the law of God, but such a formation and perfection of holy habits, as to render it certain that we shall never again sin. And that a man can no more tell when he is entirely sanctified, than he can tell how many holy acts it will take to form holy habits of such strength that he will never again sin. To this I answer:

(1.) The law of God has nothing to do with requiring this formation of holy habits. It is satisfied with present obedience, and only demands at every present moment, the full devotion of all our powers to God. It never, in any instance, complains that we have not formed such holy habits that we shall sin no more.

(2.) If it be true that a man is not entirely sanctified until his holy

habits are so fixed, as to render it certain that he will never sin again, then Adam was not in a state of entire sanctification previously to the fall, nor were the angels in this state before their fall.

(3.) If this objection be true, there is not a saint nor an angel in heaven, so far as we can know, that can, with the least propriety profess a state of entire sanctification; for how can they know that they have performed so many holy acts, as to have created such habits of holiness as to render it certain that they will never sin again.

(4.) Entire sanctification does not depend upon the formation of holy habits, nor at all consist in this. But both entire and permanent sanctification are based alone upon the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Perseverance in holiness is to be ascribed entirely to the influence of the indwelling Spirit of Christ, both now and to the end of our lives, instead of being secured at all by any habits of holiness which we may or ever shall have formed.

9. Another objection is, that the doctrine tends to spiritual pride. And is it true indeed that to become perfectly humble tends to pride? But entire humility is implied in entire sanctification. Is it true that you must remain in sin, and of course cherish pride in order to avoid pride? Is your humility more safe in your own hands, and are you more secure against spiritual pride in refusing to receive Christ as your helper, than you would be at once to embrace Him as a full Savior?

10. Again it is objected that many who have embraced this doctrine, really are spiritually proud. To this I answer:

(1.) So have many who believed the doctrine of regeneration been deceived and amazingly puffed up with the idea that they have been regenerated, when they have not. But is this a good reason for abandoning the doctrine of regeneration, or any reason why the doctrine should not be preached?

(2.) Let me inquire, whether a simple declaration of what God has done for their souls, has not been assumed as itself sufficient evidence of spiritual pride on the part of those who embraced this doctrine,

while there was in reality no spiritual pride at all? It seems next to impossible, with the present views of the Church, that an individual should really attain this state, and profess it in a manner so humble as not of course to be suspected of enormous spiritual pride? This consideration has been a snare to some who have hesitated and even neglected to declare what God had done for their souls, lest they should be accused of spiritual pride. And this has been a serious injury to their piety.

11. But again it is objected that this doctrine tends to censoriousness. To this I reply:

(1.) It is not denied that some who have professed to believe this doctrine have become censorious. But this no more condemns this doctrine than it condemns that of regeneration. And that it tends to censoriousness, might just as well be urged against every doctrine of the Bible as against this doctrine.

(2.) Let any Christian do his whole duty to the Church and the world in their present state--let him speak to them and of them as they really are, and he would of course incur the charge of censoriousness. It is therefore the most unreasonable thing in the world to suppose that the Church, in its present state, should not accuse any perfect Christian of censoriousness. Entire sanctification implies the doing of all our duty. But to do all our duty, we must rebuke sin in high places and in low places. Can this be done with all needed severity, without in many cases giving offence, and incurring the charge of censoriousness? No; it is impossible; and to maintain the contrary, would be to impeach the wisdom and holiness of Jesus Christ Himself.

12. It is objected that this doctrine lowers the standard of holiness to a level with our own experience. It is not denied that in some instances this may have been true. Nor can it be denied, that the standard of Christian perfection has been elevated much above the demands of the law, in its application to human beings in our present state of existence. It seems to have been forgotten, that the inquiry is, what does the law demand?--not of angels, and what would be entire sanctification in them; nor of Adam,

previously to the fall, when his powers of body and mind were all in a state of perfect health; not what will the law demand of us in a future state of existence; not what the law may demand of the Church in some future period of its history on earth, when the human constitution, by the universal prevalence of correct and thorough temperance principles, may have acquired its pristine health and powers;--but the question is, what does the law of God require of Christians of the present generation; of Christians in all respects in our circumstances, with all the ignorance and debility of body and mind which have resulted from the intemperance and abuse of the human constitution through so many generations?

The law levels its claims to us as we are, and a just exposition of it, as I have already said, under all the present circumstances of our being, is indispensable to a right apprehension of what constitutes entire sanctification.

To be sure, there may be danger of frittering away the claims of the law and letting down the standard. But I would humbly inquire whether, hitherto, the error has not been on the other side, and whether as a general fact, the law has not been so interpreted as naturally to beget the idea so prevalent, that if a man should become holy he could not live in this world? In a letter lately received from a beloved, and useful, and venerated minister of the gospel, while the writer expressed the greatest attachment to the doctrine of entire consecration to God, and said that he preached the same doctrine which we hold to his people every Sabbath, but by another name, still he added that it was revolting to his feelings, to hear any mere man set up the claim of obedience to the law of God. Now let me inquire, why should this be revolting to the feelings of piety? Must it not be because the law of God is supposed to require something of human beings in our state, which it does not and cannot require? Why should such a claim be thought extravagant, unless the claims of the living God be thought extravagant? If the law of God really requires no more of men than what is reasonable and possible, why should it be revolting to any mind to hear an individual profess, through the grace of God, to have attained that state? I know that the brother to whom I allude, would be almost the last man deliberately and knowingly to give any strained interpretation to the law of God; and yet, I cannot but feel that much of the difficulty that good men have upon this subject, has arisen out of a comparison of the lives of saints with a standard entirely above that which

the law of God does or can demand of persons in all respects in our circumstances.

13. Another objection is, that as a matter of fact the grace of God is not sufficient to secure the entire sanctification of saints in this life. It is maintained, that the question of the attainability of entire sanctification in this life, resolves itself after all into the question, whether the Church is, and Christians are sanctified in this life. The objectors say that nothing is sufficient grace that does not as a matter of fact, secure the faith and obedience and perfection of the saints; and, therefore, that the provisions of the gospel are in fact to be measured by the results; and that the experience of the Church decides both the meaning of the promises and the provisions of grace. Now to this I answer:

If this objection be good for any thing in regard to entire sanctification, it is equally true in regard to the spiritual state of every person in the world. If the fact that men are not perfect, proves that no provisions are made for their perfection, their being no better than they are proves that there is no provision for their being any better than they are, or that they might have aimed at being any better, with any rational hope of success. But who, except a fatalist, will admit any such conclusion as this? And yet I do not see but this conclusion is inevitable from such premises.

14. Another objection to this doctrine is, that it is contrary to the views of some of the greatest and best men in the Church,--that such men as Augustine, Calvin, Doddridge, Edwards, &c., were of a different opinion. To this I answer:

(1.) Suppose they were;--we are to call no man father in such a sense as to yield up to him the forming of our views of Christian doctrine.

(2.) This objection comes with a very ill grace from those who wholly reject their opinions on some of the most important points of Christian doctrine.

(3.) Those men all held the doctrine of physical depravity, which was manifestly the ground of their rejecting the doctrine of entire consecration to God in this life. Maintaining as they seem to have done, that the constitutional susceptibilities of body and mind were

depraved and sinful, consistency of course led them to reject the idea that persons could be entirely sanctified while in the body. Now I would ask what consistency is there in quoting them as rejecting the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life, while the reason of this rejection in their minds, was founded on the doctrine of physical depravity, which notion is entirely denied by those who quote their authority?

15. But again it is objected, that if we should attain this state of entire consecration of sanctification, we could not know it until the day of Judgment, and that to maintain its attainability is vain, inasmuch as no one can know whether he has attained it or not. To this I reply:

(1.) A man's consciousness is the highest and best evidence of the present state of his own mind. I understand consciousness to be the mind's recognition of its own states, and that it is the highest possible evidence to our own minds of what passes in our minds.

(2.) With the law of God before us as our standard, the testimony of consciousness in regard to whether the mind is conformed to that standard or not, is the highest evidence which the mind can have of a present state of conformity to that rule.

(3.) It is a testimony which we cannot doubt any more than we can doubt our existence. How do we know that we exist? I answer: by our consciousness. How do I know that I breathe, or love, or hate, or sit, or stand, or lie down, or rise up--that I am joyful or sorrowful--in short, that I exercise any emotion or volition, or affection of mind--how do I know that I sin, or repent, or believe? I answer: by my own consciousness. No testimony can be "so direct and convincing as this."

Now in order to know that my repentance is genuine, I must intellectually understand what genuine repentance is. So if I would know whether my love to God or man, or obedience to the law is genuine, I must have clearly before my mind the real spirit, and meaning, and bearing of the law of God. Having this rule before my mind, my own consciousness affords "the most direct and convincing evidence possible" of whether my present state of mind is conformed to the rule. The Spirit

of God is never employed in testifying to what my consciousness teaches, but in setting in a strong light before the mind the rule to which I am to conform my life. It is His business to make me understand, to induce me to love and obey the truth; and it is the business of consciousness to testify to my own mind, whether I do or do not obey the truth when I apprehend it. A man may be mistaken in regard to the correctness of his knowledge of the law or truth of God. He may therefore mistake the character of his exercises. But when God so presents the truth as to give the mind assurance, that it understands His mind and will upon any subject, the mind's consciousness of its own exercises in view of that truth, is "the highest and most direct possible" evidence of whether it obeys or disobeys.

(4.) If a man cannot be conscious of the character of his own exercises, how can he know when and of what he is to repent? If he has committed sin of which he is not conscious, how is he to repent of it? And if he has a holiness of which he is not conscious, how could he feel that he has peace with God?

But it is said a man may violate the law not knowing it, and consequently have no consciousness that he sinned, but that afterwards a knowledge of the law may convict him of sin. To this I reply, that if there was absolutely no knowledge that the thing in question was wrong, the doing of that thing was not sin, inasmuch as some degree of knowledge of what is right or wrong is indispensable to the moral character of any act. In such a case there may be a sinful ignorance which may involve all the guilt of those actions that were done in consequence of it; but that blameworthiness lies in the ignorance itself, and not at all in the violation of the rule of which the mind was at the time entirely ignorant.

(5.) The Bible every where assumes, that we are able to know, and unqualifiedly requires us to know what the moral state of our mind is. It commands us to examine ourselves, to know and to approve our own selves. Now how can this be done but by bringing our hearts into the light of the law of God, and then taking the testimony of our own consciousness, whether we are or are not in a state of conformity to the law? But if we are not to receive the testimony of our consciousness in regard to our sanctification, are we to receive it in respect to our

repentance or any other exercise of our mind whatever? The fact is that we may deceive ourselves, by neglecting to compare ourselves with the right standard. But when our views of the standard are right, and our consciousness is a felt, decided, unequivocal state of mind, we cannot be deceived any more than we can be deceived in regard to our own existence.

(6.) But it is said our consciousness does not teach us what the power and capacities of our minds are, and that therefore, if consciousness could teach us in respect to the kind of our exercises, it cannot teach us in regard to their degree, whether it is equal to the present capability of our mind. To this I reply:

(a) Consciousness does as unequivocally testify whether we do or do not love God with all our heart, as it does whether we love Him at all. How does a man know that he lifts as much as he can, or runs, or leaps, or walks as fast as he is able? I answer: by his own consciousness. How does he know that he repents or loves with all his heart? I answer: by his own consciousness. This is the only possible way in which he can know it.

(b) The objection implies that God has put within our reach no possible means of knowing whether we obey Him or not. The Bible does not directly reveal the fact to any man, whether he obeys God or not. It reveals his duty, but does not reveal the fact whether he obeys. It refers this testimony to his own consciousness. The Spirit of God sets our duty before us, but does not directly reveal to us whether we do it or not; for this would imply that every man is under constant inspiration.

But it is said the Bible directs our attention to the fact of whether we obey or disobey as evidence whether we are in a right state of mind or not. But I would inquire, how do we know whether we obey or disobey? How do we know any thing of our conduct but by our consciousness? Our conduct as observed by others is to them evidence of the state of our hearts. But, I repeat it, our consciousness of obedience to God, is the highest and indeed the only evidence of our true character.

(c) If a man's own consciousness is not to be a witness, either for or against him, no other testimony in the universe can ever satisfy him of the propriety of God's dealing with him in the final Judgment. Let then thousand witnesses testify that a man had committed murder, still the man could not feel condemned for it unless his own consciousness bore testimony to the fact. So if ten thousand witnesses should testify that he had performed some good act, he could feel no self-complacency, or sense of self-approbation and virtue, unless his consciousness bore its testimony to the same fact. There are cases of common occurrence, where the witnesses testify to the guilt or innocence of a man contrary to the testimony of his own consciousness. When God convicts a man of sin, it is not by contradicting his consciousness; but by setting the consciousness which he had at the time in the clear strong light of his memory, causing him to discover clearly, and to remember distinctly, what light he had, what thoughts, what convictions; in other words, what consciousnesses he had at the time. And this, let me add, is the way and the only way in which the Spirit of God can convict a man of sin, thus bringing him to condemn himself. Now suppose that God should bear testimony against a man, that at such a time he did such a thing--that such and such were all the circumstances of the case--and suppose that, at the same time, the individual is unable to remember, and appears never to have had the least consciousness of the transaction. The testimony of God in this case, could not satisfy the man's mind, or lead him into a state of self-condemnation. The only possible way in which this state of mind could be induced, would be to arouse the memory of past consciousness, and cause the whole scene to start into living reality before his mind's eye, as it passed in his own consciousness at the time. But if he had no consciousness of any such thing, and consequently no remembrance of it could possibly take place, to convict him of sin is naturally and for ever impossible.

(7.) Men may overlook what consciousness is. They may mistake the rule of duty--they may confound consciousness with a mere negative

state of mind, or that state in which a man is not conscious of a state of opposition to the truth. Yet it must for ever remain true, that to our own minds "consciousness must be the highest possible evidence" of what passes within us. And if a man does not by his own consciousness know whether he does the best that he can, under the circumstances--whether he has a single eye to the glory of God--and whether he is in a state of entire consecration to God--he cannot know it in any way whatever. And no testimony whatever, either of God or man, could, according to the laws of his being, satisfy him, and beget in him either conviction of guilt on the one hand, or self-approbation on the other.

(8.) Finally, let me ask, how those who make this objection know that they are not in a sanctified state? Has God revealed it to them? Has He revealed it in the Bible? Does the Bible say to A.B., by name, you are not in a sanctified state? Or does it lay down a rule, in the light of which his own consciousness bears this testimony against him? Has God revealed directly by His Spirit, that he is not in a sanctified state? Or does He hold the rule of duty strongly before the mind, and thus awaken the testimony of consciousness, that he is not in this state?

Now just in the same way, consciousness testifies of those that are sanctified, that they are in that state. Neither the Bible, nor the Spirit of God, makes any new or particular revelation to them by name. But the Spirit of God bears witness with their spirits, by setting the rule in a strong light before them. He induces that state of mind that consciousness pronounces to be conformity to the rule. This is as far as possible from setting aside the judgment of God in the case, for consciousness is, under these circumstances, the testimony of God, and the way in which He convinces of sin on the one hand, and of entire consecration on the other.

Again, the objection that consciousness cannot decide in regard to the strength of our powers, and whether we really serve God with all our strength, seems to be based upon the false supposition that the law of God requires every power of body and mind to be excited at every moment to its full strength, and that too without any regard to the nature of the subject about which our powers are for the time being employed. In the first lecture on this subject, I endeavored to show and trust I did show, that perfect obedience to the law of God requires no such thing.

Entire sanctification is entire consecration. Entire consecration is obedience to the law of God. And all that the law requires is, that our whole being be consecrated to God, and that the amount of strength to be expended in His service at any one moment of time, must depend upon the nature of the subject about which the powers are for the time being employed. And nothing is further from the truth than that obedience to the law of God requires every power of body and mind to be constantly on the strain, and in the highest possible degree of excitement, and activity. Such an interpretation of the law of God as this, would be utterly inconsistent with life and health; and would write MENE, TEKEL upon the life and conduct of Jesus Christ Himself; for His whole history shows that He was not in a state of constant excitement to the full extent of His powers.

16. Again it is objected that, if this state were attained in this life, it would be the end of our probation. Probation, since the fall of Adam, or those points in which we are in a state of probation or trial, are:

- (1.) Whether we will repent and believe the gospel;
- (2.) Whether we will persevere in holiness to the end of life.

Some suppose that the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, sets aside the idea of being at all in a state of probation after our conversion. They reason thus: If it is certain that the saints will persevere, then their probation is ended; because the question is already settled, not only that they will be converted, but that they will persevere to the end, and the contingency in regard to the event, is indispensable to the idea of probation. To this I reply:

That a thing may be contingent with man that is not at all so with God. With God, there is not and never was any contingency, with regard to the final destiny of any being. But with men, almost all things are contingencies. God knows with absolute certainty whether a man will be converted, and whether he will persevere. A man may know that he is converted, and may believe, that by the grace of God he shall persevere. He may have an assurance of this in proportion to the strength of his faith. But the knowledge of this fact is not at all inconsistent with the idea of his continuance in a state of trial till the day of his death;

inasmuch as his perseverance depends upon the exercise of his own voluntary agency.

In the same way some say, that if we have attained a state of entire and permanent sanctification, we can no longer be in a state of probation. I answer, that perseverance in this state depends upon the promise and grace of God, just as the final perseverance of the saints does. In neither case can we have any other assurance of our perseverance than that of faith in the promise and grace of God; nor any other knowledge that we have arrived at this state, than that which arises out of a belief in the testimony of God, that He will preserve us blameless until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. If this be inconsistent with our probation, I see not why the doctrine of the saints' perseverance is not equally inconsistent with it. If any one is disposed to maintain that for us to have any judgment or belief in regard to our final perseverance, is inconsistent with a state of probation, all I can say is, that his views of probation are very inconsistent with my own, and so far as I understand, with those of the Church of God.

Again, there is a very high and important sense in which every moral being will remain on probation to all eternity. While under the moral government of God, obedience must for ever remain a condition of the favor of God. And the fact of continued obedience will for ever depend on the faithfulness and grace of God; and the only knowledge we can ever have of this fact, either in heaven or on earth, must be founded upon the faithfulness and truth of God.

Again, if it were true, that entering upon a state of permanent sanctification in this life, were, in some sense, an end of our probation, that would be no objection to the doctrine; for there is a sense in which probation often ends long before the termination of this life. Where, for example, a person has committed the unpardonable sin, or where from any cause, God has given up sinners to fill up the measure of their iniquity, withdrawing for ever His Holy Spirit from them, and sealed them over to eternal death; this, in a very important sense, is the end of their probation, and they are as sure of hell as if they were already there.

So on the other hand, when a person has received, after that he believes, the en sealing of the Spirit unto the day of redemption, as an earnest of his

inheritance, he may and is bound to regard this as a solemn pledge on the part of God, of his final perseverance and salvation, and as no longer leaving the final question of his destiny in doubt.

Now it should be remembered, that in both these cases the result depends upon the exercise of the agency of the creature. In the case of the sinner given up of God, it is certain that he will not repent, though his impenitence is voluntary and by no means a thing naturally necessary. So on the other hand the perseverance of the saints is certain though not necessary. If in either case there should be a radical change of character the result would differ accordingly.

17. Again, while it is admitted by some that entire sanctification in this life is attainable, yet it is denied that there is any certainty that it will be attained by any one before death. For, it is said, that as all the promises of entire sanctification are conditioned upon faith, they therefore secure the entire sanctification of no one. To this I reply:

That all the promises of salvation in the Bible are conditioned upon faith and repentance, and therefore it does not follow on this principle, that any person ever will be saved. What does all this arguing prove? The fact is that while the promises both of salvation and sanctification, are conditioned upon faith as it respects individuals; yet to Christ and to the Church as a body, as I have already shown, these promises are unconditional. With respect to the salvation of sinners, it is promised that Christ shall have a seed to serve Him, and the Bible abounds with numerous promises, both to Christ and the Church, that secure without condition, as it regards them, the salvation of great multitudes of sinners. So the promises that the Church as a body, at some period of her earthly history, shall be entirely sanctified, are, as it regards the Church, unconditional. But, as I have already shown, as it respects individuals, the fulfillment of these promises must depend upon the exercise of faith. Both in the salvation of sinners and the sanctification of Christians, God is abundantly pledged to bring about the salvation of the one and the sanctification of the other, to the extent of His promises. But as it respects individuals, no one can claim the fulfillment of these promises without complying with the conditions.

These are the principal objections that have occurred to my mind, or that have, so far as I know, been urged by others. There may be and doubtless are others, of

greater or less plausibility, to which I may have occasion to refer hereafter. Lest I should be tedious, these must suffice for the present.

LECTURE VIII.

April 8, 1840

SANCTIFICATION- No. 8

by the Rev. Charles G. Finney

Text.--1 Thess. 5:23-24: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it."

VIII. I am next to show when entire sanctification is attainable.

1. The blessing of entire sanctification is promised to Christians. The promises in--

Jeremiah 31:31-34: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Ezek. 36:25-27: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of

flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them."

1 Thess. 5:23, 24: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it."

Eph. 1:13: "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise."

These and many others show that the promise is made to those who have some degree of faith, i.e. who have been regenerated. In the last it is said, "We are sealed after that we believe."

2. Faith is always the expressed or implied condition of the promises. It has been supposed that the promise in Jer. 31, together with other kindred promises, are absolute in such a sense as to have no condition whatever. To this it may be replied, that the things which they promise are of such a nature as that they cannot possibly be received but by faith. The law of love cannot possibly be written in the heart, but through the faith which works by love. Therefore from necessity this promise, as well as all other promises of spiritual blessings, is conditioned upon faith in us. Should it be said that the promise to write the law in our hearts, includes the doing of all that which is essential to its fulfillment, and that therefore a promise to beget love is virtually also a promise to produce faith, I reply, that in some sense this is true. A promise to secure an end is virtually a promise to secure the right use of the means necessary to that end. But this is as far as possible from excluding our own agency and responsibility. When Paul had declared, that not a hair of any man's head on board the ship should perish, this did not exclude the necessity of the sailors remaining on board. For he afterwards informed them, "except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved." Now it is true that in a very important sense, the promise that the hair of no man's head should perish, implied that God would secure the use of the requisite means to preserve them. Yet who would infer from this that that promise was not conditioned upon the sailors remaining on board, and the right use of the voluntary agency of Paul and all the rest on board to preserve themselves. So it should be remembered, that the promises, to

create a new heart and a new spirit--to make a new covenant with the house of Israel--and to write the law in their hearts--are certainly and necessarily conditioned upon the faith of every one who would receive their fulfillment.

3. This state is attainable on the ground of natural ability at any time. If this state were not attainable on the ground of natural ability, it would not be required, and its absence would not be sin. But it has been doubted whether the work of entire sanctification is such, in its own nature, that it can be accomplished at once. To this I reply:

(1.) If it cannot be instantly accomplished, it would not be instantly required.

(2.) If it were not, in its own nature, capable of being attained at once, the non-attaining it at once would not be sin. All that would be required would be to press forward as fast as we could.

(3.) But in this case the pressing forward would be a sinless state, because it would be all that could be required. So that we should possess at once, what according to the supposition, is naturally impossible, i.e. a state of entire sanctification.

(4.) I have already shown that provision is made against every temptation. And as temptation, under some form, is the cause of all sin, if sufficient provision is made against all present and future temptation, it follows that a state of entire sanctification is attainable at once.

4. Full faith in the word and promises of God, naturally, and certainly, and immediately produces a state of entire sanctification. Let it be understood that by faith, I mean--

(1.) A realization of the truth and meaning of the Bible.

(2.) A laying hold upon all those truths upon which this state of mind depends, especially a full realization and belief of the sacred record God has given of His Son, "that his blood cleanseth us from all sin." It is easy to see that the realization and belief of the infinite love of God, as manifested in Christ Jesus, would have a tendency to fill the mind

with unutterable and constant love to God--to annihilate selfishness--and beget the most cordial and perfect love to man. This result is instantaneous on the exercise of faith, and in this sense sanctification is an instantaneous work.

5. God is able to produce entire sanctification in any soul, when he is pleased to do so.

This appears to be plainly taught by Christ, when he spoke of the ability of God to save the rich. He asserts that their salvation is more difficult "than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle." And when the disciples expressed their astonishment, He replied, that "with God all things are possible." Now this seems to be a case in point. To sanctify the rich is the only difficulty in the way of their salvation. And Christ has asserted, that God is able not only to sanctify them, but that "all things are possible with Him," i.e. that there is no limit to His ability in this respect.

Eph. 3:20, proved the same point. Here the Apostle asserts that God is able to do "abundantly above all that we ask and above all that we think," exceedingly abundantly, &c. Now we can both think of and ask for the blessing of entire, and permanent, and instantaneous sanctification, and if this passage of scripture is true God is able to grant it.

That God is able not only to produce present but also to confirm us in a state of perpetual sanctification, is plain from many other passages of scripture. Jude 24: "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy." Upon this passage, I remark:

- (1.) Here it is asserted, that God is able to keep us from falling.
- (2.) To present us faultless before the presence of His glory.
- (3.) To keep us and present us faultless, is to preserve us in a state of permanent sanctification. And this it is declared He is able to do.

To this it has been objected that moral government implies the power to resist every degree of motive. This I most fully admit. But it is one thing to have the power thus to resist, and quite another thing to use that power. God

certainly knew when he created moral agents to what extent, under their circumstances, they would actually exercise their powers of resistance, and therefore whether He could sanctify and save them or not. As a matter of fact, He has overcome the voluntary resistance of all who are converted. And if He has broken down their enmity, and so far subdued them, is it incredible that He should be able wholly to sanctify them, and preserve them blameless?

IX. I am to show how entire sanctification is attainable.

1. A state of entire sanctification can never be attained by an indifferent waiting God's time.
2. Nor by any works of law, or works of any kind performed in your own strength, irrespective of the grace of God. By this I do not mean that were you disposed to exert your natural powers aright, you could not at once attain to this state in the exercise of your natural strength. But I do mean, that as you are wholly indisposed to use your natural powers aright without the grace of God, no efforts that you will actually make in your own strength or independent of his grace, will ever result in your entire sanctification.
3. Not by any direct efforts to feel right. Many spend their time in vain efforts to force themselves into a right state of feeling. Now it should be for ever understood, that neither faith, love, nor repentance, nor any other right feeling is ever the result of a direct effort to put forth those exercises. But on the contrary, they are the spontaneous actings of the mind when it has under its direct and deep consideration the objects of faith, and love, and repentance. By spontaneous, I do not mean involuntary. They are the voluntary and the most easy & natural states of mind possible under such circumstances. So far from its requiring an effort to put them forth, it would rather require an effort to prevent them, when the mind is intensely considering those objects & considerations which have a natural tendency to produce them. This is so true that when persons are in the exercise of such affections, they feel no difficulty at all in their exercise, but wonder how any one can help feeling as they do. It seems to them so natural, so easy, and I may say, so almost unavoidable, that they often feel and express astonishment that any one should find it difficult to love, believe, or repent. The course that many persons take on the subject of religion has often

appeared wonderful to me. They make themselves, their own state and interests, the central point, around which their own minds are continually revolving. Their selfishness is so great, that their own interests, happiness, and salvation, fill their whole field of vision. And with their thoughts and anxieties, and whole souls clustering around their own salvation, they complain of a hard heart--that they cannot love God--that they do not repent, and cannot believe. Being conscious that they do not feel right, they are the most concerned about themselves, which concern but increases their embarrassment and the difficulty of exercising right affections. The deeper they feel the more they try to feel--the greater efforts they make to feel without success, the more they are alarmed and discouraged, the more are they confirmed in their selfishness, and the more are their thoughts glued to their own interests, and they are of course at a greater and greater distance from any right state of feeling. And thus their selfish anxieties beget ineffectual efforts, and ineffectual efforts but deepen their anxieties. And if in this state, death should appear in a visible form before them, or the last trumpet sound, and they should be summoned to the solemn Judgment, it would but increase their distraction, confirm and almost give omnipotence to their selfishness, and render their sanctification morally impossible.

4. Not by any efforts to obtain grace by works. In my lecture on Faith, in the last volume of the Evangelist, I said the following things:

(1.) Should the question be proposed to a Jew, "What shall I do that I may work the works of God?"--in other words, how shall I obtain a state of entire obedience to the law of God, or entire sanctification?--he would answer, keep the law, both moral and ceremonial, i.e. keep the commandments.

(2.) To the same inquiry an Arminian would answer, improve common grace, and you will obtain converting grace, i.e. use the means of grace, according to the best light you have, and you will obtain the grace of salvation. In this answer it is not supposed, that the inquirer already has faith, and is using the means of grace in faith; but that he is in a state of impenitency, and is inquiring after converting grace. The answer, therefore, amounts to this: you must get converting grace by your impenitent works; you must become holy by your hypocrisy; you

must work out sanctification by sin.

(3.) To this question, most professed Calvinists would make in substance the same reply. They would reject the language, while they retained the idea. Their direction would imply, either that the inquirer already has faith, or that he must perform some works to obtain it, i.e. to obtain grace by works.

Neither an Arminian, nor a Calvinist would formally direct the inquirer to the law, as the ground of justification. But nearly the whole Church would give directions that would amount to the same thing. Their answer would be a legal, and not a gospel answer. For whatever answer is given to this question, that does not distinctly recognize faith, as the foundation of all virtue in sinners, is legal. Unless the inquirer is made to understand, that this is the first, grand, fundamental duty, without the performance of which all virtue, all giving up of sin, all acceptable obedience, is impossible, he is misdirected. He is led to believe that it is possible to please God without faith; and to obtain grace by works of law. There are but two kinds of works--works of law, and works of faith. Now if the inquirer has not the "faith that works by love," to set him upon any course of works to get it, is certainly to get faith by works of the law. Whatever is said to him that does not clearly convey the truth, that both justification and sanctification are by faith, without works of law, is law, and not gospel. Nothing before, or without faith, can possibly be done by the unbeliever, but works of law. His first duty, therefore, is faith; and every attempt to obtain faith by unbelieving works, is to lay works at the foundation, and make grace a result. It is the direct opposite of gospel truth.

Take facts as they arise in every day's experience, to show that what I have stated is true of almost all professors and non-professors. Whenever a sinner begins in good earnest to agitate the question, "what shall I do to be saved?" he resolves as a first duty, to break off from his sins, i.e. in unbelief. Of course, his reformation is only outward. He determines to do better--to reform in this, that, and the other thing, and thus prepare himself to be converted. He does not expect to be saved without grace, and faith, but he attempts to get

grace by works of law.

The same is true of multitudes of anxious Christians, who are inquiring what they shall do to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil. They overlook the facts, that "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith," that it is with "the shield of faith" that they are "to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." They ask why am I overcome by sin? why can I not get above its power? why am I thus the slave of my appetites and passions, and the sport of the devil? They cast about for the cause of all this spiritual wretchedness and death. At one time, they think they have discovered it in the neglect of one duty; and at another time, in the neglect of another. Sometimes, they imagine they have found the cause to lie in yielding to one sin, and sometimes in yielding to another. They put forth efforts in this direction, and in that direction, and patch up their righteousness on one side, while they make a rent in the other side. Thus they spend years, in running around in a circle, and making dams of sand across the current of their own corruptions. Instead of at once purifying their hearts by faith, they are engaged in trying to arrest the overflowing of its bitter waters. Why do I sin? they inquire; and casting about for the cause, they come to the sage conclusion, it is because I neglect such a duty, i.e. because I do sin. But how shall I get rid of sin? Answer: by doing my duty, that is, by ceasing from sin. Now the real inquiry is, why do they neglect their duty? Why do they commit sin at all? where is the foundation of all this mischief? Will it be replied, the foundation of all this wickedness is in the corruption of our nature--in the wickedness of the heart--in the strength of our evil propensities and habits? But all this only brings us back to the real inquiry again--How are this corrupt nature, this wicked heart, and these sinful habits, to be overcome? I answer, by faith alone. No works of law have the least tendency to overcome our sins; but rather confirm the soul in self-righteousness and unbelief.

The great and fundamental sin, which is at the foundation of all other sin, is unbelief. The first thing is, to give up that--to believe the word of God. There is no breaking off from one sin without this. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." "Without faith, it is impossible to please God."

Thus we see, that the backslider and convicted sinner, when agonizing to overcome sin, will almost always betake themselves to works of law, to obtain faith. They will fast, and pray, and read, and struggle, and outwardly reform, and thus endeavor to obtain grace. Now all this is in vain and wrong. Do you ask, shall we not fast, and pray, and read, and struggle? Shall we do nothing--but sit down in Antinomian security and inaction? I answer, you must do all that God commands you to do; but begin where He tells you to begin, and do it in the manner in which He commands you to do it; i.e. in the exercise of that faith that works by love. Purify your hearts by faith. Believe in the Son of God. And say not in your heart, "who shall ascend up into heaven, i.e. to bring Christ down from above; or who shall descend into the deep, i.e. to bring up Christ again from the dead. But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that is, the word of faith which we preach."

Now these facts show, that even under the gospel, almost all professors of religion, while they reject the Jewish notion of justification by works of the law, have after all adopted a ruinous substitute for it, and suppose that, in some way they are to obtain grace by their works.

5. A state of entire sanctification cannot be attained by attempting to copy the experience of others. It is very common for convicted sinners, or for Christians inquiring after entire sanctification, in their blindness to ask others to relate their experience, to mark minutely the detail of all their exercises, and then set themselves to pray for and make direct efforts to attain the same class of exercises. Not seeming to understand that they can no more exercise feelings in the detail like others, than they can look like others. Human experiences differ as human countenances differ. The whole history of a man's former state of mind, comes in of course to modify his present and future exercises. So that the precise train of affections which may be requisite in your case, and which will actually occur in your case, if you are ever sanctified, will not, in all their detail, coincide with the exercises of any other human being. It is of vast importance for you to understand, that you can be no copyist in any true religious experience; and that you are in great danger of being deceived by Satan, whenever you attempt to copy the experience of others. I beseech you, therefore to cease from praying for or trying to obtain the precise experience of any

uninspired person, whatever. All truly Christian experiences are, like human countenances, in their outline, so much alike as to be readily known as the lineaments of the religion of Jesus Christ. But no farther than this are they alike, any more than human countenances are alike.

6. Not by waiting to make preparations before you come into this state. Observe that the thing about which you are inquiring is a state of entire consecration to God. Now do not imagine that this state of mind must be prefaced by a long introduction of preparatory exercises. It is common for persons when inquiring upon this subject with earnestness, to think themselves hindered in their progress by a want of this or that or the other exercise or state of mind. They look every where else but at the real difficulty. They assign any other and every other but the true reason for their not being already in a state of sanctification.

7. Not by attending meetings, asking the prayers of other Christians, or depending in any way upon the means of getting into this state. By this I do not intend to say that means are unnecessary, or that it is not through the instrumentality of truth, that this state of mind is induced. But I do mean that while you are depending upon any instrumentality whatever, your mind is directed from the real point before you, and you are never likely to make this attainment.

8. Not by waiting for any particular views of Christ. When persons, in the state of mind of which I have been speaking, hear those who live in faith, describe their views of Christ, they say, "O, if I had such views, I could believe; I must have these, before I can believe." Now you should understand that these views are the result and effect of faith. These views of which you speak, are those which faith discovers in those passages of Scripture which describe Christ. Faith apprehends the meaning of those passages, and sees in them these very things which you expect to see, before you exercise faith, and which you imagine would produce it. Take hold, then, on the simple promise of God. Take God at His word. Believe that he means just what He says. And this will at once bring you into the state of mind, after which you inquire.

9. Not in any way which you may mark out for yourself. Persons in an inquiring state are very apt, without seeming to be aware of it, to send imagination on before them, to stake out the way, and set up a flag where

they intend to come out. They expect to be thus and thus exercised--to have such and such peculiar views and feelings, when they have attained their object. Now there probably never was a person who did not find himself disappointed in these respects. God says, "I will bring the blind by a way that they know not. I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." This suffering your imagination to make out your path is a great hindrance to you, as it sets you upon making many fruitless, and worse than fruitless, attempts to attain this imaginary state of mind--wastes much of your time--exhausts much of the energies of your mind--and greatly wearies the patience and grieves the Spirit of God. While He is trying to lead you right to the point, you are hauling off from the course, and insisting that this which your imagination has marked out is the way, instead of that in which He is trying to lead you. And thus in your pride and ignorance you are causing much delay, and abusing the long suffering of God. He says, "This is the way, walk ye in it." But you say no. This is the way. And thus you stand and parley and banter, while you are every moment in danger of grieving the Spirit of God away from you, and of losing your soul.

10. Not in any manner, or at any time, or place, upon which you may in your own mind lay any stress. If there is any thing in your imagination that has fixed definitely upon any particular manner, time or place, or circumstances, you will in all probability either be deceived by the devil, or entirely disappointed in the result. You will find that in all these particular items on which you had laid any stress, that the wisdom of man is foolishness with God--that your ways are not His ways, not your thoughts His thoughts. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than your ways, and His thoughts than your thoughts. But,

11. This state is to be attained by faith alone. Let it be forever remembered, that "without faith it is impossible to please God," and "whatever is not of faith, is sin."

Both justification and sanctification are by faith alone. Rom. 3:30: "Seeing it is one God who shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith;" and 5:1: "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Also, 9:30, 31:

"What shall we say then? that the Gentiles, who followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, who followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but, as it were, by the works of the law."

That you may clearly understand this part of the subject, I will quote again from my lecture in the last Vol. the elements that constitute saving faith.

(1.) The first element of saving faith is a realizing sense of the truth of the Bible. But this is not alone saving faith, for Satan has this realizing sense of truth, which makes him tremble.

(2.) But a second element in saving faith is the consent of the heart or will to the truth perceived by the intellect. It is a cordial trust or resting of the mind in those truths, and a yielding up of the whole being to their influence. Now it is easy to see, that without the consent of the will, these can be nothing but an outward obedience to God. A wife, without confidence in her husband, can do nothing more than perform outwardly her duty to him. It is a contradiction to say that without confidence, she can perform her duty from the heart. The same is true of parental and all other governments. Works of law may be performed without faith; i.e. we may serve from fear or hope, or some selfish consideration; but without the confidence that works by love, obedience from the heart is naturally impossible. Nay, the very terms, obedience from the heart without love, are a contradiction.

(3.) This is the most simple and rational state of mind conceivable. It is that state of mind for which very young children are so remarkable. Before they have been taught to distrust by the experience of human depravity, they seem to know nothing of unbelief. They are so simple and honest, that they feel entire confidence in those around them. It is merely a trust in testimony, a resting of the heart in truths perceived by the intellect, a natural yielding of the voluntary powers to the testimony of God.

(4.) This state of mind is spontaneous. It is not, as I have said, the result of an effort to believe, but the natural resting or reposing of the mind in the truth of God. And when the soul believes, all that it can

say, is that "while I mused the fire burned," when I thought on the truth to be believed, ere I was aware, I found myself believing.--As I have already said, I do not mean that this is an involuntary state of mind, but that it is voluntary in so high a sense as not to be the result of effort, but the joyful, and natural, and easy yielding up the mind to the influence of truth.

(5.) Faith discovers the real meaning, and apprehends the fulness of those passages that describe Christ. Faith therefore presents Christ to the mind not as at a distance, but as near, not as enveloped in clouds; but in those passages that describe Him, is beheld a fulness, and a glory, and a surpassing loveliness that overpowers and melts the soul.

(6.) The truths to be believed, in order to induce this state of mind, are those which comprise "the record that God hath given of His Son." The mind needs to apprehend God in Christ. To be like God, we must know what He is. To be led to a spontaneous consecration of all to Him, our selfishness must be overcome by a knowledge of what God is. And this knowledge is to be obtained only by seeing God in Christ. For this very purpose God took to Himself human nature, that He might reveal Himself to the sons of men, and thus possess their minds of a true knowledge of His character.

(7.) The natural, and certain effect of their knowing God, is a state of entire consecration to Him. I have said that while individuals are taken up with contemplating themselves, their own characters, dangers, and troubles, they cannot be sanctified, because there is no tendency in such considerations to produce this state. They may dwell upon their own misery, or their wretchedness to all eternity, without finding it possible to consecrate themselves to God, for what is there in such considerations that can in any way produce such a result. It is a consideration of the infinite excellence of Christ's character, and this alone that can inspire faith or love. If, therefore, you ever expect to trust in God, and love Him with all your heart, you must acquaint yourselves with the reasons for thus loving and trusting Him. You must know God. You must have the true knowledge of God. God, and not yourselves, must be the object of your thoughts. Cease then, I beseech you, to expect to be sanctified by any works of your own, or any direct

efforts to feel or do more or less, and remember "that faith cometh by hearing." In other words to understand and believe the record that God hath given of His Son, will at once give you an experimental acquaintance with the truth, that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin."

The New and Old dispensations differ in two respects.

(a) The New, is a fuller and more perfect revelation of Christ, or of those things that are indispensable to sanctification.

(b) There is a vastly greater amount of the Holy Spirit's influences exerted under this dispensation. The Old made nothing perfect, because of the obscure nature of the revelation of Christ, and because there was such a want of divine influence as fully to possess the mind of the truths indispensable to sanctification. The mind must know enough of God to slay selfishness, and without this, neither love or sanctification is possible. The New, blessed be God, with the influences of the Holy Spirit, have brought us into the clear sunlight, and so revealed God as to overcome sin.

LECTURE IX.

April 22, 1840

SANCTIFICATION- No. 9

by the Rev. Charles G. Finney

Text.--1 Thess. 5:23-24: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it."

In concluding the series of discourses upon this text, I would remark:

1. That it is useless to speculate upon any supposed distinction that might have been in the Apostle's mind between the soul and spirit of man. I understand the prayer of the Apostle to be for the entire consecration of the whole being to the service of God. I need not dwell with any more

particularity upon the text, except it be to mention some things which I suppose are implied in the entire sanctification of the body.

(1.) I understand the sanctification of the body to imply the entire consecration, by the soul, of all its members to the service of God. The body is to be regarded merely as the instrument of the soul through which it manifests itself, and by which it fulfills its desires.

(2.) The entire sanctification of the body implies also the entire consecration of all its appetites and passions to the service of God, i.e. that all its appetites shall be used only for the purposes for which they were designed, not to be the masters, but the servants of the soul, not to lead the soul away from God, but to subserve the highest interests of the physical organization.

(3.) It implies the necessity of keeping the body under, and bringing it into subjection--that no appetite or passion of the body is to be indulged merely for the sake of the indulgence--that no appetite or passion is to be at any time consulted or its indulgence allowed but for the glory of God, to answer the ends of our being, and to render us in the highest degree useful. The grand error of mankind is, that the soul has been debased even to be the slave of the body, that appetite and passion have ruled, that the "fleshly mind which is enmity against God," has been suffered to become the law of the soul, and hence the Apostle complains that he saw "a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, bringing him into captivity to the law of sin and death, which was in his members. Hence also, it is said that "if ye live after the flesh ye shall die," that "to mind the flesh is enmity with God," that "the minding of the flesh is death," "he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." In short it is every where in the Bible expressly taught, that one great error and sin of mankind is the indulgence of the flesh. Now the entire sanctification of the body implies the denial of the lusts of the flesh, that "we put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof," that the appetites and passions be restrained and entirely subjugated to the highest interests and perfection of the soul, and to the glory of God. The highest sense in which the body may be sanctified in this life implies:

(a) The strictest temperance in all things. By temperance I mean the moderate use of things that are useful, and total abstinence from things that are pernicious.

(b) It implies also the utter denial of all the artificial appetites of the body. By artificial appetites I mean all those appetites that are not natural to man previous to all depravity of the system by any kind of abuse or violation of its laws. Among the artificial appetites are all those hankerings after various poisons, narcotics, and innutricious [sic.] stimulants that are in almost universal use, such as tobacco, tea, coffee, and the like. All such substances are utterly inconsistent with perfect temperance--are worse than useless, and produce only a temporary excitement, at the expense of certain and permanent debility. They deceive mankind on the same principle that alcohol has so long deceived men, and though not to the same degree injurious and inconsistent with the highest well being of the body and soul; yet they are as really so; and therefore utterly unlawful. And nothing but ignorance, can prevent their use in any instance as an article of diet from being sin; and when the means of knowledge are at hand, this ignorance itself becomes sin.

(c) Temperance implies a knowledge of, and compliance with, all the laws of our physical system. There is scarcely any branch of knowledge more important to mankind than a knowledge of the structure and laws of their own being. Nor is there scarcely any subject, upon which men are so generally and so shamefully ignorant. It seems not at all to be known by mankind in general, or even suspected, that everything about their bodies is regulated by laws, as certain as the law of gravitation; and that a perfect knowledge of and conformity of those laws, would render permanent health as certain as the motion of the planets. The world is full of disease and premature death, and these things are spoken of as mysterious providences of God, without ever so much as dreaming, that they are the natural and certain results of the most outrageous and reckless violations of the laws of the

human constitution.

(d) Temperance in all things implies correct dietetic and other habits in respect to exercise and rest. And in short, such obedience in all respects to the physiological laws of the constitution as to promote in the highest degree its physical perfection, and thus preserve it in a state in which it will be in the highest degree capable of being used by the soul, to fulfill all the will of God. There are no doubt, occasions on which the bodily strength and the body itself may be sanctified to the interests of the soul, and of the Redeemer's kingdom--cases in which the violation of physical law may be justifiable and even a duty, where the kingdom of Christ demands the sacrifice. Christ gave up His body a sacrifice. The Apostles and Martyrs gave up theirs. And in every age multitudes have given themselves up to labors for the kingdom of Christ, that have soon ended their mortal lives. This is not inconsistent with the highest instances of such consecration. But where the circumstances do not demand it, the sanctification of the body, implies that its strength shall not be exhausted, or any of its powers debilitated or injured, by any neglect of exercise, or by any overworking of its organs, or by any violation of its laws whatever. It implies the utmost regularity in all our habits of eating, drinking, sleeping, labor, rest, exercise, and in short a strictly religious regard to all those things that can contribute to our highest perfection of body and soul. Can a glutton, who is stupefied two or three times a day with his food, be entirely consecrated, either body or soul to God? Certainly not. His table is a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling block to him. Can an epicure, whose dainty palate loathes every correctly prepared article of diet, and who demands that every meal should be prepared with seasonings and condiments highly injurious to the health of his body and the well-being of his soul, can he be in a state of entire consecration to God? No! surely. His "God is his belly." His "glory is in his shame." He "minds earthly things," and an Apostle would tell him, "even weeping, that his end is destruction." It is appalling to see the various forms of disease and wretchedness with which mankind are cursed on account of

their wanton disregard of the laws of their being. The highest power of the human mind can never be developed, nor its highest perfection attained, in a diseased body; and probably scarcely a single member of the human family in their present state, has any thing like perfect health. Many suppose themselves to be perfectly healthy, simply because they never saw a person who had perfect health, and also because they do not know enough of themselves to know that many of their organs may be fatally diseased without their being conscious of it.

The influence of dietetic and other habits upon the health of the body is known to but a very limited extent among mankind, and far less is it understood that whatever affects the body, inevitably affects the mind, and that the temper and spirit of a man are in a great measure modified by the state of his health. It is known to some extent that an acid stomach begets fretfulness, and that certain nervous diseases, as they are called, greatly affect the mind. But it is not so generally known as it ought to be, that all our dietetic and other physiological habits have a powerful influence in forming and molding our moral character. Not necessarily but by way of temptation, acting on the mind through our bodily organs, all stimulants and every thing injurious to the body act most perniciously upon the mind. Let me say therefore, beloved, in one word, as I cannot dwell upon this subject longer, that if you would expect the sanctification of body, soul, and spirit, you must acquaint yourselves with the true principles of temperance and physiological reform, and most religiously conform yourself to them not only in the aggregate but in the detail.

But I have already protracted the discussion of this subject so far that I will not add more at present, except to conclude what I have to say with several brief

REMARKS.

1. There is an importance to be attached to the sanctification of the body, of which very few persons appear to be aware. Indeed unless the bodily appetites and powers be consecrated to the service of God--unless we learn to eat, and

drink, and sleep, and wake, and labor, and rest, for the glory of God, entire sanctification is out of the question.

2. It is plain, that very few persons are aware of the great influence which their bodies have over their minds, and of the indispensable necessity of bringing their bodies under and bringing them into subjection.

3. Few people seem to keep the fact steadily in view, that unless their bodies be rightly managed, they will be so fierce and overpowering a source of temptation to the mind, as inevitably to lead it into sin. If they indulge themselves in a stimulating diet, and in the use of those condiments that irritate and rasp the nervous system, their bodies will be of course and of necessity the source of powerful and incessant temptation to evil tempers and vile affections. If persons were aware of the great influence which the body has over the mind, they would realize that they cannot be too careful to preserve the nervous system from the influence of every improper article of food or drink, and preserve that system as they would the apple of their eye, from every influence that could impair its functions.

4. No one who has opportunity to acquire information in regard to the laws of life and health, and the best means of sanctifying the whole spirit, soul, and body, can be guiltless if he neglect these means of knowledge. Every man is bound to make the structure and laws of both body and mind the subject of as thorough investigation as his circumstances will permit, to inform himself in regard to what are the true principles of perfect temperance, and in what way the most can be made of all his powers of body and mind for the glory of God.

5. From what has been said in these discourses, the reason why the Church has not been entirely sanctified is very obvious. As a body the Church has not believed that such a state was attainable in this life. And this is a sufficient reason, and indeed the best of all reasons for her not having attained it.

6. From what has been said, it is easy to see that the true question in regard to entire sanctification in this life, is its attainability, as a matter of fact. Some have thought the proper question to be, are Christians entirely sanctified in this life? Now certainly this is not the question that needs to be discussed. Suppose it be fully granted that they are not; this fact is sufficiently accounted for, by the consideration that they do not know it, or believe it to be attainable in this life. If they believed it to be attainable, it might no longer be true that they do not attain

it. But if provision really is made for this attainment, it amounts to nothing, unless it be recognized and believed. The thing then needed is to bring the Church to see and believe, that this is her high privilege and her duty. It is not enough to say that it is attainable, simply on the ground of natural ability. This is as true of the devil, and of the lost in hell, as of men in this world. But unless grace has put this attainment so within our reach, as that it may be aimed at with the reasonable prospect of success, there is, as a matter of fact, no more provision for our entire sanctification in this life than for the devil's. It seems to be trifling with mankind, merely to maintain the attainability of this state on the ground of natural ability only. The real question is, has grace brought this attainment so within our reach, that we may reasonably expect to experience it in this life? It is admitted, that on the ground of natural ability both wicked men and devils have the power to be entirely holy. But it is also admitted, that their indisposition to use this power aright is so complete, that as a matter of fact, they never will use this power aright, unless influenced to do so by the grace of God. I insist, therefore, that the real question is, whether the provisions of the gospel are such, that, did the Church fully understand and lay hold upon the proffered grace, she might as a matter of fact attain this state?

7. We see how irrelevant and absurd the objection is, that as a matter of fact the Church has not attained this state, and therefore it is not attainable. Why, if they have not understood it to be attainable, it no more proves its unattainableness, than the fact that the heathen have not embraced the gospel proves that they will not when they know it.

8. You see the necessity of fully preaching and insisting upon this doctrine, and of calling it by its true scriptural name. It is astonishing to see to what an extent, there is a tendency among men to avoid the use of scriptural language, and cleave to the language of such men as Edwards, and other great and good divines. They object to the terms perfection and entire sanctification, and prefer to use the terms entire consecration, and other such terms as have been common in the Church.

Now I would by no means contend about the use of words; but still, it does appear to me, to be of great importance, that we use scripture language and insist upon men being "perfect as their Father in Heaven is perfect," and being "sanctified wholly body, soul, and spirit." This appears to me to be of the most importance for this reason, that if we use the language to which the Church has

been accustomed upon this subject, she will as she has done, misunderstand us, and will not get before her mind that which we really mean. That this is so is manifest from the fact that the great mass of the Church will express alarm at the use of the terms perfection and entire sanctification, who will neither express or feel any such alarm if we speak of entire consecration. This demonstrates, that they do not, by any means, understand these terms as meaning the same thing. And although I understand them as meaning precisely the same thing, yet I find myself obliged to use the terms perfection and entire sanctification, to possess their minds of my real meaning. This is Bible language. It is unobjectionable language. And inasmuch as the Church understand entire consecration to mean something less than entire sanctification or Christian perfection, it does seem to me of great importance, that ministers should use a phraseology which will call the attention of the Church to the real doctrine of the Bible upon this subject. And I would submit the question with great humility to my beloved brethren in the ministry, whether they are not aware, that Christians have entirely too low an idea of what is implied in entire consecration, and whether it is not useful and best to adopt a phraseology in addressing them that shall call their attention to the real meaning of the words which they use?

9. Young converts have not been allowed so much as to indulge the thought that they could live even for a day wholly without sin. They have as a general thing no more been taught to expect to live even for a day without sin, than they have been taught to expect immediate translation, soul and body, to Heaven. Of course they have not known that there was any other way, than to go on in sin, and however shocking and distressing the necessity has appeared to them in the ardor of their first love, still they have looked upon it as the unalterable fact, that to be in a great measure in bondage to sin was a thing of course while they live in this world. Now with such an orthodoxy as this, with the conviction in the Church and ministry so ripe, settled, and universal, that the utmost that the grace of God can do for men in this world is to bring them to repentance and to leave them to live and die in a state of sinning and repenting, is it at all wonderful that the state of religion should be as it really has been?

10. Christ has been in a great measure lost sight of in some of His most important relations to mankind. He has been known and preached as a pardoning, justifying Savior, but as an actually indwelling and reigning Savior in the heart, He has been but little known. I was struck with a remark, a few years since, of a brother whom I have from that time greatly loved, who had been for a

long time in a desponding state of mind, borne down with a great sense of his own vileness, but seeing no way of escape. At an evening meeting the Lord so revealed Himself to him as entirely to overcome the strength of his body, and his brethren were obliged to carry him home. The next time I saw him, he exclaimed to me with a pathos I shall never forget, "Brother Finney, the Church have buried the Savior." Now it is no doubt true, that the Church has become awfully alienated from Christ--has in a great measure lost a knowledge of what He is and ought to be to her--and a great many of her members I have good reason to know, in different parts of the country, are saying with deep and overpowering emotion, "They have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid Him."

11. With all her orthodoxy, the Church has been for a long time much nearer to Unitarianism than she has imagined. This remark may shock some of my readers, and you may think it savors of censoriousness. But, beloved, I am sure it is said in no such spirit. These are "the words of truth and soberness." So little has been known of Christ, that, if I am not entirely mistaken, there are multitudes in the orthodox churches, who do not know Christ, and who in heart are Unitarians, while in theory they are orthodox.

I have been, within the last two or three years, deeply impressed with the fact, that so many professors of religion are coming to the ripe conviction that they never knew Christ. There have been in this place almost continual developments of this fact, and I doubt whether there is a minister in the land who will present Christ as the gospel presents Him, in all the fulness of His official relations to mankind, who will not be struck and agonized with developments that will assure him that the great mass of professors of religion do not know the Savior. It has been to my own mind a painful and a serious question, what I ought to think of the spiritual state of those who know so little of the blessed Jesus. That none of them have been converted, I dare not say. And yet, that they have been converted, I am afraid to say. I would not for the world "quench the smoking flax or break the bruised reed," or say any thing to stumble or weaken the feeblest lamb of Christ; and yet my heart is sore pained, my soul is sick; my bowels of compassion yearn over the Church of the blessed God. O, the dear Church of Christ! What does she know in her present state of gospel rest, of that "great and perfect peace they have whose minds are stayed on God"?

12. If I am not mistaken, there is an extensive feeling among Christians and

ministers, that much is not, that ought to be known and may be known of the Savior. Many are beginning to find that the Savior is to them "as a root out of dry ground, having neither form or comeliness;" that the gospel which they preach and hear is not to them "the power of God unto salvation" from sin; that it is not to them "glad tidings of great joy;" that it is not to them a peace-giving gospel; and many are feeling that if Christ has done for them, all that His grace is able to do in this life, that the plan of salvation is sadly defective, that Christ is not after all a Savior suited to their necessities--that the religion which they have is not suited to the world in which they live--that it does not, cannot make them free; but leaves them in a state of perpetual bondage. Their souls are agonized and tossed to and fro without a resting place. Multitudes also are beginning to see that there are many passages, both in the Old and New Testaments, which they do not understand; that the promises seem to mean much more than they have ever realized, and that the gospel and the plan of salvation as a whole, must be something very different from that which they have as yet apprehended. There are great multitudes all over the country, who are inquiring more earnestly than ever before, after a knowledge of that Jesus who is to save His people from their sins.

A fact was related in my hearing, a short time since, that illustrates, in an affecting manner, the agonizing state of mind in which many Christians are, in regard to the present state of many of the ministers of Christ. I had the statement from the brother himself, who was the subject of his narrative. A sister in the church to which he preached became so sensible that he did not know Christ, as he ought to know Him, that she was full of unutterable agony, and on one occasion, after he had been preaching, fell down at his feet with tears and strong beseechings, that he would exercise faith in Christ. At another time she was so impressed with a sense of his deficiency in this respect, as a minister, that she addressed him in the deepest anguish of her soul, crying out-- "O I shall die, I shall certainly die, unless you will receive Christ as a full Savior," and attempting to approach him, she sunk down helpless, overcome with agony and travail of soul, at his feet.

There is manifestly a great struggle in the minds of multitudes, that the Savior may be more fully revealed to the Church, that the present ministry especially may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, and be made conformable to His death.

13. If the doctrine of these discourses is true, you see the immense importance of preaching it clearly and fully in revivals of religion. When the hearts of converts are warm with their first love, then is the time to make them fully acquainted with their Savior, to hold Him up in all His offices and relations, so as to break the power of every sin--to break them off for ever from all self-dependence, and to lead them to receive Him as a present, perfect, everlasting Savior.

14. Unless this course be taken, their backsliding is inevitable. You might as well expect to roll back the waters of Niagara with your hand, as to stay the tide of their corruption without a deep, and thorough, and experimental acquaintance with the Savior. And if they are thrown upon their own watchfulness and resources, for strength against temptations, instead of being directed to the Savior, they are certain to become discouraged and fall into continual bondage.

But before I conclude these remarks, I must not omit to notice the indispensable necessity of a willingness to do the will of God, in order rightly to understand this doctrine. If a man is unwilling to give up his sins, to deny himself all ungodliness and every worldly lust--if he is unwilling to be set apart wholly to the service of the Lord, he will either reject this doctrine altogether, or only intellectually admit it, without receiving it into his heart. It is an imminently dangerous state of mind to consent to this or any other doctrine of the gospel, and not reduce it to practice.

15. Much evil has been done by those who have professedly embraced this doctrine in theory, and rejected it in practice. Their spirit and temper have been such as to lead those who saw them to infer, that the tendency of the doctrine itself is bad. And it is not to be doubted that some who have professed to have experienced the power of this doctrine in their hearts, have greatly disgraced religion by exhibiting any other spirit than that of an entirely sanctified soul. But why, in a Christian land, should this be a stumbling block. When the heathen see persons from Christian nations who professedly adopt the Christian system, exhibit on their shores and in their countries, the spirit which many of them do, they infer that this is the tendency of the Christian religion. To this our Missionaries reply that they are only nominal Christians, only speculative, not real believers. Should thousands of our church members go among them, they would have the same reason to complain, and might reply to the Missionaries, these are not merely nominal believers, but profess to have experienced this Christian religion in their own hearts. Now what would the Missionaries reply?

Why, to be sure, that they were professors of religion; but that they really did not know Christ; that they were deceiving themselves with a name to live, while in fact they were dead in trespasses and sins.

It has often been a matter of astonishment to me, that in a Christian land, it should be a stumbling block to any, that some, or if you please, a majority of those who profess to receive and to have experienced the truth of this doctrine, should exhibit an unchristian spirit. What if the same objection should be brought against the Christian religion; against any and every doctrine of the gospel; that the great majority, and even nine tenths of all the professed believers and receivers of those doctrines were proud, worldly, selfish, and exhibited any thing but a right spirit? Now this objection might be made with truth to the whole professedly Christian Church. But would the conclusiveness of such an objection be admitted in Christian lands? Who does not know the ready answer to all such objections as these, that the doctrines of Christianity do not sanction such conduct, and that it is not the real belief of them that begets any such spirit or conduct; that the Christian religion abhors all these things to which they object. And now suppose it should be replied to this, that a tree is known by its fruits, and that so great a majority of the professors of religion could not exhibit such a spirit, unless it were the tendency of Christianity itself to beget it. Now who would not reply to this, that this state of mind and course of conduct of which they complain, is the natural state of man uninfluenced by the gospel of Christ; that in these instances, on account of unbelief, the gospel has failed to correct what was already wrong, and what needed not the influence of any corrupt doctrine to produce that state of mind? It appears to me, that these objectors against this doctrine on account of the fact that some and perhaps many who have professed to receive it, have exhibited a wrong spirit, take it for granted that the doctrine produces this spirit, instead of considering that a wrong spirit is natural to men, and that the difficulty is that through unbelief this doctrine has failed to correct what was before wrong. They reason as if they supposed the human heart needed something to beget within it a bad spirit, and as if they supposed that a belief in this doctrine had made men wicked, instead of recognizing the fact, that they were before wicked and that, through unbelief, the gospel has failed to make them holy.

16. But let it not be understood, that I suppose or admit that any considerable number who have professed to have received this doctrine into their hearts, have as a matter of fact exhibited a bad spirit. I must say that it has been eminently

otherwise so far as my own observation extends. And I am fully convinced, that if I have ever seen Christianity in the world, and the spirit of Christ, that it has been exhibited by those, as a general thing, who have professed to believe, and to have received this doctrine into their hearts.

17. How amazingly important it is, that the ministry and the Church should come fully to a right understanding and embracing of this doctrine. O it will be like life from the dead. The proclamation of it is now regarded by multitudes as "good tidings of great joy." From every quarter, we get the gladsome intelligence, that souls are entering into the deep rest and peace of the gospel, that they are awaking to a life of faith and love--and that instead of sinking down into Antinomianism, they are eminently more benevolent, active, holy, and useful than ever before--that they are eminently more prayerful, watchful, diligent, meek, sober-minded and heavenly in all their lives. This as a matter of fact, is the character of those, to a very great extent at least, with whom I have been acquainted, who have embraced this doctrine. I say this for no other reason than to relieve the anxieties of those who have heard very strange reports, and whose honest fears have been awakened in regard to the tendency of this doctrine.

18. I have by no means given this subject so ample a discussion as I might and should have done, but for my numerous cares and responsibilities. I have been obliged to write in the midst of the excitement and labor of a revival of religion, and do not by any means suppose, either that I have exhausted the subject, or so ably defended it as I might have done, had I been under other circumstances. But, dearly beloved, under the circumstances, I have done what I could, and thank my Heavenly Father that I have been spared to say this much in defence of the great, leading, central truth of revelation--the ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION OF THE CHURCH BY THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST.

And now, blessed and beloved Brethren and Sisters in the Lord, "let me beseech you, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." "And may the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved BLAMELESS unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it."

[Back to Top](#)

Unbelief- No.'s 1 & 2

Lectures X & XI

May 6, 1840

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

LECTURE X.

Text.--Heb. 3:19: "So we see they could not enter in because of unbelief." --
Mark 16:16: "He that believeth not, shall be damned."

In this discussion of this subject I desire to show:

I. What unbelief is.

II. Some of its developments and manifestations.

III. Its unreasonableness.

IV. Its causes or occasions.

V. Its wickedness.

I. What is unbelief?

It is the absence, or perhaps I should say, the opposite of faith. Faith is a felt, conscious, practical confidence in the character, providence, and word of God; and conscious assurance that what God has said shall come to pass; such an inward and felt assurance, and hearty and joyful embracing of the truth, as to produce corresponding feeling and action, and to exclude doubt. Unbelief then is a real withholding of this inward, felt, conscious assurance or confidence--a state of mind that leaves the conduct uninfluenced by the truths of God--such a withholding of confidence as to leave both body and soul under the influence of error, to pursue a course as if the truths of God were not true.

II. Some of the manifestations of unbelief.

1. One of its manifestations is, stupidity on religious subjects. It is not in the nature of a moral being to be stupid upon religious subjects upon any other principle than that of unbelief. The infinitely great and weighty truths of religion make an impression as a thing of course upon a moral being, in proportion to the fulness with which they are apprehended and believed.

2. Another of its developments is worldly mindedness. It is impossible that a human being should give himself up to the pursuit of worldly goods upon any other principle than that of unbelief. Let him but possess that inward, felt assurance that the infinitely great truths of religion are realities, and the world will at once dwindle to insignificance in his estimation. It will appear

to be a very small thing whether he does or does not possess the wealth, the honors, the friendship, or wisdom of this world. And to spend his time and give up his thoughts to accumulating any thing that this world can give to take away, is entirely unnatural to a mind that believes in eternal realities.

3. Another development of unbelief is, a spirit of carefulness, or corroding and peace-destroying anxiety upon any subject. Can a man who has the conscious and felt assurance that the infinitely faithful God is pledged for the supply of all his temporal, and spiritual, and eternal wants, experience the carefulness and anxiety of one who has no such belief?

4. Worldly conversation is another development of unbelief. Can the infinitely interesting things of religion be felt, conscious realities to the mind whose conversation is worldly? Impossible. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." For a man to converse upon that which does not occupy his thoughts is impossible. And if eternal things are felt realities, and realities too in which the heart takes the deepest and most joyful interest, it is impossible that the conversation should not correspond with this state of mind.

5. Insensibility to the state of the Church and of the world, is another manifestation of unbelief. A man can no more avoid being excited by the religious state of the Church and the world, if religious truth be a reality to the mind, than he could avoid excitement, if the house or town in which he lived was all in flames.

6. Insensibility to the abuse which is every where heaped upon God, is a manifestation of unbelief. If the existence, character, and omnipresence of God, with their kindred truths, be realities, it would give the man who realized this, unutterable pain to witness the abuse which is heaped upon God by His creatures. Could you see your father, or mother, or wife, or husband, or governor, or king, or dearest earthly friend, abused, and experience no agony? Impossible.

7. Apathy in regard to spreading the gospel, proves that you do not believe it. What an excitement there was in this country a few years since, about the famine in the Cape de Verd Islands; and upon the subject of the oppression of the Greeks. What a public interest was awakened, and what pains were taken to send them relief. Should a famine pervade Europe or America,

what a universal sympathy would be awakened, and how the excited population would bestir themselves with their thousands of tons of provisions to supply their wants. This is natural, reasonable, right, and according to the laws of our being. But how shall we account for the apathy of the Church, in reference to starving souls going down to hell without the gospel? Why, only upon the principle that almost nobody believes it. It is impossible to account for it upon any other supposition.

8. Neglect of the Bible is another development of unbelief. What is the Bible? What are its claims? What does it profess to reveal to mankind? Why, it claims to be a revelation from God to men, a history of their past lives, and a revelation of their future destiny. In every point of view it is infinitely the most interesting book that ever existed. And yet, almost all men, even in Christian lands, are in a great measure unacquainted with its truths, and manifestly care but little about them. Now it is impossible that they should be so upon any other principle than that of unbelief. Did men believe the Bible, they would search after its meaning as they would search for hidden treasures. They would not, could not, rest satisfied, until they possessed themselves of every practical truth contained in it.

9. Unbelief often manifests itself in the interpretation of the Bible. Unitarians can see no sufficient evidence of the divinity of Jesus Christ. And why? Because of unbelief. It is remarkable to see to what an extent unbelief is the grand rule of biblical interpretation in the Church. Take for example, 2 Cor. 6:16-18: "And what agreement hath the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." Now what an infinitely different inference the Apostle drew from these promises from what is generally drawn: (2 Cor. 7:1:) "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Here Paul saw in these promises such a fulness of meaning, as to infer at once from them, even if there were no other kindred promises in the Bible, the practicability of attaining a state of entire sanctification or holiness in this life. Mark the strength of his language. He exhorts them to "cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the

flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God." How easy it is to see that his faith apprehended an infinitely greater fulness in the meaning of these promises than is seen by the heart of unbelief. And why should he not make the inference he does?--for he says: "Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." Certainly the inference which the Apostle draws in the first verse of the next chapter, or rather the exhortation or command, as it may be regarded, to avail ourselves of the provisions, and "perfect holiness in the fear of God;" is eminently reasonable. And yet unbelief sees no satisfactory reason, either in these or in all the promises of the Bible, to warrant the conclusion, that as a matter of fact any such state is attainable in this life.

Hear that spiritual minded woman converse with her minister, of the great fulness there is in Christ. While she speaks in general terms he consents to all she says, that there is indeed unspeakable and infinite fulness in Christ. But where does she see this fulness? Why, in the scripture declarations and promises of God's word. Now let her begin to quote them one after another as she understands them, and he will probably demur to her views of every one of them, and consider her notions as utterly extravagant, and perhaps fanatical. He consents in general to the fulness that is in Christ, but explains away in the detail, all the evidence of that fulness as apprehended by a spiritual mind. The truth is, that a spiritual mind, and a spiritual mind only, understands the real meaning of the Bible. And nothing is more common than for persons in a state of unbelief to read again and again, any and every passage in the Bible, without apprehending the real meaning of the Holy Spirit. And a man in this state of mind has, as a matter of fact, never begun to understand the fulness there is in Jesus Christ, nor the depth and extent of meaning in the declarations and promises of the Bible.

10. Stumbling at difficulties, is another manifestation of unbelief. There is a large class of minds that seem not to be under the influence of evidence, especially upon those subjects that in any way clash with their own interests. However weighty the evidence may be, the suggestion of the least difficulty is to them an insurmountable stumbling-block, and the shadow of

an objection seems to bring them to a dead stand in regard to all progress in reform, and to give them right over to the dominion of appetite, lust, and every form of selfishness. They are eagle-eyed in discovering an objection, and seem not to have the faculty at all to answer and remove objections. A slight objection or difficulty is a sufficient reason even for their resisting the evidence of miracles. Even demonstration itself, does not in such cases seem to move their hearts. If an answer to their difficulty be suggested to them, they heed it not but for a moment, for perhaps the next hour, or the next day, you will find them still hanging up their doubts, upon their old and perhaps often answered objections, and going stubbornly on in their sins. This is a most guilty and abominable state of mind. With what odiousness did it manifest itself among the Jews, when neither the life, nor the doctrine, nor the miracles, nor the death, nor the resurrection of Christ, could convince them. Certain preconceived notions of what Christ would be--certain false and absurd interpretations of prophecy in regard to Him, were sufficient objections in their minds to break the power of all the evidence with which Christ brought forth the demonstration of His Messiahship.

It is often amazing and distressing to see how unbelief will paralyze the power of testimony in favor of truth, insomuch that no weight or accumulation of evidence can gain ascendancy over the intellect and the heart in the presence of objections oftentimes the most ridiculous.

Now with this state of mind, contrast the conduct of Abraham, the "father of the faithful." God had promised to make him "a father of many nations." But the fulfillment was delayed until both himself and wife were at such an age, that but for the promise of God, it was utterly unreasonable to expect that Sarah would have an heir. Rom. 4:19-21: "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded, that what He had promised, He was able to perform." The fact that himself and Sarah were nearly a hundred years old, was not a sufficient objection to set aside the testimony of God with his mind. And he remained firm in the opinion that His promise would be performed.

Witness his conduct also in offering up Isaac as a burnt sacrifice. Here is another beautiful illustration of the power of faith as contrasted with unbelief. After a long time his beloved Isaac was born, who also was to be the father of many nations, through whom the promised Messiah was to come. But previously to his being the father of any offspring, God commanded Abraham to offer him as a burnt sacrifice. Now so unshaken was his confidence, that he appears not to have felt the least uneasiness about the event. Feeling probably that it might stagger Sarah's faith, he appears not to have communicated it to her, but rose up calmly in the morning, after the command was given, and proceeded to the spot, with the wood and necessary implements, manifestly expecting really to offer him according to the command of God. And in fact, as far as the mental act was concerned, he really did offer him, and is so represented in the Bible: "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."

Observe also the conduct of Abraham in regard to the promised land. God had promised to give him that land, and to his "seed for a thousand generations." Now Abraham lived in this country as a stranger: "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." When his beloved Sarah died he bought the cave of Macpelah for a burying place, in which cave he was afterwards buried himself; and his seed did not inherit the land for more than four hundred years; which shows that Abraham understood the promise, as to be fulfilled to his descendants, and remained "strong in faith, giving glory to God."

Now how vastly different was the state of Abraham's mind from that to which I have before alluded, where a trifling objection can stumble a mind and paralyze and overthrow all confidence in the testimony of God.

11. Confiding more in men than in God, is another development of unbelief. How common it is for even professed Christians to have more confidence in the prayers of some mere man, than in the intercession of Christ; and to place more reliance upon the word of man than upon the word of God, and as a matter of fact, to be more influenced by the opinions, or the mere say

so of men, than by the testimony and even the oath of God. Should you ask them if they had more confidence in man than in God, they would say no. But, as a matter of fact, they have, whether they are aware of it or not. Their conduct proves to a demonstration, that their faith is not in God, but in man. As an illustration of this, witness the anxieties, and carefulness of multitudes of God's professed children, on the subject of temporal provision for their families. Now if some wealthy man would give them a bond and mortgage, a check upon some bank, or even a promissory note, for ten or twenty thousand dollars, they would feel perfectly at rest in regard to the supply of their temporal wants. Their faith or confidence in this security would have its practical influence. It would allay all their fears, silence all their carefulness in the hearts of God's professed people. "Trust in the Lord and do good, and thou shalt dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." Now this, and multitudes of kindred promises, are infinitely higher and better security than can be given by the wealthiest men on earth. They are the bond, and mortgage, and promissory note, and oath of Jehovah, who cannot lie, and who has the resources of the Universe at His command. Now let me ask you, what state of mind is that which does not repose practically as a matter of fact, as much confidence in these promises, as in human obligations and securities? What do you mean? Why do you not rest? What higher possible security can you have? What shocking unbelief, and how infinitely provoking to God! that the promise of mortal man is so much more confidence in than the promise and oath of God!

12. Murmuring at the providence of God, is another of the developments of unbelief. Some persons are almost always in trouble, lest things should not go right under the providence of God; full of fearfulness, and trembling, and anxiety, lest the winds, and the weather, and the seasons, and millions of other things, should not be exactly agreeable to their wish; and continually murmuring at what is daily coming to pass; manifesting in the most absolute manner, either that they are entirely opposed to God, or that they are infidels, and have no belief in his providence. They manifest an utter want of confidence in His existence, and wisdom, and providence; and would fain have almost every thing in the government of the material Universe different from what it is. To-day, you are sorry that it rains--tonight you fear there will be frost--to-morrow you fear there will be a high wind--in the summer, that there will be drought--and in the winter, that

there will be too much or too little snow. Indeed the unbelief of many persons keeps them in a state of almost perpetual and God-dishonoring anxiety. And is it not astonishing that this state of mind is so seldom regarded as being the very essence of all that is criminal and abominable in the sight of God?

13. The absence of a joyful acquiescence in the whole will of God, as expressed either in His works, or providence, or word, is also a development of unbelief. If a man has entire confidence in God in all things, he will have a supreme complacency in the will of God. He will not merely submit without rebellion, but will be joyfully acquiescent in all the works, and ways, and will of God. Whatever the weather is; whatever the seasons are; whatever God does or permits to be done, is, so far as God is concerned, most sweetly acquiesced in, by a soul in the exercise of faith.

14. Maintaining a false hope, is another of the developments of unbelief. God has said, "If any man hath this hope in him, (i.e. the true Christians hope,) he purifieth himself even as Christ is pure." Now how many thousands of professors of religion are there, whose hope as a matter of fact, does not manifest itself in a holy life. Of this they are just as certain as that they exist, and yet they hold on to their hope and seem determined to venture their eternal destiny upon it. Now what is this but virtually staking their eternal salvation, that this express declaration of God is not true. It is not only calling this and multitudes of kindred passages in question--it is not merely denying them--it is not merely making God a liar--but it is virtually saying, "I stake my eternal salvation, that these declarations of God are not true." Upon what other conceivable or possible ground can they hold fast to their false hope? They seem to be entirely ignorant, that their hope is the result of sheer infidelity. They have not so much as a conviction that the Bible is true. If they had, their hope would perish like the moth in a moment. How many thousand cases are there, in which professors of religion as soon as they become convicted, and have a realizing sense of the truth of the Bible, yield up their false hopes, and seem never to have known, that the fact that they ever had a hope was attributable entirely to their unbelief.

15. A present refusal to enter into the rest of faith, is another of the developments of unbelief. God has said, "thou wilt keep him in perfect

peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." What multitudes there are, who are continually disquieting themselves, not only about their temporal but about their spiritual state, simply because they refuse to believe that in Christ they are complete; that in Him all fulness dwells; that in Him every demand of their nature, every thing that they can need for time and eternity, is made secure by the promise and oath of God. A state of unbelief is very like a mind in the midst of some agonizing dream,

" _____ where the wreck'd desponding thought,

From wave to wave of fancied misery

At random drives, her helm of reason lost."

How often a man in some distressing dream, imagines himself poor--perhaps himself and family destitute and in want of all things--perhaps in debt, and in prison, and no means of payment, surrounded with the darkest and most forbidding prospects on every side, and on every subject; no friends, no home, no employment, no confidence in himself or in any body else. The consummation of wretchedness and despair has overwhelmed him, until some dire catastrophe breaks up his slumbers, and behold, he is at home, in bed, in health, and the reverse of all his crazy dreams is true. I thank God, he exclaims, that all this is but a dream. I thought I had no home, no friends, no health, was in debt, persecuted, imprisoned; saw no help, for time or eternity, but all this was a dream. I am now awake, and blessed be God the reality all the reverse of my vain imaginings.

Just so faith breaks up the spell that binds the mind in all its doubts, perplexities, and anxieties, and introduces it into a state of perfect rest in Christ. O the wretched unbeliever felt condemned, owed ten thousand talents to divine justice, and had nothing to pay, struggled, agonized, prayed, read, searched, looked every way, saw neither help nor hope; the remembrance of the past filled the soul with shame, and was agonizing beyond expression, present circumstances are discouraging and fill the mind with forebodings of future wrath. The future as dark as midnight; there seems to be "no eye to pity, and no arm can save." It would seem as if the aggregate of all conceivable woes, temporal, spiritual, and eternal, were in reserve for him. But, ah! He apprehends Christ, and how instantaneously the whole scene is

changed. Can it be possible? he exclaims. Oh what a wretched, horrible pit of miry clay, is that from which my feet are taken. This is indeed everlasting rock. My "goings are [indeed] established." I see an ample provision, not only for the forgiveness of all my past sins, but for all my present, future, utmost, conceivable or possible wants. While the provision is absolutely boundless, and made sure by the promise of Him who cannot lie. "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with thee." Is it so indeed? Have I such a Savior, in whom all fulness dwells? Am I complete in Him? Is He my wisdom, my righteousness, my sanctification, and my redemption? It is surely so. It is certain as my existence. O, I feel as if my soul were in an ocean of sweet and boundless rest and peace, and my God hath said, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee." Now any refusal or neglect to enter at once into this state of mind is unbelief. And, dearly beloved, if this is so, let me inquire, was not that a most pertinent question of Christ, "When I come, shall I find faith on the earth?"

16. Another development of unbelief is, a want of an inward assurance and felt confidence that God's promises will be fulfilled. Take for instance, James 1:5-7: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." Now who will pretend to call this truth in question? And yet, who believes it? Who has the inward assurance that is essential to faith, that he shall be taught of God? Who comes to Him with the same assurance that he will be taught, with which a student goes to his professor upon some question with which he knows him to be familiar? Why, the student goes to his teacher, with the felt and conscious expectation--with as much inward assurance as he has of his existence, that he shall be instructed. He does not go in a mere negative state of mind; but he knows that his teacher is himself informed upon the subject of his inquiry, and that he will at once lead him to an understanding of it. Now why does he expect this? Because this is the business of his teacher, and because he has pledged himself to instruct his pupils. So has God pledged Himself, in the strongest and most solemn manner, and have we not a right, nay, are we not bound to come to God for instruction, with as much felt

assurance as we would exercise in going to a human teacher?

Take also, 1 Thess. 5:23, 24: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved BLAMELESS unto the coming of OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." Now here the Apostle prays for the entire sanctification of spirit, soul, and body, and that our whole being may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; and then pledges the faithfulness of God: "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." Now have we not a right; nay, are we not bound to exercise the utmost confidence, and to have a felt and strong assurance of mind, that what is here promised shall come to pass? Now whatever is short of this is unbelief.

See also the case of Paul, 2 Cor. 12:9: "And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." God had given him "a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure." But Paul, fearing that it would injure his influence, besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from him. But Christ replied, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my grace is made perfect in weakness." Now this entirely satisfied the mind of Paul, and he immediately subjoins, "Most gladly therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." It appears that he, at once, felt an inward, conscious assurance, that allayed all his fears in regard to the influence of this thorn in the flesh, and enabled him to say, "Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities." Now I suppose this to be as true of every man as of Paul, that Christ's grace is sufficient for him, in any circumstances in which the providence of God can place him; and that nothing but unbelief, prevents any Christian from experiencing the utmost confidence, and the inward unwavering assurance of mind, that Christ's grace is sufficient for him.

17. All asking God for an inward assurance of what He has promised, is another of the developments of unbelief. Suppose you had promised your little son, something that he knew you were abundantly able to give, but your promise did not satisfy him. He is uneasy and continues to ask, whether you will certainly do it. And notwithstanding your most solemn

assurances, he should come to you and say, "Father, I want you to do something that will give me an inward assurance that you will fulfill your promise. I feel very unhappy about it. I don't realize in my mind, that you will do it. I want to feel in my heart, that I shall have it. I want that inward assurance, without which I cannot rest." Now would you not consider this a downright insult to you? Suppose you had not only repeatedly given him your word, but had confirmed it by an oath; and yet he had no felt confidence in your veracity. All asking for any additional assurances, would be regarded by you with grief and indignation. You would consider it a virtual charging you with false hood and perjury; and you would consider it an act of vast condescension in yourself to listen to such a request, and to furnish farther assurances, even were it in your power. Now let me ask, is it considered by Christians, that all asking for an inward felt assurance for that strong confidence that quiets the mind, is but an instance of shocking unbelief? Why do you not feel that assurance already? Cannot the promise and oath of God convince, persuade, and assure you, that what He has said shall come to pass? You ought to know, that the absence of this felt assurance, is a virtual charging Him with falsehood and perjury.

18. All pleading the promises of God without this inward, felt, unwavering assurance of mind, where the promise is plain and the application just, is an instance of unbelief. When Paul prayed against the thorn in the flesh, he had no express promise that that thorn should be removed. He was not therefore bound to believe that it would be. So Christ had no express promise that His agony in the garden should be removed. In neither of these cases did perfect faith in God, imply the belief that the particular things requested would be granted. But had there been an express promise in either or both of these cases, they both would have had the right, and been under an obligation to exercise the most unwavering assurance, that the specific blessing promised should be granted. It should be understood, therefore, that in pleading the promises of God, with a just apprehension and understanding of them, every state of mind is unbelief that falls short of the most unwavering assurance, that the thing promised shall be granted, according to the true tenor and meaning of the promise. All uneasiness of mind in regard to the event--all unhappiness through fear, that it will not be granted--every thing short of the utmost repose of mind in the veracity of God, is God-dishonoring unbelief. Suppose a student should receive letters

from his father, containing the strongest assurances, that he would supply all his wants, giving him the fullest liberty to draw on him at any time for any amount he needed; and suppose it were well known that his father's fortune was very ample, and there could be no doubt of his ability to fulfill his promises; and suppose that his father's promises were backed up by oaths and the most abundant assurances that could be expressed in words: and now suppose this student is seen to be full of anxiety and carefulness about his support; laying his plans and making arrangements to help himself, entirely independent of his father's aid. It would be manifest at once, that he had no confidence in his father's assurances. Every body would infer at once, that however rich his father might be, no confidence could be placed in his veracity. Every one might say, "You see how it is. This young man is acquainted with his father. We have seen his letters. We know what abundant promises he has given, and yet as a matter of fact, his son has not a particle of confidence in these assurances." The inference of a want of integrity in his father would be natural and certain.

Now, Christian, did you ever consider how horrible your conduct is in the eyes of an unbelieving world. They know what promises your Father has made, and they see by your anxiety and worldly-mindedness how little confidence you have in these promises. They witness your carefulness and worldly spirit, and think in their hearts, these Christians know that God is not to be trusted, for as a matter of fact they have no confidence in His promises. Now how can you in any way more deeply wound religion, than in this--more awfully and horribly dishonor God? It is a most shameful publishing, in the most impressive manner possible, that you believe God to be a liar!

19. Not realizing that Christ died for you in particular, is another development of unbelief. The Apostle says, that "Christ tasted death for every man." Now what state of mind is that which does not realize and feel assured, that He died for you? There is a great deal of complaining in the Church, that individuals cannot feel as if Christ died for them in particular. If He died for every man, He died for you as an individual, and every want of realizing and feeling the inward assurance of this is unbelief. It is the mind's hiding itself in the darkness of its own selfishness. You believe that he died for all men--that "He tasted death for every man;" but cannot make it seem as if He died for you. Thus you parry obligation, and hide away from realizing that your sins nailed him to the cross, and that your soul is

guilty of His death, and that his love has rolled a mountain weight of responsibility upon you. It is time for you to realize that this is nothing but unbelief, and a virtual contradiction of the truth that "Christ tasted death for every man." No wonder your heart is not subdued. No wonder you are in bondage to your sins. No wonder your lusts and appetites have dominion over you, while you are so unbelieving as not to realize that what God has said is true.

20. All want of appropriating the truth, and promises, and warning of God, to yourself, is unbelief. There is a wonderful disposition in most professors of religion to mingle with the crowd, and to mix up their own sins, and wants, and every thing that regards themselves individually with the sins and wants of the Church at large. Now truth does no good in the world, only as it has its individual application. It sanctifies only when it is appropriated, taken home, and applied to the individual conscience and heart. Not to appropriate it to yourself, is like an individual invited to a feast with many others; but does not go himself, because the promise is general; or when he is there, does not eat himself, because the provision was made for all the guests. The grand reason why he should go as an individual, why he should partake personally without hesitation, is because the provision is general, and every one has a right and is expected to partake of course. How shocking it is that so many professors of religion let the provisions of the gospel lie before them, and all the promises of the Bible cluster around them, and yet because the provisions are so ample, and the promise is to everyone who will partake, they stand and look on, in their unbelief, and starve to death.

But I must defer the remaining heads of this discourse, till my next.

LECTURE XI.

May 20, 1840

UNBELIEF--No. 2

Text.--Heb. 3:19: "So we see they could not enter in because of unbelief." --
Mark 16:16: "He that believeth not, shall be damned."

I am to show,

III. The unreasonableness of unbelief.

1. It is unreasonable, because confidence in testimony is natural to man. This is a law of his being. And until selfishness comes to take possession of his heart and blind him, in respect to any truth or thing that opposes his will or inclinations, it is one of the easiest and most natural exercises of the human mind, to confide in testimony. This is strikingly manifest in the conduct of very young children.
2. It is unreasonable, because confidence in testimony is one of the easiest and most natural exercises of the mind through every period of life. Society could not exist without it. All the business transactions of the world, turn upon this law of the mind, viz: its confidence in testimony. Every one knows or may know, that no such thing as government, or order, or happiness, could exist in any community without confidence.
3. It is unreasonable, because all evidence is in favor of unlimited and heart-felt confidence in the character and word of God.
4. Creation and Providence confirm the truths of the Bible, and, when properly understood, give forth the same lessons, so far as they go. The heavens above, the earth beneath, every thing within and without us, goes to confirm the proposition, that it is the perfection of reason to place the most unlimited confidence in God.
5. The works of creation and providence, when duly studied and understood, exhibit God in such a light as not only to confirm the testimony of the Bible, but to lead to the conclusion that the Bible means as much as it appears to mean, that God is to be trusted for all that He has promised, and that His promises mean as much as they say.
6. Unbelief is entirely unreasonable, because the atonement is the highest possible demonstration of God's intention to do to every human being all the good He wisely can. Certainly it is the opposite of every thing that is reasonable, to suppose that God should give His only begotten Son to die for men, and then willingly withhold any lesser good which He can wisely bestow upon them. And this is the reasoning and the conclusion of the Apostle: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him freely give us all things?"

7. In the Atonement alone we have the highest evidence that can be given, of the infinitely great love of God to every one of us--a degree of evidence that demands the most heart-felt confidence in His character, government, word, promises, providence, and carefulness for our temporal and eternal good. Reader, did you ever consider the amount and force of evidence contained in the Atonement, that God really loves you, that He loves you so much as to give His only begotten and well beloved Son to die in your stead? What higher evidence could you ask, expect, or conceive, that any being else loved you, than for him to give his own son to die to preserve your life. And should such a thing take place, would you not consider it the most shocking, unnatural, and abominable conduct conceivable, to withhold confidence in his love for you?

8. The Atonement so illustrates and confirms the love of God to men as to render it in the highest degree reasonable to put the most liberal construction on all His promises of good to them. Let me advert again to 2 Cor. 6:16-18, & 7:1-- "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." I have already said, that from these promises, "I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people; I will receive you and be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters"--the Apostle infers the practicability, of entirely cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and of perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Now I would ask, if this is not one of the most reasonable inferences in the world? In the light of the Atonement, and considering the infinitely great love of God, as therein manifested, how much is it reasonable to expect God to mean, in such promises as these? What is naturally and fully implied in these and kindred promises, in view of His infinite love and the bountifulness of His heart as expressed in the Atonement? I do not hesitate to say, that it is in the highest degree unreasonable, in view of these promises alone, to draw any other inference

than that which the Apostle drew from them. And what shall we say of the almost numberless exceeding great and precious promises, that were given for the express purpose of making us partakers of the divine nature? It must be admitted, that they conduct us at once to the conclusion, that it is utterly unreasonable to believe any thing less than that God will "sanctify us, spirit, soul, and body, and preserve us blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

9. The evidence contained in the Atonement, of the infinitely great love of God to us, is, if such a thing be possible, confirmed and strengthened, by the great patience and forbearance of God exercised towards this world since the Atonement--His patience, and perseverance in using means to induce mankind to accept the Atonement--His striving by His Spirit, and all the influences He exerts to sanctify and save, seem to pile demonstration upon demonstration of His infinite love and disposition to do us good. And certainly nothing in earth or hell can be conceived of as more unreasonable than unbelief.

10. To stumble at any difficulties which really lie in the way, is utterly unreasonable, for these difficulties are just what we ought to expect, and a moment's consideration would show us that it is naturally impossible it should not be so. We are but in the infancy of our being. It is but a very little that could be, by any possibility, explained to us in this world. There is scarcely a thing in the Universe that does not involve, in minds like ours, mysteries, which we do not and cannot understand. Our own nature, the nature and constitution of every thing around us, present to us mysteries as impenetrable, and difficulties as great, so far as we know, as any of the truths of religion. And yet, on other than religious subjects, we receive testimony, and believe facts, where we cannot comprehend all the philosophy and explanation of them. We are shut up to this necessity in relation to almost every thing in the Universe. And how infinitely unreasonable it is, in the midst of our ignorance of material things, to stumble at difficulties, perplex ourselves with mysteries, and withhold confidence in the testimony of God, simply because the why and the how are not in many instances understood by us.

11. It is vastly unreasonable, not to feel an inward assurance that God's promises shall all be fulfilled. If I owed you a thousand dollars, you might

have reason to feel insecure in regard to the payment, and should you come to me and say, I doubt your responsibility, I want to feel at rest upon the subject, and wish you to give me further security, this might be very reasonable. But will you ask further security of God? Who will underwrite for Him? Who or what can make His promises more secure? Would you have a warrantee deed of the Universe, a bond and mortgage, sealed, signed, and delivered, and registered in the court of heaven? Why all this you have and more too. For "God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." And now do you say, why, I want to feel in my heart, the assurance that God will fulfill His promises to me. Feel in your heart! Do not the promise and oath of God make you feel in your heart that what He has said shall come to pass? What an infinitely unreasonable and abominable state of mind is this, that can complain of the want of a felt assurance, that the God of infinite truth will not lie? Why, what security can He give? Who can be His bail? Who, or what in the Universe can make His promise more certain?

But suppose you had the bond, and mortgage, and oath of the richest man in America, for a thousand dollars. Would not your neighbors consider you a mad man, if you did not feel in your heart that your debt was secure? Yes, you would be pronounced deranged by every court of law or equity in the land. I recollect to have heard of a case, where a man of wealth became a hypochondriac and made himself continually unhappy, lest himself and family should become paupers. His wealthy connections, to relieve his mind, offered to secure to him a large amount of money annually, for the support of his family. He replied, "that would be of no avail, that "riches would take to themselves wings," that he could put no confidence in any such security." Finally, a commission of lunacy was issued to secure his property, and he pronounced a lunatic, in view of these developments of mind. Now I do not hesitate to say, that his state of mind was almost the perfection of reason, when compared with the infinite unreasonableness and insanity of not feeling the utmost assurance that all the promises of God should be fulfilled. Why, what was there so very unreasonable in the conduct of this man? Why, he refused to trust in human security and responsibility, for the maintenance of

his family. Now in one sense this might have been unreasonable, and the court may have done right in pronouncing him a lunatic or an unreasonable man. But if this is insanity, what state of mind is that which cannot confide in the testimony and oath of the infinite and ever blessed God of truth? Why, beloved, if God has promised to maintain your family--if He has told you, "trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily shalt be fed"--if the infinitely faithful God has promised to circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul--if He has promised to "sanctify you wholly, spirit, soul, and body, and preserve you blameless"--is it not the widest departure from reason that can be conceived of, for you not to feel assured in your heart, that all this shall be done?

IV. Causes or occasions of unbelief.

1. Selfishness prevents attention to the evidence of God's character. Men are so taken up with seeking their own private interests as to have very little time for consideration in regard to the real character of God as manifested in the works of creation, providence, and grace. Men in their delirious scramble after their selfish interests almost lose the idea even of the existence of God, and to all practical purposes they often quite do this.
2. The selfishness of men prevents their receiving the idea that God is benevolence. Being conscious of their own selfishness, and witnessing the same principle in all around them, they come to regard all intelligent beings as selfish. It is amazing to see how difficult it is to possess the human mind of the true knowledge of God. God charges mankind with thinking that he is altogether such a one as they are; and to judge others by ourselves is indeed very natural, however presumptuous and blasphemous it may be in respect to God.
3. Consciousness of our own hypocrisy in many things, and the constant developments of insincerity and hypocrisy in almost all around us, naturally begets in us distrust, or a want of confidence in the sincerity and disinterested benevolence of every body.
4. Consciousness of our own and evidence of others unmercifulness, renders it difficult to conceive of the infinite mercy of God.

5. The fact that men seek and think they find their happiness in getting all they can, blinds their minds in regard to the fact, that God's character is directly the reverse of this--that benevolence is His character--that doing, instead of getting good; and that giving instead of receiving good, constitute His happiness. Men cry continually, like the horse-leech, "Give, give," and are never satisfied with appropriating to themselves, but God on the other hand, finds His happiness in giving and in pouring out blessings from his infinite fulness upon all that can be persuaded to receive them.

6. Men are naturally unwilling to conceive of God's character as the direct opposite of their own. And this is one cause of their unbelief.

7. Unwillingness to believe whatever rebukes our sin, is another cause of unbelief.

8. A regard to our own reputation, is another fruitful source of unbelief. John 5:44: "How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?" Here Christ plainly teaches, that a regard to our own reputation will prevent our receiving and believing the testimony of God.

9. Prejudice is often a fruitful source of unbelief. To pre-judge or make up your mind on any question before you know all the facts, is of course in the highest degree calculated to bar the mind against a knowledge and belief of the truth.

10. Committed pride is another fruitful occasion of unbelief. When a man has committed himself in favor of any error, or against any truth, he is in the greatest danger of never coming to a knowledge of the truth. He will almost of course, reject in unbelief, any light that might correct his darkness.

11. Sensuality is another fruitful source of unbelief. Let any man give himself up to indulgence of his appetites, and his mind will become dark as midnight to all but sensible objects. He will "walk after the sight of his eyes, and the hearing of his ears;" but is never likely to believe or know any thing of God as he ought to know.

12. Confidence in the opinion of those who are themselves unbelieving will of course prevent our believing the testimony of God. This is an amazingly

fruitful source of unbelief. There are great multitudes who confide more in men than in God, who suffer their confidence in God to be entirely destroyed or prevented, by the unbelieving evasions of those who profess to have, but who really have not faith in God.

13. The temptations of Satan, as every one knows, are the occasion of much unbelief. By contradicting God and shaking the confidence of our first parents in God, he ruined the world.

14. A want of a clear idea of what faith really is, is another fruitful source of unbelief. Many think that they already believe, because they admit the truths of the gospel, and have no consciousness of positive disbelief. They overlook the fact that faith is the minds' felt, and joyful assurance of the truth of God. They are aware, that they have no felt and conscious assurance. They would think this a very high and rare attainment in religion, to have a felt, clear, conscious assurance, that God's promises would be fulfilled to them. Thus supposing that what really constitutes the faith of the gospel is some very high and rare attainment, they take up with something short, and rest in a state of mind that is the mere absence of felt disbelief.

15. Gluttony, and every species of intemperance, are sure causes of unbelief. They all grieve the Spirit of God. They sensualize and degrade the mind, and bring it into bondage to the flesh.

16. Our selfish will, more than any thing and every thing else, precludes the exercise of faith. The Jews could resist the evidence of miracles. And who has not observed how difficult it is, to beget confidence in any mind, against the will. Indeed the thing is impossible. Confidence is an act of the will itself; and it is often amazing to see what an amount of evidence may be accumulated before the mind, and yet the heart withhold its confidence. The truth is, that men do not believe God, because they will not.

V. The wickedness of unbelief.

1. It is the most unreasonable abomination in the Universe. I mean as I say. There is not so great a perversion of right reason in the whole universe of mind, as unbelief. Should the son of a great prince, who possessed immeasurable wealth, be filled with cares and great anxieties, lest he should

want his daily bread, who would not say that this was a vastly unreasonable and ridiculous state of mind. And suppose, to quiet his anxiety, his father gave him a bond and mortgage of all that he possessed, and made him secure by every possible security; notwithstanding which his fears should still prevail, and he should say, "I cannot realize and feel assured in my own mind, that my temporal necessities shall be supplied." Who would not pronounce this to be a most unreasonable state of mind? But how would this begin to compare with the infinite unreasonableness of that state of mind, that complains that it does not realize and cannot feel assured, that all its wants, spiritual and temporal, shall be supplied by God?

2. It is the most injurious sin against God that can be committed. It implies and includes:

(1.) A flat denial of the integrity of His character.

(2.) It is denying His attributes.

(3.) It charges Him with hypocrisy, and actually says to God, "Thou makest high pretensions of love to me--of thine ability and willingness to supply all my wants. Thou professest infinite compassion, and boastest of thine infinite grace. Thou averrest, that thou are able and willing to meet the necessities of my nature--hast given thy pledge and thine oath, and sworn by two immutable things, by which thou sayest it is impossible for thee to lie; and yet, Lord, I do not feel in my heart, that there is a word of truth in all these professions. I have no confidence in them, and do not feel in my mind as if they were true."

(4.) It is plainly charging God with lying, and that too, under oath.

(5.) It is charging Him with infinite folly and inconsistency. Indeed unbelief, cannot lodge in any mind, without virtually charging home upon God, the very worst character of any being in the Universe. For when we take into consideration God's promises and professions, how can we possibly exercise unbelief, without virtually charging Him with the very opposite of all His promises and professions.

Take again the illustration of a student, whose father has again and again, by letter, assured him that all his wants should be supplied. Now

if these assurances were full, often repeated, and even backed up by an oath, it is easy to see, this son could not doubt or make himself at all uneasy about his temporal support, without calling in question his father's ability or willingness. And now suppose the father had made as multiplied, and great, and various promises as God has; and suppose he had made as great a sacrifice, to promote the well-being of his son as God has to promote our well-being, could any thing be conceived more injurious to the father's feelings and character, than for him to have and manifest no confidence in his father's word.

3. Unbelief has the most injurious tendency of any sin in the Universe:

(1.) To ourselves, unbelief renders all heart-obedience impossible. How can we obey God from the heart, when we have no confidence in Him? All obedience to any government, parental or state government, or to the moral government of God, implies and must necessarily be based upon confidence in the ruler. If private or public confidence is destroyed, just in the same degree is the obedience of the heart rendered impossible.

(2.) It is in its tendency the most injurious sin to the universe of creatures that can be conceived. It is a most contagious abomination. How easily unbelief prevailed over our first parents, when the serpent suggested to Eve, that God was not sincere in his prohibition. It is truly wonderful to witness the contagious nature of unbelief. Let any one suggest a query and a doubt, or manifest in his conduct, that he has no confidence in God and His promises, and the influence seems to go forth almost with the power of omnipotence. If professors of religion manifest by their careless lives, their unbelief in the guilt and danger of sinners, it seems to act like a charm upon them. The most solemn assertions and threatenings of God are not regarded by them as any thing more than the baseless fabric of a dream. I have often been astonished to see, how the suggestions of unbelief could chill every thing to death, and put down the spirit of prayer and confidence in God, in a revival of religion. Let any one but suggest, under such circumstances, that the revival is going to decline; that God cannot work, because such and such things are in the way--let him but call in question the application or meaning of the promise; and it will be seen

how easily confidence can be destroyed, and how unbelief in any case, if it finds vent, will be in a community like the letting out of waters.

4. Unbelief tends to annihilate God's influence over the Universe. His influence over mind consists in the estimation in which He is held by moral beings. Where ever there is not a felt confidence in God, His influence over that mind is destroyed. And thus unbelief tends to the complete annihilation of the government of God. One great design of the Atonement was to restore public confidence. Satan had suggested, and our first parents had believed him, that God was selfish, in prohibiting their eating a certain fruit, on the ground that they would "become as gods, knowing good and evil." The Atonement was designed to exhibit in the strongest manner, God's disinterested love to men, that He might restore their confidence in Him, and thus gain dominion over their hearts, for their good and His own glory. In the Atonement He has given the highest evidence that He possibly could give, both of the disinterested nature and infinite degree of his love. But unbelief sets this all aside, and declares after all, that it has no confidence whatever in God. Thus it completely annihilates the power of moral government, and renders the gospel the savor of death unto death. It is a direct refusal to be satisfied with the infinite evidence that God has given of His disinterested love to man. It is virtually saying, "I will not be satisfied with any evidence that God has given or can give, of the integrity of His character. He is not to be trusted. He shall not have my confidence, say or do what He may."

5. Unbelief is the most grievous to God of any sin that can be committed. Suppose a husband should find, that his wife had no confidence at all in him, and suppose him to entertain for her the sincerest affection, and always to have manifested it in every possible way. Now what could be more grievous to his heart than to find that his wife had no confidence in him? If, under these circumstances, a husband would have cause of grief--would have reason to feel deeply injured, and wounded to the very heart; what must be the state of God's feelings, when He sees that His creatures have no confidence in Him, notwithstanding the infinite pains He has taken to secure their confidence, and thereby save their souls.

6. Unbelief "tramples the Son of God under foot, and counts the blood of

the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and does despite to the Spirit of grace." It says, I have no confidence in the necessity, or nature, or reality of the Atonement, and as for Jesus Christ, I do not believe that "His blood cleanseth from all sin." I do not feel in my heart, that He is "my wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." I in fact do not realizingly believe any such thing.

7. It is the cause of all other sins. A little reflection will convince any one who will look at the subject, that unbelief or the withholding a felt confidence in the character, word, and promises of God, is the cause of worldly mindedness, and selfishness, under all the forms in which they exist in this world. Let the mind but have a conscious realizing assurance, that all the infinitely interesting things contained in the Bible are realities, and it instantly breaks the power of selfishness and pride, and every other abomination, and delivers the soul up to the entire dominion of truth.

8. It is the setting aside of infinite evidence, and therefore, the greatest conceivable departure from the law of our nature. It has been already remarked, that belief in testimony is natural to man; and the mind in an unperverted state is as yielding as air to the influence of evidence. But what must be the state of that mind that can withhold confidence in God, in the face of all the evidence He has given of the infinite excellence of His character. It is the most outrageous mutiny against the laws of our being, the most abominable setting at nought and turning upside down all of the tendencies of unperverted mind that can be conceived.

9. It is the most horrible exhibition of prejudice that the universe any where presents, or ever witnessed. But for the appalling exhibition of the facts in the case, it would seem utterly incredible that mankind should not be entirely satisfied, and universally and continually exercise the most implicit confidence in the word, and character, and promises of God. We sometimes witness very shocking exhibitions of prejudice, in one human being towards another, insomuch that the prejudiced mind can really believe nothing good of him against whom the prejudice is entertained. Whatever appears to be fair, he suspects of hypocrisy; and accounts for any appearance of goodness, in any and every way, rather than admit the reality. Every one feels that there are few more hateful exhibitions of the human character than this. But how infinitely detestable is that state of mind that is

so given up to prejudice against God, as at once to set aside the infinite weight of testimony in His favor and to withhold all practical and heartfelt confidence in His word and oath?

10. God has done all that the nature of the case admits, to secure and even compel the exercise of confidence in Him. Suppose some mischievous mind to have introduced rebellion into a human government, by insinuations that had destroyed the confidence of the people in their ruler. And suppose, that while he had the power to overcome and crush, and slay them all at once, he should notwithstanding so pity them as to give his only begotten and well beloved son to atone for their sins. Suppose he had made every exhibition of his disinterested love that could be made, and yet, confidence was withholden, and his revolted subjects continued to maintain their pernicious distrust in his character. Well might he ask, "what more could I have done that I have not done to secure the confidence of this people. I have laid down my life to do you good, and how is it that ye do not believe?" For one might think it impossible, that unbelief should have a place in this world, after all the manifestations of God's love that have been made to it. But O, what shall we say, when we find not only the heathen world, but the Christian world, and even the Christian Church, withholding confidence in God, and manifesting the most shocking unbelief, in regard to His providence and word? What more can God do to secure public and individual confidence? What higher evidence can He give? or, in His own emphatic language, "What more can I do for my vineyard that I have not done?"

11. Unbelief is eminently a willful sin. It is a matter of common observation, that it is exceedingly hard to make men believe what they are unwilling to believe. And when the will is strongly opposed to any truth it is next to impossible to retain the confidence of the mind in that truth. But what must be the strength of depravity in that heart--what must be the power of prejudice, what invincible strength must there be in the opposition of that will, when the confidence of the mind is not secured by infinite evidence; when the mind can look over the whole field and see mountains of evidence piled upon mountains, and yet feel not a particle of inward confidence and resting of heart in the character and word of the blessed God.

The influence of the will in modifying our belief, on almost any subject, is strikingly illustrated in a great many ways. A drunkard does not believe that alcohol is poison. A Universalist does not believe that there is any hell. An epicure does not believe that his innutricious condiments are injurious to his health. And it is often striking to observe the amount of influence which the will has in modifying the opinions of men. And when we come to speak of the faith of the gospel, which implies and includes volition, it is self-evident that there can be no faith where the will does not yield. And to talk of an unwilling faith is to speak of an unwilling willingness. The truth is that men are not influenced by evidence in cases where their will is opposed to the truth. They are stubborn and rebellious, not convinced, not humbled, and their confidence not gained, let God say what He will.

REMARKS.

1. One unbelieving soul may do immense evil; especially if he be a minister of the gospel. How easy it is for a blind minister to keep his congregation for ever in darkness, in regard to the meaning of the gospel and the fulness of the salvation provided.
2. A mind under the influence of unbelief, is a very dangerous interpreter of the word of God. Without faith, no man discovers the true meaning of the Bible. Nor can he by any possibility discover its spiritual import, without the state of mind which is always implied in a right understanding of the word of God.
3. The Church is robbed of its inheritance by unbelief. Inasmuch as the promises are conditioned upon faith, and cannot in their own nature be fulfilled where there is not faith, how immense is the evil of unbelief in the Church of God? Gospel rest and salvation lie before them in all their fulness, completeness of Christian character in Christ Jesus, and the sanctification of body, soul, and spirit, are proffered to them and urged with infinite sincerity upon them; but all are rejected through unbelief. Those who are unbelieving in regard to the fulness of Christ's salvation, take away the key of knowledge. They neither enter into gospel rest themselves, and those that would enter they hinder; especially is this true of those ministers who call in question the attainability of entire consecration to God in this life.
4. Unbelief is the last sin that deserves any commiseration. And yet it is very

generally whined over, as if it were a calamity rather than a crime.

5. An unlearned but spiritual mind will understand the Bible, much more readily than learned unbelief.

6. A spiritual mind is learned in spiritual things; and a mind may know much about other things, and have no spiritual discernment, in respect to the truth of God.

7. It is often distressing to see a man who thinks himself learned, look with a kind of contempt upon the opinions of those whom he considers unlearned in respect to the real meaning of the Bible.

8. Faith sees the doctrine of entire sanctification abundantly revealed in the word of God. And when once the attention of the mind is directed to the examination of this question, it has often appeared wonderful to me, that any one should doubt whether this is a doctrine of revelation. I have already remarked upon the inference which Paul drew, from the last verses of the sixth chapter of 2nd Corinthians: "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." Now the faith of Paul instantly recognized in these promises, which he quoted from the Old Testament, the truth that entire sanctification is attainable in this life; and immediately adds--"Having therefore these promises, dearly, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Here, then, Paul saw a sufficient guaranty for the belief of this doctrine, and that to "perfect holiness in the fear of God," was, by the grace of God, put entirely within our reach. Now if Paul could draw such an inference as this, from these promises, (and who, when they consider what is implied in the promises, can say that his inference was not legitimate?) what shall we say of that mind, who can look over all the exceeding great and precious promises which have been given, that we might be made partakers of the divine nature, and yet see nothing to inspire the confidence, that a state of entire sanctification in this life, is in such a sense attainable, as to make its attainment a reasonable object of pursuit?

9. No man rightly understands and believes the Bible, who is living in the

indulgence of any known sin. There are multitudes, who seem to be trying to maintain a state of spirituality, whole in some things, and perhaps in many things, they are not entirely upright in their lives. They do not walk according to the best light they have, and are yet trying to exercise faith and keep up spiritual intercourse with God. The thing is naturally and for ever impossible. Spiritual mindedness and disobedience are direct contraries. It is absurd to expect to have communion with God, and yet live in the indulgence of any known sin.

10. Many think they have faith, who are yet conscious that they have no inward, felt confidence or assurance of mind, in regard to the word and promises of God. They are not conscious of a direct doubting or a disbelieving, what God has said; but are in that state of mind, that, while it does not deny directly and consciously, yet has no felt, practical confidence in the truth of God.

11. The lowest degree of real faith has, for a long time, been looked upon as a rare attainment in piety. That state of mind in which a person feels a confident assurance, that God's promises shall be fulfilled; that state of mind, that views the truth of God as a reality; has been looked upon, and spoken of, as evidencing a high degree of spirituality; when, in fact, such a state of mind is essential to the exercise of real faith.

12. In view of this subject, and of the present state of the Church, is it wonderful that Christ inquired, "When I come shall I find faith upon the earth?"

13. No one believes who finds it hard to love. True "faith works by love." Love is the natural and certain results of living faith.

14. No one believes who finds it hard to repent. Can he find it difficult to repent of his sins, who sees the death of Christ to be a reality?

15. No one believes, who has not the spirit of thanksgiving and praise. Multitudes of individuals suppose themselves to believe, who rarely, if ever, are exercised with a spirit of thanksgiving and of praise to God. Can it be possible that any mind can believe, and have a realizing sense of the infinite love, and truth, and grace of God, and yet have no heart to praise Him?

16. No one believes, who find it difficult to pray. Can a man who has a realizing sense of the state of the world and of the Church, and of the willingness and ability of God to bless mankind, restrain prayer? Will not his very breath be prayer, devotion, and praise? Will not his very heart within him be liquid as

water? Will not his bowels of compassion yearn mightily, over a dying world? And will not his soul stand in a continual attitude of thanksgiving, and praise, and supplication?

[Back to Top](#)

Blessedness of Benevolence

Lecture XII

June 3, 1840

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Acts 20:35: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

On what occasion our Lord Jesus Christ uttered these words we are not informed, as they are not recorded by the Evangelists. But we have the authority of an inspired Apostle, that He taught this doctrine. In considering this subject I will state:

I. What constitutes true religion.

II. Some of the elements that enter into the happiness of the true Christian.

III. Notice several forms of delusion under which multitudes are laboring.

I. What constitutes true religion.

The whole of religion may be comprehended in the simple term, benevolence, or love. This love must be supreme in degree towards God, and equal to men. It must also be disinterested; i.e. God must be loved for what He is, and our neighbor's happiness must be chosen and sought for its own sake, and not from any interested motive. But I must enter still more particularly into what is implied in benevolence, or that love which constitutes religion.

1. It implies a spirit of justice.

2. Of mercy.

3. Of truth.
4. Of complacency in goodness.
5. Of opposition to sin, and sinners as such.

These are only some of the modifications of benevolence, as it is developed by circumstances calling for these particular expressions of it. But,

6. Benevolence implies a desire to promote the happiness of all beings. Benevolence is good will, or a desire to promote the happiness of its object. In a still more extended sense, it is the love of being in general, and a desire to promote happiness for its own sake. It regards the happiness of every being capable of happiness, as a real substantial good in itself, and desires his happiness most who has the greatest capacity for happiness.

7. It implies a desire to promote the happiness of enemies as well as friends. True benevolence does not distinguish in this respect between enemies and friends, but regards the happiness of all as a real good. Happiness is its object, and whether this can be promoted in an enemy or a friend, it matters not.

8. It not only implies a desire, but the choice of the happiness of all beings, so far as it can be consistently promoted. It is very common for persons to desire things which, upon the whole, they do not choose, the desires or emotions often being in opposition to the will. It should be understood that benevolence is good willing and not merely good desiring. Man's desires do not influence his outward conduct any farther than he wills in accordance with his desire. Good willing always produces good acting, because the will always governs the external conduct; but there may be much desire that never begets corresponding action.

9. The benevolence that constitutes true religion is a disposition of the mind, in distinction from those accidental choices that are sometimes made under the pressure of peculiar circumstances, which after all, by no means, constitute the character of a man. A miser may be so wrought upon, and his constitutional susceptibilities so excited by the presence of some object of great distress, as for the moment to open his hand to give relief, and perhaps in five minutes call himself a thousand fools for having done so. No one therefore would say that this was true benevolence. It implies no radical

change in his character. It is only the wringing from his selfish hand, by the force of circumstances, acting on his constitutional susceptibilities, what it was not in his heart to give, and that which would not have been given, but as a relief to his own agony at the time. Now it should be understood that the benevolence which constitutes true religion is a continually abiding disposition of the mind. I mean by disposition, what is commonly meant by it, the controlling propensity of a man's mind. We speak of a man as having an avaricious disposition, a worldly, jealous, or envious disposition. We call this a disposition, because we observe it to be the permanent bent or tendency of the mind. The avaricious man manifests his disposition in all his worldly arrangements. It is seen to be the great tendency and effort of his mind to gain worldly possessions. The envious man is seen to be instituting comparisons between himself and others, and naturally and always to manifest an ill temper towards those whom he considers as competitors or superiors. Now a benevolent man is seen to have a benevolent disposition. That is his manifest character. The happiness of being is the great object of pursuit with him. He lays his plans of doing good, and of carrying out and gratifying his leading disposition, just as naturally and certainly as an avaricious man would. But while the avaricious man lays his plans to get and hoard up, the benevolent man lays his plans to diffuse abroad. All other men are aiming, under some form, to promote self-interest, to promote their own happiness by direct efforts. But the benevolent man seeks not his own happiness, but finds it in endeavoring to make others happy. His own happiness is not the object of pursuit. And yet he is the most certain to find it in proportion as he has the less regard to it. To illustrate this: Suppose that two men are accosted by a miserable beggar in circumstances of the utmost necessity. One of them is a selfish and the other a benevolent man. They are both exercised however with a degree of compassion and both give of their means to the object of distress. It is easy to see, that he is the most happy in giving who is the most disinterested, and who has the least regard to his own happiness in the case, because the relief to him is the greatest gratification. If real piety and true benevolence were the sole motives that induced the benevolent man to give, the relief of the beggar would beget in him unmingled satisfaction, while at the same time, the one who was less benevolent would feel less intent on relieving his necessities, and of course less gratified and less happy by witnessing the relief.

It should be understood then, and always borne in mind, that Christian benevolence is a controlling disposition, or propensity of mind, and develops itself just as any other disposition manifests itself, by the daily walk of its possessor.

II. What constitutes true Christian happiness.

1. It consists in the exercise of benevolence itself. The human mind is so constructed by its Author, that the exercise of benevolence in itself, is exceedingly sweet and grateful to the mind. It has an excellent relish and sweetness that enters into the very substance of the exercise. There is a conscious happiness diffused through the mind, that seems to be woven into the very texture of benevolence itself. This is to the benevolent mind like the perennial fountain, pouring forth continually the sweet and refreshing waters of life.

2. Another element of Christian happiness is, that which consists in the gratification of the benevolent disposition. I have already said, there is a sweet satisfaction in the exercise itself. But still, the exercise is one thing, and its gratification another. The gratification is another ingredient that greatly augments the sum of happiness. To will to do good, is sweet, but to really succeed in doing the good that we desire, is sweeter still.

3. Another element of the Christian's happiness is the self-complacency that follows and accompanies the exercise or gratification of benevolence. This is indispensable to complete happiness. Men may experience a kind and degree of happiness, in indulging in those things in which all the powers of the mind do not harmonize; but if they are indulging in things to which their consciences are opposed, the inward mutiny and conflict thus produced, mingles in their cup of gratification the gall of bitterness. But benevolence always has the approbation of conscience. And the mind, from its very structure, necessarily feels a self-complacent satisfaction in the exercise of benevolent affections.

4. Another element of this happiness is the life and harmonious action of all the powers of the soul in its exercise. The mind is so constructed, that it will not, cannot harmonize in any other course of action. It was made to be benevolent. Benevolence is its proper element, and it can no more properly enjoy life in the exercise of selfish affections, than a fish can live out of

water. But there is an excellent harmony, like an exquisitely tuned instrument, in the movements of all the powers of the mind in the exercise and gratification of benevolence. Like an exquisite machine, that is made of such materials, kept so clean, and so oiled as to cut off all friction as far as possible, it moves so still, so sweet, so safe, there is a loveliness in the harmony of its movements. So the soul in the exercise of benevolence is made to harmonize. Every power of the mind consents. There is no jarring, no grating, no friction, no inward mutiny or repellancy to grate like discord; but all is loveliness; quietness, and assurance for ever.

5. Another element of the Christian's happiness is the full assurance that he pleases God. The mind is so constructed, that when it is conscious of exercising perfect benevolence, it can no more doubt that it pleases God, than it can doubt its own existence. Love naturally and necessarily casts out all fear. There is in the very workings of benevolence itself, the accompanying assurance, that these affections and this course of conduct please God.

6. Another element in the Christian's happiness is joy and rejoicing in the happiness and the glory of God. Remember, the happiness of being is the benevolent man's object of pursuit. He always rejoices in true happiness, wherever he sees it; and of course he feels the greater satisfaction, by how much the more happiness he contemplates or beholds as existing. To him the happiness of God is infinitely the greatest good in the Universe, and the glory of God, as it stands connected with the happiness of God and that of His whole government, is considered by him as the supreme good. The consideration then of God's infinite and eternal happiness, of His infinite and eternal glory, is the source of present, perpetual, boundless, and eternal consolation. What a consideration for a benevolent mind to dwell upon, is the infinite and unchanging happiness of God--an infinite, fathomless, shoreless ocean of perfect, infinite blessedness. To a benevolent mind this is an unfailing source of eternal joy.

7. Another element of the Christian's happiness is the happiness and good things of all other beings. A truly benevolent mind participates in the happiness, and really enjoys the happiness of all around him, as if those things were his own. And nothing can prevent a benevolent mind from tasting the cup of every man's happiness and sharing with every man, the

happiness of those good things which God bestows upon him, and that too without, in the least degree, diminishing the bliss of him whose happiness he shares. He is entirely satisfied and rejoiced to see things bestowed upon others that are withholden from himself. If, in time of great drought, for example, a cloud arises that promises fair to water his farm, his garden, or his neighborhood; if a change of wind carries the blessing to another town, where it is as much needed, he is equally well pleased, and enjoys the refreshing of his neighbors as if it were his own.

8. Another element of the Christian's happiness consists in his direct personal efforts to promote the good of others. His very toils and labors have in them the relish of an excellent sweetness, as carry with them and in them their own reward. Why, a benevolent mind is a disposition to do good to others. Now in doing good he is gratifying his natural propensities; he is acting out his governing disposition; so that while he is not seeking his happiness as an end at all, he is surely finding an exquisite enjoyment, in his disinterested efforts to do good.

9. The Christian's happiness consists in the present and eternal indulgence of a ruling propensity or disposition to do good. A Christian has nothing else to do any more than God has. And from the very moment of his conversion, he has nothing to do to all eternity but to pursue uninterruptedly and as zealously as he pleases, the ruling disposition of his soul. And God has so circumstanced him, as to surround him continually with objects upon which he can gratify his benevolence. He has an ample field for the exercise and pouring out of all the benevolence of his soul, in efforts to do good; without ever, for one hour, being called off from that which constitutes his chief delight--from pursuing and indulging without restraint, the grand, peculiar, absorbing disposition of his soul.

III. Several forms of delusion.

1. Many seem to mistake light for religion. They get some new views of religious truth which produce a corresponding excitement of mind, and they bustle about, under the impression that this excitement is religion; when, at the same time, if they would narrowly watch, it would be seen that their heart is still selfish, and not benevolent--that their ruling propensity or disposition is not changed--that while they are excited by their new views of religious truth, it is emotion and not will that is active. Their business

habits and transactions will soon develop the fact, that selfishness is, after all, in some form, the ruling propensity of their mind. In all such cases, there is of course a radical mistake, a fatal delusion, under which the mind is laboring.

2. Many are deceiving themselves, by the exercise of a legal religious zeal. Paul testified of his countrymen, that "they had a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." I have long been convinced, that much of the zeal manifested by professors of religion, and many of the professed converts, is of this character. They slumber on, until awakened by the thunders of Sinai; when they bluster about, urged by a sense of duty and conscience, and a multitude of legal considerations, while they are conscious, that they are not influenced by the deep love of God and of souls. The evidences of their legal spirit are:

(1.) A manifest want of a deeply heart-broken and humble spirit.

(2.) A manifest want of a deep satisfaction of mind in the work itself.

(3.) The absence of that abiding soul satisfaction which belongs to the exercise and gratification of benevolent feeling. Many very zealous persons are any thing but truly happy in the exercise of the affections which are working within them. They carry with them all the while a sense of condemnation. They feel as if their holiest exercises needed to be confessed as sins, and there is all the time a grating and friction within, and a felt consciousness, that all is not right, a sense of defilement, a want of integrity and perfect uprightness of intention, and a consciousness of more or less selfishness in every thing they say or do. Now persons in this state of mind do not conceive what a clean heart is. They do not understand the immense and radical difference between their feelings and the exercises of a purely benevolent mind. How a person can live without condemnation, they cannot understand. And their experience being what it is, they of course look with great suspicion upon any who profess to live without a sense of condemnation, and judge of course that it is because they are not well acquainted with their own hearts, and also are ignorant of the purity of God's law. Now I can understand very well, from my own experience, what this state of mind is. I know very well what it is to have a legal

zeal, that would compass sea and land to make a proselyte, and yet carry with it, as if woven into its very texture, the sense of condemnation. The fact is, the mind is so constructed that whenever it is enlightened, it cannot be satisfied with a legal zeal. Nothing but the exercise of unmixed benevolence can make it happy. Nothing but a conscious exercise of right affections can free it from the sting of self-condemnation. Herein is a vast delusion. Persons in this state of mind are very apt to suppose that there is no other state than this to which Christians may attain in this life, and to judge, and censure, and condemn all who profess the consciousness of a clean heart.

3. Many mistake emotion for disposition. They do not distinguish between the emotions which constitute their excitement of mind and that controlling disposition, or state of the will, that constitutes true benevolence.

4. Others still mistake mere assent for disposition. They are enlightened, and hold correct opinions; and knowing that religion does not consist in emotion, they are satisfied without emotion, and do not consider, that although emotion may sometimes exist independent of the will, yet as a matter of fact and philosophy, the emotions take fire most easily in accordance with the disposition, and men feel most naturally and easily on that subject, that most fully chimes with the leading disposition of their minds. Therefore if an individual supposes that he has a benevolent disposition, while his emotions are not easily enkindled and fanned into a flame, upon the presentation of the objects of benevolence, he is deceived. He has the religion of opinion, and not the propensity or ruling disposition.

5. There are many instances in which individuals are deceived, by setting down to the account of benevolence that which as a matter of fact, is only one form of selfishness triumphing over another. As for example:

(1.) The love of reputation may be the supreme ruling propensity of mind, and triumph over lust, intemperance, and a host of other subordinate propensities. So that a man or a woman may be liberal in giving, chaste in conversation and deportment, and of temperate habits; and all this may be put to the account of true benevolence, or religion, when it should be ascribed only to the love of reputation.

(2.) Again, a literary ambition may triumph over sloth or appetite, and many other evil, but subordinate, propensities of the mind.

(3.) A spirit of avarice may be the ruling propensity of the mind, and triumph over lust, intemperance and many forms of sin.

(4.) Selfish fears and hopes may restrain inward wickedness, and all these restraints may be, and often are, supposed to result from pure benevolence, when in fact they are only one form of selfishness, controlling and subordinating other forms of the same principle.

6. The only remaining form of delusion, that I shall now notice, is, where the individual's happiness consists, not in the exercise of his benevolence, but in the consideration of his own safety. We sometimes see persons settle down into an Antinomian security, and manifest great quietness and peace of mind, where happiness and peace are manifestly based upon the consideration of their own safety. Now this is as far as possible from a truly religious state of mind. Real religious happiness arises out of the true saint. To be sure, the contemplation of the grace of Christ, the joys of Heaven, and an eternity of blessedness at God's right hand, come in to make up the aggregate of a Christian's happiness; but the basis and foundation of the whole is that which belongs to the exercise and gratification of benevolent affections themselves.

REMARKS.

1. The natural heart does not apprehend the true nature of religion. I have often wondered what sceptics can be thinking about, and how it is that they can have any doubts of the necessity of a change of heart. But a consideration of the selfishness of their hearts, explains the whole difficulty. God's state of mind is the exact opposite of their own. Benevolence is the contrast of a selfish disposition. Selfishness finds its happiness in getting; benevolence, in giving. Selfishness is always endeavoring to promote its own, and benevolence the happiness of others.

2. This remark leads me to say, that we can here see the necessity of examples, to illustrate the true nature of religion. A leading object of Christ in taking to Himself human nature was, to associate with men, and possess their minds of the true idea of God's character, so to live and associate with them, that they might

observe what God would be as a Neighbor, or Brother, or Son, or Friend; what spirit and temper He possessed, and would manifest, under the circumstances in which men are. As soon as a few had caught the rare idea, that God was love, He sends them forth, "as sheep among wolves," to lay down their lives, as He had done, for a rebellious world. They catch His spirit, imitate His example, and the waves of salvation roll wherever they go; and a few years had well nigh seen a world prostrate at the feet of Christ. But alas! the state, with her selfish and polluting embrace, soon seduced the Church into selfishness and apostacy from God. And the world can never be converted, only as examples and illustrations of what true religion is, are held up in the lives of professed Christians, before the eyes of men.

3. You can see from this subject, what constitutes real apostacy from God. The moment you set up a selfish interest as the object of pursuit, go to any place, engage in any business, marry, or take any other step, inconsistent with the exercise and pursuit of the great ends at which God aims, you are in a state of apostacy from God; you have forsaken the fountain of living waters, and are "hewing out broken cisterns that can hold no water."

4. You see from this subject, what constitutes the happiness of God. Benevolence is His whole character. His benevolence is infinite. His happiness is, therefore, infinite and unchangeable.

5. You see, that Christians may and ought to be as happy, in proportion to their capacity, as God is.

6. You see what constitutes the unhappiness of many professors of religion. It is selfishness. It is naturally impossible, that a selfish mind should be happy. Selfishness lets loose an infernal brood of scorpions and vipers, to sting the soul's happiness to death.

7. You see also, what constitutes the misery of all men. They are pressing after happiness but cannot obtain it. And the reason is, they are seeking it in that in which it cannot consist. If a man pursues his own happiness as an end, he may as well expect to overrun his own shadow. The mind is so constituted that it cannot possibly be obtained in this way. To be disinterestedly benevolent, is the only possible way to be happy. To seek not your own, but another's good, is for ever and unalterably indispensable to the happiness of a moral being.

8. What striking evidence does the human constitution afford of the benevolence of God! He has so constructed it, that happiness is the certain and necessary result of benevolence, and that no other possible working of the constitution can result in happiness. What striking and unanswerable testimony is this to the benevolence of the Author of our nature!

9. Those who do not enjoy the good things of others, or find occasions of gratitude, and really feel the spirit of gratitude, for blessings bestowed upon others, are not Christians. I have already said, that true benevolence is the love or desire of our neighbor's happiness, or rather the willing or choosing his happiness. Now whenever blessings are conferred upon others, then we are pleased. It is what we choose. It is in accordance with and a gratification of the ruling propensity of our minds. It is just as certain then as our existence, that if we are benevolent, we shall rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep; that we shall participate in the joys and sorrows of those around us, and rejoice in and be thankful for all the good bestowed upon the world.

10. From this subject it is easy to see, of what spirit those are who are ready to murmur at others possessing good things, of which themselves are deprived. Did you ever see a family of selfish children, and witness their complainings and murmurings, whenever something was bestowed upon one, which the others had not received? "Now, Ma, you have given brother such a thing and have not given it to me. Now let me have the best things; let me have the largest piece, and the most and best of every thing." Now this is a supremely hateful spirit; but it is exactly the spirit of many professors of religion. Instead of rejoicing to see their brothers and sisters blest with temporal or spiritual good things, they are ready to murmur and be offended, because these things are not bestowed on them. This manifests the supreme selfishness of their minds, and affords the highest demonstration that they are not Christians.

11. They are not Christians, who have no heart to thank God for bestowing blessings upon their enemies. There is no religion in selfish gratitude. A supremely selfish mind might be thankful for blessings bestowed upon itself, or upon its friends who are accounted as parts of itself. But a truly benevolent mind will rejoice in blessings bestowed on enemies as well as friends.

12. It is easy to see, that the covetous and the ambitious are not and cannot be Christians.

13. That a spirit of worldly competition is utterly inconsistent with the spirit of benevolence.

14. We see what that state of mind must be, that is never willing to do a neighbor a kindness without taking pay for it. Some persons seem never to have the spirit of doing good, or of obliging any body but themselves. The pay seems to be the sole motive in doing almost any thing and every thing for those around them. They seem never to enjoy a luxury in making those around them happy, for its own sake. And if they do any thing for a neighbor, it is, by no means, for the sake of doing good, but for the sake of the pay. Now every one can see, that if a minister should be actuated by such motives in visiting the sick, and in preaching the gospel, every one would say there was no virtue in it. They will go and visit the sick as often as the physician does, and take as much pains to restore the health of the soul as the physician does the health of the body; and in all this they are expected to be actuated by pure benevolence. And for all this they never think of asking any pay, whether they have any salary or not. What minister has not traveled hundreds of miles, and spent hours, and days, and weeks, and months, in such labors of love, without ever expecting or desiring to receive an earthly remuneration for it. He found in the very exercise itself an excellent solace, and an exquisite relish, that was to his benevolent mind worth more than gold. But what is expected of ministers of the gospel in this respect, should be true of all men. They should as far as possible, "do good and lend, hoping for nothing again." They should be actuated by disinterested benevolence, knowing that "with whatsoever measure they mete it shall be measured to them again."

15. We see what we should think of those who are unwilling to exercise any self-denial, for the sake of doing good to others. There is one man, who will not give up what he calls the temperate use of alcohol, for the sake of doing good. He contends, that it is lawful for him to use it moderately; that others have no right to make a stumbling-block of his use of it; and as for practising a little self-denial for the sake of the example, he will not do it. Here is a woman, who professes to love God supremely, and her neighbor as herself. She prays for the heathen, and thinks herself truly religious; and yet, she will not deny herself the use of tea and coffee, to save the heathen world from hell. The wail of eight hundred millions of human beings is coming upon every wind of heaven, crying out, "send us tracts, send us Bibles, send us missionaries, send us the means of eternal life; for we are dying in our sins." "But ah!" says these professing Christians, men and women-- "It is hard times; money is scarce; we are in debt;

we must turn away our ears from hearing these wailings of woe." Now brother--sister--let me sit down at your table. What have you here? How much does this tea and coffee cost you a year? How much do these worse than useless articles of luxury curtail your ability to send the gospel to the perishing? My sister, how many Bibles and tracts have you used up in this way? How many Bibles, at five shillings each, might be sent by you to the heathen every year, were you willing to exercise a little self-denial, and that too, a self-denial which your own health and highest good demand? Brother, perhaps you use tobacco. How long have you used it? The price of how many Bibles does it cost you a year? And how many heathen might this day have had Bibles in their hands, who will now go down to hell, without ever hearing of the Savior, who might have had the Bible and eternal life, had you had one particle of benevolence in your heart? Will you make the calculation? Will you ask, how many Bibles and tracts might have been purchased by the money you have squandered in this manner? And will you settle the question, definitely, whether you are influenced by the love of God and of souls? Whether you eat and drink these things for the glory of God, or for the gratification of your own lust? Surely, the question is of no less importance, than whether benevolence or selfishness constitutes your character.

16. Again, we see what to think of those whose religious duties are not a source of the highest enjoyment to them. The religion of many persons seems to make them miserable, and whatever they do for the cause of Christ they seem to do painfully and grudgingly. The reason is, they are not actuated by love. If love were the ruling disposition of their hearts, their religion would be a source of the sweetest enjoyment to them.

17. We see what to think of those who prefer getting, to giving for the cause of Christ. The truly benevolent value property, only as the means of forwarding the great object upon which their heart is set. Every thing is esteemed by them in proportion as it relates to and bears upon the Kingdom of Christ. Life, health, time, property, talents, all things, are brought into the service of God, and regarded only as they are the means of promoting His glory, and the good of souls. A truly benevolent mind places no value upon money for its own sake. It no more desires to hoard up money to gratify and please self, than it would board up chips and stones. In short, it places no earthly value upon money, or any thing else, only as it can be made instrumental in doing good. When, therefore, you see a man that loves to make great bargains, who is engaged in getting all he can, and gives to the poor and to the cause of Christ grudgingly and sparingly, it is a

simple matter of fact, that he is a selfish, worldly man, and no Christian at all. In this connection you can see the delusion of that professor of religion, who will be more zealous in seasons of speculation, and enter with more enthusiasm into a money-making enterprise, than into a money-giving enterprise for the cause of Christ.

18. You see the delusion of that professor of religion, who more readily loses the spirit of revival than the spirit of speculation--in other words, whose religious zeal can be cooled down by an opportunity to make money, and who can be driven away from God and prayer, by the opening of navigation, the coming in of the business season, or when any new project of money-making comes up before the public. There are many painful instances, in which professors of religion will seem to bustle about and be active in religion, at seasons of the year when they have little else to do, or when little can be done at money-making; but are ever ready to backslide, and are sure to do so, whenever an opportunity occurs to favor their own interests. But this is almost too plain a case of delusion to need remark.

19. In the light of this subject, you can see that there is no true spirituality without real benevolence of heart and life. Many persons seem to be engaged in a most absurd attempt to keep up spirituality and a spirit of prayer and intercourse with God, while they live and conduct their business upon principles of selfishness. Now nothing can be a greater insult to God, than this--to pray for His Spirit, to attempt to have intercourse with Him, or even pretend to be His friend, while as a matter of fact selfishness is the rule of your life.

20. If "it is more blessed to give than to receive," what infinitely great satisfaction must God take in supporting so great a family. He is pouring out, from His unwasting fulness, an ocean of blessings continually. And what an infinite gratification it must be to His benevolent mind to plan and execute all the good that He is planning, and executing, and will plan and execute to all eternity.

21. We see from this subject, how to understand that declaration concerning Christ, "that for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is for ever set down at the right hand of God." Although multitudes of things connected with the Atonement were in themselves painful, yet, upon the whole, the great work was a source of infinite satisfaction to the Father and the Son. And God is virtuous in the Atonement, just in proportion as

he really enjoys the making of it Himself. "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver;" and we always regard that self-denial as most virtuous, that is exercised most willingly. And where the greatest self-denial is exercised, not only with great willingness, but with great joyfulness, for the sake of doing good to others, we pronounce that the highest degree of virtue. The Father is represented as being well pleased with the conduct of Christ in the Atonement. He was greatly gratified with the virtue of His Son, and to see Him count the work a joyous one, in so freely and joyfully denying Himself to save His enemies from death.

22. If God finds it "more blessed to give than to receive," why should we not abound with every blessing that we need? Why should we, by our narrow-mindedness and unbelief, render it impossible for God to gratify His benevolent heart in giving us great things?

23. You see the secret of all unbelief in prayer. It is our own selfishness. I have already said that a selfish mind finds it difficult to conceive of the true character of God. A selfish man knows that he gives grudgingly; and he very naturally conceives of God, as being altogether such a one as himself. He finds it exceedingly difficult to get hold of the rare and great idea, that God is his exact opposite in this respect--that giving is His happiness--that He has infinitely more satisfaction in giving good things, than we have in receiving them--that He has greater pleasure in giving things, than the most avaricious man on earth has in getting. But it is no wonder that selfish minds are slow to understand and believe this.

24. There is no religion but that which consists in a sympathy with God, in being benevolent as He is benevolent; in having a benevolent disposition--a settled, fixed, abiding disposition to benevolence. 1 John 4:7, 8, 16: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love. And he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him."

[Back to Top](#)

A Willing Mind Indispensable to a Right Understanding of Truth

Lecture XIII

July 1, 1840

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--John 7:17: "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."

In discoursing upon this subject I shall show:

I. That God's promises, with their conditions, are a revelation of the great principles of His government.

II. What is implied in a willingness to do the will of God.

III. That this state of mind is indispensable to a right understanding of the truth of God.

IV. That this state of mind will certainly result in a right knowledge of the truth, unless you tempt God by neglecting the means of knowledge.

I. God's promises, with their conditions, are a revelation of the great principles of His government.

God is unchangeable. What He does, or promises, or says at one time, He would do, or promise, or say, the circumstances being the same, at all times. Every thing that he does and says, is but a revelation of his character. He knows nothing of favoritism. His regards are always founded in the reason, and nature, and relations of things. He regards all beings and events according to their true nature, character, and relations. His providence, his threatenings, his law, gospel, and promises, only reveal so many great, unchangeable principles of his government. And as He never changes, as there is in Him "no variableness nor shadow of turning," we may rest with the utmost confidence in the fact, that both a promise and its condition, that all the promises with their conditions, are founded in, and are a revelation of the unalterable principles of His government;

both the promise and the condition being founded in the nature and relations of things. And that He always holds Himself pledged to fulfill the same promises, under the same or similar circumstances, and upon the same conditions. These are irresistible inferences from his unchangeableness.

II. What is implied in a willingness to do His will.

1. It implies implicit confidence in his character. We should have no right to be willing to do the will of God, unless we had reason to confide in the perfection of his will. His character consists in the state of his will. To be willing, therefore, that his will should be done, implies an unwavering confidence, that his will is perfectly right. It implies the ripe conviction on our part, that He is absolutely omniscient, and knows perfectly what He ought to will, or what upon the whole is best to be done, and that his will is for ever and unalterably just what it ought to be.
2. It implies supreme love to God. If any other being is loved more than He is, we should feel more desirous to please that being than to please God; for indeed the object, so loved, is in reality our God. A willingness therefore to do the will of God implies a supreme attachment to Him for his own sake, and the supreme desire of pleasing Him.
3. It implies a supreme regard to God's authority. It is absurd to say that we are willing to do his will, and yet, that our regard to his authority is not supreme. It is one thing to desire to do his will, and another thing to be willing to do it. It is a common thing for persons to desire what, upon the whole, they do not choose. But to be willing to do God's will, instead of our own or that of any other being, certainly implies a supreme regard to his authority.
4. It also implies a supreme desire or willingness in us to do or to be wholly right or wholly conformed to the will of God. It implies an intense desire and willingness to be right on every subject, to have our whole being and all the influences that we exert wholly and perfectly right--to be wholly conformed to the will of God in all the relations we sustain to Him and to the whole Universe--an intense desire and willingness to do and feel exactly right towards ourselves and all other beings.
5. It implies an intense desire and willingness to do our utmost to glorify

God--to be used all up to his service--to have every power and every moment, and every thing in, about, and belonging to us, wholly devoted to the infinitely important end of glorifying God. It is God's will that we should be so; and a willingness to do his will implies a willingness in us to be so.

6. It implies an intense desire and disposition to avoid whatever is displeasing to Him or contrary to his will--a willingness on our part to submit to any sacrifice, rather than displease Him. If a man would not sacrifice his own life, rather than knowingly to displease God, he is not, in the sense of this text, willing to do his will.

7. It implies an intense desire and disposition to know the truth on all subjects--to know whatever concerns our highest interests and usefulness--whatever will contribute to the highest perfection of our body and soul, and to our highest usefulness. In short, it implies an intense desire and willingness to know the whole circle of truth, in relation to our whole being, all our duty, all our influences, and all the will of God concerning us. If there be one subject, relating to the highest perfection of our bodies or souls, or our highest and best influences and usefulness, upon which we are unwilling to be enlightened, upon which we are not intensely desirous to be enlightened, we cannot properly be said to be willing to do the will of God.

8. It implies that we have no lust or idol to spare or defend. But on the contrary, that we have wholly renounced idolatry, under every form, and have cast off the dominion of lust, and are wholly devoted to the will of God.

9. It implies the renunciation of our own will, and that we have no will except that God's will should be done. It implies the constant yielding up of our will to Him, and that it is the abiding state of our minds, and the constant echo of our hearts, "Thy will--thy will--THY WILL, O God, be done."

10. It implies that we have no longer any selfish interest to promote: that we have for ever renounced all idea or desire of setting up any interest of our own, as the end of pursuit, whether a temporal interest or an eternal interest, whether a material or a spiritual interest, and that "whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do," is designed by us to promote "the glory of God."

11. It implies that we have no longer any appetite or passion to consult or to defend--that we have no desire to pursue our own gratification in any respect as the great end and object of life, and that no appetite and passion is indulged merely for the sake of the indulgence. But that we consider our whole being as God's; that our appetites were created to subserve the highest interests of our being, to be the servants and not the masters of our souls; and that, whether we eat or drink, or sleep or wake, or labor, or rest, lie down, or rise up, or study, or pray, or preach, whatever we do, that all be done from a supreme desire to do the will of God.

12. It implies that we have no reputation of our own to maintain or defend; but that, like our Master, we have made ourselves of no reputation--that we have wholly renounced it as of no value, except as connected with the kingdom of Christ, and that we have so entirely given up our good name to Him, as to be willing to have it cast out as evil, or that any thing shall result respecting it that can in the highest manner promote the ultimate glory of God.

13. It implies that we have no longer any indulged prejudice to blind our minds, or harden our hearts, to prevent our knowing and doing the will of God. Prejudice is a state in which we make up our mind and commit ourselves, before we are possessed of all the facts. To condemn an author before we have patiently and candidly examined and possessed ourselves of his views, is a very common and injurious form of prejudice. To condemn a person or a sentiment without a most candid examination and hearing of the whole matter, is another odious form of prejudice. A willingness to do the will of God, therefore, implies the giving up of all prejudice on every subject, and a candid throwing of the mind open to conviction, to light, and truth with an entire readiness to follow the will of God, in whatever direction it shall lead us.

14. It implies that the love of truth and of God has swallowed up every thing else, and come to be the ruling principle of our whole being--that it is our meat, and our drink, and our life, to do the whole will of God--that a knowledge of his will has, with our minds, the power of omnipotence to sway our minds and carry us all lengths in obedience to it.

15. It implies an honest and earnest disposition in us, to be acquainted with all our errors of opinion and practice--a willingness to be searched with the

utmost scrutiny--yea, with the scrutiny of omniscience itself, and that we feel the utmost gratitude to any one who will point out to us any thing in which we can, in any respect, be more perfectly conformed to the will of God.

16. It implies the greatest abhorrence in us, of whatever shall give over to Satan any part of our influence, time, talents, property, or any thing whatever, that should in any way thwart the will of God.

III. This state of mind is indispensable to a right understanding of the truth of God.

1. Because it is indispensable to honest and diligent inquiry. It is certain that a man will never inquire honestly after truth, until he is in an honest state of mind, and that he will not inquire diligently and perseveringly until he is possessed of an intense desire and will to know and do the truth. To suppose the contrary of this is manifestly absurd.

2. This state of mind is indispensable to a just appreciation of the value and force of evidence. Certainly it is absurd to say that a mind will justly appreciate the force of evidence, upon any subject upon which it is not upright.

3. This state of mind is indispensable to the heart's embracing truth, when it is perceived by the intellect. It is not necessary to suppose that the mind already knows the truth upon every subject, in order to have a disposition to obey it. A mind may be in love with truth for its own sake. In this state it loves all truth upon all subjects. It goes forth with earnest longings in search of truth, and whenever and wherever it finds it, it receives and obeys it with all joyfulness. But unless the heart be in love with truth, it is not honest in the search of it, nor ready to embrace it when apprehended by the intellect.

4. It is impossible for the mind to receive the whole truth without this state of heart. Some shreds of truth may be perceived by the mind, and many things about it may be known, while the heart is in an unsubdued state; but the whole truth in its bearings, relations, tendencies, and results, is never apprehended by an uncandid mind, or by a mind unwilling to know and do it.

IV. This state of mind will certainly result in a right knowledge of the truth,

unless you tempt God by rejecting the means of knowledge.

1. Tempting God may defeat the fulfillment of any promise where our own agency is concerned in its fulfillment. In Acts, 27th chapter, we have an account of the shipwreck of Paul. Here God expressly promised, by Paul, "that there should be no loss of any man's life among them, but of the ship." But when the sailors were about to abandon the ship, Paul informed them that if the sailors did not remain on board their lives could not be saved. The promise was without any condition expressed; yet it implied of course that they should use the best means of which they were possessed to preserve their lives. For the sailors, therefore, to abandon the ship, would be to tempt God; in which case, notwithstanding his promise, they would all be lost. Now it should be for ever understood, that where the conditions of a promise, either expressed or implied, are not complied with, we tempt God, and it is vain to expect their fulfillment.

2. We tempt God, when we expect Him to violate the principles of his own government, as revealed in his works, providence, and word. Example: If we neglect to use the means for the accomplishment of any end, and expect Him to bring it about by miracle, this is tempting God.

Again, being less honest, industrious and persevering than we ought to be, in search of truth, is tempting God, and may be expected to result in our remaining in ignorance.

Again, restraining prayer on the subject of divine teaching is tempting God. He has expressly said to us, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it." "Call unto me and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not." The conditions upon which we are to be taught the will of God are expressly laid down in Prov. 2:1-9: "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous; He is a buckler to them that walk

uprightly; He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path." Here the conditions are:

- (1.) A willingness to receive and treasure up his words as of great importance.
- (2.) Such a willingness as to incline the ear and apply the heart.
- (3.) Such a willingness as to cry after knowledge and lift up the voice for understanding.
- (4.) Such an intenseness of desire as to seek for her as silver, and search after her as for hid treasures.

Upon these conditions, it is added, "thou shalt understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God." To neglect any of these means, therefore, and then expect "to know the doctrine whether it be of God," is to tempt your Maker. But,

3. If we fulfill the condition, we may expect the fulfillment of the promise, and that we shall surely have whatever of truth is needful for us to know and as fast as we need to know it.

4. We are bound to feel assured of this. We are under just as much obligation to feel the inward assurance of it as we are to feel that God will not lie. If we are conscious that we fulfill the conditions, we have no right whatever to doubt. If we are conscious that we do not fulfill the conditions, we have no right to expect it.

5. God will teach us as fast as he safely can. "He knows our frame and remembers that we are dust." He knows how easily we are bewildered and overset with being taught too much at once. It is a well known truth that where children are taught too early and too fast, there is a determination of blood to the brain, and great danger of derangement or permanently impaired health. Just so it is with us, God teaches us, if we are His children, and are anxious to be taught as fast as we are able to learn. He said to His disciples, "I have many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now." They were not enough advanced in religious knowledge. There was not such a providential development of facts and such a degree of the Spirit's

influences as to prepare them for the reception of certain great truths which He desired to teach them.

6. If we are anxious to do the will of God, on all subjects, with a proper use of means, we may expect His teachings on all subjects that relate to our highest perfection and usefulness--to direct us in regard to our health--the right management of our body--how to restrain its appetites and propensities--how to keep it under and cause it to subserve the highest interests of the soul. In short, there is no subject upon which we need knowledge, upon which we may not confidently expect Him to teach us all that we need to know in the diligent and honest use of means.

REMARKS.

1. The opinions of a sensualist, or one under the dominion of his appetites and propensities are not to be trusted. He is uncandid and unwilling to know the truth in relation to the self-denying gospel of Jesus Christ.

2. His opinions on the subject of temperance and the true principles of physiological reform, are not to be trusted for the same reason.

3. The opinions of a speculator or worldly minded man are not at all worthy of credit in respect to the application of the law of God to the business transactions of this world. Upon this subject he is not, and remaining a speculator, cannot be in a candid state of mind.

4. Very few persons have so renounced themselves as to be willing to know the whole truth, in regard to all branches of reform.

5. Very few have so renounced their appetites as to be willing to know and do the truth upon the subject of dietetic reform.

6. Very few have so renounced self-interest as to be willing to know and do the truth upon the subject of sanctification.

7. He who has renounced himself will search for light, and hail and embrace it with great joy upon every subject. He will find his soul panting after it with unutterable longings.

8. He who is willing to do the will of God, will keep hard upon the heels of truth, and practice as fast as he can learn. Truth upon any subject is his law. He no

sooner sees than he obeys. His practice and his theory are at one.

9. Many mistake the absence of felt resistance for a willingness to do the will of God.

10. There must be a felt willingness, a longing of soul to know the whole truth. Else there is no proper willingness to do the will of God.

11. We need not expect, as I have already intimated, that God will teach us all the truth at once. When Solomon prayed for wisdom and God informed him that He had given him his desire, it is not to be supposed that he felt at the time as if he had a great enlargement of wisdom. But this wisdom was imparted as he had occasion for it. Soon after his request and the assurance of God that his prayer was granted, the two women came to him with their controversy about the child, at which time wisdom equal to the decision of the question was imparted by God in accordance with His promise. So in our own case. We are to rest and feel assured that when we have occasion for knowledge by a faithful application to Him, in the diligent use of means, we shall surely be instructed.

12. From this subject it is easy to see that the cavils of infidels against the Christian religion are of no weight. If they were really pious and holy men and gave evidence of being willing to know and do the will of God, they would know of the doctrine whether it be of God.

13. The same remark is applicable to Universalists. What confidence can be placed in their assertions in respect to the gospel of Christ? Who does not know that as a body, they are ungodly and unholy men?

14. God often teaches us in ways that greatly agonize and astonish us at the time.

15. When we pray for divine teaching, we should be entirely reconciled to let God teach us in his own way, cost us what it may. Else we tempt the Spirit of the Lord.

And now, beloved, are you in a candid state of mind and are you willing to know and do the whole will of God in respect to your whole being? Are you willing to know and do your whole duty, and the whole truth, cost what it may, on all the great subjects of reform that are before the public? Are you anxious to look through, to understand, to know and do the whole truth on the subject of entire sanctification, abolition, temperance, moral reform? A man is very ill informed

who does not see, that as certainly as we are made up of body and soul, physiological and dietetic reform are indispensable to permanent moral reform.

If a man is in an uncandid state of mind on any one subject, he will not know and thoroughly do his duty on any subject. He is in a state of mind that forbids the reasonable expectation that he will. Beware then dearly beloved, I beseech you of committing yourself on the wrong side of any question. I have greatly feared and I may truly say that I have been troubled lest multitudes should do on the subject of entire sanctification, what others have done on subjects of the temperance and moral reform--so commit themselves against the truth as never to know of the doctrine whether it be of God.

And now let me, as I have often done, ask you to go down upon your knees and lay your whole heart open before the Lord. Beseech Him to search you and try your reins and your heart, and see whether you are wholly willing to conform your entire being to the will of God--to do, to say, to be nothing more or less than is for His glory. May the Lord give us grace to know and do His whole will.

[Back to Top](#)

Death to Sin

Lecture XIV

July 15, 1840

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Romans 6:7: "For he that is dead is freed from sin."

In the discussion of this subject I shall notice,

I. The different kinds of death mentioned in the Bible.

II. What kind of death is intended here.

III. What it consists in;

IV. What is implied in it;

V. How it is effected.

I. Different kinds of death.

1. Natural death. This is the death of the body.
2. Spiritual death. This is death in sin. It is total depravity or a state of entire alienation from God.
3. Eternal death. This consists in the endless curse of God.
4. Death to sin.

II. The kind of death mentioned in the text.

The death here spoken of is manifestly a death to sin. This is very evident from the context. At the close of the preceding chapter, Paul had been speaking of the super-abounding grace of Christ, and commences the sixth chapter by saying, "What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" Here Paul is speaking of those who were alive and yet dead to sin. He spoke of their having received a baptism into the death of Christ. By their spiritual baptism they had been solemnly set apart or consecrated to the death of Christ. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection; knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now, if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him." He speaks of them as not only dead, but, by their spiritual baptism buried into the death of Christ. And to carry the idea of their being still farther from the life of sin; he speaks of them as being planted into the likeness of His death, and crucified with Him that the body of sin might be destroyed. And then adds in the words of the text, "Now he that is dead is freed from sin." The term here rendered justification may be rendered "is made righteous."

It is plain from this connection, that Paul is speaking of those who had been so

baptized by the Holy Spirit so as to be dead to sin, buried, planted, crucified, as it respects sin.

III. What it consists in.

Summarily, death to sin consists in the annihilation of selfishness, and the reign of perfect love to God and man in the heart and life.

IV. What is implied in it.

1. Death to sin is the opposite of death in sin. Death in sin implies living for self, or being dead to God's glory and interests and only alive to our own glory. Death to sin implies the reverse of this. It implies a death to our own interests and happiness as an end of pursuit, and a living wholly to the glory of God, and for the up-building of His kingdom.

2. Death in sin implies a will opposed to the will of God. I speak here of a fixed and permanent state of the will in opposition to a single particular volition. A will in this state is not at all influenced by the will of God. It has never submitted to His will, and consequently a knowledge of the will of God is no influential reason to determine its volitions. But death to sin implies a will wholly subservient to and under the control of the will of God. I speak now also of a state of will. One who is dead to sin has no other will than that God's will should in all things be done. Lay before him any question in which he is in doubt in respect to what the will of God is, and he will find himself unable to decide upon a course of action. All he can decide upon in such a case is to search and inquire what is the will of God. But until he is satisfied in some way in respect to the will of God, he is utterly in doubt and finds himself unable to make up his mind and come to any decision in respect to the question before him. This is a state of mind directly opposite to a death in sin. In a state of death in sin, the will of God is not inquired after as the great and only influential motive to decide the will. A man in this state has, as we say, a will of his own. He decides upon his own responsibility, in his own strength, and entirely in view of selfish reasons. While one who is dead to sin, has so submitted himself to the will of God--so bowed his will to God's will, that he decides nothing in view of selfish reasons, and the will of God has come to be the controlling reason or motive of his conduct. Let him but know what is the will of God in the case, and his will is yielding as air. But shut him out from this knowledge, and he

is in a state of the utmost perplexity and cannot decide upon any course of conduct. He can only say, "I have no will about it." However uncommon it has been for Christians to come into this state while in life and health, it has not been at all uncommon for them to be in this state while on a death bed. Every one conversant with death bed scenes has probably witnessed such cases of entire surrender of the whole being to the will of God, as that the individual was unable to choose whether to live or die and could only say, "I have no will about it." Not knowing what the will of God was there was no other choice than this, viz. that the will of God, whatever it was, should be done. Ask an individual whether sick or well, living or dying, who is in this state, whether he wills or chooses a certain thing; and if it be a question in respect to which he is in doubt, as to what the will of God is, you will find him to be entirely at a loss. He is conscious of choosing that the will of God should be done. But until he knows whether this or that is the will of God he has no choice about that particular event.

3. Death in sin implies a self-indulgent state of mind. To consult ones own ease, happiness, reputation, and interests is natural to him who is dead in sin. If he is on board a steam boat, you will find him ready to contend for the best berth and hastening to obtain the best seat at the first table. If riding in a stagecoach, you will observe him seeking for the best seat. To consult his own comfort, his own indulgence and happiness is the law of his mind. And in ten thousand ways will this state of mind develop itself.

But a death to sin implies a self-denying state of mind, a disposition to give others the preference, a choosing to accommodate others, and bless, and benefit others, at the expense of self-interest or self-indulgence.

4. A death in sin implies the real and practical regarding of ourselves as our own. But death to sin is the real and practical regarding of our whole being as God's.

5. A death in sin implies the love of our own reputation. Death to sin implies the making of ourselves no reputation as Christ did.

6. A death in sin implies the practical regarding of our possessions as our own. Death to sin implies the real and practical regarding of our possessions as God's.

7. Death in sin implies the dominion of the flesh and a will in subjection to the flesh. A death to sin implies a subjection of the body to the soul. It implies the keeping the body under and bringing it into subjection, and that all its appetites and propensities are brought into subjection to the will of God.

8. A death in sin implies a state of mind that is influenced by sensible objects, by the honors, riches, opinions, and things of this world as much as if its possessor expected to live here forever. Death to sin implies the giving up the world substantially as a dying man gives it up. Its riches, honors, amusements, pursuits, ambition, strifes, and envyings, what are all these to him? If he knows himself to be a dying man, he regards them not. He desires them not. He seeks them not. He does not, cannot, under these circumstances, will to have them. He chooses nothing of this world's goods, but those things that are really necessary for the few hours or moments which remain to him of this life. A little more breath--perhaps a few spoons full of water--a little of the kind attention of his friends are all that is left for him to desire of earthly good. Now death to sin implies this giving up all desire and expectation of the wealth, honors, and selfish pursuits of this world. The man who is dead to sin is as absolutely satisfied with a competency of earthly good as a man is who is on a bed of death. He would no sooner lay his schemes of earthly aggrandizement, or for enlarging and perpetuating his selfish gratification, than a man would upon a bed of death. In a word, he has given up the world as an object of pursuit, as really and emphatically as if he knew himself to be doomed to live but one hour. He has entered upon a new and eternal life. All his plans, desires, and aims are heavenly, and not earthly, sensual or devilish.

V. How this death is effected, or how persons may enter into and exercise this state of mind.

1. Not by the strength of your own resolutions. You will never die to sin by merely resolving to die to sin. It is one of the most common delusions among men to suppose that they can stand against temptation by the strength of their own resolutions. Peter thought himself able to follow Christ even unto death. But his resolution, like all mere human resolutions, failed him just when he most needed its support. A brother said to me the other day, "I have learned this of my resolutions; they are firm enough when

there is nothing to overthrow them, and just when I do not need their support. But they always fail me when I do, just when I have a trial that demands their sustaining power, I find they are like air and good for nothing."

2. This state of mind is never to be entered into by any unaided efforts of our own. Sin has too long had dominion over us. Our powers are too much enslaved by its protracted indulgence. Sin has too long been our master, to be at once put down by any unaided efforts of ours. But,

3. This state of mind is effected by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Spirit does not imply the bestowment of miraculous gifts, as some seem to have supposed. The Apostles possessed miraculous gifts before they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. The power of miracles may or may not be incidental to spiritual baptism. But it, by no means, constitutes any part of it. Nor does spiritual baptism imply great excitement.

But it does imply such a degree of divine influence as will purify the heart. The New Testament writers manifestly use the term baptism as synonymous with purifying. Water baptism is typical of spiritual baptism. Spiritual baptism is the purifying of the heart by the Holy Spirit. Miraculous gifts, great excitement of mind, great rejoicings, or great sorrowings over sin, may be incidental to spiritual baptism, but they are not essential to it. You that have read the memoir of J. B. Taylor will recollect that on the 23rd of April 1822, while he was engaged in prayer, he felt his whole soul sweetly yielding itself up to God. Such a sweet thorough yielding himself and all his interests for time and eternity, into the hands of God he had never before experienced. Now I suppose that this was the effect of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He ever after remained in a state of mind entirely different from anything he had before experienced.

In receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we are by no means passive but eminently active.

This influence is secured by faith. Faith in Christ throws the mind open to the influence of His truth and gives the Spirit the opportunity of so presenting truth as sweetly to bring the entire person under its whole power. Christ administers spiritual blessings, and this is received by taking hold of His promise to baptize with the Holy Spirit, and throwing the mind open to His influences. The baptism

of the Apostles, by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, will illustrate what I mean. Christ had promised them that they should be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence. They fastened upon this promise, and waited in a constant attitude of prayer and expectation, throwing the door of the mind open to His influence. Now Christ has given to all believers a great many promises of the freeness of the Holy Spirit. He has said that the "Father is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him than earthly parents are to give good gifts to their children." The "water of life" which is so abundantly promised in both the New and Old Testaments is the Holy Spirit. This everyone knows who has attentively considered the real meaning of those promises.

And now if you would enter into this death to sin, you must be baptized with the Holy Spirit. If you would be baptized with the Holy Spirit, you must fasten upon the promises of Christ and take hold of them in faith, laying your whole soul open to receive His influences. Rest with the utmost confidence in His promise to give you of the "fountain of water of life freely." And when you have taken hold of His promise, be sure not to let go or let your confidence to be shaken until you feel a consciousness that "you are baptized into His death."

REMARKS.

1. In the connection of this text, Paul speaks of himself and others as dead to and freed from sin.
2. If death to sin does not imply entire sanctification, death in sin does not imply total depravity, for they are manifestly opposite states of mind.
3. As death in sin is consistent with persons doing many things which the world regards as righteous, so death to sin may be consistent with many things which the world would regard as sinful.
4. Paul's history confirms the profession which he here makes of being dead to sin.
5. The circumstances of the primitive Church rendered a death to sin almost inevitable, at least in many instances. The profession of attachment to Christ must inevitably cost many of them all that the world holds or calls dear. They had to enter upon the Christian life by a renunciation of the world, by giving up worldly expectations and pursuits, as much as men do on a bed of death. This state of public sentiment was eminently calculated to facilitate their entrance into

a state of spiritual death, and was no doubt a prime reason for their rapid advancement in the divine life.

6. We see why it is that state and other violent persecutions have already greatly contributed to the spirituality of the Church.

7. We see also why it is that state and worldly favor has crippled the energies, and overthrown the purity of the Church.

8. We see how the idea comes to be so prevalent that Christians are not wholly sanctified until death. As a matter of fact, this no doubt generally is true, that Christians are not wholly and permanently sanctified until about the close of life, until they come into that state in which they expect very soon to die. I once knew a good man who was told by his physicians, that in consequence of the enlargement of the large blood vessel near the heart, he was exposed to instant death, and that at all events he must expect to die very soon. This intelligence after the first shock was over, was instrumental in baptizing him into the death of Christ. He very soon entered into a most blessed and heavenly state of mind, let go of the world, and seemed to stand looking and waiting with most heavenly serenity for the coming of the Son of Man. In this state of mind, he was informed after a while, that he might probably live for a long time, notwithstanding his disease. This so staggered him as to well nigh bring him again into bondage. Not seeming to understand the philosophy of the state of mind in which he was, and how to remain in it by simple faith, he staggered and groaned under this intelligence till Christ, true to His promise, interposed and set his feet upon eternal rock. After this he lived and died to the wonder of all those around him, few if any of whom perhaps, so much as dreamed that his state of mind was what is intended by a death to sin.

9. Payson and multitudes of good men have found it easy to enter into this state of mind when all expectation was relinquished of remaining longer in this world. But it seems impossible or difficult for most persons to conceive, that this state of mind may be really entered into, with a prospect of any amount of life still before us.

10. But there is no need of waiting until the close of life before we die to sin. We have only to thoroughly let go of all selfish schemes and projects whatever, and give ourselves as absolutely up to the service of God, as much as we expect to when we come to die, and we enter at once into this infinitely desirable state of

mind.

11. If persons have entered into this state of mind, new trials may call for fresh baptisms of the Spirit. While we are in this world of temptation, we are never beyond the reach of sin and never out of danger. If selfishness could be called into exercise in holy Adam, how much more so in those who have lived so long under the dominion of selfishness? If a man has been intemperate or licentious although these appetites and propensities may be subdued, yet it behooves him to keep out of temptation's way; and renewed temptation calls for fresh and more powerful baptisms of the Holy Spirit. Be not satisfied then with one anointing. But look day by day for deeper draughts of the water of life.

12. If we allow any form of sin to live, it will have dominion. It must be wholly exterminated or it will be our ruler. The principle of total abstinence in regard to sin is wholly indispensable to the reign of spiritual life.

Let us then, beloved, not rest satisfied until we are conscious that we are dead and buried, by spiritual baptism into Christ's death, until we are planted in the likeness of His death; and so crucified with Him that the body of death is fully destroyed.

[Back to Top](#)

The Gospel the Savor of Life or of Death

Lecture XV

July 29, 1840

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--2 Cor. 2:14-17: "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life: and who is sufficient for these things: for we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of

God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ."

In remarking upon this text, I will endeavor to show:

I. That God has great delight in the Atonement of Christ.

II. That a full exhibition of Christ must do great good, whether men are saved or lost.

III. That such an exhibition of Christ will produce great and manifest changes in the character of those who hear.

IV. That God will be as truly honored in the damnation of those who reject, as in the salvation of those who receive Christ.

I. God has great delight in the Atonement of Christ.

1. From scripture testimony, Phil. 2:5-11:--"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

From this passage, it appears that God was highly pleased with the Atonement of Christ Jesus, on account of which "He highly exalted Him, or gave him a name above every name."

Isaiah, 53:10-12:--"Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him: He hath put Him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, , He shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He hath poured out his soul unto death; and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of

many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

Here also God is represented as being so pleased with the Atonement of Christ as to give Him a great reward for his labor of love.

The text also contains the same doctrine, and multitudes of other passages that might be noticed.

2. God has great delight in the Atonement of Christ, because he sincerely desires the salvation of men. He knew it was impossible to save them upon the principles of his government, without an Atonement. And his delight in the Atonement of Christ, as the means of their salvation, is equal to his desire for their salvation.

3. The self-denial of Christ must have been greatly pleasing to his Father. What virtuous father would not consider himself as greatly honored by the exhibition of such a spirit as Christ manifested in dying for his enemies? When God saw his Son willing to leave the realms of glory, to take upon Him the form of a servant, to deny Himself even unto death, for the sake of making the salvation of his enemies possible, this must have been infinitely pleasing to a God of love.

4. His whole life and death under the circumstances in which He lived and died, must have been infinitely pleasing to God--his life, under circumstances of such trial, so spotless, so meek, so just like God, such an exhibition and illustration of what God is--his death, so submissive, so Godlike, it must have come up before his Father "as an odor of a sweet smell."

5. The bearing of the Atonement upon the universe, must have given it great value in the sight of God. But I shall enlarge upon this thought under the next head, viz.:

II. A full exhibition of Christ must do great good, whether men are saved or lost.

1. Because it fully reveals and demonstrates the infinitely great love of God to the universe. Should the province of an earthly monarch be betrayed into rebellion by slander, and the insinuation of selfishness in the government, would it not be highly honorable to the sovereign, instead of sending forth

his armies, to crush and slay them, to send forth his son to expostulate, instruct, and insure them of the disinterested love and good-will of the government toward them. Now suppose that this son, associated with the father in the government, should go forth, not at the head of an army, but alone, unarmed, unattended, unprotected, should go from town to town, on foot, taking unwearied pains to instruct them, healing their diseases, spending whole nights in prayer for them, and when persecuted in one town should go to another--suppose that he should continue this course of teaching, of expostulation, and of prayer, and when at last they rose to murder him, should meekly suffer himself to be crucified, rather than injure a hair of any man's head, would not such a demonstration as this, of the love and disinterestedness of the government, greatly confound its enemies, and greatly honor the sovereign? Who cannot see that it certainly would?

2. A full exhibition of the Atonement, must do great good whether sinners are saved or lost, because it fully contradicts the slander by which our race were drawn off from their allegiance to God. The serpent instigated our first parents to rebellion by insinuating that God was selfish, in prohibiting their eating of a certain tree. It was necessary therefore, that this slander should be thoroughly repelled and refuted. The infinitely great and disinterested love of God exhibited in the Atonement is the most impressive refutation of it.

3. The full exhibition of the Atonement of Christ must do great good because it fully justified God as having acted all along, under the influence of the most perfect love, and condemns sin as infinitely unreasonable, inexcusable, and abominable.

4. Such an exhibition of the Atonement must do great good because it demonstrates God's great willingness and desire to save his enemies, whether they will be saved or not. It rolls the responsibility of their salvation or damnation upon themselves. It proves that while they have forfeited their lives, God has no desire to take this forfeiture at their hands. It proves that while they deserve to die, He has no pleasure in their death.

5. The full exhibition of the Atonement manifests the great value of their happiness in his estimation, and his great reluctance to punish them--that his love for them was so great as to give his only begotten Son to die for them--that He accounted the death, even of his own Son, as a less evil than

their destruction, notwithstanding they so infinitely deserved to be destroyed.

6. A full exhibition of the Atonement of Christ must do great good, whether sinners are saved or lost, because it must establish forever the confidence of all holy beings in God. But for the Atonement, the universe might have been open to the surmise at least, that there was possibly something not exactly right in the dealings of God with the inhabitants of this world. But the disinterested love of God, manifested in the Atonement, must forever put his character entirely and infinitely beyond all suspicion.

7. A full exhibition of the Atonement of Christ must do great good to the universe, whether sinners are saved or lost, because it reveals to sinners, to the whole world, and to the universe, the sincerity of God, by exhibiting the fulness of the provisions of grace. It demonstrates that the provisions are ample, that there is love and grace enough in God's heart, and ample fulness in the provisions of the gospel for the salvation of every sinner, and this stops every mouth, and leaves the damnation of every sinner, to be wholly chargeable upon himself.

III. Such an exhibition of Christ must produce great and manifest changes in the character of those who hear.

1. Because they cannot but receive or reject it. If they receive it, it will of course make them holy, fill them with love to God and men, and mold their whole character into the image of Christ. If they reject it, it must greatly confirm their selfishness and depravity, greatly harden their hearts, and place them in an attitude of greater, and more daring, and odious, and shameless rebellion than before.

2. Such an exhibition of God as is made in the Atonement, must of necessity either subdue or greatly aggravate the spirit of rebellion and hostility of his government. It is impossible that it should not be so. If this exhibition of love does not subdue a sinner, it is because of his unbelief. And he cannot disbelieve the infinite and disinterested love of God, in view of the Atonement, without virtually charging God with the most abominable hypocrisy, and with every thing that is hateful. His soul must take this attitude, or it must consent to the truth as it is revealed in the Atonement. Now the consent of the heart to this truth must fill the soul with love, and

the life with holy conformity to his law. But the rebellion of the heart against this truth, must greatly deepen and strengthen, and forever confirm the reign of sin in the heart and life.

3. Such a great change of feeling as must necessarily result from an understanding of the Atonement of Christ, must be manifest in the temper and life. With but little knowledge of God, sinners may proceed in the indulgence of their lusts, without being sensible of any direct hostility to God. But when He reveals his love to them in the Atonement, they must necessarily either take strong ground against Him, or repent, abandon their sin, and give up their whole being to his influence. This knowledge must necessarily produce an immense change in the temper of their mind toward God. Before, they knew and perhaps thought but little of Him. But after understanding the Atonement, they cannot but know and think much of Him. And the attitude of their minds must be that of ferocious resistance and rebellion, or of gentle and Christ-like obedience. Such a change of the temper as this, must and will manifest itself in some way in the life.

4. When Christ is fully preached, persons must be fully subdued, or confirmed in sin. I say FULLY preached. It is amazing to see how many sinners have sat under what is supposed to be the gospel, and yet have little more knowledge of Christ than a heathen. They have never as yet conceived the idea of the love of God, as exhibited in the Atonement, and remain as quiet, and as self-complacent as a Pharisee, without ever being stirred up on the one hand, to opposition, or on the other, to submission. But when Christ is so exhibited as to force home light upon the sinner's conscience, and compel him fully to understand the doctrine of Atonement, the offices, relations, and love of Christ, as a sin pardoning, and sin subduing Savior, the soul must be soon subdued, or confirmed in sin.

IV. God will be as truly honored in the damnation of those who reject, as in the salvation of those who receive Christ.

1. Because it will be known He did all the nature of the case admitted, to save those who are lost--that when they had forfeited their lives, He took not the forfeiture at their hands. But when they infinitely deserved damnation, He pitied and spared, and sent his Son to die for them--that they refused salvation either by the law or gospel--that they would neither obey the law, nor repent and be forgiven--that nothing that infinite love could do

for them, could persuade them to accept salvation.

2. His sending them to hell after manifesting so great a desire to save them, will most impressively demonstrate and illustrate his holiness and justice. So great was his pity and love for them, that He would sooner die Himself, in their behalf, than send them to hell, and yet so great is his holiness and justice, that when they refuse salvation upon the only principles that can reconcile justice and mercy, he does not hesitate to send them to the depths of hell. If an earthly sovereign should order his own children to execution, for rebellion against the laws, would not this be an impressive exhibition of his regard to public order, and of attachment to the principles of his government? What an amazing reluctance did God manifest in the Atonement, to sending sinners to hell. And after such an exhibition of bleeding mercy, if He is obliged to send them to hell, how infinitely honorable to Him, will be such an exhibition of his Holiness and Justice.

3. The damnation of the finally impenitent, will greatly increase public confidence in God. What a glorious magistrate is this, how infinitely desirous to avoid public execution, and yet so attached to the principles of his government, so in love with order, so high and holy in his regard to the public interests as to sentence his own children to an eternal hell, if they persist in rebellion, and those very children for whom his love is so great as to have laid down his own life for them! What must the universe think of a sovereign that could do this! What an infinitely holy and glorious king is this! And how must such an exhibition as this establish forever the confidence of all holy beings in Him and his government.

4. The damnation of the wicked, as rejecters of the gospel, will give to the law of God great power. The death of Christ has magnified the law, and made it honorable, has manifested God's great regard for it, and demonstrated that, sooner than repeal it, or suffer it to be trampled under foot, he would have his own Son to die, that a way might be opened for setting aside its penalty in consistency with the honor of its precept. The damnation of the wicked, will greatly strengthen the power of his law, by showing that so high is God's regard for it, that when so costly an expedient for setting aside its penalty had failed to subdue the sinner, he would execute his penalty upon him notwithstanding his love and compassion for him, were infinitely great.

REMARKS.

1. This subject sets in a strong light, the error of those who represent God the Father as being angry with Christ, and as seeking his vengeance upon Him, and all such like representations. On the other hand God says, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Instead of God's being angry with Christ, He was infinitely pleased with Him for undertaking the work of redemption.

2. From this subject, we see that sinners cannot rob God of his glory. Sinner, you need not suppose that the Atonement will be lost to the universe, although you reject it. It may be worse than lost to you. But to God and to the universe, it will not be lost. Not one drop of the blood of Christ was shed in vain. And whether you accept the Atonement or not, God's government shall receive the full benefit of Christ's Atonement.

3. We see the mistake of those who hold to a limited Atonement, and alledge as a main argument in its support, that if Christ died for all men, He died in vain for those who are finally lost, and that such a provision were vain and useless. Now this goes upon the supposition that the exhibition of God in the Atonement, is to have no bearing upon his character and government in any other world than this. Nay, it is founded in such a contracted view of the moral bearings of the Atonement, as even not to see that in the estimation of those who are saved, a real provision for those who reject, would be infinitely honorable to God.

4. From this subject we see that the value of the Atonement, is not at all to be estimated by the number saved. If not one sinner was saved--if all mankind persisted in rejecting it, the exhibition of that love which is made in the Atonement, would be infinitely important to the universe, in confirming holy beings, and strengthening the power of his government.

5. We see that the usefulness of ministers to the government of God, is not at all to be estimated by the number of persons saved under their ministry. Look at the text, "for" says the Apostle, "we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish. To the one we are the savor of life unto life, and to the other the savor of death unto death."

If then ministers fully exhibit Christ, God is as truly honored when men reject, and are damned, as when they believe, and are saved. They cannot but be useful to the universe in proportion to their faithfulness. Their usefulness respects God

and his government. To the sinner they may be "a savor of death unto death." But unto God they are "a sweet savor of Christ not only in them that are saved, but in them that perish." They hold forth the love of God in Christ. In this God is glorified, and Christ is preached, in which they "do rejoice and will rejoice," and in which all holy beings will rejoice; sinner, whether you are saved or lost.

6. The opposition excited by preaching Christ, will as really glorify God, as the holiness produced by it. I say nothing of the degree in which the one or the other will glorify God. But that in both God will be really glorified. If the preaching of Christ produces holiness, God will be glorified by it. If sinners rise up and oppose, it will only further illustrate the nature of sin, and the character of sinners, and more impressively illustrate his justice in their damnation.

7. Neither God nor ministers aim at the damnation of sinners, nor rejoice in their destruction, when they are sent to hell. But they do rejoice in the triumph of justice, in that infinitely glorious exhibition of God's character, which is made in their destruction.

8. The more singly and earnestly God and ministers desire and labor for the salvation of sinners, the more their final damnation, if they are lost, will glorify God. If God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost--if ministers and Christians all labor earnestly and honestly, and with all long suffering for the salvation of sinners, and they will not be saved, then sinner, remember when you go weeping and wailing along down the sides of the pit, God's justice will be the more glorious, by how much the greater pains have been taken to save you.

9. To promote the salvation of men and to honor God in their damnation, ministers must have strong and manifest sympathy with God. The more strongly they sympathize with God the more fully will they exhibit his great desire to save men. And the more fully they exhibit God the more thoroughly do they strip the sinner of all excuse and show that his damnation is imperiously demanded by the principles of eternal righteousness.

10. Ministers glorify God in proportion as they preach or exhibit the whole gospel. If they pour out before the sinner the whole heart of Christ, if they exhibit Him in all his love, relations and offices, if they unveil the fulness of his compassion and grace, they are removing the sinner infinitely far from all excuse, and rendering his damnation at every step, a more illustrious and impressive exhibition of the holiness of God.

11. Opposition to the preaching of Christ is to be expected though not desired. Though the damnation of the sinner will glorify God, yet his salvation is to be preferred, as his salvation would glorify God, to say the least, as much as his damnation. In addition to which his salvation is a real good in itself, and a good which God and all holy beings greatly desire.

12. But if sinners will oppose, ministers should not be discouraged by it and feel as if they were doing no good. My brother, if you are really preaching Christ, exhibiting Him in your pulpit, in your life, and in all your ways, you are certainly doing good and great good, to the universe, and greatly glorifying God. If every sinner in your congregation goes down to hell, be not discouraged, my brother. "Hold up the hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees." But do you say my compassions are moved for them, I cannot bear to be to them a savor of death unto death. How shall I meet them in the Judgment and see them sent to hell--my neighbors, the people of my prayers and my tears, the souls for whom my heart has groaned, and agonized, and bled. My brother, God pities them more than you do. Christ's heart has bled for them more than yours. They are the people for whom He has not only prayed and wept, but for whom He has actually died. How shall he meet them in the Judgment, and weep over them as He did over Jerusalem, and say, "O sinners, sinners, how often would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, and ye would not. O that thou hadst known the things that belong to thy peace. But now are they hidden from thine eyes." "How shall I give thee up? How shall I deliver thee? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? My heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." O my brother lift up your thoughts to the compassionate but infinite holiness and firmness of Christ. He knew how these sinner would treat his Atonement. Notwithstanding He would die for them. He knew that He should be to them a savor of death unto death; yet He knew that He should greatly glorify God by dying for them and offering them mercy.

And now my brother, be willing to exhibit in your body the dying of the Lord Jesus. Be willing to make up in your self-denying labors and sufferings, for their salvation, the sufferings of Christ that remain, that through you, God may be glorified, that you may be "unto God a sweet savor of Christ both in them that are saved and in them that perish."

13. Here we have the true ground of consolation, when we see men hardening

under our ministry. If in revivals of religion, we estimate the good that is really done, by the number of conversions only, we overlook one important item, in the amount of glory that shall redound to God. The truth is, that in revivals of religion, ministers are not only a sweet savor of Christ in them that are converted, but also in them that are hardened. To the one class they are "a savor of life unto life, and to the other of death unto death." In both these classes God is greatly glorified.

14. Every one may know, and is bound to know what effect the gospel is producing on himself, and whether it is to him the "savor of life unto life or of death unto death."

15. We should observe what its effect is upon our families, and narrowly watch its influence upon the minds of all around us, and lay ourselves out with all our might, to make it the savor of life unto life. But if through the perverseness of the sinner's heart, he will make it the savor of death unto death, let us rejoice not in his hardness nor in his destruction, but in the fact that the holiness and justice of God will be the more gloriously illustrated in his damnation.

16. And now sinner where are you? Did you ever realize the circumstances of awful solemnity and responsibility in which God has placed you? Do you know what you are doing? Do you understand the relation which the gospel ministry sustains to you? Do you not tremble when you see your minister, and know that God has unalterably ordained that he shall be unto you the "savor of life unto life, or of death unto death"? Do you know that he is the messenger of God to your poor soul?--and that you can no more prevent his being to you a savor of life or death, than you can prevent your own existence. Sinner, Christ has not died in vain. Ministers do not preach in vain. Christians do not pray in vain. The Holy Spirit does not strive in vain. Heaven from above does not call in vain. Hell from beneath does not warn in vain. God's mercies are not in vain. All these influences are acting upon you. They will act, they must act. They must be to you the "savor of life unto life or of death unto death." How infinitely solemn and awful are your circumstances. How dreadful your responsibility! How short your life! How near your death! Are you prepared for solemn judgment? Sinner will you go down instantly on your knees, and offer up your whole being to God, "before wrath comes upon you to the uttermost"?

[Back to Top](#)

Christians
The Light of the World
Lecture XVI
August 12, 1840

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 5:14-16: "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

I shall show,

- I. That the world is in great spiritual darkness.*
- II. That Christians, under God, are to enlighten it.*
- III. How they are to do this.*
- IV. If the world is not enlightened, it is the fault of Christians.*

I. The world is in great spiritual darkness.

1. Impenitent sinners are universally ignorant of the true God. Many of them may have a correct theory in some respects. But after all they know not God. To know God and Jesus Christ, is to have eternal life. And while in their sins, they have no correct apprehension of the true God.
2. They are in great darkness in respect to the spirituality of his law. If they understood the spirituality of his law, they would understand something of his character and of their own. The truth is they have no correct apprehensions of the true spirit and meaning of God's law.

And here let me say that when we speak of the spirituality of God's law, there

are many minds who seem to turn away from us as if we were speaking very mystically. What, they say, law is law. We can understand what God's law says as well as you can, and do understand it as well as you do. And why should you mystify and speak of its spirituality as if it had some occult meaning which none but the initiated can understand? To this I reply:

(1.) That to be sure, law is law.

(2.) That every law has its letter and its spirit: i.e. the general statement of its propositions in words is its letter; the true intent and meaning of it, in its real application to every state of facts, is its spirit. Now the world are in total darkness in respect to the true meaning of the law of God. E.g. The first commandment is, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Now this command has both its letter and its spirit. And so has every commandment of God. Its letter prohibits all idolatrous worship. Its spirit requires supreme, disinterested, universal, perpetual love to God, with every holy affection carried out in every holy action.

As a farther illustration, take the commandment, "Thou shalt not steal." The letter of this commandment, prohibits the secret taking of another's property, and using it as if it were our own, without intention of returning it. But the spirit of this commandment forbids all covetousness and requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves. It prohibits our using our neighbor's good, selfishly, whether with or without his consent. It prohibits every form of fraud, speculation, and taking any advantage in business, that is inconsistent with the royal rule, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Now who does not know that unconverted sinners are in the dark in regard to the spirituality of these and every other command of God. What horrible conviction and consternation would fill the world if sinners but thoroughly understood the spirituality of God's law.

3. Sinners are ignorant of themselves. They know very little of their own constitution, and in most cases still less of their character. This ignorance of their own character is a natural consequence of their ignorance of the law of God. Being ignorant of the true intent and meaning of the standard with which they are to compare themselves, they are of course utterly mistaken in regard to their true character. Judging of themselves only in the light of the letter, and overlooking the breadth of the spirit of the law, they of course

form an estimate of their character altogether different from the true one.

4. Sinners are altogether ignorant of their true desert. Being ignorant of the spirituality of the law, they know not either the number or the exceeding demerit of their sins.

5. Sinners know not their own helplessness, nor do they understand the remedy which God has provided for healing their souls. They neither care for, nor know but little about the remedy, because they are ignorant of their disease.

6. Sinners are ignorant of what is really good for them, and what will in the highest manner promote their own well being, both in time and eternity.

7. Consequently they are pursuing exactly the course, that must eventually and necessarily result in their everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power.

II. Christians, under God, are to enlighten the world.

1. Because they have the true light. They know God. They understand the spirituality of his law. They know the character of man. They know his guilt, desert, helplessness, and necessities. They have seen their own ignorance, and know that the world is in darkness and lieth in wickedness. They have the most certain knowledge of this, and the best of all knowledge, that of their own experience. They also know the remedy for sinners. They have been enlightened by the true light. True Christians have all been taught of God. They know God and Jesus Christ, whom to know is life eternal. They are conscious of so knowing him as to have eternal life abiding in them. They can truly say, from their own consciousness, "Where as I was blind, now I see." They then are the persons, and the only persons in all the world, that are capable of enlightening the world. It is in vain for unconverted philosophers or statesmen, or any unconverted persons whatever to talk of enlightening the world. The light that is in them is great darkness. And when they talk of enlightening the world, they know not what they say, nor whereof they affirm. They speak at random, and deceive their followers. They are blind leaders of the blind, and they all stumble on together upon the dark mountains, till teachers and disciples fall into the pit of destruction together.

2. The world must be enlightened through human instrumentality. Constituted as men are, truth must address them through the medium of the senses. Consequently God found it necessary to unite Himself with human nature in order to enlighten men. Taking to Himself human nature, He lived, and conversed, and ate, and drank, and held conversation with men through the medium of his human nature. And this possessed their minds of the true idea of who and what He is. He exhibited in his own life, and in all his deportment, the spirit of his own law. By his teachings, but more especially by his life, He called the attention of men away from the letter to the spirit of his law, and when He gave them precepts, He gave them illustrations of their meaning in his own example, and thus possessed their minds of the nature of true religion, and what it was to love their neighbor as themselves.

3. None have had the true light but those who have received it through the instrumentality of the saints of God. From the earliest period of man's existence, God has caused the light to shine upon the world through human beings. Sometimes He has had but few representatives on earth. And gross darkness has covered the whole face of the earth, except here and there a little spot has been lighted up, by some pulpit and saint of God. Noah was a light to the old world in its worst estate. Daniel was a light in the idolatrous court of Nebuchadnezzar. Prophets and holy men have been scattered up and down in the earth enough to preserve the true knowledge of God, to a greater or less extent, through these representatives. The Lord Jesus Christ, first in his forerunner John, next in his own person, afterwards in his apostles, and now in all his saints, is enlightening the world. His people are now the medium through which He discovers Himself to mankind. His spirit dwells in them "working in them to will and to do of his good pleasure." They are his disciples who teach his doctrines, exhibit his spirit, and thus at once rebuke and enlighten the darkness of the world.

III. How Christians can enlighten the world.

Under this head I inquire what constitutes the Christian's light, or what renders him a light to others? Ans.

1. It is not simply his creed.
2. Not simply his profession.

3. Nor is it his profession and creed together.
4. Not his sanctimonious appearance on the Sabbath.
5. Nor his sitting at the communion table.
6. Nor does his light consist in all these together. But,
7. His light consists in his temper and spirit.
8. In his good works in a most strict regard to the universal law of love. As Christ did, so does the Christian. His life is a commentary upon the law of God. He is giving continual illustrations in his own temper and spirit and life, of the spirituality, the true intent and meaning of the law of God.
9. In his practical and firm opposition to all that is unholy or injurious to the souls or bodies of men, and in the manifestation of his undying attachment, to whatever is holy, lovely and of good report.

Christians then can enlighten the world, not

1. By conforming to whatever is wrong in their tempers, views or practices- not by any direct or indirect connivance at their sins, worldly mindedness, or whatever is the result of their darkness.
2. Not by any compromise of principle or by conciliating their favor, by keeping out of view the points of difference between themselves and sinners. Some professors of religion seem disposed to avoid all controversy with impenitent men, to lessen as far as possible the differences of opinion, and views, and practices between themselves and sinners. They seem to think that the true way to enlighten them, is by falling in with them as far as possible and by conforming in a great measure to their customs, views, business practices, and almost every thing else. Now this is as far as possible from the true philosophy of enlightening the world. It is as if you attempted to clear the eye-sight of your neighbor by putting out your own eyes. It is like attempting to pull the mote out of your neighbor's eye, not by plucking the beam out of your own eye, but by filling your own eye both with beams and motes. If you wish to convince a man that he is in the dark, you must hold up your own light, in contrast with his darkness. If he can see your light, it will discover his own darkness.

3. Christians can never enlighten the world by any thing that will imply that they lay but little practical stress upon the points of difference between them and sinners. It is in vain to attempt to enlighten the world by any course of conduct that is calculated to make the impression that the real difference between saints and sinners lies merely or mostly in opinion, if after all the practices of Christians are such as demonstrate that their opinions have very little to do with practice. But,

4. Christians can enlighten the world by holding up the light of their own example on all subjects in strong and constant contrast with the example of the ungodly.

5. They can enlighten the world by a patient and firm perseverance in well doing, in spite of all the opposition of earth and hell. To what a wonderful extent did the Apostles and primitive Christians succeed in enlightening the world. This was a thing of course. Their lives were a perpetual light, dissipating the moral darkness around them. They did not hold forth a flickering, waving, and uncertain light. It was clear, steady, pure, and had well nigh banished darkness from the earth. In the text Christ says, "let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." "So shine." How? Ans. By exhibiting our good works in contrast with their evil works, and that continually.

6. By exhibiting our self-denial, in contrast with their self-indulgence, and that continually.

7. By exhibiting our heavenly mindedness, in contrast with their worldly mindedness.

8. By showing that our conversation is in heaven, in contrast with their showing that their conversation is of earth.

9. By showing that our treasure is in heaven, in contrast with their showing that their treasure is on earth.

10. By showing our conformity to correct principles, in contrast with their disregard of them.

11. By showing our conformity to the laws of our being, in contrast with their shameless violations of them.

12. By manifesting our faith in Christ, in contrast with their unbelief.

13. By manifesting our sweet submission to all the providential dealings of God, in contrast with their restlessness and rebellion against his providence.

14. By holding up on every subject and in every way, both by precept and example, the light of truth in opposition to their darkness. In these and in similar ways can Christians enlighten the world. But by blinding the light, by making any compromise, by frittering away the points of difference, by going one hair's breadth aside from the love of truth, for the sake of conciliating their favor, they will not, and never can enlighten them.

IV. If the world is not enlightened, it is the fault of Christians.

1. Because Christians have the means of enlightening the world. They have the gospel and the means of spreading it throughout the world. They have the true light in their own hearts, and have the means of exhibiting it to all mankind.

2. They have abundant opportunities to enlighten the world. God has stationed them in different parts of the world, for the very purpose of enlightening the world. He has commanded them to go, and given them the means of going and holding up their light in every dark corner of the world. When the early Christians clung together in Jerusalem, he scattered them in all countries by the force of a persecution. And they "went every where preaching the gospel." And being thus scattered, they learned the true philosophy of enlightening and converting the world.

3. The world is expecting and looking to Christians to enlighten them. The eyes of ungodly men are turned to the Church, and marking their example, taking knowledge of their lives, spirit, and ways, and wherever among professors, there is a true Christian, his light is seen, as a matter of fact, to rebuke the darkness around him.

4. If the world is not enlightened, it is the fault of Christians, because, if the truth is properly and fully exhibited, it will dispel their darkness. The human mind is so constituted that truth "commends itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God." There is no mistake about this. The human mind is true to its own laws. And when truth is clearly, strongly, and

constantly exhibited, it will and must rebuke the darkness of any human mind.

5. The principal business which Christians have in this world is, to enlighten the world. Christ has gone to heaven. He has left Christians as his representatives, to carry out the revelation of God and shine as lights in the world. If He should take all Christians immediately from the world, it would leave the world in impenetrable and hopeless darkness, notwithstanding all that has been done to enlighten it. These must be illustrations of religious truth. The minds of men are so dark, they are prone to view religious truth so much in the abstract, and as so purely a matter of opinion, that without living illustrations, truth seldom, if ever gains possession of their minds.

6. Christians are in fault, if the world is not enlightened, because they can have any degree of spiritual illumination which they need to carry forward and complete the enlightening of the world. Christ has promised you the Holy Spirit, and has told you that God "is more willing to give it than earthly parents are to give good gifts to their children." Every needed aid is abundantly guaranteed by the same promise of God to Christians. And in full view of these exceeding great and precious promises Christ has said to them, "Ye are the light of the world." And now, "let your light so shine before men that they, seeing your good works, [not merely hearing your good doctrines, but seeing your good works,] may glorify your Father who is in heaven.

7. Nothing can prevent your enlightening the world, but a refusal on your part to perform good works. If you perform good works men will see them. If they see them they will be constrained to glorify your Father which is in heaven. If then men are not enlightened, it is because you do not perform good works. In other words, it is because you are not Christians. Observe Christ does not say, ye ought to be the light of the world. But "Ye are the light of the world." As the mind of Christ is true, real Christians are the light of the world. And this is a matter of fact. True Christians have the spirit of Christ, for the possession of this spirit is what constitutes them Christians. The spirit of Christ will always manifest itself in performing the works of Christ. If therefore men do not see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven, it is only because you have the form, and

not the spirit of Christianity. And "if the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness."

REMARKS.

1. How much evil is done by temporizing and keeping out of view the great and numberless points of difference between Christianity and the spirit of the world, as if we could show ungodly men the necessity of a great and radical change in themselves, by as nearly conforming our lives and tempers to theirs as possible. It is only by strong and constant contrast that the conviction of the necessity of a radical change in themselves, is to be forced home upon them. The more striking and constant this contrast, the better: the more universal and perfect this contrast is, the more sudden and irresistible will be their conviction of the necessity of a great and radical change in themselves.

2. We see from this subject how utterly injudicious it is to conceal the true light, on any great subject of reform, whenever a favorable opportunity should present itself to hold it up. Some ministers and professors of religion, seem to be always waiting to have the people find out the truth themselves, and for such a public sentiment to be formed as will anticipate and render it popular to hold up any heretofore unpopular or offensive doctrine. They seem not inclined to go ahead and rebuke the darkness of the public mind, by holding up the true light. They seem to dread the loss of their own popularity, and as they say, fear to injure their usefulness, by calling things by their right names, by declaring their own experience of the power of the gospel of the blessed God, by at once preaching and bringing out the whole truth before the world. In order to render themselves popular with all parties, they will so hold forth certain unpopular truths, as that the already initiated, will perceive that they believe them and correctly teach them: but in such language, with such provisos and caveats as that none others will suspect them of believing or teaching any such thing. If the whole Church and congregation were but to get right, without their instrumentality, if a public sentiment should be formed that would invite their coming out in plain language, they would then become bold champions for the truth. But they are waiting for the Churches to learn the truth before they declare it to them. And when it becomes popular to tell the whole truth, they will be the first to tell it.

3. The same is true of multitudes of professing Christians, in respect to their lives. For their worldly-mindedness, and for all forms and degrees of conformity to the world, they plead the force of public sentiment, that it will not do to differ

from every body else, and that the law of expediency demands of them a good degree of conformity to the world, in order to secure an influence over them. But is this the way to enlighten the world? Instead of setting yourself to correct public opinion, do you suffer yourself to become the mere creature of it? Instead of opposing what is wrong in the views and practices of mankind, on every subject, do you fall in with them, and thus strengthen their bands, and confirm them in their darkness, expecting that by and by public sentiment will change so that you can do your duty without losing your influence, so that you can declare what God has done for your soul, relate your experience of the power of his grace, and hold up your light in the midst of the acclamations of the crowd? What a delusive dream is this!

4. Christians should remember that silence on any great subject of moral reform, that hiding their light either in precept or example, when a suitable opportunity occurs for exhibiting it, implies either that they do not believe it, or that it is with them a mere matter of opinion, and that they lay little or no practical stress upon it. Or else it implies that they are ashamed of it.

5. How cruel it is to let people remain in darkness through a fear of losing our own popularity. On what multitudes of subjects, are people injuring both their bodies and their souls for lack of correct information. And how shameful and cruel it is for those who have the true light, to hide it.

6. We see from this subject, the importance of believers in the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life, holding up this infinitely important doctrine, both by principle and example, whenever they have the opportunity. They should be "living epistles known and read of all men."

7. Unless Christians hold up the true light in contrast with the world's darkness, they are the greatest curses that are in the world. They are like a false light, that decoys the unwary mariners upon the rocks and quicksands. The world knows that you are professors of religion, that you are set as a moral lighthouse. They therefore think it safe to steer in the direction in which your light indicates that they should go. If therefore the light that is in you be darkness, what a curse are you to your family, your neighborhood, and the world around you. They will look at you. They mark your words. They ponder well your temper, and spirit, and life. They feel themselves safe in copying your example, in drinking in of your spirit, and in steering their course to eternity, by your light. And what a cruel monster are you, if you mislead them. What do you say of pirates who

erect a false light upon some shoal, to decoy the unwary mariners to dash upon it, for the sake of plunder? Does not your blood curdle in your veins? Do not cold chills run over you? Does not your soul shudder when you read of the abominable selfishness of those who hold up false lights to mariners at sea, destroying so many lives, and so much property, for the sake of gratifying their odious selfishness? But professors of religion, you are the light of the world. Do you hold up a false light in the midst of the world's darkness? And when thousands of sinners are hovering round about upon your coast, benighted and bestormed, and looking to you for light, are you engaged in your selfish projects, exhibiting a carnal, earthly, and devilish spirit, while they are running upon the rocks and quicksands, ruining their souls, and going to hell by scores around you? Hear the wail of that lost soul, as it dashes upon the rocks, and sinks to hell. It lifts its eyes and cries out, O, I did not dream that evil was near. I had my eye upon that professor of religion. I transacted business upon the same principles, upon which I saw he transacted his. I kept my eye upon him and steered my bark by his light. And oh, unutterable horror, I am in the depths of an eternal hell!

[Back to Top](#)

Communion with God- No.'s 1 & 2

Lectures XVII & XVIII

August 26, 1840

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

LECTURE XVII.

Text.--2 Cor. 13:14: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all. Amen."

In discussing this subject, I shall--

- I. Consider the meaning of the term communion.*
- II. What is implied in communion with the Holy Ghost.*
- III. How we may know whether and when we have communion with God.*
- IV. The value and importance of communion with God.*
- V. How to secure and perpetuate it.*

I. Meaning of the term Communion as used in the Bible.

It sometimes means friendly intercourse, as in Gen. 18:33: "And the Lord went his way, as soon as He had left COMMUNING with Abraham." Sometimes it means counsel, advice, and instruction; 1 Kings 10:2: "She came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold and precious stones; and when she was come to Solomon, she COMMUNED with him of all that was in her heart." It is the same term in the original that is rendered fellowship in Phil. 2:1: "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any FELLOWSHIP of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies." And 1 John 1:3: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye may also have FELLOWSHIP with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." To commune with God, then, is to have fellowship with Him, friendly intercourse, consultation, advice,

instruction.

II. What is implied in communion with the Holy Ghost.

1. It implies that He is a moral agent, and not a moral attribute of God.
2. His actual and personal presence, and indwelling, in the heart, of him with whom He communes. He must be actually present with our spirits, to render it possible to commune with Him.
3. The communion kept up between the Holy Spirit and all his saints in every part of the world, implies both the omnipresence and the omniscience of the Holy Spirit.
4. It implies infinite love and condescension in Him. What infinite condescension in God, to suffer such worms as we are, to consult and commune with Him, to hold frequent and protracted private interviews with Him, and to commune with Him of all that is in our hearts. His, surely, is condescension infinitely great.
5. Communion with the Holy Spirit implies a disposition in us to consult Him, and commune with Him, in respect to our duty, his will, and the affairs of his kingdom.
6. It implies a disposition in Him to be consulted by us. It implies a constant readiness on his part, to admit us into his presence, to give us audience, and to listen attentively to all that we have to say, and to encourage us to lay open our whole case before Him.
7. It implies a sense of our own ignorance and deep dependence upon Him. We never seek communion with God, only in proportion as we are emptied of dependence upon ourselves. A man who is not deeply sensible of his own ignorance will not seek communion with God, for the purpose of receiving instruction of Him. A man who is not emptied of self-dependence, will not seek to lay himself all along in the arms of the Savior.
8. It implies that He takes the deepest interest in us. Surely his interest in us must be exceedingly great, to be willing to hold consultation with us so often, to commune with us so deeply, to enter so much into the detail of all our affairs, and interest Himself in our slightest grievances, trials, and

difficulties. To do this constantly, without weariness or impatience, certainly implies, on his part, a most profound interest in us.

9. It implies a deep sympathy and fellowship between the Holy Ghost and us; that we feel as he does, and that He feels as we do; that we have a common object in view; that we are influenced by the same motives, interested in the same objects, employed in the same labors, and, in short, it implies that our fellowship and sympathy with Him are equal to our communion, for they are in fact the same thing.

III. How we may know whether and when we have communion with God.

1. When we are conscious of being drawn by his silent but powerful influence, very near to Him in prayer. Every true Christian knows what it is to feel a secret moving of heart toward God; a silent, but deep, powerful melting, drawing of soul away from the world, from society, from business, from every thing else, into a most sacred private interview with God.

In such cases the soul seeks to be alone with God. It naturally follows, crying after God, and its desires are like a liquid stream, flowing and flowing; and as he is on his way to some retired spot, or upon his knees in his closet, or perhaps in the night season upon his bed, "his heart and his flesh cry out for God, for the living God." From the deep bottom of his heart, his soul cries out, "Father, Father," and repeats and echoes, over and over, all the dear names, the titles, and relations of God; and his soul seems to be all liquid, and flowing, and gushing, and drawn into the deep waters of his love.

2. We have communion with God, when we have great freedom and enlargement in prayer. Sometimes the soul feels unutterably burdened with conviction and distress, but has no words. It is bowed down to the earth, but cannot express, nor even think over, in any order, its sins, its burdens, or its sorrows. It seem to be shut up to God, and yet feels as if it could not approach and fully lay the heart open before Him; but at other times, there is great freedom and enlargement of mind. Our thoughts and words flow like a river. We find not only our desires enlarged, but our views of ourselves and of Him greatly enlarged. We have a kind of supernatural ability, to express ourselves in a most emphatic and elevated manner, in pleading our cause before Him. There seems to be room enough in the benevolent yearnings of our hearts to embrace the world, and the universe;

and we seem as it were to embosom the whole race, and bring them before God, in earnest longings, with strong cryings and tears, that He would have mercy on them. We seem to see every thing and feel every thing, and express every thing, on an enlarged scale. We enter into such a deep sympathy with God, as to feel our whole souls drawn away with benevolent desires. In this state of mind we may rest assured we are in communion with God.

3. We have communion with God when our necessities are laid open to us. Sometimes we are hard and dark. We know that something must be wrong, but have no clear idea of what it is. I speak now of the case of those who have not yet learned to abide all the while in the light. But those who have made the greatest attainments, of any persons in this world, no doubt, often feel their spiritual necessities laid open before them, in a most remarkable manner. If not conscious of present or recent sin; yet they are often made to see how vastly they fall short of what they should have been had they never sinned at all. How much ignorance, how much weakness, how many infirmities, are open and about them, in consequence of their former sins, and habits of selfishness. God often draws us into deep communion with Him, and has protracted and close interview with us, sometimes for hours and even days together, for the purpose of kindly calling our attention to, and laying open before us, those particulars in our character and infirmities in which we need greater measures of his grace. He makes us to see the depth of our ignorance, how weak we are under temptation, and how certainly we shall be overcome, but for his ever present grace. In this state of mind, we may be sure that we are in communion with God.

4. When we are able to spread our whole case, and open up the deepest necessities and secrets of our hearts before God, we are in communion with Him. We sometimes feel as if we could go to the very bottom of our whole being, and bring forth every secret thought, affection, emotion, and whatever has been deep and concealed, and spread them out in the light of his countenance.

5. When we are enabled to bring forth our strong reasons in pleading with God, we are in a state of communion with Him. Sometimes we find ourselves able to plead and reason with God, as a man would plead with his friend, to bring forth our reasons, and array our arguments, with a strong

confidence and almost assurance, that they will affect his mind as they do our own. The reasons which we offer to God, appear to be weighty, and sufficient to our own minds; and we feel a kind of supernatural confidence, that they will, and must, and do influence the mind of God. We press Him with them. We turn them over and over; lay them out in their connections and bearings, and feel as if they could not be resisted. Nay, we insist upon their weight and force, and often urge them upon God, with a kind of supernatural vehemency of spirit, which refuses to be denied. This was no doubt the state of Jacob's mind, when he wrestled all night with God. This state of mind is what is intended by wrestling with God. In this state the soul uses the strongest language, feels the utmost confidence in the ground it takes, takes hold of the very strength of God, and casts its whole being upon Him, and upon the strong reasons which it urges, and upon his immutable faithfulness and promises. But this state of mind is only understood by those who have experienced it. The stranger intermeddleth not with such things as these. And could any cold hearted professor or ungodly sinner be concealed in some secret place, and witness the secret intercourse of such a soul in communion with God; could he listen to his language, behold his streaming perspiration, the whole scene would, no doubt, impress him with mingled feelings of wonder and consternation.

6. When we feel like consulting God on almost every thing that interests us, and that concerns the interests of his kingdom, we are in communion with Him. Christians sometimes feel, and many habitually feel a disposition to ask God's opinion, consent, and advice, at every turn. They seem to abide in that state of mind in which Paul was, when he said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" With others, less advanced in grace, this feeling is not so habitual; but yet all true Christians know what it is to feel their hearts drawn into an attitude of constant consultation with God, a fleeing and running to Him for advice, a breathing out its ejaculations to Him for counsel; a disposition to consult Him about the minutest things, and mention to Him even the most trivial occurrences and circumstances of life. In this state, the soul feels like a very little child, consulting a most wise and affectionate father.

7. Whenever we feel disposed to make God a sacred confidant, and disclose to Him all those secret things which we would confide to no other being in the universe, we are in a state of communion. The Christian's soul is

sometimes drawn into such a state as to feel an intense longing to treat God as the most sacred and confidential friend, laying open before Him all those secret things with which no other being has any right to intermeddle. The Christian's soul is united to God, and sustains a thousand endearing and interesting relations to Him, that it sustains to no other being. It is sometimes compared to the married state; but it almost infinitely exceeds it in the deep and sacred confidence it reposes in God. No conjugal confidence ever began to equal it. The sweet, sacred, deep, profound confidence of the soul in God. No husband ever laid open to his wife, or wife to the husband, the deep springs of action, the most retired and secret workings of the soul, as one in communion with God will often do. O the unspeakable confidence which the soul feels, when it discloses to Him the deepest, darkest, profoundest necessities of the whole being.

8. When the scriptures are opened to our understandings, and made to take hold upon our hearts, we are in communion with God. A soul not in communion with God, may be interested in the Bible as a history; but its more spiritual parts are like a sealed or an uninteresting book. The mind's eye will wander over chapter after chapter, wander through its sacred pages, and amidst all the glories it reveals, without being struck, and fixed, and held as by enchantment, in view of its glorious developments. But when in communion with God, every sentence bears the impress of God. It is full of meaning, full of light, and love. It discloses the very secrets of the heart of God, and lays his very being bare to our inspection. The soul pauses at every sentence, and wonders, and admires, and adores. It looks into the deep profound. The spiritual world is open to its view. It seems, as with a telescope, to have bidden eternity into his presence. And the whole spiritual world seems to be so uncovered before him, that he is almost in the state in which Paul was, not able to tell whether he is in the body or out of the body. It is easy for a mind in this state to conceive what Paul meant, when he said, "I knew a man fourteen years ago, whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell; God knoweth; I knew such a one caught up into the third heavens, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." The fact is, his mind was so entirely absorbed with the objects presented to his spiritual eye--his attention was so entirely engrossed with them, as to be unconscious of the presence of any objects of sense. And he could not afterwards tell, whether he was in the body or out of the body. It

is related of Xavier, that his communion with God was so intense, that when he retired for secret devotion, he was obliged to leave word with his servant to call him off at a certain hour. Sometimes his servant would go, after he had remained for hours in secret communion with God, and find him upon his knees, the Bible open before him, with his eyes fixed, and lost in deep, secret communion with God, so that his servant would be obliged to shake him, before his attention could be so drawn off from spiritual objects, as to be conscious that he was still a resident of earth. I have myself known instances, in which persons were very much in this state of mind.

Now there are many degrees of this kind of communion with God, when the scriptures are so opened up to the mind, and so understood, and its truths so apprehended, and appear to the soul so glorious and ravishing, as to swallow up in a greater or less degree, the thoughts, attention, and whole being.

9. When we are made deeply sensible of our character, past and present, we are in communion with God. Sometimes Christ has intercourse with the soul, and calls its attention to a great many things, that make it vastly ashamed of itself. The whole soul is filled with shame, confusion and blushing. The Holy Spirit gently but thoroughly opens up to the mind, the past, and the present, and lifts up the vail of oblivion, quickens the memory, and as it were causes our whole character to stand out before our mind's eye, like a hideous and unseemly ghost. The soul in this state seeks to find the very lowest place in the whole universe. it cries out, from its deepest foundations, "O to get infinitely low before God." Sometimes persons in this state of shame, self-abasement, and unutterably self-abhorrence, seem not at all to be aware, that this is communion with God. Being in the habit of considering communion with God to consist altogether in those joys which the saints sometimes experience, they do not realize that these deeply self-abasing thoughts and views, are only the result of a close and searching interview with God. In this state of mind, they sometimes feel as if God has forsaken them, and can see it to be so infinitely reasonable, that He should, as not to be aware that they are now, perhaps, more thoroughly in the light, and really in a state of more deep and thorough communion with God than perhaps they have been at any other time.

10. We are in communion with God, when we have great confidence in Christ. The mind is sometimes filled with adoring views of the fulness there

is in Christ, as its Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption. It oftentimes, when drawn into this form of communion with the Holy Spirit, whose business it is to take the things of Christ and show them to us, sees in Him such infinite fulness and security, such a world of promises, so vast in their meaning, so true, so infinitely certain is their fulfillment, that they are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus. The soul feels at such times that it is indeed complete in Him; that He is a perfect Righteousness, a perfect Sanctification, a perfect Redemption; that his grace and fulness are large enough to swallow up all thought, all finite conception; that the sins of all mankind might be merged in the ocean of his grace; that all the temptations, and wants, and woes of man, might all be swallowed up in the boundless ocean of his love and grace, and would all be only as a pebble in the midst of the great Pacific Ocean. At such times, the mind can see that in Christ dwells the fulness of the Godhead. It feels itself set upon everlasting rock, in a large place, and its goings established. It feels such vast repose in Christ, that "as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so is the Lord Jesus Christ round about them that fear Him."

11. When we are spiritually minded, we are in communion with God. All those states of mind of which I have spoken, are forms of spiritual mindedness; but here I mean a state of spiritual mindedness in general, upon every subject; a habitual minding of spiritual things, in opposition to minding earthly things. In this state, a man, while he lives in the flesh, is, after all, much more conversant with the spiritual and heavenly world, than with the men and things of this world. He indeed walks upon the earth; but his conversation is in heaven. He is surrounded with sensible objects; but he is so little interested in them, that he scarcely heeds them. His soul has come into the light, as God is in the light. It walks, it lives in light. It is bathed in the very sunlight of heaven. Spiritual objects are stronger and more impressive realities than sensible objects. Such a soul, and such a one only, can understand the full import of Paul's language, when he said: "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live. Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." The soul in this state, is in a marvelous attitude. In the body, and of course able to converse with sensible objects, and yet, so in the Spirit as to be able to hold sweet, intimate, and continual communion with the Holy Spirit. It can repose its

head as upon the very bosom of Christ, while its feet are standing upon the earth.

12. When we have victory over our spiritual enemies, we have communion with the Holy Spirit. The soul in communion with God can easily bid Satan to depart, and he flees. Its faith seems to have the strength of omnipotence. It seems to vanquish all its spiritual foes with the utmost ease. The mind in this state rises above spiritual enemies and the power of temptation. The waves of temptation, that would at another time overwhelm it, seem, when in communion with God, to break harmless at its feet. It stands upon a rock above them. Temptation cannot reach it, but spends its impotent strength in beating against the everlasting rock on which it stands. It feels that Christ fights all its battles for it. It has only to hide in Him, as in the cleft of a great rock, and Christ says to the winds and waves of temptation, "Peace, be still," and "there is a great calm." Now, beloved, do you know any thing about these states of mind. If you do you know what it is to have fellowship with the Father and the Son, through the Holy Ghost.

13. There is one more form of communion which I will mention, and that is, when the soul is swallowed up, and all its will and desire lost and merged in the will of God. In this state of mind, the soul feels as if it had not and could not have any will of its own, any wish or desire, that any thing in the universe should be in any respect different from what God would have it. It feels that it has and can have no interest of its own, aside from the interest and will of God. His interest, his kingdom, and his will are its all. If in any case it is uncertain what is the will of God, it feels as if it could make no other petition, in respect to that event, than "Thy will be done." It feels such an attachment to the will of God, such confidence in it, as infinitely right and benevolent, as to feel as if it never could have a wish, desire, or thought, inconsistent with the will of God, and to feel as if the least risings of opposition against the will of God--the least want of most entire resignation, and most entire acquiescence in his will--were more to be dreaded and more terrible than hell itself.

I must omit the remaining heads of this discourse till my next.

LECTURE XVIII.

September 9, 1839

COMMUNION WITH GOD--No. 2

Text.--2 Cor. 13:14: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all. Amen."

In pursuing this subject, I shall notice, according to my plan--

IV. The value and importance of Communion with God.

1. Communion with God is just as important as the true knowledge of God. No man really and truly knows any thing of God, only as God reveals Himself personally to that soul. I do not mean, that He must make to him a revelation not made in the Bible; but God must make him feel and apprehend the real meaning of the Bible. "No man can say that Jesus is the Christ, save by the Holy Ghost." No man understands any thing more than the letter of the Bible, only as he has direct and personal communion with God. The Bible is to no man a revelation any further than God makes it a revelation to him. Without this personal and direct opening up the truths of the Bible to the soul, it is only "the letter that killeth." Bible truth is to him no revelation of God. It is but blindness, darkness, and mystery. This does not seem to be understood, even by the great body of the Church--that direct communion with God, the Holy Spirit explaining his own word, and making the Bible a direct and personal revelation to him. I say, it does not seem as if the Church understood that without this, no soul has the knowledge of the true God. Why it is said, that "to know God and Jesus Christ is eternal life." But do all know God and Jesus Christ, who have the Bible? Do all who read and even study the Bible know Jesus Christ, and have they eternal life? Surely not. None know God and Christ in such a sense as to have eternal life, unless He is directly and personally revealed to them, through the word, by the Holy Spirit. What vast and ruinous mistakes are in the Church upon this subject.

2. Communion with God is just as important as true knowledge of ourselves. No man has any thorough knowledge of himself any farther than he has been revealed to himself, by his intercourse with God. The human

heart is naturally such a deep pit of darkness, that we absolutely need a revelation of ourselves as much as we need a revelation of God. God is the only being in the universe that knows us. We are naturally lost, bewildered, and in almost total ignorance of our own real characters. In our long and frequent intercourse and communion with God, He takes occasion, as it were, in our protracted conversations with Him, to spread out before us our own history, to reveal us to ourselves, to command up from the deep oblivion of our own forgetfulness, the forgotten occurrences of our lives. In his light and in the light of his law alone, do we ever come to a right knowledge of ourselves. O how infinitely important is that communion with God, that reveals man to himself.

3. Communion with God is just as important as that we should be saved. No man can by any possibility be saved, without that communion with God of which I have been speaking. He cannot be saved without this communion, for the simple reason, that he cannot be saved without the knowledge of God and of himself. It is absolutely indispensable to his being sanctified and prepared for heaven.

4. Communion with God is just as important as that we should be useful to others. Here is the great secret of the inefficiency of the Christian minister--their want of that deep communion with God--that walking in the light of God--that sympathy and fellowship with God--that intercourse and fellowship with the spiritual world--that gives unction, and spirituality, and power to their preaching.

O what is a minister that does not keep up communion with God? As well might an alien, an enemy, or a rebel, be employed as an ambassador, as a minister assume that office, and attempt to treat with sinners in the name of God, without communion with Him. My ministerial brethren, will you allow me to ask you, in the kindness, sincerity and sobriety of my soul, whether you understand, in your own experience, what I have been talking about? Do you know, dearly beloved, in your own experiences, what this communion with God is? Do you live in his light? Do you walk with God? Is your conversation in heaven? Do you feel as if your souls were wafted on the Pacific Ocean of love, by the trade winds of his eternal Spirit? Do your people, when you go into the pulpit, see that your soul stands out before them as bathed in the sun light of heaven? Do your prayers, and preaching,

and all your ways, impress them with the conviction, that you are a spiritually minded man--that you are risen with Christ--that your conversation is in heaven--that your heart is not set upon things on earth, but upon those things where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God?

My brother, my beloved brother, do you preach the spirit or the letter of the gospel? Are you a minister of the New or of the Old Testament? Be not offended, but let me come near, I pray you, and commune with you. Would you be useful to your fellow-men? Would you glorify God in all your ways? Are you useful to them? Does your fruit abound to the glory of God? Are you instrumental in watering their souls with the water of eternal life? Do you feed them with the bread of heaven? What is the state of the church to which you minister? What is the standard of their spirituality? Especially, how is it with those with whom you associate most, and over whom you have the most influence? Do you feed them with the "sincere milk of the word?"

If, by your daily experience, you know what that communion with God is, of which I have been speaking, I might venture to answer these questions for you; but if you do not, you are but a "blind leader of the blind." Be not displeased with this. I speak it in love, and because I deeply feel it. And if you do not know it to be true, the more deeply do I pity you, and the church to which you minister; and the more emphatically do I blame you.

5. Communion with God is as important, as it is that we should not ruin the souls of those around us. A professor of religion who has not habitual communion with God, is one of the greatest curses to the world that is in the world. He is a professor of religion, and hence the eyes of the world and of the Church are upon him. And by his profession he is publicly set forth as an example and a light to the world. He is professedly the representative of Christ. he is to be regarded as a living illustration of the truth, nature, and importance of religion. He is a "living epistle, known and read of all men." But if he has not communion with God, there is nothing in him that resembles God. Without communion with God, he is earthly, sensual, devilish; the very reverse of what he professes to be; and with his profession of religion and the spirit of the world, he is certainly one of the greatest stumbling blocks and greatest curses that can stumble and afflict the world. If this is true of any professor of religion, what must be true of a

minister of Christ who does not hold habitual communion with God. I do not hesitate to say, that he is vastly worse than no minister at all; that the people had almost infinitely better be without any pastor, than to have one who has turned his back upon God, and holds little or no communion with Him from day to day. The fact is, that communion with God is the secret of all piety. It is absolutely indispensable to the usefulness of ministers and private Christians, and that without which they will certainly do almost infinitely more hurt than good in the world.

6. Communion with God is as important as that we should not be a perpetual dishonor to God. No man can honor God in his walk and conversation, without keeping up habitual communion with God. Nay, his life will be a perfect libel upon the character of God--a perfect misrepresentation of God and of his religion--just that which, of all things, is best calculated to increase and perpetuate the prejudices of the world against God.

7. Communion with God is just as important as that we should have peace of mind. Nothing so recommends the gospel to mankind, as the exhibition of that great peace of mind which they have who love the law of God. To our own happiness, to our own usefulness, to the honor of God, to the interests of the church and the world around us, our own peace of mind is of vast importance--that we should be able to pass through the storms and trials that keep the world and the great mass of the Church in a state of great fermentation and distress, in calmness and unbroken peace, is a most desirable and infinitely important thing. But this cannot be without communion with God. When storms arise, the soul must be in such a state as to take refuge in the very bosom of God; whence it can look out upon the warring elements, with the keenest composure of mind. God's heart is always calm. It is a great and infinite ocean of eternal love and peace. Infinitely serene, and calm, and pure; never disturbed by any event, nor thrown into a state of fermentation, by any or by all the occurrences of the universe.

Now nothing can calm our own minds, amidst the shocks, vicissitudes, and trials of life, but continual communion with the infinitely calm and peaceful mind of God. O when the soul has been disquieted by the occurrences of life, and takes a deep plunge into the ocean of eternal love--when it steals away

from all human eyes, and holds a protracted and soul calming interview with God, how peacefully does it look about upon those occurrences that are throwing the world into fermentation around it.

8. Communion with God is just as important as we should have any grace or religion at all. No man, be his pretensions or professions what they may, has one particle of religion in exercise, any farther than he lives in communion with God. Christ says, "I am the vine, and ye are the branches." Now communion with God is just as indispensable to the life of religion in the soul, as the sap of the vine is to the life of the branches.

V. How to secure and perpetuate Communion with God.

1. It must be sought. God will be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do those things for them which they need. The soul must desire communion with God. It must seek it. It must prize it above all price.

2. If you desire communion with God, do not neglect Him, and go into communion with other gods. Suffer no idol to have any place in your heart. Suffer nothing, of any name or nature, to draw off your heart from communion with Him. See that your heart does not, in the least degree, become divided between God and some other object of affection.

3. Be sure not to neglect his counsels, when He condescends to commune with you and give you advice. Whatever he shows to be your duty, do it at all hazards. Do not in any case, or for any consideration, confer with flesh and blood. Spare not a right hand, or a right eye; but whenever He shows you the path of duty, let it be the fixed purpose of your heart to enter upon it at once, without gainsaying or hesitation, if you face death at every step.

4. Avoid every thing which you would avoid, were He visibly present with you. Consider how you would act, and what you would do, if Christ stood visibly before, or were God to be seen by you, pouring the blaze of his searching eye upon all your ways. Now be sure, if you mean to keep up communion with God, to be as holy in heart and life, and conversation, as you would be were Christ your visible and constant companion.

5. Engage in nothing that shall in any way interrupt your communion with Him. Engage in no more business than is consistent with living and walking with God. Engage in no such kinds of business, adopt no such business

principles, read no such books, have no such companions, spend no time in such a way as is inconsistent with a state of entire consecration to God.

6. Keep your whole heart open to Him. Let the door of your heart, as it were, stand open, and your heart lie all spread out continually before God. Habitually and daily lay open the secrets of your whole heart before Him. Cultivate this state of mind, and rest not short of feeling that you keep your whole mind in a state of entire transparency, before God, with nothing covered up, or in the least degree veiled or concealed from the inspection of his eye. I do not speak thus because I suppose any thing can be concealed from God; but because it is one thing for God to see through your whole being, whether you will or not, and quite another for you to come, and habitually, and voluntarily show Him your whole heart.

7. Give yourself wholly up to his guidance. Let it be the fixed purpose of your heart to spare no idol, to indulge no sin, to do nothing, say nothing, think nothing, be nothing, more nor less, than is in exact accordance with his guidance and instruction. Have no more desire or thought of varying a hair's breadth from his instruction, than you would of cutting your own throat, or even of leaping into hell.

8. Rest not, if your communion with God is interrupted but for one hour. Let the medium between your heart and God be so clear, that the least mist or thickness of atmosphere shall at once alarm your soul. Whatever you are engaged in, wherever you are, let your very first business be to inquire what it is that is causing the Sun of Righteousness to shine more dimly upon your soul. And be not satisfied until you ascertain and remove the cause. Nay, you must set your heart upon keeping in the pathway of the just, that shineth more and more until the perfect day. Better, vastly better for you, to sacrifice any worldly good, and make any earthly sacrifice, than to have your intercourse with God at all interrupted. It is better far to live in a dungeon, in communion with God, than to sit upon a throne in an earthly mind.

9. Expect much, and adequate guidance and grace. Christ says, his "grace is sufficient for thee." It was sufficient for Paul, under the circumstances in which he was, it is sufficient for every saint. Do not be afraid then to ask and expect great things. The greater things the better. "Open your mouth wide," He says, "and I will fill it. Call unto me and I will answer thee, and

show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not." And remember that He is able to do "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think." He has told you, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." If, therefore, you limit his giving by your unbelief, you grieve his heart. You cannot do Him a greater injury than by your unbelief, to prevent his bestowing upon you the blessing he so greatly desires to give.

10. Show Him that nothing is valued by you in comparison with communion, with Him,--your lusts, and whatever would in the least degree divert you from Himself. Do not surround yourself with idols, nor with such creature comforts as will show Him that you feel as if He were not a sufficient portion. He calls you his bride. Let your soul be satisfied with his love and wander not at all after other loves. Let Him see that you consider Him an all-sufficient and infinitely satisfying portion, and that you desire no other.

11. Form no unnecessary attachments to any being or thing on earth. Guard your heart as you would guard the apple of your eye. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." And remember that the Lord your God is a jealous God; you cannot have communion with Him and communion with the world at the same time.

12. Aim just as much at being wholly consecrated to Him as you aim at being religious at all. Have no thought, and make no calculation at all inconsistent with this. Form no plans, entertain no desires, and engage in nothing whatever, that shall be in the least degree inconsistent with your being as holy as He is holy.

13. Be sure, as far as possible, to avoid temptation. It would seem as if the great mass of professors of religion are either perfectly blind in regard to exposing themselves to temptation, or the they think themselves able to overcome in their own strength. I have often been struck and shocked with the state of mind in which those persons are who deny the doctrine of entire sanctification or entire consecration to God in this life. It is manifest that they expect to continue to sin, as much as they expect to live; that they make all their calculations accordingly; that they do not so much as mean to live in a state of entire consecration to God. No, not for a single day.

A brother minister said, but a short time since, in my hearing, that on being

requested, some time since, by a brother minister to engage in a certain business which he feared would be a great temptation to him, he declined, upon the ground that he feared, that in so doing he should sin. His brother replied, "O what of that? we are sinning all the time. If we sin we must repent, you know."

Now I cannot tell in how many instances I have seen this state of mind developed, among professors of religion, within a few years past. And it sets in a most striking and abhorrent light, the sentiment that Christians are not to expect to be entirely sanctified until death.

Now, Christian, let me tell you, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, what, if you are a Christian, you know to be true--that you cannot live in communion with God, only as you give yourself up to Him, in a state of entire consecration. Whenever you are overcome by sin, your communion is interrupted of course; and unless you really mean, intend, and expect to be wholly and perpetually consecrated to his service, to keep up communion with God is impossible.

14. Communion with God cannot be perpetuated, without watching unto prayer, and praying in the Holy Ghost. "Pray without ceasing, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit; watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." It is a vain dream, to expect to keep up communion with God in the neglect of frequent and protracted seasons of secret prayer. When a certain man, not long since, was asked, whether he prayed in secret, he replied, "When my friends are absent I write to them, but when they are with me I have no need to write." But I would ask such a one, when your friends are with you, do you not so much as speak to them? Communion with God, implies what is equivalent to talking with God. And more than this is implied in communion with God. It implies the most intimate and confidential interchange of views and feelings that can be conceived. Let no man dream that his communion with God will continue for any length of time, if he neglect to offer much, very much secret prayer.

REMARKS.

1. How few there be that keep up communion with God.

2. Sinning willfully against the light may cut off communion between your soul and God forever. I have known some lamentable and distressing cases, where persons by one willful sin, brought themselves into a state of protracted, if not final despair.

3. Communion with God is the secret of all ministerial usefulness. Here let me say that ministers often deceive themselves, as it respects their usefulness, through the instrumentality of pious members of their church, there may be revivals of religion in their churches, entirely independent of their instrumentality. This, I have good reason to know, is often the case. And that they are often supposed by others to be eminently useful in promoting the salvation of souls, when, as a matter of fact, they are right in the way. It is to be feared that they often think themselves in a good degree useful, because they live so far from God as not to see that they are in reality doing more hurt than good.

4. In the light of this subject, we can also see the fruit of ministerial unfruitfulness. Christ says, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." In this passage Christ seems expressly to teach, that if ministers are unfruitful, or if any Christian is unfruitful, it is because, as a matter of fact, he does not abide in Christ. Abiding in Christ I understand, to be the keeping up constant communion with Him. Now as these words of Christ are true, no professor of religion, and no minister, has a right to say that he abides in Christ, if he does not "bring forth much fruit."

5. From this subject we see the importance of students keeping up communion with God during the progress of their education. It is, I believe, one of the greatest, one of the most common, and ruinous errors among students to suppose that they can give up in a great measure communion with God while pursuing their college education, and that they shall naturally resume it again when they shall enter upon Theology, or at all events when they shall enter the ministry. Now, beloved young men, let me warn you against this delusion, as fatal to your

future usefulness. Inquire the world around among all the fruitless ministers of your acquaintance, and you will find almost without exception that this has been the "stone of stumbling" to them. They were pressed in their studies. They gave up communion with God for communion with their authors, their teachers, and their fellow students. They became earthly, sensual, devilish. And the results of their ministry, can tell you the consequences of their folly.

6. The privileges of Christians now are greater than if they enjoyed the personal presence and preaching of Christ. Christian, what would you say, if you could have Christ for your pastor. Should you not expect to grow in grace? Would you not expect to live a life of entire consecration to God? Here what He say, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send Him unto you." "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth, for He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak; and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify me; and He shall receive of mine, and shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine, therefore said I, that He shall take of mine and shew it unto you." Here then we have the express mind of Christ, that the presence of the Holy Spirit which we may always enjoy, is of more importance to us than his personal teachings. Christ could not be every where in his bodily presence. But the Holy Ghost is every where. Christ could only instruct us by his words and example were He personally present with us. But his Spirit can directly approach our minds and put us in possession at once of the whole truth. Christian brother, sister, ministerial brethren, I beseech you, understand your privilege and know that as a matter of fact, they are greater, if you will lay hold of them, than if you lived in the same house, eat at the same table, enjoyed the daily conversation, and personal preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

O, then keep up constant communion with God. And may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all, Amen.

[Back to Top](#)

Temptations Must Be Put Away

Lecture XIX
October 7, 1840

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 5:29,30: "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

In discussing this subject I will show:

I. That things in themselves lawful and even important, may, by sinful indulgences, become a cause and a source of stumbling to the soul.

II. That however dear, and even important they may be, if through abuse, they, as a matter of fact, are the cause of our falling into bondage to sin, they must be put away.

III. That to continue the temptation, in such cases, and expect grace to overcome it, is to tempt God.

IV. If any form of temptation is allowed to have dominion over us, we are inevitably and for ever lost.

I. Things in themselves lawful and even important, may, by sinful indulgence, become a cause and a source of stumbling to the soul.

1. This is plainly implied in the text. The text plainly lays down a principle, and a strong case is supposed by way of illustration. If thy right hand or thy right eye offend thee; that is--cause thee to offend--cut off the hand and pluck out the eye. What is more important to us than a right hand or right eye? It is as if the Savior had said, If these things, which are the most important to you, as a matter of fact, become a snare and lead you into sin, put them away. Here it is as plainly implied as possible, that the most lawful and useful things, may become a snare to our souls.

2. It is a very common occurrence. Who does not know, that his eyes, and his ears, his friends, his employments, his possessions, his bodily appetites, and multitudes of useful things, may, by perversion, be made a snare to the soul.

II. However dear and even important they may be, if, through abuse, they, as a matter of fact, are the cause of our falling into bondage to sin, they must be put away.

1. Because, as the text affirms, it is profitable for us; that is--our own good demands it. "For it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

2. It must be put away, because whatever is prized more than sin is hated, is our idol and our god. That is our god which we supremely regard. If we supremely love Jehovah, we shall sooner part with any thing than offend Him. Hence Christ teaches that, except a man hate his father, and mother, and brother, and sister, and even his own life, for Christ's sake, he cannot be his disciple. If any thing is loved or prized in comparison with God, we have no religion at all. If a man, therefore, does not dread sin more than he dreads death, he is no disciple of Christ. If there is any thing in the world that he loves more than he hates sin, any thing whatever, that would be spared, notwithstanding it kept him in bondage to sin, he is not, and cannot be a disciple of Christ. I speak of course of those things that can be put away by us, by an act of self-denial on our part. And if there is any kind or degree of self-denial which we would not prefer to being in sin, then, if the Bible is true, we are not the disciples of Christ. Let it be understood, now, that I do not speak of some very rare and high attainments in piety; but of a universal condition of discipleship. Christ has laid it down in as strong language as any in which it can be expressed. He uses the strongest language, without seeming to fear being misunderstood. He says, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

III. To continue the temptation in such case, and expect grace to overcome it, is to tempt God.

1. Because Christ has taught us to pray, that we may not be tempted. Now

what is tempting god, if this is not--to pray that we may not be tempted, without using all the means in our power to avoid temptation? Suppose, that a drunkard should pray against temptations to intemperance, and still keep his sideboard loaded down with all kinds of tempting liquors? I know it is sometimes related of persons, that they have set some tempting object continually before them, to show the strength of their resolution to overcome. Whether there is any truth in such reported cases I know not; but this I know, that it is very unwise. And, if persons are instructed, it is nothing less than tempting god, to suffer a temptation, that can be removed at our pleasure, and that actually brings us into sin, to continue before us and exert its influence upon us.

2. It is tempting God, because grace was never designed to purchase exemption from self-sacrifice, and self-denial; but to lead to them and support the soul under them.

3. To suffer the temptation in such cases to continue is to tempt God; because grace was never designed to purchase exemption from cross-bearing, cutting off right hands, and plucking out right eyes, and putting away our idols, and those indulgences that overcome us. But grace was designed to enable us to empty ourselves of all those things.

4. It is enough for the servant to be as his master. Christ, as a man, was obliged to watch and deny Himself, and keep Himself clear of those besetments and temptations that would naturally overcome Him. His Apostles followed in his steps. Paul found it indispensable to keep his body under, to mortify his members which were upon the earth; and it is an unalterable law of the kingdom of grace, that men must put away those weights and easily besetting sins that hinder and overcome them, or they will never enter into the kingdom of God. Therefore, to continue the temptation and expect grace to overcome it, is to "turn the grace of God into lasciviousness."

IV. If any form of temptation is allowed to have dominion over us, we are inevitably and for ever lost.

1. Because it is a state of impenitence. He is an impenitent sinner, who prefers living in sin, to cutting off a right hand or plucking out a right eye.

2. To suffer a temptation that prevails over us to continue, when by an act of self-denial on our part we can put it away, is but to confirm a state of impenitence. Every day and hour we suffer ourselves to continue under such an influence, the bonds of impenitence are strengthening, until we are hopelessly delivered up to the dominion of our besetting sins.

3. To suffer any form of temptation to continue, which as a matter of fact leads us into sin--which temptation can be put away by us--is totally inconsistent with any degree of holiness. Suffering the temptation under such circumstances is an impenitent state of mind. It is the opposite of all holiness. It so supremely loves the darling object as to refuse to part with it, although as a matter of fact it leads us to sin against God! I say again, that this is not merely a state of defective piety; it must be a state of no piety at all.

REMARKS.

1. If things the most lawful and important in themselves must, if through abuse they have become a stumbling-block to us, be put away, how much more needful then that we put away useless and unnecessary things.

2. From this subject we can see the error of those who hold on to practices and things, that are a cause of stumbling to them, on the ground that they are lawful in themselves. What is more lawful or more important than a right hand or a right eye? Suppose, that when Christ delivered this sermon on the mount, of which the text is a part, one of his hearers had replied-- "Surely, this man is mad and hath a devil. Will he teach us to cut off our right hands and pluck out our right eyes? Did not God make them for lawful and useful purposes? Would he have a man maim himself, or make himself a cripple for life? Is it not lawful for us to enjoy the good things of providence? This is altogether a legal spirit, and by no means the doctrine from God." What reply, suppose you, Christ would have made to such an objection as this? And yet how many vehement debates do we hear, in which men are pleading for and defending their lusts, indulging their appetites, and ruining their souls, on the ground that these things are lawful in themselves? Suppose they are lawful in themselves, and yet, as a matter of fact, you abuse them and suffer them to lead you into sin. If they are lawful in themselves, you do not use them lawfully. They have become your masters, instead of your servants; and therefore you must put them away, however lawful they may be in themselves, or you will lose your souls.

3. We see the mistake and the presumption of those who hold on to things which prove a snare to them, on the ground that they are useful things. What is more useful than a right hand or a right eye? And yet Christ says, put them away; for however useful they may be, they will never pay you for the loss of your souls.

4. We see the folly and madness of those who hold on to their indulgences in things that lead them into sin, on the ground that these things are not expressly forbidden in the word of God. One man can find it no where forbidden in the scriptures to use ardent spirits--another can find no express passage, forbidding the use of wine--and a third can find slavery no where prohibited in the word of God. In short, many seem disposed to indulge themselves in whatever is not expressly forbidden, without at all regarding the actual influence of those things upon them.

5. How little he cares for sin, or knows of God, who can willingly spare that which leads him into sin. What can he know of God? What does he really know of sin? What idea can he have of true religion? Surely none that are not infinitely far from truth.

6. From this subject it is easy to see, that if property becomes a snare it should be put away. If a man's state of mind is such that, as a matter of fact, worldly possessions lead him into a state of worldly-mindedness, he should give his property at once to the cause of God, and refuse to possess any, even if he become as poor as Lazarus. Such a course is altogether indispensable to the salvation of his soul. If his property is a snare, he must put it away, whether it be much or little. Any and every article of property, that gets hold of the heart, diverts the attention and affections from God, whether it be a dollar or a mine of gold, a horse, a house, a farm, a store, or any thing whatever, that as a matter of fact alienates the soul from God, must be put away, or the soul is lost. Now is this any stronger than the doctrine of the text? No, verily. If this is extravagant, then Christ was extravagant. If this is not solemn truth, and if as much as I here affirm is not true, then the text is not true, and Christ is a false witness. I know that such statements are apt to be looked upon as extravagant; but mark what I say--It is no extravagant assertion, that whatever piece of property, whatever kind or amount of worldly goods, seduces the soul away from God, they must be put away, and put away for ever, or the soul is inevitably lost.

7. What vast madness possesses the souls of those who are endeavoring to get all

the worldly goods they can, and even to lay up wealth for their children, when they are as conscious as they are of their own existence, that their worldly possessions are diverting their minds from God and heaven. It would seem as if they were enlisted to work out their own damnation with all their might.

8. If you are inclined to eat too much, you must deny yourselves those kinds of diet that betray you into gluttony. Whatever those kinds of diet are, of which you are so fond, and that overcome you when placed before you, and lead you to transgress the laws of your being, put them entirely away. Do not suffer them to find a place upon your table.

9. The exact opposite of this course is generally pursued by mankind. From the general conduct of mankind, it would seem that they fear starvation a thousand times more than they do gluttony, and that the utmost attention must be paid to preparing tempting dishes, or mankind would not have sufficient appetite to meet the demands of their nature. Now gluttony is one of the most common sins in the world. It is the testimony of the best judges upon this subject, that excessive eating is the most common form of intemperance that prevails among mankind, and is the cause of more disease, especially in this country, than any other form of intemperance. How unwise then, how wicked, what tempting God is it, to continue to prepare and set before yourselves those tempting dishes, instead of furnishing your tables with those wholesome, bland articles of diet of which you will be likely to eat but the requisite quantity.

10. If any article of dress, as a matter of fact, begets pride and vanity, occupies your thoughts, and diverts your mind from God, put it away for ever. A woman in one of our large cities, who was justly considered beautiful, and had been recently converted, was seen by a female friend with her hands filled with artificial flowers and curls, approaching the fire. "What!" answered the young convert, "I am going to burn them up." "O," said the friend, "don't burn them up; you can sell them and give the avails to some benevolent object." "Sell them," said she, "and thus tempt somebody else to be as proud and vain of them as I have been! No! I will burn them up. They shall no more be a temptation and a snare to any human being."

How wonderful is the conduct of human beings, and especially of professors of religion. Knowing, as they do, their weakness and liability to be overcome by pride, one would suppose that they would avoid, in the purchase of articles of dress, every thing that might excite pride or vanity, as they would avoid

destruction itself. But alas! how different is their conduct. Under the pretense of consulting good taste, they are at the utmost pains, and spare no expense, in tempting themselves to pride, by the purchase of any and every article that will adorn their persons, and show them off to advantage. Let me say, then, that whatever of dress, or equipage, or furniture, as a matter of fact excites pride and vanity, must be put away, or the soul is lost.

11. Every appetite and passion that has the ascendancy, and leads us into sin, must be crucified and its dominion entirely destroyed, or the soul is utterly lost.

12. Those who live in self-indulgence, and still think that they know and enjoy Christ, are deceived Antinomians. I have heard of some, who professed to come into the liberty of the gospel, decrying every thing that looked like self-denial and mortifying the flesh, as legal and belonging to Judaism, rather than to Christianity. Hence they indulge in the use of wines and strong drinks--their women indulge in dress, and flutter about after the fashions of this world; because, forsooth, they are now in a state of liberty, they spurn and despise a course of temperance, self-denial, and cross-bearing, of non-conformity to the world, as altogether a legal and self-righteous spirit and course of life. So did not Paul. So did not Christ. So does not any one who truly knows Christ.

13. Many seem to understand the gospel as designed to purchase indulgence, instead of begetting self-denial. The gospel was evidently designed to enlighten the minds of men in regard to the value of heavenly things--to bring them out from under the dominion of the objects of sense, and engage their thoughts and their hearts, in the pursuit and enjoyment of spiritual objects; and thus to lead mankind to neglect the glitter and baubles of this world--to forgo pampering their appetites, indulging their passions, adorning their bodies, and floating on in the currents of this world. But many seem so entirely to mistake the true spirit and intent of the gospel, as to suppose it designed to sanctify conformity to the world, instead of entirely delivering the soul from it. With this understanding of the gospel some persons seem to be in a very wonderful state of mind. I heard, sometime since, of a young woman, a professor of religion, who was in the habit of cohabiting with a young man as if she had been his wife, and who, before retiring to her bed of iniquity and shameless lust, would kneel down, and very gravely thank God, that He allowed her such indulgences.

Now, she no doubt supposed herself to be very thankful, and in a very humble frame of mind. Although this was an extreme case, yet I have myself seen many

things that seemed to involve the same principle, and to be the result of the same utter misunderstanding and perversion of the gospel, where persons were manifestly living in self-indulgence, pride, and luxury, and appeared to be very thankful that the gospel had relieved them from the necessity of an opposite course of life, and had sanctioned and sanctified such a use of the good things of providence, as that in which they were indulging--squandering Christ's money, injuring their health, stupefying and imbruting their minds, adorning their bodies, compressing their chest with tight lacing, and in multitudes of ways making war on both moral and physical law; and yet, having the idea that the gospel sanctioned all this, they were highly pleased with such a gospel, and such a Christ, and such a salvation--a salvation evidently not from sin, but in sin; not from the dominion of the flesh, but a salvation that throws up the reins to appetite, lust, and vanity. These poor dreamers seem to suppose that there is, under the gospel, no need of restraining the natural appetites, but that all may be indulged with perfect safety and propriety, if there is only faith in Christ. Now it should be for ever understood, that faith in Christ is that which gives victory over these things, instead of sanctifying indulgence in them.

14. I next remark, that what may be expedient for one to possess, or enjoy, may not be so for another. On account of natural temperament, or the influence of grace, one man may have possessions without being a temptation to him, to draw him away from God, which another cannot have. It is never safe for us to possess or indulge in any thing because another does so; for it may be that we are not equally able to bear it.

15. Under some circumstances, we may not be able to bear, what under other circumstances we could bear without injury.

16. From this subject it is easy to see the importance of watchfulness, and giving the utmost attention to the occasions of our stumbling, whether proximate or remote. When I was a young convert, I was struck with this resolution of Edwards:

"Resolved, that when I do any conspicuously evil action, to trace it back till I come to the original cause, and then both carefully endeavor to do so no more, and to fight and pray with all my might against the original of it."

It is no doubt of the utmost importance, that our eyes should be continually open to all the influences that are acting on us, and affecting our moral characters.

Every article of dress, every thing in our employments, amusements, companions, books, diet, in all our habits, and in all our ways, whatever leads us into sin, should be put away.

17. Some indulge temptation and sin, until so blinded and hardened, as to feel no condemnation, and think that all is well. Their consciences have become stupefied and remain indignantly silent. And what they once esteemed to be sin they no longer regard as such. They can now complacently indulge in what would once have made them tremble. And because they feel no condemnation, they imagine that they are not condemned. Now it is one thing to have a seared conscience, and to be in that negative state of mind in which there is no felt condemnation, and that active, positive, and conscious state of love to God and souls, in which the soul has the continual testimony that it pleases God.

18. All the promises in regard to support under temptation and deliverance from it, are to be understood to be upon the condition that we avoid and put away all temptation as far as we possibly can. We often find promises to which no express condition is annexed, but where a condition is either plainly implied or expressed in some other part of the word of God. Take the promise in 1 Cor. 10:13: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Here is a promise without any condition expressed with regard to deliverance from the power of temptation. But our text, is to be regarded as a condition annexed by Christ Himself to all promises of this stamp. And these passages together teach this doctrine, that we need not fall under the power of any temptation, that we cannot avoid or put away from us--that when we have gone the full length of sacrificing a right hand or a right eye, to be rid of temptation, that no unavoidable temptation shall come upon us, from which we shall not have grace to escape. And this is all that such promises can mean, when viewed in the light of the expressed or implied conditions of the gospel.

19. If we are not enabled to put away and overcome temptation, it is because we have no Savior. The Savior's name is Jesus, because He saved his people from their sins. If, therefore, you are not enabled to overcome your sins, it is because you reject the Savior.

20. How many are engaged in defending their idols and their lusts, rather than in putting them away.

21. If any thing is found to be a temptation and a cause of stumbling to us, we should never indulge or defend it, because others indulge in the same thing. Perhaps they may do it without its being an overcoming stumbling-block to them. Or if it does overcome and lead them into sin, their going to destruction is certainly no good reason why we should do so.

22. Where a thing may be reasonably suspected as the cause of our falling into sin, it should be put away. It sometimes happens, that we are not fully aware of what the particular thing is, in our habits, which grieves the Spirit of God, and yet have some or much reason to suppose that it is the practice or indulgence of some particular thing. A doubtful thing should never be allowed.

23. A thing may be overlooked as a cause or occasion of our stumbling, because it is not a proximate but a remote cause. The thing which acted immediately upon us to cause our fall, may perhaps be something that we cannot put away. But should we candidly inquire, we might find the more remote occasions, and by removing them, continue in a state of liberty.

24. If a man but love God, he will not, cannot rest until every cause of stumbling be searched out, and removed. Can a man love God supremely, and yet find himself betrayed into sin against Him, and rest until he has searched out and removed the cause? No!

25. Those who secretly dislike the doctrine of entire holiness in this life, are not Christians. From the manner in which many professors of religion treat this question, it seems manifest that they feel a secret dislike to it. They seem indisposed to understand it. They appear to set themselves to object to and pervert it, rather than candidly and earnestly to investigate it, with a manifest desire that it might be true. What they say and write, often makes the impression upon those who hear and read, that there is in the bottom of their hearts a spirit of secret but deep opposition to it. It may be supposed by some, that this manifested opposition is because it is regarded as error, and that Christians will naturally and of right manifest opposition to error. I should be glad to believe, that this opposition is founded in the conviction that this doctrine is false; but there is one circumstance that seems to forbid accounting for this opposition upon this principle. When a doctrine is hated because it is false, the doctrine will be fairly stated and met, and hated for what it is, and not for what it is not. Whenever we see a mind betaking itself to misstatement, and misrepresentation,

in order to evade a doctrine, it is difficult for us to believe, that the misrepresented doctrine is rejected because it is believed by the mind to be false. If the doctrine, as it is, were believed by the mind to be false, it would be stated and met as it is, and not misrepresented and misstated.

26. We see why so many, who admit the truth of the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life, do not practically embrace it. They have some idol with which they will not part. Their right hand and their right eye are so dear to them, that they will not spare them for the sake of eternal life. Especially, they will not do this, as from the common sentiments of the Church, they think they can get along very well without. They seem to reason thus: "We are about as good as common Christians, although to be sure, we are in the practice of many sins. The great mass of Christians do not believe that entire sanctification in this life is necessary or even attainable. We can, therefore, satisfy ourselves with but partial sanctification in this life, and still go to heaven. Why then should we throw away all our idols, merely for the sake of entire sanctification here, when partial sanctification will, in the judgment of the Church, and even of the ministers, do just as well. Now it is doubtful whether any such state is really attainable; and if it is, as I can get to heaven just as well without, I will not be so extravagantly foolish as to part with a right hand or a right eye, for the sake of being wholly without sin in this life." Now this seems to be a statement in words of the real, though unexpressed sentiments, of many professors of religion. The truth is, they are unwilling to give up their sins, and they resolve, if possible, to get into heaven without. Let such hear the words of Christ: "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

27. If a temptation is of such a nature, that it cannot be utterly put away, every thing should be done by us that can be, to destroy its influence over us. For example: Our appetites and passions cannot, at our will, be annihilated; but those things that excite them can be avoided.

28. How terrible is the delusion of those who expect to be sanctified, or even saved, in the courses of life which they are pursuing.

29. It is no wonder that the Church do not believe in the doctrine of entire

sanctification in this life. They are well satisfied that, with their present habits and indulgences, they cannot be entirely sanctified. And as these habits and indulgences appear to be stereotyped, they reject the doctrine of entire freedom from sin in this life, as unreasonable.

30. Whenever all is done that can be done, to avoid temptation, and to put away whatever brings us into bondage to sin, we may expect, and are bound to expect, that no temptation shall come upon us, from the power of which we are not able to escape. It is then entirely within the reach of every individual to live in a state of entire consecration, or sanctification, to God.

And now, whatever you do, do quickly. Will you put away now and for ever those temptations that overcome you, which can be put away by you? And will you now commit yourselves to the keeping and protection of the Lord Jesus Christ, to sustain you against the power of those temptations which you cannot avoid? Or will you hold on to your idols but a little longer, until all is lost. Again I say, whatever you do, do quickly. Every moment's delay is grieving the Holy Spirit. And even while I speak, unseen hands may be ready to toll the knell of eternal death over your soul! while you sink, weeping and wailing, down the sides of the pit!

Professor of religion, and you, impenitent sinner, do you realize, that while I speak the curtain may be ready to drop, the scene close, and your soul shut up to the horrors of the second death! O, do you know, "that now of a long time your judgment lingereth not, and your damnation slumbereth not"--that the Spirit is grieved--God is provoked; Divine forbearance almost exhausted--and your soul for ever lost! Again I say, what you do, do quickly.

[Back to Top](#)

Design or Intention Constitutes Character

Lecture XX

October 21, 1840

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Psalm 28:4: "Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavors."

By endeavors in this text, I understand design, or intention.

In discussing this subject, I shall--

I. Notice the distinction between intention and volition.

II. The distinction between an ultimate or supreme intention and a subordinate intention.

III. Show that moral character lies mainly in the ultimate or supreme intention of the mind.

IV. Show that the moral character or those volitions and outward actions, which are directed by the intention, is as the ultimate intention is.

V. Show when the intention is sinful.

VI. When it is holy.

VII. Show that a man's character, as distinguished from the character of any one of his acts, is as his supreme and ultimate intention is.

I. The distinction between intention and volition.

Intention is the mind's design, aim, or end. Not the outward object aimed at, but the inward design of the mind to secure a given object. Volition is the action of the will or those subordinate choices, which are produced and directed by the intention. In other words, intention is a state of the will--a permanent disposition or state of the will, in distinction from single volitions or actions of the will. Volitions, then, are, strictly speaking, the means used by the will, or the efforts which it makes to obtain the object of design or intention.

II. The distinction between an ultimate or supreme intention and a subordinate intention.

An ultimate intention, end, design, or object, is the final end which the mind has in view, and that to which all other ends are subordinate, and to which they sustain only the relation of a means. For example:--A student may work--to get

money--to purchase books--to obtain an education--to preach the gospel--to convert sinners--to glorify God. Here are several ends, subordinate to one supreme or ultimate end. The first end which the student has in view is to get money. But this is both an end and a means. His second end is to purchase books. A third end, the end for which he purchases books, is, to obtain an education. But his education is also a means to another end, which is to preach the gospel. This is also a means to another end, the conversion of sinners. And the conversion of sinners is a means to another end, which is, to glorify God.

III. Moral character lies mainly in the ultimate or supreme intention of the mind.

1. It cannot lie in the outward actions. The outward actions of a man, when viewed apart from the intention, have no moral character, any more than the motions of a machine.
2. It cannot lie in volition, irrespective of intention, for the same volition may be holy or sinful, according to the intention. For example: I may will to use the name of God, and the moral character of this intention must depend upon the design I have in using his holy name. I may will to go to a certain place, or to do a certain thing, and this willing or volition may be holy or sinful, as my design to go to that place or to do that thing is good or evil.
3. The reason of every man decides, that character lies in intention. If a man designs to do us evil, and by chance does us good, we do not thank him for it. And if a man designs to do us good, and without any fault of his own, it results in evil, we do not blame him.
4. The text assumes, that the moral character lies in endeavor or intention. Let the case of the student, already referred to, serve as an illustration. The student works to get money. But when we learn, that he intends to purchase books with his money, we cannot yet decide upon the moral character of what he is doing. Hence, we inquire what books he intends to purchase, and what he intends to do with them. We learn that he wants to obtain an education; but here we are as much at a loss as ever, to know what the moral character of his conduct is, and must inquire why he obtains an education? We are informed, that it is to preach the gospel. This looks well so far; but as yet we cannot decide upon the moral character of his conduct. He may intend to preach the gospel to promote his own interest, to gratify

his ambition, or with some other sinister design. We must, therefore, pursue our inquiries, and know why he designs to preach the gospel. He replies, that it is to convert sinners. But this does not decide his moral character. Why does he wish to convert sinners? Is it that he may be thought and called a useful man, or thus promote his own reputation? We must, then, push our inquiry home, and ask, why he wishes to convert sinners? We are told that it is because he supremely loves God, and dearly loves the souls of men--that he desires to promote God's glory and their happiness, as things good in themselves--that but for this ultimate supreme end, he would not work to get money to buy books, &c.--that he is conscious, that the ultimate intention, that at which he aims, which is the mainspring and cause of all his volitions, and that to which all these other ends are subordinate, is the glory of God and the interests of his kingdom. Here, and not until we arrive here, have we any light in respect to the moral character of his present employment, laboring to get money.

IV. The moral character of those volitions and outward actions which are directed by the intention, is as the ultimate intention is.

1. Because, but for intention they would have no moral character at all.
2. The moral character must be decided by the ultimate intention, as we have just seen in the example of the student. We see him vigorously at work, and know that volition is the cause of all his outward actions. But the moral character of what he is doing cannot be in these volitions themselves, when viewed separately from the intention, in obedience to which they are exercised. We next see the student purchasing his books--and next, poring over his studies--and again, preaching the gospel. In all these instances, we see every busy volition continually at work. But not one of these volitions, when viewed separate from the intention, would have moral character, any more than the volitions of a brute. Nor does the moral character lie in any of the subordinate ends. To get money, to purchase books, to obtain an education, to preach the gospel, have none of them any moral character when viewed apart from the ultimate intention of the mind in doing these things. The reason and common sense of all men affirm this.

V. When the intention is sinful.

1. When the intention is to do wrong, although the thing intended may not

be in itself wrong. If it is thought to be wrong, and intended as wrong, it is wrong.

2. When the intention is to do a thing known to be wrong, not because it is wrong, but in spite of its being wrong. Multitudes of human actions come under this denomination; vastly more, no doubt, than under the first. It is believed that men seldom do wrong for the sake of the wrong; but that they generally do wrong, knowing it to be so, not for the sake of the wrong, but for some other reason, and in spite of the wrong.

3. When the intention is, to do or omit a thing, regardless of, and without inquiring into the moral character of that act or omission.

4. When the intention has no respect to the will of God.

5. When the intention is selfish. Whenever the ultimate end is to secure our own good, this is a state of selfishness. This is wrong, because our own is not the highest good, and that at which we ought ultimately and supremely to aim. God's glory, and the interests of his kingdom, are of infinitely more value than our own individual happiness. Whenever our ultimate intention is to secure our own happiness, our whole character and conduct is sinful, whatever means we may employ. We may attend to all religious duties, with the greatest zeal, give all our goods to feed the poor, our bodies to be burned, if we have not charity, and are not actuated by supreme love to God--if our ultimate intention is not to glorify Him, rather than to make ourselves happy--the foundation of our character is utterly wrong.

VI. When the intention is holy.

When and only when it is the ultimate aim, object, or intention of the mind, to glorify God, and promote the good of the universe. If we design to glorify God as the means of promoting our own happiness, this is selfishness. To glorify and please God must be a thing intended and sought, for its own sake, and on its own account. And when this is the supreme and ultimate end at which we aim, the character is holy. In other words, none but a disinterestedly benevolent intention is holy.

If it be inquired, whether my designing or intending, and laboring to promote the glory of God, will not result in my own happiness, and may not therefore be regarded as the most remote or ultimate end at which I aim, I answer:

1. That supremely to aim at and labor for the promotion of God's glory, will doubtless promote my own happiness.

2. But my own happiness in this case, depends upon the disinterestedness of my intention of laboring to promote the glory of God. If, in laboring to promote the glory of God, my ultimate end is my own happiness, I cannot in this way be happy, any more than I could be happy in praying, if I should pray, not because of communion with God, but to promote my own happiness. I cannot be happy only as I do that which my whole nature approves. My whole moral being decides, that God's glory and interests, are supremely important in themselves, and that I should seek to promote them for their own sake, and on their own account. In no possible way, therefore, can I be happy, only as I act in conformity with this stern and uncompromising dictate of my nature. My happiness, therefore, will result or not result, from my intending and laboring to glorify God, just in proportion to the disinterestedness of my intentions and labor. I repeat it, therefore, that although a man's happiness is a consequence of his intending and laboring to glorify God; yet the intention terminates not at all upon his own happiness as an ultimate end of pursuit, but upon the glory of God and the interests of his kingdom, as something infinitely important in itself.

VII. A man's character, as distinguished from the character of any one of his acts, is as his supreme and ultimate intention is.

1. We have seen, that the character of our acts is as the ultimate end is.

2. A man's character is made up of his ultimate or chief end. Thus, we speak of an avaricious man, an ambitious man, a disinterested man, meaning by such expressions to distinguish the character of the man, from the character of any one of his acts.

REMARKS.

1. The ultimate end which a man has in view in his conduct, may not always be that which occupies his thoughts, and his conduct may be sinful or holy without the ultimate intention being at the time the subject of consciousness, or even thought. The student's thoughts may be, for the time being, wholly upon his labor or his books; and yet he may be influenced by the ultimate end he has in view, whether it be ambition or disinterested love to God, without being at all

conscious at the time, of being influenced by any other than the immediate end before him. But although the immediate object before him is the subject of his thoughts, still his labor or his study is holy or sinful, as his ultimate intention is.

2. There can be but two classes of mankind, in respect to moral character. There is but one right, ultimate end or intention, which is the glory of God and the interests of his kingdom. This ought to be the ultimate intention of every moral being in the universe. Every other ultimate end or intention is entirely wrong. So that there cannot, by any possibility, be more than two classes of moral beings, in respect to moral character, in the universe.

3. From this subject it is easy to see, that unregenerate sinners are, without exception, entirely depraved. We have seen, that a sinner's character is as his ultimate intention is. Every unregenerate sinner has a selfish ultimate or supreme intention, and is, therefore, in a state of total depravity.

4. From this subject we can see what regeneration is--that it consists in the change of the supreme or ultimate intention of the mind.

5. We can see that two persons may act precisely alike, be engaged in the same transactions, and in every respect be outwardly exactly alike, and yet possess moral characters precisely opposite. Nay, they may be both outwardly and inwardly, with the exception of their ultimate intention, exactly alike, and yet possess opposite characters. They may both will to pray, to go to meeting, to perform every religious duty. They may will, do, and be exactly alike in every other respect, if their ultimate object or intention is not the same, their moral characters are, in the sight of God, totally unlike.

6. An action may be morally right, because the intention is so, and yet there may be a sinful ignorance connected with it. A man may mistake in the use of means to glorify God. If he honestly intended to glorify God, the action itself is not sinful. Yet, if he was culpably negligent in the use of the means of information, and has used improper means, through his ignorance, his ignorance is a sin.

7. From this subject we can see what we are to understand by the sin of ignorance. It is that ignorance itself, is a sin, when the means of information are neglected. If I act wholly from right intentions, that act cannot be in itself sinful; yet, if I am mistaken through ignorance, the ignorance itself may be sinful.

Objection. But to this it may be objected, that Paul blamed himself for doing

what he verily thought he ought to do-- "many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth."

Ans. It is true, that in this case, Paul was to blame for doing what he verily thought he ought to do, because he was an impenitent sinner at the time, and his ultimate intention was not to glorify God; but he thought he ought to do it in obedience to the superstitious and persecuting notions of the Jews. Had he been a converted man at the time, and had his heart set upon glorifying God, he could not have thought as he did, that he "ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." Therefore, notwithstanding he thought he ought to do it, his conduct was sinful, because the ultimate design or end of doing it was not to glorify God, but to gratify his Jewish prejudices.

8. You see the real distinction between true saints and hypocrites. It does not lie in the fact, that they pursue opposite courses of life, but in that they pursue substantially the same courses of life, with opposite ultimate intentions. The true Christians' ultimate intention being to glorify God; the hypocrite's intention being his own happiness.

9. It is easy to see the great danger of delusion, because the ultimate intention of the mind is so often and so easily overlooked. Here, for example, are two students, just commencing a course of study. Now how many subordinate ends must they pursue, and how remote, so to speak, is the ultimate end at which they aim. They both labor hard, exercise economy, study hard, and may preach zealously, and be equally useful; and yet their moral characters all along be entirely opposite; their thoughts being taken up so much with the different subordinate ends of pursuit, that they may easily overlook and keep out of view, the ultimate end or main spring of all their actions. But herein lies the moral character of all their conduct. And if they are ignorant or mistaken in respect to this, they may, at any period of their lives, drop into eternity with a false hope, but in a state of such deep delirium as to cry out, "Lord, Lord, open unto us. Have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto you, I never knew you."

10. From this subject it is easy to see, that the sins of real Christians are accidental, in opposition to deliberate and habitual. In other words, that they consist in volitions rather than in deliberate intention. I have said, in a former part of this discourse, that the moral character of those volitions and actions

which are caused and directed by an ultimate intention, is as the ultimate intention is. This implies, as I intended it should, that some actions and volitions are not in obedience to an ultimate intention, but in opposition to it, and are caused by the desire of some present gratification. In other words, that they may not be in accordance with, but in opposition to the supreme and ultimate intention of the mind. The moral character of these acts must be determined by the particular design or intention that gave them birth. A man, for example, may set out to go on a foreign mission, with the ultimate intention of glorifying God. Yet, under the force of strong temptation, he may be driven off his course, and either commit a single act, or a series of acts, not in obedience to his ultimate intention, or in accordance with it. Nor yet, are these acts performed with the ultimate intention or in accordance with the ultimate intention of abandoning his missionary enterprise. These acts are not performed in obedience to any ultimate intention, either to glorify God, or to promote his own ultimate interests. But, if I may so speak, they fall out and leave a chasm in his usual course of conduct, through the force of temptation, without any change of his ultimate design. And the reason of them is, that for the time being and under the circumstances, the temptation has more power over his single volitions than his ultimate intention has. This is indeed a deep mystery, but so it is, as a matter of fact, however its philosophy is to be explained. I repeat it, then, that the sins of real Christians, while they are voluntary, are accidental, in opposition to deliberate and habitual.

11. We see why God does not and cannot deal with men in this world according to their real characters. Universalists have vainly asserted that He does; but every man knows, in his own experience, that he is not dealt with precisely according to his character in this life. Now it would create vast confusion, were God to deal with men according to their ultimate intentions, as they appear to Him. It is said that "the ploughing of the wicked is sin." Now upon what ground is it sin? The volitions that regulate the muscles in holding the plough are not sinful. It must be, therefore, that his ploughing is sin, simply because his ultimate intention is selfish. Should God punish men in this life, according to their real character or ultimate intention, it would require the confidence of angels so to believe that He was right as not to be stumbled by his conduct. One man would be punished for ploughing, and another for praying, and another for preaching, and others for multitudes of things, so far as human observation can go, that are good and praise-worthy. While, on the other hand, many actions would be rewarded, which, so far as human observation could go, would be

pronounced sinful, It must, therefore, be true, that God does not and cannot deal with men in this world according to their real character, without perplexing and perhaps ruining the universe.

12. You see from this subject, the necessity of a General Judgment, when God shall disclose the real character of all mankind, to the whole universe, and deal with every man according as his work shall be.

13. Men will be rewarded according to their ultimate intentions, whether they have been able to carry it out or not. "Give them," says the Psalmist, "according to their endeavors." This is the language of inspiration. Here is one man, designed to be a missionary, to save souls, and glorify God. But his health, in the providence of God, has prevented. Be of good cheer, my brother. God will carry on his work without you, and reward you according to your intentions. Here is another man, who has devised and intended to execute liberal things for Zion, but his expectations have been blasted, and he has been unable to succeed according to his endeavors. Well done, good and faithful brother; thou hast done well that it was in thine heart to glorify God. Thou shalt be rewarded according to all that was in thine heart.

14. We can see what permanent sanctification is, and when saints are permanently sanctified. They are permanently sanctified, when they arrive at that state in which they are not drawn aside in heart and in life, to will or to do what is inconsistent with the ultimate intention of glorifying God.

15. How many professors of religion will go down to hell with a lie in their right hand.

16. You can see the secret of the self-righteousness of sinners. They do not judge themselves by their ultimate intention, wherein their moral character lies, but by the subordinate ends at which they aim, If a sinner ploughs, he thinks, surely, there is no harm in this; but on the other hand, takes credit for it, as being in accordance with his duty. He maintains his family, goes to meeting, does thousands of things which professors of religion do. He supposes these things to be commendable and virtuous in themselves, irrespective of the ultimate design, which lies at their foundation, and is the cause of them. In this consists his sad and ruinous mistake.

17. In this same neighborhood lies the ruinous delusion of deceived professors.

18. A man may do wrong, without designing to do wrong. Indeed it is not common for men to aim at the wrong they do, and do things because they are wrong.

19. So also a man may do wrong, without designing to do a thing, notwithstanding it is wrong, but not for that reason.

20. A man sins unless he desires to do right, to act in accordance with his duty.

And now, beloved, when tried by this standard, is MENE TEKEL written upon your Christian character? Will you honestly go down upon your knees before God, and spread your whole heart out before Him? Will you honestly look into the foundation of your conduct, and inquire what is your ultimate and supreme intention? And will you remember...that according to your intention, God will deal with you in the solemn Judgment?

[Back to Top](#)

Confession of Faults

Lecture XXI

November 4, 1840

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--James 5:16: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed."

In this discussion I shall show:

I. What is intended by faults in this text.

II. To whom this passage requires confession to be made.

III. The design and use of confessing faults one to another.

IV. That we are under special obligation to pray for those who confess their faults.

I. What is intended by faults in this text.

1. Offenses against our neighbor.
2. Public offenses, or offenses against the public.
3. Secretly besetting sins, or those secret lusts and appetites, and passions, and temptations and states of mind that easily beset, and frequently overcome us.
4. Offensive and injurious traits of character. There are very few persons who have not more or less features of their character that are particularly offensive, either to good morals or good breeding, and are therefore injurious and disastrous in their tendencies and results. These are to be regarded not as isolated faults, but as faults of character--habitual faults, in opposition to accidental or occasional faults. All such faults should be confessed, one to another.
5. Such weaknesses and infirmities as lay us open to the power of temptation. These weaknesses may be owing to some constitutional infirmity, or they may arise out of evil habits that have acquired great power over us. Whatever they are, if they are faults in such a sense as to bring us into legal bondage to sin, they doubtless come within the scope of the Apostle's meaning.
6. All such things as grieve the Spirit of God, and hinder our growth in grace.

II. To whom this confession is to be made.

1. To those especially who have been injured by our faults. That we are under obligation to confess to them, and make what reparation is in our power, is too plain to need comment.
2. Public sins are to be confessed to the public. By this I mean, that if sins have been injurious to the public, to the Church, or to the world, or to both, the confession should be as public as the injury.
3. But especially does this text require confession to our praying friends. "Confess your faults one to another," says the Apostle, "and pray one for

another that ye may be healed." Although the duty of confessing sin to all that have been injured, is abundantly taught in other parts of scripture; yet in this particular text, the Apostle manifestly intended to enjoin the duty of confessing our faults to praying friends, for the purpose of enlisting their sympathies and prayers in our behalf.

4. And more especially still does he seem to require the duty of confessing our faults to eminently praying persons; for he immediately adds, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Hence it is plain, that the Apostle designed to direct persons to confess their faults especially to those who offer effectual fervent prayer.

III. The design and use of confessing faults one to another.

1. To make known to Christian friends our real circumstances and wants, so as to enlist their sympathies and enable them to pray for us intelligently, and present our case before the Lord as it is. Without this knowledge, persons may either altogether neglect to pray for us, or if they pray at all, they may be in such ignorance of our real necessities as greatly to misconceive our wants, and therefore never benefit us by their prayers.

2. Another design and use of confessing our faults one to another is, to make reparation, so far as confession goes, for the wrong we have done. Until this is done, God will not forgive. For while we refuse to make the reparation within our power, it were not only unreasonable, but unjust in God to pardon us.

3. To remove temptation to hard feelings on the part of those who have been injured by us. To injure a man by our faults is bad enough, but to refuse or neglect to confess is often worse, and may often result in worse consequences, and prove a greater injury to him, than did our original fault. If, after we have done wrong, and injured a brother or a neighbor, and he knows that we have done so, we persist in refusing to confess, it is a grievous temptation to him to entertain hard and revengeful feelings toward us. And where this course is persevered in it often results in the greatest injury, if not in the absolute annihilation of the piety of the injured party. If, then, you have committed a fault, take the earliest opportunity to confess it, lest you lay a stumbling block, a grievous, fatal stumbling block, before your brother's feet.

4. Another design and use of confession is, to remove obstacles to the restoration of Christian confidence and fellowship. When you have been guilty of a fault, and this is known to your brethren, they cannot and ought not to have Christian confidence in you, until you confess your faults. And it sometimes comes to pass, that church members so long refuse to neglect to confess their faults to one another, as to render Christian confidence impossible. And members of the same church have little or no confidence in each other's piety. And whatever hope one may have, that another is pious, is founded not in the fact that he has any evidence that he is a Christian, but in the fact that he knows himself to be as bad as others, and is, therefore, constrained to hope for others upon the same principle that he hopes for himself. In such cases there is not and ought not to be Christian confidence and fellowship. Nor ought there to be any hope among them that they are Christians. For until they confess their faults one to another, and can heartily pray one for another, they are as far as possible from having any evidence that they are the disciples of Christ. Now the only possible way in which Christian confidence and fellowship can be restored in such cases, is honestly and freely to confess your faults one to another.

5. Another design and use of confessing our faults is, to enlist Christian prayer and sympathy in our behalf. Nothing is more calculated to beget sympathy, Christian compassion, and brotherly love--to draw out the heart in fervent prayer--than to confess our faults and lay our hearts open to our friends and brethren.

6. To promote our own humility. Humility is a willingness to be known and estimated according to our real character. While we are unwilling to confess, we have no humility at all. Nothing is more directly calculated to deepen, perpetuate, and perfect humility, than a full and frequent confession of our faults.

7. Another design and use of confessing is, to promote our own watchfulness. The very fact of confessing our sins to one another, has a strong tendency to put us on our guard against repeating them. And on this account confession is of great importance to us.

8. To promote watchfulness over us. If we confess our faults to others, we call their attention to our faults, and easily besetting sins, and thereby lead them to notice our walk and conversation, and to watch over us with a

greater degree of Christian faithfulness than they otherwise would.

9. Another design and use of confession is, to encourage Christian reproof and admonition from our brethren. If we do not confess our sins, but on the contrary, show a disposition to conceal them, our brethren know that we are proud, and have reason to believe, that we would take it amiss if they should reprove us; but if, on the contrary, we open our hearts to our brethren, we invite and encourage their Christian watchfulness and reproof, and thereby greatly promote their faithfulness to us.

10. Another design and use of confession is, to promote self-examination in them. Few things have a stronger tendency to fasten conviction upon the mind of a man, than to go to him with a frank and full confession of our sins. It is often holding up a mirror, in which he is constrained to behold himself. Under scarcely any circumstances have I seen myself so utterly vile, as when persons have been ingenuously confessing to me their sins. It has so strongly called my attention to the facts of my own history, as not unfrequently to fill me with shame and confusion of face.

11. Another design and tendency of confessing is, to impress others with the truth of the Christian religion. When ungodly men hear the frank and heart broken confessions of Christians, they are often struck with the contrast between this spirit and the spirit of the world. They secretly, and sometimes openly exclaim, if they see themselves to be so great sinners, what am I?

12. Another design and use of confession is, to insure spiritual healing. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

13. Confession is indispensable to forgiveness. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy."

14. It is indispensable to a present walking with God. If persons, for the time being, are brought into the light, and when they remember their sins, do not confess their faults, and ask the prayers and forgiveness of their brethren, they will undoubtedly and surely backslide. For in neglecting this duty, they will grieve the Spirit, harden their hearts, and immediately fall

again under the power of sin.

IV. We are under special obligation to pray for those who confess their sins.

1. Because, by their confessions, we have been made acquainted with their necessities, and are, therefore, not in the dark, in respect to what we should pray for as it respects them. Now as light increases obligation, peculiar light in regard to their necessities, brings with it peculiar obligation.

2. We are under peculiar obligation to pray for them, because there is special encouragement to pray for those who are willing to confess their faults. We have express promises upon which we can fasten, in praying for such persons; especially when they not only confess but forsake their sins. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh shall have mercy."

3. To pray for them will be peculiarly useful for us, especially if we have been injured by them.

(1.) It will reveal to us the real state of our feelings towards them. Let a man attempt to pray for another, and he will soon discover the real state of his heart, in relation to that subject of prayer.

(2.) It will beget in us the spirit of forgiveness. We cannot pray that an individual may be forgiven, and be honest and sincere in this prayer, unless we honestly forgive him ourselves. And nothing is more highly calculated to beget in us a spirit of forgiveness, than to be much employed in praying for the forgiveness of others, especially for the forgiveness of those who have injured us.

4. The duty of praying for those who confess their sins, is expressly enjoined in the text, and therefore a special obligation exists, to make them particular subjects of prayer.

REMARKS.

1. We see from this subject, why so many are in bondage to sin. The fact is, they do not and will not confess their faults. They have too much regard to their own

reputation, ingenuously to confess their faults; and hence they wear their galling chains and remain the miserable slaves of sin.

2. We see why there is so little Christian sympathy and love. So long as professors of religion remain so ignorant of each other's history, joys, sorrows, trials, and besetting sins, there is no such foundation or reason for Christian sympathy and love, as there might be and ought always to be among the followers of Christ. We sometimes see two Christians who are in the habit of confessing their faults to each other, and disclosing their own experience to each other, and praying one for the other. In all such cases, without exception, you see much Christian sympathy and brotherly love. Such a course of conduct as this, is indispensable to Christians sympathy; and this ought to be universally understood by the Church.

3. This subject shows, that there is very little humility in the world. I have already said, that humility consists in a willingness to be known and estimated according to our real character. While there is so little confession as there now is in the Church of God, how can there be much humility?

4. We see why there is so little humility in the Church. If Christians would but begin, and make thorough work of confession, this would greatly promote their humility; but until they begin, cast away their pride, and address themselves in earnest to confessing their faults one to another, their pride will never be crucified, or their humility perfected.

5. There is but very little confidence among professors of religion, in each other's prayers. If there were, they would more frequently confess to their brethren, and beg them to pray, that they might be healed. It is often amazing to see how little confidence professors of religion have in prayer.

6. Living as they do, professors of religion have no right to have confidence in each other's prayers. And without utter presumption, it is impossible that they should. Professors of religion very generally know, that their own prayers are not answered; that they live in such a manner, as to have no right to expect an answer to their prayers; and from observation they perceive, that other professors of religion, with very few exceptions, live as they do. And in this view of the subject, how is it possible for them to have confidence in each other's prayers, so as to render it an object to solicit the prayers of their brethren.

7. There is here and there a professor of religion, who is regarded by other professors of religion, and by the Church generally, as one who prevails with God. And it is truly wonderful, that they do not resort to such persons, to confess their sins and ask their prayers. This can be accounted for only upon the supposition--

8. That there is very little honest and earnest desire to get rid of sin, among professors of religion. If they were really agonized, to get rid of sin, it does appear to me impossible that they should not avail themselves of the prayers and counsels of those whom they regard as eminent Christians, in order to get rid of their loathsome depravity. James Brainerd Taylor was, according to his own account of himself, in earnest to get rid of his sins. He believed the thing possible, and felt that it was indispensable to his usefulness as a minister. He gave himself up thoroughly to the work of getting away from his sins; and, as was very natural and scriptural, went to those whom he considered eminently pious and praying persons. To them he opened his heart and solicited their prayers in his behalf, that he might be healed. And, blessed be God, he was healed. And so, Christian, may you be healed, if you will go and do likewise, with as much honesty and earnestness as he did.

9. The fact is, that most professors of religion prefer remaining in bondage, to confessing that they are so. They wear a cloak over their chains, and while their hands are manacled, and they are fast bound in the chains of sin, the law in their members so warring against the law in their mind, as to keep them in a state of perpetual captivity, they gather their cloak of concealment all over them, try to cover up and conceal their loathsome servitude and detestable chains, rather than throw off the mask, confess their faults, and be healed. O professor of religion, what a miserable slave you are. Hold up your hands. Let us see if they are not chained. Lay aside your cloak. Are you not the bond-slave of Satan, or of lust, or of the world?

10. How shameful and lamentable it is, that persons regard their reputation more than they hate sin, and prefer concealment to humility, reputation to holiness, the good opinion of their brethren to the favor of God.

11. But in a very few cases, after all, do they by such concealment, secure any reputation for real piety. Although they are ashamed to confess, and do not confess what the difficulty is; yet, as a matter of fact, every discerning mind sees, that there is some difficulty--that they are not spiritual--that they do not

walk with God--that they do not prevail in prayer. So that, after all, they gain nothing, even of reputation, by their concealment. And this is the folly of sin--a man under its dominion will think to cover it up. But while some particular form of it may be disguised, its existence in some form will be known, from the spirit and temper of the man, in spite of himself.

12. Confession, to be of any avail, should be ingenuous and full, so as to give our brethren as full a view of our real character and wants as possible; so that they may understand, as far as may be, the worst of our case, and know how to present it before the Lord. If individuals will but half confess, they will find that such confessions will do no good, but only harden their hearts. You must fully confess, and cover up no essential feature of your depravity, if you expect to be healed.

13. Few things are so useful and important to us and to those against whom we have sinned, as to confess our faults to them. When difficulties have existed between brethren, nothing can restore permanent confidence, but a full, thorough, hearty, mutual confession of faults, one to another, and praying one for another, that they may be healed.

14. There are but very few professors of religion who seem to know, or believe, that there is any such thing as spiritual healing in this world. They seem to reason thus: "Of what use would it be for me to confess my sins, as I am continually sinning? Why should I trouble the brethren with a detail of my sins, for they are as constant as the flowing of the waters? Why should I make myself the loathing of the Church of God, by continually confessing my sins? It will do no good. I shall continue to sin on as long as I live; and I may as well, therefore, groan under my chains and continue this infernal service till I die. As to ever being healed, so as to get away from my sins, in this life, it is out of the question."

Now I see not why all this is not very natural and reasonable, upon the supposition that Christians have no reason to expect, in this life, entire emancipation from the bondage of sin. But brother--sister--let me beseech you to be no longer deceived in this thing. Remember, that Christ is faithful, who has expressly promised, that if you confess your sins, He will not only forgive you, but "cleanse you from all unrighteousness."

[Back to Top](#)

Weakness of Heart

Lecture XXII

November 4, 1840

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Ezek. 16:30: "How weak is thine heart."

In this connection the Prophet is speaking of the Church, in reference to her past history. He says nothing of the real piety of the different generations of the Church; but in view of all her backslidings and inconsistencies, he exclaims, "How weak is thine heart!"

In discussing this subject, I will show:

- I. What is to be understood by the term heart, in this text.*
- II. What is implied in weakness of heart.*
- III. Mention some things that are evidences of a weak heart.*
- IV. Some things that cause weakness of heart.*
- V. The remedy for weakness of heart.*
- VI. What is implied in strengthening the heart.*

I. What is the heart.

Under this head I remark:

1. The language is figurative of necessity, as we have no language by which to represent states of the mind, only as we seize upon some analogy that exists between mental states and material things by which to express these mental states.

2. The term heart is used in a great variety of senses in the Bible. Sometimes it manifestly means the conscience--sometimes the whole mind, or soul--but whenever it is spoken of as a state of mind that has moral character, and as the foundation or fountain of moral exercises, it must represent a voluntary state of mind. When it is thus used, it cannot mean any faculty of the mind, but the particular attitude of the will in relation to moral subjects. There must be some analogy between the fleshly organ of the body, called the heart, and the heart of the mind. The bodily heart propels the blood and keeps up the vital action of the whole system. It is in this sense the center of organic life. Out of it flows, by the force of its own contractions, that vital current, which sustains both organic and animal life.

3. The heart of the mind is a voluntary disposition or preference of the mind. It is a disposition in opposition to a single exercise. It consists in a permanent, though voluntary attitude of the will, in relation to God and spiritual objects. It is a ruling disposition, or preference, in such a sense as to be the fountain, out of which, as it were, flow those individual volitions and exercises of mind, that make up its moral history. Therefore, as the bodily heart sustains organic and animal life, and may be regarded as the fountain, from which the vital current flows, so the mental heart, this ruling disposition or preference of which I have spoken, is the fountain from which obedience to God, or spiritual life flows.

II. What is implied in weakness of heart.

1. Not an opposite, heart ruling preference or attitude of the will. This cannot be; for the heart consists in a supreme disposition and ruling preference. Now it is impossible that there should be two supreme and opposite dispositions, or preferences in exercise at the same time.

2. Not a divided heart. This also is impossible. Let it be distinctly kept in mind, that the spiritual or moral heart is a supreme disposition, or ruling preference of the will. Now it is impossible that this should be divided. By a weak heart, therefore, cannot be meant a divided heart.

3. Not a wicked heart, in such a sense as to be the cause of wicked thoughts, volitions, emotions, or actions. This cannot be. A regenerate heart is a holy disposition, a holy, ruling preference of the will. It is impossible, therefore, that a regenerate heart should be a wicked heart, in such a sense as to be the

cause of any sinful emotion or affection.

4. But by a weak heart is intended, that this ruling preference or disposition of the will has not, for the time being, and under the circumstances, such efficiency as successfully to resist temptation to specific sins. The regenerate heart is not the cause of the sin; but the sin is in spite of the regenerate heart. That is--temptation prevails, and occasions specific exercises of the will; not in accordance with the regenerate heart; but, in opposition to it. Just as a wife, who loves her husband with a supreme affection, may, by the force of temptation, be betrayed into an individual exercise or act that is inconsistent with the general state and supreme attitude of her will; and just as parents, who love their children with the most intense and absorbing affection, may, through the force of temptation, feel exceedingly provoked with them, and for the time being, exercise feelings that are entirely in contrast with the state of their hearts toward their children. Every parent, and perhaps every husband and wife can testify, that such facts may exist, whatever their philosophical explanation may be.

III. Some things that are evidences of a weak heart.

1. When there is great constitutional susceptibility to temptation. When the heart, or ruling disposition, is vigorous and healthy, it is difficult to get the attention of the mind to those things that are inconsistent with it. Take, for example, the case of a young convert, who has been intemperate. While in the healthy exercise of his first love, he abhors the thoughts of his former companions, and will not allow the thought of ardent spirits to remain for a moment in his mind; but, should he leave his first love, the tendencies of his constitution would soon resume their control over him. He might then be unable to resist temptation to intemperance, if he should again come in contact with his old acquaintances, or within the smell of a bar-room. Just so a convert who has been licentious, in the healthy exercise of his first love, would so abhor his former ways, as not to suffer licentious thoughts to occupy his mind for a moment. A harlot might pass before him, at the very sight of whom his whole soul would recoil; and no other than feelings of the utmost disgust and loathing be excited. But should he leave his first love, his abused constitution would become so susceptible to the influence of temptation, as might very probably cause him to fall. Let it be

understood, then, that when there is a great constitutional susceptibility, to temptation--when the attention of the mind is easily taken--when artificial or constitutional appetites and passions are easily awakened, and the mind easily thrown into a state of fermentation, in the presence of temptation, it is a sign of weakness of heart. The ruling disposition of the mind is not in a healthy and efficient state.

2. Another evidence of weakness of heart, is a want of firmness in the will, whenever a temptation is presented to the mind. When the heart is strong, or the ruling preference in a healthy state, temptation cannot prevail, because of the great and almost invincible firmness of the will. Thus, should a temptation to conjugal infidelity, be laid before a young bride, when in the healthy and energetic exercise of deep affection for her husband, she might sooner submit to be murdered, than consent to the embraces of another than her husband. But in the weakness of her heart, had she little or no affection for her husband, there might be such an utter want of firmness in her will, as greatly to expose her to seduction. Just so in the case of a young convert. In the healthy exercise of his first love, he might sooner suffer martyrdom than consent to sin. But should his heart become weak--should he leave his first love--no such firmness and stability of preference would remain, as to overcome and put down temptation. But on the contrary, whenever his emotions became excited, by the presence of some tempting object, he would find there were no firmness and strength of resolution in his will to resist temptation.

3. When a temptation is presented, and you find it difficult to resolve against indulgence, it is because of the weakness of your heart. Suppose a man who has been formerly intemperate, licentious or gluttonous, finds it, in the presence of temptation to the commission of any of these sins, difficult to resolve against indulgence. He may know, that if his heart is regenerate at all, it is in a state of extreme weakness. If, as a matter of fact, he does not find it easy promptly to resolve against indulgence, and to carry out this resolution in corresponding action, it is because of the weakness of his heart.

4. When you find it difficult to pray, honestly and earnestly, against a particular temptation, it is because of the weakness of your heart; that is--admitting that your heart has been regenerated. It must be owing either to

the wickedness or weakness of the heart, and it may be consistent with either. If the heart has not been regenerated, it is wicked, and would, of course, prevent an honest and earnest appeal at the throne of grace against temptation; but if it has been regenerated, and become weak, temptation may get such a hold of the mind as to render it difficult to pray with perfect honesty and great sincerity against a given temptation, under circumstances, of peculiar excitement.

5. When you find it difficult to divert attention from an object of temptation, it is because of the weakness of your heart. If the heart, or ruling disposition, is in a healthy or efficient state, the attention will be naturally and promptly diverted from a seductive object. But when you find it difficult to divert your attention, and find that, as a matter of fact, the object has got possession of your thoughts, and your excited feelings are clamoring for indulgence, there is great weakness of heart, and the most imminent peril. Escape for your life, or you fall.

6. When former resolutions are found to be of no avail in the presence of temptation, it is because of the weakness of the heart. No resolution can prevail to put down temptation, unless the resolution is supported at the time of the temptation by the healthy efficiency of the heart. If the resolution was made when the heart was strong and vigorous it will be of no avail, unless its foundation remain firm. Thus, a resolution, never to touch a drop of ardent spirits, might be made in the ardor of the young convert's first love; but should he leave his first love, his resolution would be as yielding as air, in the presence of temptation. When, therefore, you find that your resolutions, to resist sin, obey God, and lead a holy life, are of no avail, in the presence of temptation, it is certain, either that your heart has never been regenerated, or that at present it has no efficiency, as is extremely weak.

7. When temptation easily excites anger, ambition, envy, pride, vanity, lust, or any other unhallowed emotion, or affection, it is certain, either that the heart has never been regenerated, or that it is extremely weak.

8. When, in the presence of temptation, and under the force of excited feeling, the soul loses an apprehension of the guilt and ill-desert of that sin to which it is tempted, the heart has either never been regenerated, or it is extremely weak. If, when the passions become excited, or the appetite for

food, in the presence of some tempting dish, the mind finds it difficult to realize the great guilt of gluttony, or the indulgence of passion, the heart must be either wholly unregenerate, or in a state of great weakness.

IV. Causes of weakness of heart.

1. Ignorance. Of course the stability of any preference, its efficiency, must depend, in a great measure, upon the reasons that are before the mind for the exercise of such a state of will. Without the true knowledge of God there can be no true love to Him. And our love to Him can never exceed our knowledge of Him. Our estimate of spiritual and divine things must depend upon our knowledge of them. Where, therefore, there is great ignorance of God and of divine things, there will be of course a proportionate instability, and want of efficiency in the ruling preference or heart.

2. Unbelief is another fruitful source of weakness of heart. God and the things of God are realities only to our minds in proportion to our faith. And it is unreasonable to expect any efficiency in the ruling preference or heart, unless faith is active, and eternal things appear as realities to the mind.

3. The state of the physical system may be and often is a cause of great weakness of heart. Ill health in general, may be expected to render the actions of the mind feeble. But especially diseases of the brain, spinal marrow, or diseases located in, or sensibly affecting any of those organs that strongly sympathize with the brain, will of course greatly disturb the healthy action of the mind, and not unfrequently render the heart, or ruling preference, extremely weak.

4. All improper indulgences weaken the heart, just as they weaken the conscience. Every one knows, that to persist in any thing to which the conscience is opposed, gradually weakens, until it not unfrequently, either entirely, or in a great measure, suspends the action of conscience, in respect to particular things. In like manner, any improper indulgence of appetite, passion, or the indulgence of any unlawful exercise of mind whatever, weakens the heart or the influence of the ruling disposition or preference of the mind.

V. The remedy for weakness of heart.

Wait on the Lord. Ps. 27:14: "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall

strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord." Isa. 40:31: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." In these passages, the remedy for a weak heart is explicitly pointed out by God Himself. But here it should be inquired, what is implied in "waiting upon the Lord?" I answer:

1. It does not imply sitting still in apathy, and leaving God to strengthen our heart in his own time and way, irrespective of our own exertions. Many persons seem to think themselves waiting upon the Lord, when they give themselves up to float on upon the stream of life, without at all concerning themselves whether they are holy or sinful, while they profess to be waiting God's time.
2. Waiting upon the Lord does not imply a self-righteous betaking ourselves to prayer, and the use of means, with the expectation that we shall in this way recommend ourselves to God. But--
3. Waiting upon the Lord does imply, giving ourselves up to prayer--a waiting in the constant attitude of prayer and supplication before God.
4. It implies perseverance in prayer, and in the use of all the means of knowledge and grace, that are essential to strengthening our hearts.
5. It implies repentance and putting away our sins.
6. It implies confession and restitution in all cases of wrong.
7. It implies great fervency of importunity.
8. It implies faith in the promises of God.
9. It implies submission to the wisdom and will of God, in respect to the time and manner of conferring the blessing upon us.
10. It implies a willingness on our part, to have Him make use of any means which He sees to be necessary to strengthen our hearts--a willingness to have Him take away our idols, property, friends, health, life, or any thing that is necessary to strengthen our hearts and make us holy.

VI. What is implied in strengthening the heart.

1. An increase of knowledge. In order to strengthen our hearts, we need to know and thoroughly to consider those things which are calculated to wean us from sin, and to strengthen our preference and purpose in the divine life.
2. It implies an increase of faith. Strengthening the heart must necessarily depend upon an increase of faith. For faith is always the condition of true love to God and stability in his service. It is certainly impossible, that the mind should be brought under the influence of divine considerations, any farther than they are believed.
3. It implies an increase of love. Supreme love and supreme preference, are the same thing.--Therefore, strengthening the heart, of course, is an increase of love to God and divine things.
4. It implies such an absorption of the mind in God, as to break the power of temptation. I say, to break the power of temptation. What power could temptation have over a man, if he stood at the solemn Judgment, or saw himself to be standing out in the broad sunlight of God's countenance? In such circumstances, temptation would pass by him like the idle wind.
5. It implies such a swallowing up of the attention and affections in God, as in a great measure to prevent the soul from being tempted. By this I do not mean, that the mind cannot, in such circumstances be tempted; but that it is much more difficult for temptation at all to gain the attention of the mind, or disturb it in the least degree. Temptation implies, of course, that to some extent, the mind is brought to attend to the temptation. When, therefore, the attention is so fixed and riveted, when the heart is so enlarged and strengthened, as that the whole soul is swallowed up in God, that soul may say, as Christ did, "The prince of this world cometh but hath nothing in me;" no unsubdued lust, passion, or appetite remains, upon which to fasten a temptation.

REMARKS.

1. A great many persons have a very weak heart, who are not at all aware of it; because they make very little or no effort to resist sin. Making no effort to resist, they of course do not know how weak they would find themselves, should they attempt to resist. They are literally "led captive by Satan at his will," and of course have no idea of the weakness of their hearts.

2. Many are sensible of their weakness, but make no other than legal efforts to escape. They are trying to resist sin by resolutions and promises, and struggling in their own strength. They do not seem to know, that unless their heart is strengthened all their resolutions, founded upon legal considerations, will be of course as yielding as air. They are convicted of sin, distressed, ashamed, and agonized--sometimes almost despairing, and then encouraging themselves, and resolving, and renewing their resolutions, and binding themselves by oaths and promises, the most solemn; but all to no purpose; for they are not supported by the active exercise of supreme love to God. Their flesh will therefore, of course, be too strong for resolutions not founded in deep affection for God.

3. Others, still, err, by going to the opposite extreme. They make no dependence upon legal efforts, nor indeed do they make any efforts at all; but in Antinomian security, settle down in an apathy which they call peace, and thus tempt Christ. They call that faith which presumptuously throws the responsibility of keeping them, upon Christ, in such a sense as to exclude the active exercise of their own agency.

4. The providence of God is designed to develop the weakness of the hearts of his people, and make them see how much they are dependent upon his grace to strengthen them. It often comes to pass, that individuals suppose their sins are dead, and that they have really overcome for ever certain temptations; and, in this state they are apt to forget, that the ruling efficiency of their former habits of mind is suspended only by the continual agency and grace of God. Now if you forget, that your sins are kept under only by the continual agency of God, his providence will soon develop your weakness, and teach you, doubtless to your sorrow and confusion of face, that your enemies are not dead, but only kept from having dominion over you, by the constant presence and agency of the Holy Spirit.

5. From this subject we can see why Paul took pleasure in infirmities. It was, that the power of Christ might rest upon him. 2 Cor. 12:7-10: "Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take

pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then I am strong." Here Paul found, as a matter of fact, that his infirmities, that is, his weaknesses, emptied him of self-dependence, and this led him to put Christ in place of his resolutions. So that, instead of depending upon his legal efforts and resolutions, he depended on Christ.

6. You see what entire and permanent sanctification is. It consists in such a strength of heart, as will resist all temptation to sin.

7. Those who have a wicked heart are not born again. A weak heart is not a wicked heart, as I have already said, in such a sense as to be the cause of wicked thoughts, emotions, and actions.

8. A strong heart, and a clean heart, are synonymous terms.

9. Whenever the heart is weak, the cause of this weakness, whatever it is, must, if possible, be put away. Sometimes the cause is physical. It lies in the indulgence of appetite or passion. Sometimes in such a state of the body as to render the healthy operations of the mind impossible. Therefore, in waiting upon the Lord, to renew our strength, we must strive to do all that in us lies, to put away the cause of the weakness of our heart.

10. Whenever we have done this, and are waiting upon the Lord according to his directions, we are bound to exercise the most unwavering confidence, that He will strengthen our hearts. "Wait then, I say, on the Lord."

[Back to Top](#)

A Single and an Evil Eye

Lecture XXIII

December 2, 1840

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 6:22, 23: "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be

single, thy whole body shall be full of light; but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness."

In this discussion I will show:

I. What is implied in singleness of eye.

II. What is implied in an evil eye.

III. That singleness of eye will insure a knowledge of truth and duty.

IV. An evil eye will insure darkness and delusion, both in regard to doctrine and duty.

I. What is implied in a singleness of eye.

This language is of course figurative. By a single and an evil eye, we are to understand the Savior as representing a state of mind. "The light of the body," He says, "is the eye: If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." It is a matter of common knowledge, that the eye sometimes becomes so disordered as to discover objects double, and in a manner so obscure or fallacious, as naturally to deceive and mislead the person who possesses it. By a single eye, then, is meant, an eye in its perfect state, when it sees objects as they are, with such distinctness as to give the mind correct information with respect to the objects of vision.

When this figure is applied to the mind, it must represent the supreme and ultimate intention of the mind. When the ultimate end or intention of the mind is single, and just as it ought to be, the eye of the mind may then be said to be single. For the mind has its eye upon but one great absorbing object. This state of mind implies:

1. Supreme love to God. Of course, if the mind has but one great absorbing object or end in view, and that end is right, the end must be supremely to honor, please, and glorify God. This certainly implies supreme love to God.
2. It implies disinterested love to Him. Unless this love be disinterested; that is, unless God is loved for what He is, for his own sake, and not for the sake of making ourselves happy; to honor Him is not a supreme or ultimate

end; but our own happiness is the end, and the love and service of God merely a means for the promotion of that end.

3. It implies a state of entire consecration. That Christ intended to be understood, by a single eye, to mean a state of entire consecration to God, is evident from what follows the text. He says-- "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." It is very plain, that the mind's eye is not right, unless the soul is supremely and only devoted to the love and service of God. Nothing less than a state of entire consecration to God can be intended by a single eye.

II. What is intended by an evil eye.

An evil eye is that which has more than one object before it, or sees objects double. When this figure is applied to the mind it means, that state of mind in which objects are seen through a selfish medium, or when the mind has two objects in view, a legal intention to serve God, but an ultimate intention to serve self. By a legal intention to serve God I mean, not that intention which is founded in supreme, disinterested love to God, which aims at honoring and glorifying Him, as an ultimate end; but an intention to serve God as the means of our own happiness, the ultimate intention being self-interest, and the intention to serve God, being a subordinate end.

III. Singleness of eye will insure a knowledge of truth and duty.

1. This is plainly taught in the text: "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." Light means knowledge, truth. Now when Christ says, if your eye be single your whole body shall be full of light, what less can He mean than that the soul that has a single eye, shall be rightly instructed in all that is essential for it to know.

2. This will be the natural result of singleness of eye:

(1.) Because it will beget honest inquiry.

(2.) It will beget earnest, diligent inquiry

(3.) It will secure the right and the best use of the necessary means of knowledge.

(4.) It will beget unfailing perseverance in the acquisition of knowledge.

(5.) The state of the will, will not prevent the perception of truth and evidence.

(6.) But the state of the will, will be such as to favor the perception, and insure the reception of evidence, when it is within its reach.

(7.) In this state of mind, the Spirit will not be resisted and quenched; but on the contrary, his influences will be sought and devoutly cherished.

(8.) His instructions will be obeyed, his slightest motions heeded, and the whole soul will be delivered up to his guidance.

(9.) Being in the same state of mind in which God, and Christ, and the inspired writers were, he will naturally understand them. If you have the same end in view, deeply sympathize with God, and are in the same state of mind in which He is, the language in which He expresses his own state of mind, will be to you the most intelligible language possible. Who does not know that persons possessing the same spirit, not only adopt the same or similar language, to express their ideas and feelings, but naturally understand each other's language perfectly? To each other they are perfectly intelligible, while to those in a different state of mind, they are unintelligible, in precise proportion to the diversity of their states of mind. Hence, the Bible is a very unintelligible and uninteresting book to an impenitent sinner. To a Christian of but little experience, who has but little religion, the Bible is in a great measure unintelligible, and he takes comparatively little interest in it; while to the Christian who lives in a state of entire consecration to God, it is not only one of the most intelligible, but altogether the most interesting book in the universe.

(10.) In this state of mind your experiences will be such as to make the teachings of the Bible, and especially the most spiritual portions of the Bible, plain to you. Whenever you are addressed upon a subject upon which you have experience, and in a manner and language that accords with your experience, you understand the speaker or writer with great

ease and perfection; but in just as far as he departs from your experience, he is unintelligible to you, in the same manner and for the same reason, as if he spake to you in an unknown tongue. Because, you do not understand language, any farther than it accords with your experience. Words are only signs of ideas; and suppose words are used which are signs of ideas that are not in your mind, you do not get, and cannot possibly get any information from such teaching as this. For to you it is no teaching at all.

(11.) This state of mind will insure great communion and great power with God. The soul that lives in a state of entire consecration to God, can come to Him with as much confidence, and with indescribably more assurance than ever a child came to an earthly parent. This, if you have ever been in this state, you know from your own experience. When you live all the time in a state of such deep communion with God, you feel the strong confidence and assurance, that you know how He feels, by your own experience. Thus you know how Christ feels, from what motives and feelings He gave his life for sinners; and are conscious, that you are willing yourselves to make up in your bodies the sufferings that remain, and to lay down your lives for the world, and for the Church of God. In this state of mind, I say, you will naturally and certainly have great power with God, and will prevail.

IV. An evil eye will insure darkness and delusion, both in regard to doctrine and duty.

1. This is expressly taught in the text: "If thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness." Mark--the whole body shall be full of darkness. Darkness means error and delusion. Now by such language as this the Savior must have intended to teach, that a selfish mind would be, and should be, full of error and delusion, or great questions of doctrine and duty. And by a selfish mind, in this connection, is intended, one that is not in a state of entire consecration to God; but is influenced by selfish considerations.

2. Darkness and delusion will be the natural and inevitable results of this state of mind:

(1.) Because selfishness will prevent inquiry; especially honest, diligent, and persevering inquiry.

(2.) Because the state of the will, will prevent the perception and reception of evidence. Few persons seem to be aware of the extent of the influence of the will, over the decisions of the understanding. I have, for many years, been so circumstanced as to have an opportunity, almost continually, to observe the developments of mind, in this respect; and have often been astonished to see, to what an extent the will influences human opinion. Almost every one has observed, that under circumstances of strong excitement, it is of little or no use to reason with a man, against his prejudices. I have had repeated opportunities to observe, with pain, that prejudice, a committed state of mind, and many other considerations, and things, will so influence the will, as wholly to exclude the light of truth from the understanding. On many subjects, it seems next to impossible to convince a man, against his will; while, on the other hand, a man will believe almost any thing which he is disposed to believe. And the credulity of mankind, on subjects that accord with the state of their will, and in regard to doctrines and things which they are strongly disposed to believe, is as surprising as their incredulity upon subjects opposed to their will. It is amazing to hear infidels and sceptics contend, that human belief is involuntary, and that men necessarily believe what they do, when the real palpable voluntariness of human opinion and belief, on almost every subject, is as striking and apparent to a considerate observer, as almost any fact of human history.

3. A man under the influence of an evil eye, or in other words, a selfish heart, will not practice the truth, and therefore he cannot teach it. There are multitudes of truths, which can be seen and understood no farther than other truths are first seen and understood. And multitudes of truths are never understood, any further than they are experienced. Take, for example, the subject of temperance. Suppose you preach strictly temperance principles to a man who has always been in the habit of drinking ardent spirits freely. Now there are certain things which you can make him understand. If he has been a habitual drunkard, by describing to him the feelings of a drunkard, he can understand you; because upon this subject he has experience. Words

are signs of ideas; and to him they will mean nothing more, than the idea represented by the word in his mind. You can therefore make him understand something of the evil of drunkenness; and yet, if he has always been in habits of intoxication, from his earliest recollection, you cannot, in any language whatever, so contrast the experience, follies, and health of a drunkard, with those of a strictly temperate man, as to make him understand you. He knows not what temperance is. He knows not what health is. He knows not what that state of mind is, which is the natural result of temperance and good health. Peradventure, you can fasten conviction upon him, of the great evils of intemperance, from the fact, that he had experience upon that part of the subject; and in this way you can get so much light in upon his mind, as to break him off from his cups. Now in proportion as he becomes a sober man, temperate, and healthy, his experience will enable you so to contrast temperance with intemperance, as fully to impress his mind with both sides of the question; and thus lodge in his mind the full weight of the momentous considerations in favor of temperance. But in all this process, it is easy to see that he must necessarily begin with the A, B, C of both the doctrines and the experience of temperance. Break him off from ardent spirits, and after a time he is better prepared to see and feel the indispensable necessity of universal temperance. Break him off from every thing that intoxicates, and his experience will soon enable him to understand the importance and necessity of breaking off from all innutritious stimulants in diet. When he has abandoned all these, his experience will, in a little while, enable him to understand the importance of selecting the most bland unstimulating kinds of food. This experience will naturally prepare his mind to understand the importance of universal cleanliness and chastity, the strictest subjection of the appetites and propensities, to the great and universal law of temperance. And in short, as he goes from step to step in reform, and no farther than he does so, is he in circumstance, to see, feel, understand, and appreciate arguments in favor of farther reformation.

Now what is true on the subject of temperance, holds true on nearly every practical question; and especially is this true on subjects that pertain to personal holiness. If a man will not practice he cannot learn. Talk to an impenitent sinner of entire sanctification. Holiness is so entirely opposite to his experience, that he does not at all understand you. Talk with him about

his sins, and his convictions, his fears, misgivings, and on every subject that is with him a matter of experience, and so far he will understand you; but talk to him of entire sanctification, and he gets no idea of what you mean. Therefore, the only possible way to deal with him is, to begin upon those subjects upon which he has experience, and bring him to see and to feel, that it is an evil and bitter thing to sin against God. This will lead him to see, admit, and experience the doctrine of repentance. Now proceed, from step to step, lead him forward, and as his experience enlarges, his capacity of understanding about sanctification, its desirableness, its indispensable necessity, will be perceived and felt by him. But no farther than he practices can he properly learn. When he stops and refuses to follow truth any farther in practice, right there the clouds of darkness will shut down, round about him. And it is only as he goes forward, from step to step, practicing or experiencing one truth after another, as it is presented, that he can, by any possibility, come to an understanding and knowledge of the truth. Let it be ever remembered, therefore, that he who will not practice will not learn. In other words, unless his eye be single, his whole body will be full of darkness.

4. Selfishness must render the Bible unintelligible to him who has an evil eye. To him it is a sealed book. It is uninteresting, enigmatical, self-contradictory, and any thing and every thing, but interesting and intelligible. The fact is, its Author and the inspired writers, were in states of mind the direct opposite of selfishness. To a selfish mind they must, therefore, of necessity, speak in an unknown tongue.

5. A selfish mind will not only find the Bible unintelligible, but in a great many instances, will naturally understand it as meaning the direct opposite of what it does mean. Nor is the fault at all in the Bible, or in its Author, but arises necessarily out of a selfish state of mind. For example--when God speaks of being angry with his enemies, as the sinner has never experienced any thing but a selfish anger, he naturally understands God's anger to be like his own. And whenever God speaks of having any state of mind, or doing any thing, sinners naturally interpret this language by their own experience. And thus it comes to pass, as God says, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself." Interpreting, as they naturally will, the language of the Bible by their own experience, they ascribe the same motives, affections, and passions to God, which they, themselves have experienced--not understanding at all, that all these states of mind in God

are truly and infinitely benevolent.

It is a familiar and a true saying, that men judge others by themselves. To a truly holy mind, the Bible is not only the most interesting, but the most intelligible book in the world; while infidels exclaim, that it is blasphemy to ascribe such feelings and conduct to God; and therefore, that the Bible must be a libel upon his character. Now for this there can be no remedy, only as they become benevolent. If they will but begin to do the truth, so far as they can understand it, and practice one truth after another, until they come into the state of mind, in which the inspired writers were, they will then understand the Bible, and not till then.

6. A man who has an evil eye, will not have the Spirit of God to enlighten his mind in regard to truth, and will, therefore, never understand it.

REMARKS.

1. A selfish minister is a blind leader of the blind. This is the mildest language that truth or inspiration can use, in regard to an ambitious, a temporizing, a man-fearing, and, in short, a selfish minister. His eye is evil. His whole body, as Christ is true, or in other words, his whole mind, is full of darkness on spiritual subjects.

2. Such a minister will certainly, in many things, mislead his flock. He sees no truth spiritually, and therefore cannot safely be trusted as a spiritual guide. Nay, to trust him is ruin and death.

3. Selfish minds are very willing to be led, by selfish ministers, as they naturally see eye to eye. Having similar experiences, they will naturally understand each other. And a carnal church will naturally be pleased with a carnal minister. And a carnal minister will not see the defects of a carnal church. And thus they will be able to walk together, because they are agreed.

4. The doctrine of the text implies to the preparation and delivery of sermons. If a minister's eye is single he will naturally select those subjects of discourse that are suited to the state of his people. He will naturally discuss them in a way, and deliver them in a manner, that will be edifying to the people; simply because that is the object at which he aims. Having his eye single to the holiness of the Church, and the glory of God, it will be perfectly natural for him, in the preparation and delivery of sermons, to do every thing in a manner that will tend

to edify and sanctify the people. But if, on the contrary, his object be to secure his salary, play the orator, or promote any selfish interest whatever, he will naturally, and of course, select subjects, prepare, and deliver them, in a manner suited to the end he has in view. If his eye be single, his whole mind will be full of light, in regard to the manner of doing his work. If his eye be evil, his whole mind will be full of darkness, and he will do any thing else, rather than edify and sanctify his people.

5. This doctrine applies to the decision of every question of duty. In selecting fields of labor, courses of life, a companion for life, or any other question of interest and duty, if the eye is single, the whole mind will be full of light. Those considerations only will be taken into the account, and suffered to have weight, that ought to influence the decision of the question. On the other hand, if the eye be evil, the whole body will be full of darkness; and the decision of the question will certainly turn upon considerations that ought to have no influence in deciding the question.

6. If you are not conscious of a single eye, you cannot safely go forward in any thing. If you have already made up your mind upon a question of doctrine or duty, and have not made it up under the influence of a single eye, you may be, and probably are, in some important respects, entirely wrong. If in selecting a course of life, a field of labor, a kind of business, a location; if you have made a bargain, or done any thing else, with a selfish intention, or under the influence of an evil eye; as certain as Christ is true, your whole body was full of darkness. The whole must be reviewed.

Perhaps it may be objected to this, that many individuals are very much enlightened, and hold true opinions, and are very orthodox, who are yet under the influence of selfishness. To this I answer both from my own experience and the word of God--that they hold the truth only in words. They know not what they say, nor whereof they affirm. They are deceived, and you who make the objection are deceived in respect to them, if you think they know the truth.

7. From this subject, it is easy to see why the Church and the ministry are so divided in their opinions. It is because they are so sectarian and selfish in their spirit. It is selfishness, and nothing but selfishness, that divides the Church. When the Church shall come to have a single eye, her watchmen and her members will then see eye to eye; because her body will then be full of light.

8. From this subject you can see the only true way of promoting real Christian Union. It is in vain to talk of destroying sectarianism by destroying creeds. Creeds may perpetuate, but they are not the cause of sectarianism. Selfishness, and nothing but selfishness is its cause. Let universal love and a single eye prevail, and sectarianism is no more. Destroy a sectarian spirit, let it be supplanted by love, and Christians would then be in a state of mind to examine their differences of opinion with candor--to come to such mutual explanations, and so honestly and thoroughly to weigh each others opinions and arguments, as to almost entirely coincide in opinion. But should there still be discrepancy of views, in relation to any points, it would be as far as possible from their thoughts, to withdraw from communion with each other, and to divide into sects and separate departments.

9. From this subject it is easy to see, why ministers feel as if they could not preach--feel as if they had nothing to say--are at a loss to know what to preach--no subject has any such interest as to enable them to preach upon it. When they have fallen into a selfish state of mind their whole body is full of darkness.

10. How infinitely important it is, that this truth should be continually remembered, that an evil eye, or selfish intention, invariably and necessarily brings the mind into great darkness. How many there are, even in the Christian Church, to whom the Bible is a sealed book, who are in great darkness in respect to truth, doctrine, and duty; whose minds resemble an ocean of darkness.

11. How many there are, who have great confidence in their own opinions, who are ready to hazard their souls upon the truth of them, who have made up their minds on the most important and solemn subjects, while under the influence of selfishness--have entered the Christian Church--are hugging their delusions--are following the guidance and instruction of those who are perhaps as much under the dominion of an evil eye, as they are themselves, and whose mind is as full of darkness as their own. And thus they go on, unsuspectingly, while Christ assures them in the most solemn manner, that if their eye is evil, their whole body is full of darkness. Still they believe it not. They have the highest confidence in their own opinions, and in the safety of their state; and thus rush on, with a kind of mad assurance, to the depths of hell!

[Back to Top](#)

Salvation Always Conditional

Lecture XXIV

December 16, 1840

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 Cor. 10:12: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

In remarking upon this subject I will show:

I. What is intended by one's thinking that he standeth.

II. Show in what such a confidence may be founded.

III. That this confidence, whatever may be its foundation, cannot secure the soul against falling into sin and hell.

IV. That continued watchfulness and wakeful, activity of soul, are indispensable to continued holiness and final salvation.

I. What is intended by one's thinking that he standeth.

The original word rendered thinketh, in this text, is used, according to some distinguished commentators, not to weaken but to strengthen the sense. In Luke 8:18, the same word is rendered seemeth. Thinketh, in this text, means great confidence, a strong assurance; as if the Apostle had said--Let him that has great confidence, or a strong assurance that he standeth, take heed lest he fall.

II. In what such a confidence may be founded.

1. A person may be very confident of his own good state, in consequence of mistaken notions in respect to the natural goodness of his character.
2. He may feel great confidence, that he shall persevere in holiness, perform all his duty, and be saved, on the ground that he knows himself to be naturally able to obey God.
3. This confidence may be founded in a dependence upon our own

discretion, and prudence, and wisdom, and zeal, in the cause of Christ.

4. It may be founded in a confidence in our experience. Persons are very apt to rely much upon their own experience; they suppose themselves to be more than a match, even for the devil himself, in cases where they have the light of their own past experience to guide them.

5. This confidence may be founded in the consideration of what God has done for us; in the fact, that He has so often given us grace to overcome temptation--and in the fact, that He has, perhaps for weeks, or months, kept us in a state of perfect conscious peace of mind, and given us entire exemption from any felt condemnation.

6. A man may be very confident that he standeth, because he believes himself to have been spiritually cleansed. He feels certain that God has renewed in him a clean heart, and a right spirit; and from this he draws the assured conclusion, that he shall not fall.

7. He may place great confidence in his purposed watchfulness. He feels so strong, and for the present, so steadfast a determination to watch unto prayer, and to pray in the Holy Ghost, that he feels a strong assurance of perseverance in holiness.

8. He may place great confidence in the great strength of his own faith. Indeed, persons are very apt, when in the exercise of strong faith, to suppose it next to impossible, that they shall ever again be guilty of unbelief. Especially is this true, if they are conscious, for a long time, of having exercised strong faith without any wavering.

9. This confidence may be founded in the fact, that we find ourselves to be dead to the influence of the world, and of the flesh, and, through grace, more than a match for the devil. When placed under circumstances in which we formerly found ourselves easily overcome, we may experience such a kind of supernatural strength, and find ourselves so lifted above the influence of temptation, as to be confident, that all our lusts and sins are forever slain.

10. This confidence may be founded in the promises of God. We feel that we believe them. We know it at the time, with as much certainty as we know our own existence, and hence infer, and feel assured, that God will keep us

for ever from falling under the power of temptation, and "preserve us faultless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

III. This confidence, whatever may be its foundation, cannot of itself secure the soul against falling into sin and hell.

1. Because, if it is founded in any thing naturally good in us, it is ill-founded of course.

2. If it is founded in what grace has already done for us, it is ill-founded; for however much grace may have done, it has not changed our nature. Our constitutional susceptibilities remain the same. It has not so changed our relations and circumstances as to exempt us from temptation; and consequently, nothing that grace has done, or ever will do for us, can render our perseverance in holiness unconditionally certain.

3. If this confidence is based upon our purposed watchfulness, prayerfulness, experience, or faith; these, independent of the sovereign grace of God, afford no such foundation for our confidence, as to render it at all certain, or even probable, that we shall not sin again.

4. If this confidence is based upon the promises of God, it will not render our perseverance unconditionally certain; because the promises of God are all conditioned upon our faith, and the right exercise of our own agency. This is a revealed principle under the government of God. Ezek. 18:21-29: "If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him; in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all, that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God; and not that he should return from his ways, and live? But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die. Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel. Is not my way equal? Are not your ways unequal? When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done, shall he die.

Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? Are not your ways unequal?" Ezek. 33:12-16: "Thou son of man, say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth. When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust in his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it. Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; if the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he hath robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed, shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live." Jer. 18:7-10: "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build, and to plant; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, than I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them."

5. Any confidence in the promises of God, either for sanctification or final salvation, that does not recognize this universal principle in the government of God, is ill-founded and vain; because God has revealed this as a universal principle of his government; and whether expressed or not, in connection with each promise, it is always implied. Overlooking this fact, has often made the promises "a stone of stumbling" to those to whom they were given.

IV. Continued watchfulness, and wakeful activity of soul, are indispensable to continued holiness and final salvation.

1. This is evident from the fact, that moral government is a government of motives, in opposition to a government of force. Moral beings are not and cannot be forced, in the exercise of their moral agency.
2. The motives of moral government are suited and addressed to the constitutional susceptibilities of moral agents.
3. An analysis of the constitution of a moral being, as revealed to us by consciousness, will show that the motives calculated to influence moral agents may and must be divided into three classes:

(1.) Those addressed to hope, or the desire of happiness.

(2.) Those addressed to fear, or the dread of misery.

(3.) Those that move us to the exercise of disinterested love, or benevolence.

It is true, that should we enter more particularly into this subject, these classes of motives might be several times subdivided; but such subdivisions would carry me too far from my main design. I must, therefore, pass on to say--

4. That it is right to be influenced in a suitable degree, or to a certain extent, by each of these classes of motives.
5. It is impossible that we should not be influenced to a certain extent, by considerations that address our hopes and fears, if these considerations are apprehended by the mind.
6. Selfish minds are influenced wholly by hope and fear; or in other words, the motives that influence them to attempt obedience to God, are purely legal; that is--those that are presented in the sanctions of the law of God. This state of mind is sin.
7. The three classes of motives which I have named, or those that address our hopes and fears, and those that move us to the exercise of disinterested benevolence, are indispensable to fill up the circle of moral influences.
8. This is as certain as that the constitution of moral beings is susceptible of

being influenced by these different classes of motives. We are conscious of possessing a nature adapted to the influence of these three classes of consideration. Unless, therefore, these three classes belong to moral government, and are indispensable to its perfection, moral government is not suited to the nature of moral beings.

9. The fact that conscience is a universal and indispensable attribute of moral agency, demonstrates the universal and unalterable necessity of these three classes of motives.

10. The Bible abundantly shows, that neither the present sanctification, justification, or final salvation of believers, is so unconditionally decided as not to need warnings, threatenings, reproofs, admonitions, and all those considerations belonging to these three great classes of motives.

11. God has shut up moral beings to a state of constant reliance upon Him for every thing natural and spiritual. We are to depend upon Him for our daily bread. He does not send an ocean of waters upon the earth at once, but has shut us up to depend upon Him for rains in their season. He does not give food enough at once to last a man all his life time. He so arranges his providence, as that, ordinarily, just about food enough for man and beast, is produced from year to year. In short, He so distributes his temporal favors as to make mankind see and feel their constant dependence upon Him.

This is equally true of spiritual blessings. He gives grace only from day to day, from hour to hour, and from moment to moment. He gives to no man a stock of grace upon which he can depend in future, without a constant reliance upon God, and a continual abiding in Christ. He deals with no man in spiritual things in such a manner that he can say to his soul, "Soul, thou hast much spiritual goods laid up in store for many years." But he has made continual reliance upon Christ indispensable to perseverance in holiness.

12. This course of procedure on the part of God, both in respect to natural and spiritual blessings, is naturally and unalterably indispensable to continued holiness. Suppose that God should cause food enough to grow in one year to last mankind a century; so that every man could say, in truth, "I have much food laid up in store for many years;" would not such a procedure manifestly tend to a spirit of infidelity, to destroy a sense of dependence upon God, and beget among mankind a general forgetfulness

and neglect of God. Who cannot see, that should the arrangements of providence be such as to make mankind feel, that all their temporal wants are already provided for, for a century, or for centuries to come, that it would ruin the world?

Just so in regard to spiritual things. If by regeneration, God really did, as some have supposed, change the very constitution of the soul, introduce, or implant within the soul a holy principle, that becomes a part of the constitution itself; in short, if He so remodded [sic.] the faculties, or made any such constitutional change whatever, as to beget the impression, that the constant indwelling, abiding influences of the Holy Spirit, are not essential to continued holiness, it would of course be the cause of universal backsliding and alienation from God.

13. It is, therefore, indispensable to continued holiness, that the mind should be shut up to a state of constant reliance upon the grace of God. And nothing can be more absurd, fanatical, or dangerous, than the idea, that our perseverance in holiness, or final salvation, can be rendered unconditionally certain.

14. It is naturally impossible for God to create a being, who can be for one moment independent of Himself. In Him all beings must "live, and move, and have their being."

15. To the fact that neither justification, sanctification, nor final salvation, can be unconditionally secured in this life, by any act of ours, or by any grace received; and that, therefore, continual watchfulness and wakeful exertion, and fear of falling, are indispensable to continued holiness--it is objected, that "perfect love casteth out fear." To this I answer:

(1.) This cannot mean, every kind and degree of fear; for a certain kind and degree of fear is universally insisted on, not only as a duty, but as constituting an essential element of holiness. Psalm 111:10: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." 2 Cor. 7:1: "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Eph. 5:21: "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God." Ps. 2:11: "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling." Mat. 28:8: "They departed quickly from the

sepulchre, with fear and great joy." Phil. 2:12: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Gen. 22:12: "He said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, for now I know that thou fearest God." Ps. 112:1: "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments." Ps. 128:1: "Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways." Prov. 28:14: "Happy is the man that feareth always; but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief." Col. 3:22: " Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God." 1 Pet. 1:17: "If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." Heb. 12:28: "We receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear."

(2.) One of the characteristics of wicked men, is, that they fear not God.

(3.) Love casts our slavish fear, but not that kind of fear that consists with love. The foundation for the exercise of which is laid in the very constitution of our being.

REMARKS.

1. No one act of faith, nor any other exercise, can render salvation from sin or hell unconditionally certain. This is manifest from the fact, that warnings and threatenings are every where addressed to the saints; which would be absurd, if their justification or sanctification were already unconditionally certain.

2. It is a capital mistake, and a dangerous error, to maintain, that one act of faith brings the soul into a state of unconditional and permanent justification. That this view of justification cannot be true, is manifest from the following considerations:

(1.) If the believer is so justified, as not to come under condemnation if he sins, it must be because the law of God is abrogated. Some have maintained, that the penalty of the law is for ever set aside in his case, on the exercise of the first act of faith. Now if this is true, then, as it respects him, the law is in fact abrogated; for a law without a penalty is no law. If the penalty is, as to

him, for ever set aside, in such a sense that he may sin, and yet not be condemned, and subject to that penalty, to him there is no law. The precept is only counsel or advice, as distinguished from law. But if the law is set aside he has no rule of action--no obligatory standard of duty with which to compare himself; and he can, therefore, be neither sinful nor holy, any more than the brute.

(2.) That a believer is not unconditionally and permanently justified by any one act of faith, is evident from the fact, that every believer feels condemned in his own conscience, when he sins. And if our own conscience, or heart, condemn us, is not God greater than our heart--and shall not He condemn us? "Shall mortal man be more just than God?"

(3.) The believers are not unconditionally and permanently justified by one act of faith, is plainly asserted, in Ezek. 18:21-29, and 33:12-16, [as quoted under the fourth division of the third head of this lecture.] Nothing can be more in point than these passages of scripture. For here it is expressly affirmed, that "if a righteous man forsake his righteousness, his former righteousness shall not be remembered;" but "in his sin that he sinneth shall he die."

To this it is replied, that these and similar passages are hypothetical--that they do not assert, that any righteous man will fall from his righteousness; but only, that if he should, he would be condemned. I answer:

That this is the very thing for which I am contending. I admit, that these and other kindred passages are hypothetical, and insist that for this very reason, they flatly contradict the proposition, that by one act of faith believers are unalterably and unconditionally justified. They make the condition of continued justification to be, continued obedience; and the condition of perfect justification to be, perfect obedience.

(4.) That one act of faith does not permanently and unconditionally justify the believer, is evident from the fact already alluded to, that the Bible every where abounds with warnings, reproof, encouragements, and every possible inducement to perseverance in holiness to the end--every where making the condition of final salvation to be, continuance or perseverance in holiness to the end of life.

To this it is objected, that these threatenings, warnings, &c., are the means by which the saints are caused to persevere in holiness.

Yes, truly, I answer, so they are. And this very fact proves, that they are not unconditionally or permanently justified, and, that they are justified no farther than they are sanctified. For what could all these warning and threatenings amount to--why should they be recorded--or what possible influence could they have, upon the supposition that they are already perfectly, permanently, and unconditionally justified, and that, therefore, their final perseverance and final salvation are already unconditionally secure? Indeed, it is absurd to say, that by one act of faith, they have become unalterably justified, and yet, that only upon certain conditions, viz: their persevering to the end, can they be saved.

(5.) That believers are not, by one act of faith, brought into a state of permanent or unconditional justification, is evident, from the manifest tendency of such a sentiment. This is asserting, in its most objectionable form, the sentiment so often attributed to Calvinists by our Methodist brethren--that if a man is once converted he will be saved, however much he may backslide, and even should he die in a state of utmost backsliding.

3. The certain knowledge and belief of unconditional salvation from sin, or hell, or of unconditional justification and salvation, would break the power of moral government, and insure a fall. It would destroy the balance of motives, and nullify entirely the power of that class of motives that are addressed to the hopes and fears of men. What, I pray you, would all the warnings of the Bible avail to sustain the virtue of a man, who already knew himself to be in a state of unconditional salvation from sin, condemnation, and hell? Do you answer, that he does not need them, and that all regard to them would be selfishness. I ask, why then, are they found in the Bible, actually and every where addressed to the saints?

To this it may be replied, that a sanctified soul is influenced by love, and not at all by hope and fear. I answer:

It is true, that love is the mainspring of action; but it is also true, that both the hopes and fears of men sustain such a relation to moral government, as that considerations addressed to them, make up an indispensable part of those influences that sustain the soul in a course of steady obedience.

To this it is objected again, that those saints who have believed themselves to be in a state of unconditional justification, and who have had the felt assurance of their final perseverance and salvation, have not found that this felt assurance was a stumbling-block to them; but have felt sustained in virtue by this very consideration. To this I answer:

That if, by the faith of assurance is meant, our assurance of final perseverance in holiness, and consequent salvation, I can easily see, that such an assurance would not be a stumbling-block to the soul. But, mark, this is not an assurance of unconditional justification. For, saints who have this assurance, have universally believed, that their justification and salvation were conditioned upon their continued holiness. They have believed that if they fall into sin, they are condemned, and that, should they die in their sins, or in a backslidden state, they would be damned. Their belief and assurance have been, that they should, through grace assisting them, be enabled so to exercise faith and persevere in the use of their powers of moral agency, as to be finally justified and saved. This assurance is eminently calculated to encourage them in all ways of well-doing, and in the most strenuous efforts to perfect holiness in the fear of God. But suppose they get the idea, that they have so believed in Christ as to render their continued holiness, their permanent justification, and final salvation, unconditionally certain--this is an eminently dangerous and ruinous belief, and is, as far as possible from any state of mind encouraged by the word of God.

4. Moral beings cannot be in a state of unconditional sanctification or justification, in any world. This is manifest, from the fact, that they cannot be put beyond the natural possibility of sinning. If they were, they would be put beyond the possibility of being holy. Holiness implies moral liberty. Moral liberty implies the power of doing right or wrong. It is, therefore, naturally impossible, that moral beings should in any world be placed under circumstances, where their eternal justification, sanctification, and salvation, are unconditionally certain. The continued justification of the inhabitants of heaven, must be for ever conditioned upon their continued holiness. And their continued holiness must ever depend upon and consist in the right voluntary exercise of their powers of moral agency. And nothing but that grace which is perfectly consistent with the exercise of their own liberty, can render their final perseverance certain.

5. "Faring always," or "passing the time of our sojourning here with fear," as the Apostle commands, does not imply unbelief, and is not a sinful state of mind;

because the promises of God are all conditional--and as the promises of sanctification are conditioned upon our own faith, and the promises of justification conditioned upon our sanctification, and as all is suspended upon the right use of the powers of moral agency which we possess, it behooves us to "fear always--to walk softly, to gird up the loins of our minds, to be sober, vigilant, and to run with patience the race set before us."

6. The assurance that we shall never sin again, does not secure us against sin, and has, in this world of severe temptation, a manifest tendency to procure our fall.

7. Nor does a fall, in such a case, in the least degree tend to prove, that there is no such state as that of permanent sanctification in this life.

8. Nor does it impeach the veracity of Christ. Some persons have supposed, that they have attained a state of permanent sanctification, and felt assured that they should never sin again. They maintained that the veracity of Christ was pledged in such a sense, that He would be guilty of falsehood, if He should suffer them to fall into sin; and especially have they inferred this from the fact, that some promise that Christ would keep them, had been deeply impressed upon their own minds. Afterwards, however, they have fallen into sin, and been greatly tempted to entertain hard thoughts of Christ, to impeach his veracity, and deny his truth.

Now the mistake in this case was, in overlooking the fact, that all the promises of Christ are, from their very nature conditioned upon the continued exercise of faith in us. Misunderstanding the promise, and leaving out of view the condition, was the foundation of the assumption, that Christ was pledged for your perseverance in holiness; and if you have fallen into sin the blame is your own. You expected of Christ what He has never promised, except upon a condition that you have not fulfilled.

To this view of the subject it has been objected, that if this is true, the promises of the gospel amount only to this, that Christ will keep us if we will keep ourselves. To this I answer:

That in a very important sense this is true. I have formerly felt this objection strongly myself, and was strongly inclined to, and even entertained an opposite opinion. What, I said, can the promise of the gospel mean nothing more than this, "I will keep him who will keep himself?" Much consideration and prayer,

with searching the word of God, have led me to the conviction, that this is the exact truth, and this opinion is in exact keeping with the whole providential government of God.

Take all temporal blessings. Who does not know that all the promises of daily bread, are so conditioned upon the use of indispensable means, as that they amount to this-- "I will feed him who will feed himself; I will take care of him who will take care of himself." Take all the promises that respect the things of this life, and the same will be found to be true. If God promises health, it is upon the condition, that we obey the laws of our physical existence; so that the promise amounts to this-- "I will keep him who will keep himself in health." If He promise to prolong our natural life, it is upon condition that we comply with the indispensable laws of life. So that the promise amounts to this-- "I will keep him alive who will keep himself alive."

Now the same is emphatically and eminently true of all spiritual blessings. Who does not know, that as a matter of fact, every believer progresses in religion precisely in proportion to his own faithfulness--that God keeps him from falling, when he watches, and thereby keeps himself from falling--that he has the spirit of prayer, in proportion as he watches unto prayer, and prays in the Holy Ghost--and that, as a matter of fact, He keeps the saints, only through their own watchfulness, faithfulness, and efforts. So that it may be truly said, that He keeps those only who will keep themselves--that He saves those only who will save themselves. Nor does this in the least degree set aside, or depreciate the grace of God; nor at all deny or set aside any correct idea of the sovereignty of God. Who ever supposed, that the farmer, who tills his land, the mechanic, who plies his trade, or the student, who trims his midnight lamp, either denies or sets aside the sovereignty of God, in accomplishing the ends at which he aims. Indeed, the sovereignty of God consists in this--in bringing about the great ends of his government, through the agency of his creatures; and no correct idea of his sovereignty will ever leave out of view, the use of the natural and indispensable means of procuring the things which He has promised.

9. Nor does this view of the subject at all touch the question of the perseverance of the saints, as I understand that doctrine to be taught in the Bible. The doctrine there inculcated, if I understand it, is not, that by one act of faith men are brought into a state of unconditional and unalterable justification; but that the saints, through the grace of God, will be kept in ways of obedience, to the end.

10. Although there can be no unconditional certainty of perpetual holiness, justification, or final salvation, in any world, yet we can have such a kind of assurance of all these, as to cast out all slavish fear, that hath torment. Think you not, that the angels know, and saints in heaven know, that if they should sin, they would be sent to hell? And think you not that they know they have power to sin, are liable to sin, and that without watchfulness, and wakeful activity, and perseverance, they will sin? They must know this; and yet, this knowledge does not bring them into slavish bondage; but affords just that healthy and holy stimulus to holy perseverance, that is demanded by the very constitution of moral agency, in any world.

11. Sanctification, justification, and final salvation, are all put upon the same ground. And it cannot be true, that men are justified, any farther than they are sanctified; or that they are, or ever can be saved, any farther than they are cleansed from sin. Gospel justification is generally defined to be pardon and acceptance. But can a man be pardoned, any farther than he is penitent? Can the soul be accepted any farther than it is obedient? Certainly it cannot be, unless Antinomianism is true, and the law of God is abrogated. The distinction, then, that is commonly made, (which I, following the current of the Church, without sufficient examination, once held myself,) between instantaneous justification and progressive sanctification, must be without foundation. Every man feels that he is condemned, and not justified, when he sins, and that he is kept out of condemnation only by keeping out of sin. This is the doctrine of the Bible. It is the doctrine of conscience and of common sense. And that is certainly a most licentious view of the doctrine of justification, that maintains that justification is perfected while sanctification is imperfect; that justification is instantaneous, while sanctification is progressive.

Beloved Christian brother, why do you pray for forgiveness when you sin? Is it not because you feel condemned? But if you were already perfectly and permanently justified, you are mistaken in praying for forgiveness; for you are already forgiven, and not condemned. You cannot possibly be pardoned, unless you are condemned; for what is pardon, but setting aside the execution of law? If, therefore, men are permanently justified by one act of faith, they not only have no need of pardon from that moment, however much they may sin, but to pardon them is impossible, as they are not condemned. And why, let me ask you, should Christ teach you to pray daily for the forgiveness of your past sins, if by one act of faith, you are permanently justified? Let me conclude, then, by saying,

"Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification

of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and

to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

End of the 1840 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1841
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Continuing the 1840 sermons on Sanctification from "The Oberlin Evangelist"

Lectures XXV. & XXVI. [Submission to God- No.'s 1 & 2](#)

Lecture XXVII. [Love Worketh No Ill](#)

Lecture XXVIII. [Self Denial](#)

Lecture XXIX. [The True Service of God](#)

Lecture XXX. [Entire Consecration a Condition of Discipleship](#)

Lectures XXXI. & XXXII. [A Seared Conscience- No.'s 1 & 2](#)

Lecture XXXIII. [Conditions of Being Kept](#)

Lecture XXXIV. [National Fast Day](#)

Lecture XXXV. [Mediatorship of Christ](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Submission to God- No.'s 1 & 2

Lectures XXV & XXVI

January 16, 1841

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

LECTURE XXV.

Text.--James 4:7: "Submit yourselves therefore to God."

In the discussion of this subject I shall inquire:

- I. What constitutes submission to God.*
- II. Point out some things that are implied in submission.*
- III. Notice various delusions which many practice upon themselves, in respect to submission.*
- IV. Show that without true submission salvation is naturally impossible.*
- V. Show that with true submission salvation is naturally inevitable.*

I. What constitutes submission to God.

1. I begin by remarking, that submission belongs to the will; and that true submission consists in the will's being entirely subdued and under the control of God's will. It is just that attitude of will, or that voluntary state of the will that God requires. This includes,

2. A joyful acquiescence in all the providence of God. There is perhaps no man, however wicked, and perhaps no devil in hell, that is not pleased with some of the providences of God, because they may favor their ambitious and selfish schemes. The assassin, who prowls at midnight to plunge a dagger into his neighbor's heart, might be very willing that God's providence should favor him with a dark and stormy night, when few persons would be abroad to detect his foul deed of blood. The pirate, also,

might rejoice in a fair wind, or in any other providence that might favor his diabolical designs. Satan himself might rejoice at some providential dispensation that may give him the opportunity of extending his rebellious operations against God. The farmer, though a wicked man, may rejoice in such weather as favors his peculiar occupation. And thus the worst, as well as the best of men, may be very much pleased with the providence of God, so long as it favors their particular designs. But there is no piety in this. One element of true submission, is, as I have said, a joyful acquiescence in the whole providence of God. A truly submissive soul cannot know what an adverse providence is; for it has no will of its own, only that the will of God shall be done. And consequently, whatever the weather is, whatever the providential occurrences with which he is surrounded may be, as these occurrences show what is upon the whole the will of God, he is well pleased with them, equally well, whatever they may be. If in any thing, the providence of God interferes with what the submissive soul had intended to do, it is just as well pleased as if the providence had been different; for the intention to do a certain thing, to go to a certain place, or attempt any thing whatever, is founded upon the supposition, that such is the will of God. But if the providence of God is found to be adverse to the carrying out any such intention, it is regarded by that soul as a revelation from God, that that intention was not according to his will; in which case he is just as well pleased to relinquish his design, and pursue any course that at present seems to be according to the will of God, as he would have been to have pursued the intended course, which has proved to be adverse to the providence and will of God. Having no other intention than to do the whole will of God, he is perfectly and supremely satisfied with whatever the providence of God may be. He has no interest of his own to promote, no ends of his own to accomplish--no ways, or schemes, or wishes, but such as he believes to be in accordance with the will of God. He, therefore, waits, in an attitude as yielding as air, to be led in a state of supreme sweetness and complacency, in any direction in which the will of God, as revealed in his providence, by his Spirit and word, shall lead him. Equally well pleased, to be sick or well--to be rich or poor--to live or die--to enjoy his friends or part with them--to be employed in any way, in any place, at any time, wherever the providence of God shall lead him.

3. Another element of true submission is, a cordial, joyful, and actual

obedience to all the known will of God. There is, perhaps, no man and no devil so wicked or in such circumstances as not to find it for their interest to do many things required by God. And although they do not do these things in obedience to the will of God, yet they give themselves credit for good behavior, as if they really did. And indeed, they are very well pleased, that God should require such things as these, because it so happens that the letter of these requirements coincides with what they find to be most agreeable to themselves, and most for their own interest, under the circumstances in which they are placed. Now in doing these things it is manifest that there is no virtue, from the fact that they do not do them because God requires them, but solely because this course of conduct is most in accordance, under the circumstances of the case, with the selfish ends they have in view. But true submission, let it be for ever understood, consists in a spirit of universal obedience to the whole will of God, because it is his will. It regards the will of God, on all subjects, as supremely good, and just as good on one subject as another. It is necessarily under the control of the will of God, and has no end in view, but in every thing to be directed by the will of God. Nothing is so dear, nothing so desirable, nothing so desired, as to have the whole will of God done on earth as it is done in heaven. Consequently, with a submissive soul there is no picking and choosing among the commandments of God, being better pleased with some than with others, and preferring obedience to one rather than another. To a submissive soul, the revealed will of God, however it may be revealed, whether by his word, providence, or Spirit, is the supreme and universal law, to which it yields a universal and joyful obedience.

4. Consequently true submission includes the practical and joyful holding of ourselves and all our possessions and interests at the disposal of the divine will. I say a joyful holding of ourselves and our possessions at his disposal, in opposition to a reluctant yielding, in compliance with the stern demands of conscience, without in reality taking any pleasure in thus doing. I said, a practical holding of ourselves and possessions thus, in opposition to that state of fancied willingness, in which men often profess to be willing to do any thing, when in reality they will do nothing--in which they profess to hold themselves and all they possess at the disposal of God, but in reality will never suffer Him to dispose of themselves or their possessions, only as he disposes of them by sending them to hell, and of their possessions by

putting them into the hands of those that will use them for his glory. By a practical and joyful holding of ourselves and our possessions at his disposal, then, I mean, that as a matter of fact, the whole body, soul, and spirit, time, talents, property, and all things over which we have control, are yielded up to the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world; not grudgingly, or by constraint, but of a ready, willing, joyful mind; finding in this course our supreme joy, and, as a matter of fact, feeling it to be true in our own experience, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

5. True submission includes an unconditional assent to be used all up, body and soul, both in time [and] eternity, for the promotion of the best interests of the universe, and the glory of God. God undoubtedly wills that the most should be made of the influence of every moral being, to promote his own glory and the interests of his kingdom; and nothing is submission short of an entire willingness and most intense desire thus to be used up, with the most divine economy, for the promotion of those vast interests upon which the heart of God is set.

6. It includes a joyful willingness to have justice take its course with us, if the interests of the universe should demand it. Every sinner in the universe deserves to be in hell; and since it is a fact that sin exists, it is indispensable that there should be a hell, that the justice of God should be vindicated in sending those who sin to hell. And certainly, it is the duty of all who are in hell to be entirely reconciled to their condition.

By this I do not mean, that they are bound to be reconciled to live in sin; for they are able to repent, and are bound to repent, and to love God with all their heart, and with all their soul. But since the interests of the universe demand, and therefore it is the duty of God to send them to hell, they are bound supremely to rejoice in being there; that is--they are bound to be willing, and rejoice to be disposed of in the best possible manner, for the promotion of the interests of the kingdom of God. And since, under the circumstances of the case, the best thing that can be done with them, is to put them in hell, they are bound to be supremely acquiescent in it. Just so in the case of every sinner on earth. He deserves to be put in hell. And if, under the circumstances of the case, this is the best disposition that can be made of him, for the glory of God, and the advancement of his kingdom; if the moral government of God can be better supported by his punishment than by his

forgiveness, he is bound not only to consent to be punished, but to be supremely pleased to let justice take its course. By this I do not mean to affirm, that the pains of hell can be chosen for their own sake, or that any pain whatever can or ought to be chosen for its own sake. It is contrary to the very nature of moral beings, and as contrary to the will of God, as it is to the moral constitution of man, that any degree of pain should be chosen for its own sake, either in this or any other world. But while the infliction of pain, on the part of God, is indispensable to the vindication of his character, and the support of his authority, whenever the endurance of pain is demanded by the same end, whether in this or in any other world, true submission consists in choosing and joyfully acquiescing in the endurance of pain, not for its own sake, but for the sake of the end to be accomplished by it. A man is just as much bound to be willing to endure the pains of hell, in vindication of the moral government of God, should the interests of the universe demand it, as he is to be willing to endure the pains of bodily disease when physical law has been violated, and the vindication of the ways of God demand that he should suffer bodily pain.

He is as much bound to be willing to suffer the pains of hell, in support of the moral government of God, as he is to endure the smarting of a burn, in vindication of the physical government of God, when he has wantonly thrust his hand in the fire.

Let me be understood. I am not saying, that a man should be willing to remain in eternal rebellion against God. I am not saying, that God is as much gratified and pleased with the damnation as with the salvation of sinners. I am not saying, that God's glory demands, or that it is consistent with the glory of God, that any penitent sinner should be damned. I am not saying, that God desires the damnation of any soul, for its own sake. Nor am I saying, that the interests of the universe can be best promoted by the damnation of any one, who can be persuaded to repent and accept salvation.

But I am saying, and do mean to say, that upon the supposition, that any one is so circumstanced as to render it necessary for God to inflict the pains of hell upon him, that it is his bounden duty to be supremely acquiescent it. Suppose that a man has committed the unpardonable sin, or a sin of such a nature that it cannot consistently be forgiven, can it be right for that sinner to be unwilling to have justice take its course in this case? Can it be right for

him to make himself miserable, because the supreme good of the universe demands his damnation? Of his own folly he may complain. Of his sin he may and ought to repent, and be unutterably ashamed; but with being thus disposed of for the promotion of the highest interests of God's kingdom, he ought to be supremely pleased. Why, he was made to glorify God. It was always his duty, to desire, above all things, that God might be glorified and the universe benefitted, to consecrate his whole being to the promotion of this end. In this he was always bound to find his supreme happiness. And now, because of his own voluntary wickedness, he has placed himself in such a situation, that the glory of God and the best interests of his kingdom demand, that he should be put in hell, rather than in heaven, has he a right to demur to this--to refuse to be used for the glory of God--to refuse to consecrate his whole being to that which will, in the highest degree, promote this infinitely desirable end? I say again, and do insist, that in such circumstances he is solemnly bound, to consecrate his whole being to the glory of God, and the support of his government, in this particular way, and willingly to lie down upon the bed of eternal death, and give up his whole being to suffering the penalty of the law of God.

7. True submission includes a deep and continual longing of soul, that the whole will of God should be done on earth as it is done in heaven. This is the state of mind that God requires, and that Christ directed to be exercised and expressed in prayer to God. This is to be the daily constant language of our souls, "Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven."

II. Some things that are implied in submission.

1. It implies the actual forsaking of all known sin. It is absurd to say, that an individual has any degree of true submission to God, and still indulges in the commission of any known sin. To suppose that true submission is consistent with any degree of known sin, is to overlook the very nature of submission. Submission belongs to the will, and consists in the supreme devotion of the heart to the whole known will of God. Now how manifestly absurd it is to say, that a man can be supremely devoted, or submissive to the will of God, and still indulge in some things, or even in one thing that is inconsistent with God's will. Whoever, therefore, among you, lives in the indulgence of any known sin, of heart or life, has not one particle of true religion. This is not a rhetorical flourish. It is not a random, hap-hazard

assertion. It is the unalterable truth of God. By this I do not mean, that if a man is sometimes overcome by temptation, and falls into occasional sins, that this demonstrates that his character is that of an unregenerate sinner. But I do mean, that where any form or degree of sin is indulged, where it is habitual, connived at, allowed, and practiced by the mind, there is not one vestige of true religion.

2. True submission implies a recognition of the universality of the providence of God. God is actually, or permissively, directly or indirectly concerned in all events; and many persons hide their enmity against God from their own view, by overlooking the fact, that God has in any sense any agency in the providence about which they vex themselves. They ascribe many things to Satan, and to wicked men, and seem to feel that they do right to be angry, and very rebellious, in view of many things that occur, because God has no agency of any kind in them. Now, a submissive spirit views God as so concerned in every thing, as to remain calm, undisturbed and joyful, amid all those occurrences that keep the ungodly in a state of constant fermentation.

3. It implies an honest, earnest, and diligent inquiry after the will of God. There are a great many who profess to hold themselves and all their possessions at the disposal of the will of God--who profess a willingness to do, or be, or say any thing that God requires of them. But mark, you will find it impossible to convince them, that any thing inconsistent with their selfish schemes, is the will of God. They profess to hold all their property at the disposal of God; but the agents of benevolent institutions may labor with them for months, without being able to convince them, that it is the will of God, that they should part with their possessions to promote these objects. The attitude of their minds is manifestly such, that they are unwilling to know what is the will of God in relation to the disposal of their possessions. They demand a kind and degree of evidence to satisfy their minds that cannot be had, and ought not to be expected, and would not be demanded by them, if they were in any other than a supremely selfish state of mind. And thus, while they profess to hold themselves and all they possess at God's disposal, they can always manage to quiet their consciences, in their superlative selfishness, by shutting out the light, and refusing to be satisfied in respect to what really is the will of God.

I knew a man who professed to be converted, and to give all his property to God. At one time he was about to devote it to one benevolent object, and at another to another object; and thus has excited hopes and expectations, sometimes in one direction and sometimes in another, that he would give up at least his surplus of worldly goods, to the promotion of the great benevolent objects of the day. But alas! he seems never to find any object, to which he can believe it to be the will of God, that he should devote his property. No actually existing evidence will satisfy him. It seems that nothing short of a direct revelation from God, in words to this effect, will work conviction in his mind, "Know you, A.B., of such a place, at such a time, that thus saith the Lord, it is my supreme will and pleasure, that you devote such a portion of the earthly goods in your possession to the advancement of the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom, and that you deliver to C.D., the agent of such a society, the specified amount without gainsaying." And that this order of God should be accredited by some direct miracle, or thundered in a voice from heaven, in order to afford the required evidence. I know others, who, while they make large professions of holding themselves and all their possessions at the disposal of God, can always find some excuse for doing little or nothing for the promotion of any benevolent object. Is a church to be built, they can avoid giving any thing by imposing some condition, to which the congregation cannot and ought not to consent. Is the minister's salary to be paid, they can always find some excuse for not believing it to be the will of God, that they should do any thing for his support. Is any thing to be given to the Foreign Mission cause, they can always find some fault with the proceedings of the Board, as a reason for not believing that it is their duty to give. Is any call made for funds to support the holy cause of the abolition of slavery, they don't like the proceedings of the abolition societies. They doubt, whether the funds are properly expended, or there is some imprudence in their measures, which renders it obligatory in them to withhold their funds. Is any thing to be done for the poor, they have always some evasive measure to propose, some other and better way to supply the poor, than the one proposed. If any thing is to be done for Moral Reform, they have some objection to the course pursued by its advocates and friends. And, in short, whatever is to be done, that calls them to self-denial, or to give their possessions up to the promotion of the glory of God, they have always some objection to what is done, or some proposal to have something else done, which, if not complied with, constitutes in their mind a sufficient reason for

giving and doing nothing for that object.

Now it should be universally understood, that true submission implies, an earnest desire to be convinced as it respects what is really the will of God--a diligent, honest inquiry after his will, and a perfect readiness to be decided and actuated by any reasonable degree of evidence, and to follow the slightest preponderance of evidence, to whatever self-sacrifice or self-denial it may lead.

4. It implies a thankful spirit, for all the past and present providential dealings of God with us. And especially a thankful spirit for those providences that have been and are most deeply afflicting to us. "God does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." And in all the afflictions of his children, the tender heart of God is afflicted. People are very apt to suppose themselves to be thankful to God for those providential dealings that seem, at the time, matters of great joy to them; while they think themselves excused from being thankful for dispensations that greatly afflict them. Indeed, they suppose themselves to be very virtuous, if they fall short of going into downright rebellion at such providences. But now let us look at this, Mother; are you a Christian? Yes. And God has given you a little blooming babe. It lies smiling at your breast. You touch its little cheek and chirp as to a little bird; and it looks up and smiles, with such a look of love as to seduce your heart into an attitude of idolatrous attachment. You hang over it when it wakes and when it sleeps. It is in your thoughts at the earliest dawn, at midday, and at evening. All the mother is awake in your soul. And as its little opening powers develop themselves, day after day, your attachment grows stronger and stronger, until it is the object of your thoughts by day, and your dreams by night. You cannot pray, without the image of your babe before you. You cannot go to the church of God, without having your warmest affections clustering around your little nursling at home. In the solemn worship of the house of God, your thoughts are upon your little idol, and you are weary with the length of the exercises, because they separate you from your little charmer. Now mark; you suppose yourself very thankful, that God has committed to you this little treasure. God loves the little one--He loves its mother. But O! He sees that this sweet gift is too much for your piety. He loves to see you pleased and happy with it. But He cannot consent to see it ruin you. Nor can He willingly see you, through your idolatrous attachment, ruin it. He puts forth his hand and

plucks it from your bosom. You open your eyes, and it is gone! And O! God, as it were, turns away his face when He strikes the blow. He feels the pang, as if it had touched the apple of his eye. It has cost Him much. Viewed by itself, it is grievous to his heart thus to afflict you. It has cost Him more self-denial than all the sweet and pleasant things He ever bestowed upon you. He would sooner have borne the pain Himself, than have inflicted it upon you, could it have answered the purpose, which He has proved to a demonstration, by sooner dying for you than to inflict death upon you. O! how you have grieved his parental heart, by forcing Him thus to smite you. Do you feel grieved, when you are obliged to chastise your children? And when you feel obliged to use the rod, to deprive them of their food, or take some prompt measures to subdue their wayward tempers--is it not a matter of grief to you? Are you not more tried and afflicted by it than by all your other pains to do them good. Would you not rather often take the blows yourself, could the same end be answered by it? Indeed, do you not consider it the very climax of parental kindness, self-denial, and love, to march up to the thorough infliction of chastisement when the good of those you love so well requires it at your hand? Now what would you say of a child who, when he had grown to manhood, should look back upon his life and say, I feel grateful to my mother for watching over my helpless infancy. I thank my father for the trouble and expense of my education, and for giving me a farm, and for all the good things of his providence. But, ah! there are many dark spots in the history of my father's dealings with me, to which I find it difficult to be reconciled, and for which I feel that I am far from having any cause to be thankful. At such and such a time he chastised me. This I do not like. I remember that he did it with tears. I recollect how he trembled when he took the rod. I recollect how he lifted up his streaming eyes to heaven. I remember well, that when he had repeated the blows, he turned him away and wept. I saw and knew, that it cost him much--that his heart was bleeding at every pore--that much sooner would he receive the blows himself than have inflicted them on me.

Now do let me ask, for what portion of parental kindness are children under so great obligations of gratitude, as for that needed discipline, which so deeply wrung the parent's heart? O, you will say, of all the trials that I have ever had with my children; of all that I have ever done for them; and of all their obligations to me; I feel that those are the greatest which compel me to

the self-denial of inflicting wounds on them.

And now let me ask you, Christian, do you think that you do well, barely to keep away from downright murmuring and rebellion, when you are chastised by your heavenly Father. O, do you remember, how much more deeply you have afflicted Him than He has wounded you? Do you remember, how much it costs Him thus to smite you?--What! can He who loves you so much as to give his life for you, rebuke and distress you, without affliction? Of all the things that He has ever done for you, you are bound to be the most grateful for his stripes. For when He has been obliged to smite, He has been obliged to touch the apple of his own eye, and reach the deep fountains of compassion in his own heart. O how his heart has pitied you, when He has lifted up the rod. O, how his bowels yearned over you, when it fell upon you; and when you wept, how deeply did He sympathize with your grief. And as soon as you relented how instantly would He smile and wipe away your tears. O! how readily He forgave you. And as soon as the prodigal returned, "He saw you a great way off, and ran, and fell upon your neck, and wept, and kissed you." He took off your rags of shame and guilt. He clothed you in the robes of gladness, and by his love He chased away all your grief. Now can a spirit of true submission imply any thing less than deep gratitude to God for all his providential dealings, and the deepest of all, for those in which He so deeply wounded Himself in wounding you. And of what ought you in infinite measure to repent, if not of those idolatries and sins that lay upon Him such a necessity?

5. True submission to God implies, the absence of all carefulness or perplexing anxiety in regard to his future dealings with us. That man certainly cannot be reconciled to God--he cannot be perfectly willing that God should deal with him in future in all respects according to his own will, and at the same time be perplexed with anxieties, and carefulness, and fears, in respect to his future dealings. True submission leaves all such questions entirely in the hands of God, without distress, distrust, anxiety, or fear.

And furthermore, true submission rejoices in the fact, that the wisdom and goodness of God will meet out all his changes for him, in a way that best promotes his own glory and the highest good of the universe.

6. True submission also implies, that you have no will of your own except

that "the will of God be done on earth as it is done in heaven." It is the constant language and breathings of a submissive soul, "thy will be done." And whenever, in any way, the will of God is known, the submissive soul not merely consents that it should be so, but rejoices in having it so; and would prefer, that this should take place, to any other possible course of events. Because it regards the will of God as supremely wise and good.

7. It implies, that you are equally well pleased with whatever God does. The submissive soul does not make a virtue of necessity, and merely consent, or assent to what God does, because to resist will be of no avail. Submission is not the mere absence of murmuring and repining at the providence of God; but is the most joyful and hearty acquiescence and delight in what He does; and that too, not merely in those dispensations of providence that are usually accounted merciful and joyous, but also in those that are usually regarded most afflictive and severe.

8. It implies the subjugation of all our appetites and passions to his will and glory. God requires, that "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we do all to the glory of God." And true submission implies, that this requirement be completely obeyed.

9. It implies implicit confidence in God. It is certainly impossible that there should be true submission, when there is not true, real, heart-felt, and practical confidence in God. To submit, and rejoice in whatever He does, certainly implies the most implicit confidence that what He does is right and best to be done. Implicit faith is therefore always implied in true submission. And this faith must respect the goodness and power of God--that He is wise, and good, and powerful enough, to do in all respects that which is best to be done.

10. It implies true repentance for sin. Repentance is that change of mind, that takes the part of God, against all sin--that condemns all sin under every form and in every degree--that fully and heartily justifies God in all the measure of his government. It is not a mere intellectual change of views, but a change of heart, a thorough radical change in the controlling disposition or affection of the soul, in regard to sin and the government of God. Therefore, true submission always implies and includes, in a sinner, true repentance, a thorough reformation of heart and life.

11. It implies a cordial acceptance of the salvation of the gospel. And here, when I speak of the salvation of the gospel, I mean, not merely the acceptance of a pardon, on account of the Atonement of Christ; but an acceptance of Christ, as a risen, reigning Savior from sin--not merely an outward, but an inward Savior as a glorious deliverer from all iniquity. This is proffered in the gospel; and nothing is true submission short of a cordial and practical obedience to and acceptance of the gospel of the blessed God.

12. It implies actual holiness of heart and life.

13. It implies a deep abhorrence of sin and sinners. Said the Psalmist, "Do I not hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? Am I not grieved with them that rise up against thee. Yea, I hate them with perfect hatred. I count them mine enemies" This hatred is a benevolent hatred. It is a hatred mingled with compassion. Nevertheless, it is a real and deep abhorrence of those that rise up against God.

The subject will be resumed.

LECTURE XXVI.

January 20, 1841

SUBMISSION TO GOD--No. 2

Text.--James 4:7: "Submit yourselves therefore to God."

In continuation of this subject, I will,

III. Notice various delusions practiced by many upon themselves.

1. They confound desire with will. And because they desire to be reconciled to God, to give up their sins, to be pious, and such like things, they suppose themselves to be willing; not considering, that willingness and desire are very different things, and that men often desire, and strongly desire, that which upon the whole they are very unwilling should occur. Sinners desire to be Christians, on a great many accounts; but still they are unwilling to forsake all and follow Christ. Multitudes are deceiving themselves in regard to the very foundation of their moral character, by thus confounding desire with will. And when you ask them, whether they are right, whether they are

deeply engaged in the service of God? They reply--"I desire to be; I am willing to do any thing; but I am a poor creature, and cannot do as well as I would." Then fleeing to the 7th of Romans, they suppose themselves exactly to coincide with Paul, in their experience; whom they understand in that chapter to say, that "when I would (am willing to) do good evil is present with me." Whereas in truth it should have been rendered, "when I desire to do good evil is present with me; so that the good which I desire to do I do not, and the evil which I desire to avoid, that I do." The case supposed by the Apostle, in this very chapter, is one in which the soul is in bondage to sin, where conviction is fastened upon the mind, and strong desires for deliverance excited, but where the will is still under the dominion of sin.

2. Many deceive themselves, by confounding emotion with the heart or will. Emotions, or what are commonly called feelings, are involuntary states of mind, and are necessarily excited in the sensibility whenever the thoughts are intensely occupied with those considerations which are calculated in their nature to produce such feelings. Now these feelings or emotions are very commonly understood to be identical with the heart. Whereas they are no more the heart than the conscience is the heart. And their existence is no more certain evidence of piety than the convictions and remonstrances of conscience are evidences of piety. Any kind or degree of emotion may exist in the mind, while the heart is entirely selfish. Submission belongs, as I have already said, to the will, or heart. And when the emotions are confounded with the heart there is a ruinous delusion. And this accounts for the fact that so many persons mistake mere excitement for religion. While in all their business transactions they are supremely selfish, they nevertheless can maintain a hope of eternal life. Under strongly exciting preaching, circumstances, or measures, they find themselves strongly excited, and exercised with deep emotion. They call these feelings the feelings of their heart, and thus take it for granted, that their hearts are changed; while all their lives demonstrate, that their hearts are supremely selfish.

3. They mistake conviction, remorse, and emotions of sorrow, for that repentance that forsakes sin. Repentance, let it be understood, belongs to the will, and emotions of sorrow for sin, are a consequence of repentance, and do by no means constitute it. Indeed, emotions of sorrow for sin may

and often do exist in a high degree, without repentance, or without that change of will that actually rejects or forsakes sin. It should be always understood, that a truly penitent soul cannot live in sin; that is, that it is naturally impossible for a truly penitent soul to live in sin. John says, "he that is born of God cannot sin, because his seed remaineth in him." Now by this seed is not meant some root or kernel, but it represents the voluntary attitude of the will. Will controls the thoughts. It controls the outward actions. Repentance, let it be understood, is a fixed choice, preference, or intention of the mind, and consequently controls the volitions that direct the thoughts and actions. Suppose a man chooses or intends to go to Europe. This choice or intention will beget and be the cause of all those volitions that move the muscles, direct the thoughts, and use all the means necessary for the accomplishment of the intended end. Now if the will or heart is right with God--if a man is in a state of penitence, it is as impossible that he should live in sin, as that he should act against his will. By this I do not mean, that no regenerate soul can fall under the power of temptation, and at no time commit a sin; for a single volition, or even a series of volitions may, under the pressure of temptation, be put forth by the mind which are inconsistent with the healthy or ruling choice or preference of the mind. But in all such cases, as soon as the pressure of temptation is removed, if the heart is truly regenerate, as soon as the thoughts cease to be diverted from the great object or end which is supremely aimed at by the mind, the whole being will at once come back under the influence of the heart, or supreme choice and intention of the mind. Persons are often convicted, experience the deep agonies of remorse, deeply regret their having sinned, on a great many accounts, and yet, after all, know nothing of that repentance which is unto life, or of that state of submission to God, that puts and keeps the soul strongly on its guard against iniquity.

4. Many mistake assent and conviction for faith. Overlooking the fact, that faith belongs to the will, they suppose themselves to believe, while, as a matter of fact, they do not practically confide. Now faith is a practical confidence in God. It is of course a practical confidence, because it is the confidence of the heart. To call that faith which does not produce a corresponding practice is absurd. It is no more an act of faith, than an act of vision is an act of faith. The mere apprehension of truth by the intellect, the mere conviction of the understanding, is just as distinct from faith as an act

of vision is distinct from the effect of an act of vision. I see a house on fire; but this is not faith, it is mere perception. I perceive, know, and am convinced, that the house is on fire; but this is not faith. Faith is that act of the mind which is produced by this perception. It is an act of will. In perceiving this truth, the mind goes into action. It puts forth choice, volition, and the whole being into motion, to extinguish the flames, or to rescue the inmates of the house. Just so, when the great truths of religion are perceived by the mind, the mind apprehends and knows these things to be true. But this is an involuntary state of mind. It is not confidence. It is mere apprehension, or knowledge. It may be the occasion of confidence, or faith, or it may not. Faith is that act of the will, that choice, that confidence and trust, which results from the intellectual apprehension of truth; but does not consist in this apprehension. Now to confound conviction with that act of the will or heart which constitutes faith, is a ruinous mistake. I say again, that faith always consists in a practical confidence; because it is an act of will, which of course and of necessity produces corresponding practice.

5. Many confound a foolish and wicked Antinomian state of mind with true submission. They have such absurd views of the sovereignty and agency of God, as to think it unnecessary to make any efforts to accomplish their own salvation, or the salvation of others. They suppose themselves to be truly submissive in respect to the salvation of their own children, while they make no more efforts to bring about their conversion or sanctification, than they would to produce a storm of thunder.

6. Many mistake a legal and outward reformation for religion.

7. Others take it for granted, that the standard notions of the Church, in respect to what constitutes true religion is religion indeed. Especially do they regard the notions of their particular denomination as correct; and looking away from the Bible, they call that religion which accords with the views of their church. And still, more especially, do they think that religion, described by their minister as being such. Now suppose that a minister had mistaken conviction for conversion, as thousands of professors of religion, and as, no doubt, many ministers really do. In his preaching he would naturally be guided very much by his own experience of what religion is. He would describe that as religion, which he himself had experienced. Whenever any persons in his congregation came into the state of mind in

which he is himself, he thinks them converted, and encourages their uniting with the church. Both he and they, thinking themselves converted, remain securely entrenched under their delusions. But upon this model the Church is formed, with these ruinous notions of what true religion is. And out of it young men are sent to prepare for ministry, who also have confounded conviction with conversion. And they form and gather churches, having the same notions of what religion is. Thus this delusion extends itself, until great multitudes of churches and ministers have radically defective views, and consequently a radically defective experience. All such ministers, and such professors of religion, would think it highly censorious and uncharitable, of course, for any one to intimate that they were not truly converted. Now that such is the real fact, at least in some large branches of the Christian Church, cannot be reasonably disputed or doubted; and the longer I live, the more ripe and painful is my conviction, that great numbers of ministers have mistaken conviction, and a mere legal religion, for conversion and the religion of the gospel.

8. Many deceive themselves, by ascribing to benevolence or true religion what is in fact the result of other and radically different principals of action. Some ascribe to true benevolence, that which is the result merely of constitutional temperament. Others ascribe that to benevolence, which is the result of the influence of public sentiment, a regard to their own reputation, which should have been done or omitted from pure benevolence alone. And without questioning themselves in respect to what the motive is, under whose influence they are acting, they take it for granted that it is real religion; because outwardly it is in conformity with the principal of benevolence. Or, they ascribe to benevolence and true religion in the heart, those duties that are performed under the influence of hope and fear, or merely legal considerations. In short, they deceive themselves; because they are too careless, or too uncandid to thoroughly discriminate between those things that are the undoubted and conscious results of benevolence, and those things that result from other and opposite principles.

9. Others still, deceive themselves, by confounding a boisterous, legal, bitter zeal, with true religion. They forget, that nothing is true religion but love and its fruits. They mistake a vociferous and highly excited state of mind, for that sweet, composed, heavenly, and yet energetic love that constitutes the true religion of the Bible. Such persons are very apt to

confound Christian faithfulness with a very harsh and vituperative manner of reproving and rebuking sin. Instead of manifesting a deep disposition to instruct and reclaim self-deceivers and backsliders, they seem to think themselves doing God service in using such language as is only used in inspiration, when addressing those who are the most hardened reprobates and blasphemers.

10. Many deceive themselves by saying, that they are willing to do any thing, when in fact they really do nothing. They say they are willing to give up sin; yet, as a matter of fact, they do not give it up. They are willing to forsake all and follow Christ, and yet really do forsake nothing to follow Him. This is a deep delusion. I have more than once said, and it should be for ever remembered, that as the will is so the conduct is, and that to will is the very thing which God requires. It is a principle in the government of God, that "If there be first a willing mind it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not." This is always true, under the government of God. To will the rejection of sin is the rejection of it. To will obedience to Christ, is obedience to Christ. In other words, to will what Christ requires, is to do what He requires; as the will and the action consequent upon the will are connected by a natural necessity. Many are deceiving themselves, by saying and thinking that they are willing, but are unable to obey God, when the fact is, that they are able enough, but entirely unwilling to do his will.

11. Others deceive themselves, by supposing themselves to be pious, when in fact they do not possess even common honesty. They have been guilty of lying, fraud, and multitudes of sins, which have injured their neighbors; and yet they refuse to make confession and restitution. Even when they are in what they call their best frames of mind, they are overreaching and selfish in their dealings, and will perhaps defraud the Post-Office, by sending or receiving double letters, and paying single postage, or take any other selfish and unlawful means to promote their own interest, when they have the prospect of concealment and impunity.

IV. Without true submission salvation is naturally impossible.

1. Because God must and will govern the universe. This He will do, whether you consent to it or not. If He governs without your consent, and contrary to your will, you are of course rendered miserable by it; for his

government will continually conflict with your own desires and intentions; and being in direct opposition to your will, it will be a source of continual vexation and annoyance to you.

2. He will dispose of you for his own glory, whether you consent or not. Now if this conduct on his part, is not consented to by you--if his disposal of you is not that which you would make of yourself, you are rendered miserable by it of course. You cannot possibly be happy, only as your will perfectly coincides with his in relation to the disposal that is to be made of you. Unless it be the supreme choice and delight of your soul, to be disposed of for his glory, in whatever world it may fix your destiny, and under what circumstances soever your lot may be cast, you are not and cannot be happy under his government. If, on the contrary, you have a will of your own, and would make a different disposal of yourself, property, time, talents, or any thing which you possess, than that which is agreeable to the will of God, you are of course rendered wretched, by having your own feelings crossed, by one whom you cannot resist. You see, then, that it is naturally impossible for you to be saved, any farther than you are truly submissive to God.

3. It is naturally impossible that you should have peace, except your will is completely subdued to the will of God. When you become so dead to your own interests as to have no will of your own, except that the will of God should be done, then, and not till then, can your "peace be as a river, and your righteousness as the waves of the sea." Peace is opposed to war. War is a state of conflict. Every moral being, whose will is not in entire conformity with the will of God, is striving with his Maker. And it is certainly and naturally impossible that you should have peace, while your will is in a state of conflict with the will of God. He cannot yield to you. He ought not to do so. His will is supremely good, and should not be yielded up to gratify any being in the universe. Therefore, you must yield. Your will must be entirely subdued. You must come into such a state as to feel supreme complacency and delight in the will of God, not only in all other things, but in his will as it respects yourself, or your salvation is for ever and naturally impossible. God cannot possibly save you in any other way.

4. God has no right to save you, unless you are, in all things, submissive to his will. I have already said, that his will is supremely good. For this very

reason--He is bound to insist, that every moral being shall be entirely conformed to his will. In just so far, then, as you resist his will, He is bound to treat you as the enemy of the universe.

5. He cannot, by any possibility, save you, only as you are entirely conformed to his will. What is salvation? If salvation implies holiness and happiness, then it is self-evident, that He is entirely unable to save you in any other way, than by your being entirely conformed to his will. Suppose He should change his will, and for the sake of gratifying you, and to avoid a conflict between your will and his own, suppose he should submit to you, instead of your submitting to Him. This would do you no good; but would ruin Him and yourself too. The laws of his being would remain for ever the same; and He has no power to change them. He cannot by any possibility be happy any farther than He conforms to the laws of his own being. Supreme and universal benevolence, is in entire conformity with the laws of his being, and therefore naturally and necessarily constitutes his happiness. You are moral agents. If God should so alter your nature as to destroy your moral agency, He would render it impossible for you to be holy, or morally happy. But without a change in your very nature, happiness to you is as naturally impossible, without holiness, as it is to God. The fact is, there is but one possible rule of conduct, conformity to which can make a moral being happy, and that is the law of perfect and universal benevolence. As, therefore, God is love, or benevolence, it is absurd to say, that He can render a moral being happy, only so far as he is holy. For holiness is nothing else than exact conformity of heart and life to the nature and relations of moral beings.

V. With true submission salvation is naturally inevitable.

1. Because, let God do what He will with you, you cannot but be happy, if you are submissive. Let it be remembered, that submission is not a mere negative state of mind. It is by no means a passive state of the will. It is an active, joyful, supreme acquiescence and delight in the will of God. If, therefore, you are in a state of true submission to God, you are supremely pleased and delighted with whatever disposition God shall make of you and are therefore happy of course; whether in heaven or in hell, whether in heathen or in Christian lands, whether poor or rich, whether sick or in health. In whatever circumstances you may be, if you are truly submissive,

your "peace is as a river, and your righteousness as the waves of the sea." You are supremely blessed, because supremely pleased, gratified, and delighted, with the will and providence of God respecting you. Now what is this but salvation? What other idea can you form of salvation, than what is implied in this state of mind?

2. Because, whatever God does, or may do, would be just as you would have it, in all respects. If He should see it to be his duty to send you to hell, and certainly He will never send you there, unless He sees it to be his bounden duty to do so, this would be just as you would have it, and the very place which you would select for yourself, if left to your own choice in view of all the circumstances of the case. If you believed it to be God's duty to send you there, you would feel it to be your duty to consent to go there. If He should see that the interests of the universe demanded, and could be better promoted, by making you a monument of his justice than in any other way, and that, therefore, this would be the most economical disposition that He could make of you--that by sending you to hell, He could accomplish a greater good than by making any other disposition of you, this is the very election which you yourself would make, if in a state of entire submission to God.

3. If then salvation consists in holiness and happiness, true submission will put you in actual possession of salvation in any world. So that God Himself could not prevent your happiness, were you truly submissive to Him, although you were in the depths of hell. For even there you would shout forth his praise, for putting you there, and would be supremely delighted that you were in circumstances, in which you would be of the greatest possible service to the universe. Now, if to do good is your delight--if truly and perfectly benevolent, so that you find it more blessed to give than to receive--if truly or supremely desirous to do the utmost good in your power, put you in any possible circumstances, in any possible world, with the knowledge that you are now in circumstances to do the greatest possible good that can be done by you, and you are supremely blessed, delighted, yea, supremely gratified, to be just in those circumstances. Talk then of making you miserable! Why, it is for ever naturally impossible, while you remain in that state of mind. Happiness is a state of mind. All happiness and all misery belong to the mind, and are the natural and necessary result of conformity or non-conformity to the laws of our being. When in all things

we are submissive to God, the whole machinery of our minds works with a most divine sweetness, like an excellent machine, in which there is no friction, no jarring; but all is exquisitely balanced, and a most divine sweetness is shed over all the soul, in its harmonious results. It is like a sweet instrument, so exquisitely tuned and touched with such divine skill, that it breathes the very harmony of heaven. The mind, in a state of entire submission to God, not only harmonizes in all its own movements, but it also entirely harmonizes with the workings of all the machinery in the universe. God's mind, government, plans, and the minds of all holy beings, work together, with the most divine and exquisite harmony, whenever each mind exactly keeps its place; and the law of order is so fully realized, that there is not a point of friction, a note of discord, among all the holy minds in the universe. Why, we read of music in heaven. Do you suppose we shall need instruments there to create our music and feast us with their harmonies? Why, the true idea of music is this very harmony of mind with mind, of which I am speaking. Mind is so constituted, that when all its powers harmonize in action, and when all holy minds act precisely in accordance with their nature, it produces of necessity a universal harmony, a universal sweetness, and a ravishing delight, that needs not instruments and audible sounds to enable the mind to realize that which is intended by the music of heaven. Universal submission to God, is universal harmony, while on the other hand, opposition to the will of God is the friction and discord of the soul. There is an infernal grating, mutiny, and rebellion, of the mind, which naturally and necessarily produces misery. And while a holy soul is like an exquisite instrument that breathes forth nothing but the harmonies of heaven, a sinful soul is like a wretched discordant and infernal instrument, whose keys are touched with a diabolical agency, and groaning forth the very dissonance of hell.

REMARKS.

1. There is no submission any farther than there is true peace and happiness. If this is true, and certainly it is self-evident, how little submission is there in the world! If all the unhappiness, vexation, and misery of earth, is owing to a want of true submission to God, then there is certainly very little true submission.
2. A submissive soul can know what it is to agonize in prayer, and can know the pain of struggling with temptation; but these are not at all inconsistent with

perfect peace in God, and with that happiness that is the natural result of holiness; because this agony in prayer, and this painful struggle with temptation, are only emotions of the mind, and not at all inconsistent with the deep repose of the will in God. But, on the contrary, are evidences that the will is in a state of true submission to God. For, if the will were not in a state of submission to God, this earnest resistance would not be made to temptation. Nor would there be an agonizing struggle in the soul for the salvation of sinners.

3. No man has salvation, therefore, who is not really saved; that is--any farther than his will is subdued to the will of God. In this salvation consists; and it is in vain to talk about salvation, while that in which it consists is overlooked. Many persons entertain the hope of salvation, who self-evidently are not saved, and who, so far as human observation can go, are not likely to be saved. They are continually fretted and annoyed by the providences of God, and are never happy any farther than the providence of God favors their selfish schemes. Every thing else but vexes and displeases them. If the weather is not just as they would have it--if their business operations do not go just so as to favor their own interests--if their health and the health of their families are not in accordance with their selfish views and aims, they are rendered miserable, by what they call adverse providences of God. In short, the fact is, they have a will of their own. They have interests of their own. They have aims and ends, upon the accomplishment of which their happiness is dependent. If God's providence favors them in these respects, they are happy, and think they enjoy religion. But if otherwise, they are miserable, and think themselves to be highly virtuous if they do not go into downright open rebellion against God. They understand submission to mean nothing more than the absence of murmuring, complaining, and accusing God of wrong; and do not understand, that submission implies a delightful acquiescence, a sweet yielding, and delightful choosing, that in all respects the will of God should be done. Now it is manifest, that such persons understand salvation to consist more in a change of place, than in a change of mind--that to be taken to heaven, is to be saved--that to be pardoned is to have eternal life. But certainly this is an infinitely dreadful mistake. Heaven is a state of mind, and may be enjoyed in any world. Hence the saints, or truly submissive souls, are represented as already being in the enjoyment of eternal life. Hell, also, is a state of mind; and it does not require a change of place, to give the wicked a foretaste of the pains of hell. Why, then, talk of salvation, when you are not saved? Why talk of happiness, while you are not holy? Why hope for heaven, while you have

the spirit of hell?

4. An unsubdued will is conclusive evidence of an impenitent heart; or, to speak properly, I should say, an unsubdued will is nothing else than an impenitent heart. True submission and penitence, in a sinner, are the same thing. Now there are multitudes of professors of religion, who of course profess to be penitent, while at the same time, they continually manifest a very unsubdued will. They are not submissive either to God or man. They sometimes have emotions of sorrow. They weep and pray, and confess their sins; but to yield up their own will is out of the question. They know not what submission of will is. They are kept almost in a constant state of fermentation, rasping excitement, and distress, by the providence of God, and yet suppose themselves to be penitent. What oceans of delusion exist among professors of religion upon this subject!

5. This subject shows the immense importance of teaching children, at a very early period, lessons of true and unconditional submission to parental authority. Parents should remember, that they stand to very young children in the place of God. They should lay the hand of parental authority and influence upon the will at a very early period. If their will is not early subdued, it is not likely to be subdued at all. If unconditional and sweet submission to parental authority be not early learned, it will never be learned. And if submission to parental influence be not learned, it is almost certain, that no true submission to God or man will ever be attained. I have witnessed a great many cases of protracted seriousness and distress of mind on religious subjects, when, after all, there was not, and I fear is never like to be any thing of the peace and sweetness of unconditional submission to the will of God. On inquiry, I believe that I have found it to be universally true, that lessons of submission have never been learned by such persons, in early childhood.

6. You can see from this subject, how to account for the dealings of God with many persons. They are almost continually in a course of sore discipline. They are smitten, stripe upon stripe. Now in such cases we may rest assured, that there is some good reason for this, as "God does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." Under such chastisements, we often hear persons saying, that they cannot understand why they should be thus dealt with. They seem to think there is something very mysterious in God's dealings with them, and are ready to say, "What have I done, that I should be treated thus." Now this state of mind at once reveals the reason, and shows the necessity of such dealings on the part of

God. He sees that the will is not subdued; and if you want any other reason for his dealings, than that this course of providence is agreeable to his will, this is itself a sufficient reason why he should cross and disappoint you. It is indispensable to your salvation, that you should be supremely pleased with whatever is agreeable to his will. Now whatever his providence towards you may be, if you are not supremely pleased with it, if you ask for any other reason, why He has dealt so with you, than that so it has seemed good in his sight, this shows, that you are not submissive; that you have not entire confidence in his benevolence and wisdom; and that, therefore, He must give you the reasons of his conduct, before you will fully acquiesce in what He does. This demonstrates the necessity of crossing and re-crossing your path, until you will submit. God can never make you understand all the reasons for his conduct; and unless you have sufficient confidence in Him, and are sufficiently submissive to his will, to be happy in what He does; until you can know and apprehend the reasons for his conduct--you need to be, and must be chastised, until you unconditionally submit, or else be given up and sent to hell.

7. From this subject you may see, how great a blessing it is to be chastised of God, until we do submit, and that we ought most devoutly to beseech God not to spare us until our submission is perfect.

8. You see from this subject, what to think of sinners and backsliders, who live and prosper, without providential chastisements. "Whom I love I rebuke and chasten," says Christ. "If ye are without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons." If then you are without chastisement, especially if you do not live and walk with God, do not infer, from your temporal prosperity, that God approves of your course of life, or that you are the favorite of heaven. But on the contrary, you have reason to fear, that you are given up of God; that God has abandoned you to your own ways, and left you to fill up the measure of your iniquity.

9. You see from this subject, the indispensable necessity of thorough discrimination in respect to what does and what does not constitute true Christian submission. Some persons have seemed to suppose, that true Christian submission consisted in a kind of dreamy, heartless indifference to what they call the mysterious sovereignty of God. They suppose that submission respects foreordination and decrees; and seem to have no idea, that true submission consists in voluntary conformity to the revealed will of God. This class of persons are

never for making any efforts, to save and sanctify the souls of men. They think this is to be left with the sovereignty of God, and that submission respects rather the unrevealed, than the revealed will of God. Now it is impossible that we should submit to the unrevealed will of God, for the obvious reason, that we do not know what it is, and therefore cannot possibly submit to it. It is, therefore, a delusion, for the man who neglects scrupulously to conform himself to all the revealed will of God, to suppose himself submissive to the sovereignty of God.

10. True submission, and entire consecration, are the same thing. In other words, no man is truly submissive to God, any farther than he is consecrated to God. And it is very obvious, that there can be no true submission, unless for the time being there is universal submission. A man certainly does not submit to God, as God in one thing, who at the same time refuses submission in something else. It is possible that the same mind may be submissive at one time and not at another. But it is certainly impossible that the same mind should both submit to and rebel against God, at the same time. Present submission then is present consecration; continued submission is continued consecration, and permanent submission is permanent consecration, or sanctification to God. Do you know what this is by your own experience?

[Back to Top](#)

Love Worketh No Ill

Lecture XXVII

March 3, 1841

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 13:10: "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

In discussing this subject I shall show:

I. What the love that constitutes true religion is not.

II. What it is.

III. Who is to be regarded as our neighbor.

IV. Why love worketh no ill to our neighbor.

I. What the love that constitutes true religion is not.

1. It is not natural affection, or the love of kindred. This needs no comment. The absence of natural affection, as mentioned in the Bible, is evidence of a high degree of depravity; but its exercise is not holiness.

2. It is not the love that exists between the sexes. This is only a modification of natural affection.

3. It is not the love of complacency. Complacency is an emotion of delight in its object. It is an involuntary state of mind, and exists naturally and often necessarily, when an object calculated to excite emotions of complacency is present to the mind. Being an involuntary state of mind, it often has no moral character at all, and when any degree of moral character is to be ascribed to complacency, it is because the emotions are indirectly under the influence of the will. Emotions are consequent upon thoughts, and arise spontaneously in the mind, when the attention is directed to the deep consideration of any subject. And as the will controls the attention, it indirectly controls the emotions. And emotions of complacency or displacency have moral character only as they are indirectly produced by the action of the will. Complacency may respect a great many different objects:

(1.) Personal beauty. We are so constituted, that the presence of beautiful objects naturally excites emotions of complacency or delight in its object. The presence of a beautiful human being naturally and certainly excites emotions of delight, where no feeling of prejudice, envy, or other selfish consideration, begets an opposite state of emotion.

(2.) Complacency may respect other physical accomplishments, such as an elegant form, dignified deportment, elegant manners, good breeding, and multitudes of similar things. In such things we naturally take delight, and emotions of complacency naturally and certainly

exist in the mind, under the consideration of such objects, unless some selfish or envious reason prevents.

(3.) It may respect intellectual endowments, a towering intellect, a lofty imagination, great learning, great eloquence; and innumerable such like things may naturally excite emotions of complacency in their objects.

(4.) It may respect benefits received or expected. We naturally feel emotions of complacency in those who befriend us, or grant us great favors; and therefore men may exercise very strong emotions of love to God on account of favors received or expected from Him, without one particle of true religion; but just as naturally as similar emotions of complacency might be exercised towards any other benefactor, without reference to any other feature of his character than that which is made by the bestowment of the particular favors which excite gratitude and complacency.

(5.) Complacency may respect and be founded in a similarity of views and intentions. Every man knows it to be true, that he naturally feels complacency in those whose views, aims, and objects of pursuit correspond with his own, unless it be in cases where a similarity of aims produce a clashing of interests, as is sometimes the case with competitors in business. We see men of the same political creed having complacency in each other; and so we often see among professing Christians, members of the same sect, often exercise a strong affection for or complacency in each other, solely on account of the fact of a similarity of views and prejudices. But in this there is not a particle of true piety.

(6.) Or, complacency may be a mere reciprocation, a mere loving of those who love us, and because they love us. But there is no piety in this. The Savior says, "If ye love those that love you, what thank have ye? Do not even sinners love those that love them?"

(7.) Or it may respect character, whether good or bad. We often see individuals exercising a high degree of complacency in each other, because they are associated in vice. On the other hand, we often see persons exercising a high degree of complacency in each other, on

account of their virtues. Men are so constituted, that they never can conscientiously approve of a wicked character; but on the contrary, they must always approve of right character. And all moral beings in the absence of selfish reasons for a contrary feeling will naturally experience emotions of delight in right character, when it is the subject of contemplation. But emotions of love or delight in right character do not constitute piety. Nor are they any certain evidence of piety. There is not a moral agent in the universe who knows what the character of God is, who does not approve it. Nor one who may not, and perhaps does not, when viewing the character of God in the abstract, experience strong emotions of delight in the moral beauty of his character, upon the same principles that he would feel emotions of delight in personal beauty.

(8.) It may respect the natural attributes of a being. Thus the wickedest of men may experience the strongest emotions of admiration and delight, in view of the natural attributes of God, as manifested in the works of creation, without a particle of that love to God that constitutes true religion.

4. It is not a fondness for a particular person. The love that constitutes the essence of true religion does not respect moral character at all. Nor is it complacency in particular individuals, or a feeling of love of any kind for particular individuals, to the neglect of others. God's holiness consists in universal benevolence to all beings, irrespective of their moral character; and for this reason, it led Him to give his only begotten Son to die for his enemies.

5. Nor is this love an emotion, or mere feeling of any kind.

6. It is not a mere experience, or something in which we seem to ourselves to be passive, as we do in the exercise of emotions. A false philosophy has confounded emotions with true religion, under the name of religious affections. And it is astonishing and alarming, to witness the extent to which this mistake and delusion is entertained by mankind. Hence they speak of experiencing religion, and speak of religion as something in which they are passive, something springing up in their own minds involuntarily. They speak of experiencing such and such states of mind, and regard

religion as something to be experienced, rather than as something to be done. Indeed the mistake seems to be almost universal, that religion belongs to the emotions, or feelings, rather than to the actings of the will. Hence, complacency in God and in Christians, because they are holy, is generally regarded, not only as evidence of piety, but as constituting the very essence of piety itself. And multitudes of professors of religion are supposing themselves to be highly spiritual, simply because they are in the exercise of lively emotions of gratitude for favors received, of complacency in God, on account of benefits conferred, and of complacency in Christians because they are Christians. Now let me say, that these emotions may be the result of a right state of the will, or of the exercise of that love which constitutes true religion, or they may not. They do not in any case constitute the essence of true religion, and may often exist without it. And what ungodly man, who has ever been in the habit of intense thinking upon religious subjects, cannot testify to the truth of this from his own experience. The fact is, that religion is something to be done, and not merely to be experienced; something in which man is voluntarily active, and not passive. Indeed the foundation of all true religion consists in voluntary action, and not in emotion. By voluntary action I mean, of course, the actings of the voluntary power or the will.

II. What the love that constitutes true religion is.

1. I have just said, it always belongs to the will; that is, it consists in acts of the will.
2. It is a state of the will, in opposition to a single or a series of volitions. There is an important distinction to be here noticed, between choice and volition. Choice is the mind's election or selection of an end. Volition consists in those efforts or actions of the will which are put forth to accomplish the end chosen. A man chooses to be a merchant. In obedience to this choice his will puts forth all those volitions that put his body and mind in motion, and that are necessary to accomplish the object chosen. Choice, then, is a state of mind in opposition to those volitions that are exercised for obtaining the end chosen.
3. The love, then, that constitutes true religion, is a fixed, permanent choice, or state of the will. It should be understood, that it is a state, abiding choice, or preference; and from the very laws of the mind has a controlling

influence. If you choose to go to the city of New-York, this choice will naturally and certainly beget those volitions and states of mind, and actions of the body that will accomplish this end, if it is within your power.

4. The love that constitutes true religion is the choice of a supreme end or object of pursuit, or a selection of the great and ultimate end of existence. It is a supreme, permanent, controlling preference or choice of the mind.

5. It is benevolence or good-willing; the exact opposite of selfishness. Selfishness is the supreme preference or choice of self-gratification, as the grand end of life. It is a choosing or willing our own gratification. This is the foundation of all sin, and the carryings out of this consist in those volitions, states of mind, emotions, and bodily actions that make up the history of wicked men. The love mentioned in the text, and that constitutes true religion, is that state of mind demanded by the law of God. Hence, it is said in the text, that "love is the fulfilling of the law." It is the mind's supreme election or choice, of the universal good of being, as the supreme end of existence. And it respects the good of all beings capable of doing or enjoying good. This supremely respects the being of God, as He is capable of doing and enjoying infinitely more good than all other beings. It therefore prefers his good, happiness, and glory, to all other things in the universe. Remember, it is benevolence in God and not complacency in God, that constitutes the foundation of all true religion. Complacency in God is virtue, when it is produced by a virtuous state of the will, but not otherwise. Complacency in the character of God, is often mentioned in the Bible as constituting virtue; but it should always be remembered, that emotions of complacency in God and other holy beings, when they are virtuous at all, instead of constituting the foundation and essence of virtue, are virtue only in its lowest form. I repeat it, the foundation of all virtue is benevolence to God and to the universe. It is good willing and doing, in opposition to mere good feeling. I wish to get this idea distinctly before your minds, because there are so many mistakes upon this subject.

6. But here let me say, that the love which constitutes true religion is disinterested love. And here again let me beg you not to misunderstand me. For oftentimes, when we speak of disinterested love, it is manifest that we are understood to mean disinterested good emotions, rather than disinterested good willing. When it is said that disinterested love consists in

loving God for what He really is, it often seems to be meant, that we are to exercise complacency in God, on account of his character, and this complacency is represented as disinterested love; but this is a grand mistake. To love God for what He is, and with that love which constitutes true religion, is to love Him with the love of benevolence, to will his good, his glory, and happiness. Now complacency in his character will naturally and certainly exist where there is true benevolence toward Him, and as I have already said, it may exist where there is no benevolence at all, when his character is viewed as it may be, as a mere abstraction. But let it be forever remembered, that true religion consists in benevolence to God and to men, and to all beings capable of loving or receiving good. This benevolence does not respect personal character, but regards the good of every moral and every sentient being, in proportion to its relative value as that is apprehended by the mind, whether sinful or holy. It longs for the salvation of the wicked as much as for the salvation of the righteous. This is manifestly the temper and spirit of God. This is the spirit of Christ, and this is the essence and substance of true godliness wherever it exists. It would not wantonly injure a fly nor tread upon a worm. It regards happiness as a real good. It longs for the diffusion of universal holiness among all moral agents, and of universal enjoyment among all sentient beings. God delights Himself in the happiness of the little chirping birds, and bounding lambs, and leaping fishes, and all the multitudes of animal existences with which the universe is teeming. So every benevolent mind has chosen the promotion of universal good as the supreme end of life. Consequently its volitions, thoughts, and actions are in deep harmony and sympathy with God, and directed to the same end to which He directs his efforts.

III. Who is to be regarded as our neighbor.

1. We are to regard all moral beings as our neighbors, in whatever country or in whatever world they may exist. We are to regard their interests and happiness according to their relative value. This cannot reasonably, and probably will not be doubted.
2. All sentient beings are to be regarded as our neighbors, all connected with us in the great chain of being. And the good of mere animals is to be regarded and treated by us according to its relative value. The beasts of the field--the fowls of the air--the fishes of the sea--every thing that has life and

breath, all are to be regarded as our neighbors.

3. Especially those moral beings most immediately within our reach, and who are the most naturally and certainly affected by our influence--those whose geographical proximity to us brings them within our immediate neighborhood, in a most emphatic sense. Our families, and those whose habitations are most contiguous to ours, who live in the same town, county, state, or nation--these are to be regarded as especially our neighbors, not to the neglect or annihilation of our relation to the human family and to the universe. But to those more within our reach, we are under special obligations, whether they be men or mere animals. Every sentient being within our reach, is to be regarded as emphatically our neighbor.

IV. Why this love worketh no ill.

1. Because, as it belongs to the will and therefore naturally controls the actions of both body and mind, it will work no ill to its neighbor. As it directs the thoughts, it will not think evil of a neighbor. As it consists in choice, and therefore directs the volitions, it will not suffer volitions that shall work ill to its neighbor. As through the volitions it controls the outward actions, it cannot work ill to its neighbor.

2. Because it has no tendency to work ill to our neighbor--

(1.) It respects a neighbor's rights, and aims at securing instead of trampling upon them.

(2.) It respects a neighbor's piety, and endeavors by all possible means to make him holy as a means of making him happy. It regards his holiness and happiness as a great good, and is not reckless of the influence it exerts, either to promote or destroy a neighbor's piety.

(3.) It regards the interests and well-being of a neighbor in all respects.

(4.) Especially does it respect the rights, piety, and happiness of those with whom we are most nearly in contact, and who for this reason are more immediately under our influence.

(5.) Benevolence omits no known duty, whereby our neighbor's interest may suffer, and therefore does not by omission work ill to its

neighbor.

(6.) It does not omit any duty, whereby he is stumbled, and led through imitation of our example or in other ways to fall into sin.

(7.) As it consists in good-willing, or in choosing the universal good of being as the supreme end of life, it will of course beget those volitions and actions, that will promote the good of all around us, and especially of those who are near, and most immediately affected by our conduct.

In the 13th chapter of first Corinthians, the Apostle describes this love as the foundation and sum of all virtue; and after asserting in the strongest language, that no faith or work is of any value without it, he mentions several of its prominent characteristics, with the manifest design of distinguishing that which constitutes true religion from every thing else.

Our translation calls it charity. The original word is the same as that which is rendered love in this text. The same word is uniformly used in the original for that state of mind that constitutes true religion, or the love required by the law of God. This love, He says, is "patient and long suffering." And who does not know, that we are naturally very patient and long suffering towards those whose happiness is very dear to us, and toward whom we feel truly benevolent. Mere complacency is fitful and evanescent, and depends so much upon the particular exhibition made to our mind at the time, as to be transitory from its very nature. See the complacency that parents have in their children. When they are sweet, and smiling, and lovely, the parent is exceedingly delighted with them. But if they become ill-natured, and hateful, here another exhibition is made to the mind, which, instead of exciting complacency, begets impatience and fretfulness. Just so a mere complacency in God will often be exceedingly fitful and of short duration, as the ever varying course of his providence exhibits Him to our minds as robed in smiles or clothed with frowns. But benevolence is not subject to these changes; because it has not its foundation in the moral character, in the naturally pleasing or displeasing manifestations that are made to the mind; but it is good-willing. It is a patient, persevering, supreme disposition to promote the good of its

object.

A second characteristic named by the Apostle is kindness. "Charity suffereth long and is kind." This is of course a characteristic of benevolence, or good-will.

A third characteristic is, that it "envieth not." Envy is an emotion of unhappiness in view of the prosperity of others. Now as the love that constitutes true religion consists in benevolence, it is impossible that it should consist with envy. Benevolence cannot be disturbed and made unhappy by the prosperity of its object. Envy is, therefore, the very opposite of true religion, and is the offspring of hell. An envious man is "of his father the devil, and the lusts of his father he will do."

A fourth characteristic of this love is, that it "vaunteth not itself," or, as rendered in the margin, it is not rash. It is mild and amiable, and not rough and head-strong.

A fifth characteristic of this love is, that it "is not puffed up." It is not swelling, and pompous, and showy, and Pharisaical, ostentatious, and proud; but is exactly the reverse of all this.

A sixth characteristic is, that it "doth not behave itself unseemly." True politeness consists in the practice of benevolence. And when wicked men affect to be truly polite, they affect to be truly benevolent. They are, to be sure, hypocritical in this; but still, it remains a truth, that true politeness manifests itself in a disposition to make every body happy. So that one of the characteristics of true religion is true politeness. It "doth not behave itself unseemly." There is a natural urbanity and courteousness that is always a characteristic of true benevolence. True religion does not need the polish of a dancing school, or to ape the manners of nobility, or the most refined classes of society, in order to exhibit genuine politeness. Who doubts that Jesus Christ was truly polite? His benevolence led Him to seek the comfort and happiness of all around Him. He sought both their temporal and their spiritual good. When at a feast, he chose not the chief seat for Himself; but gave others the preference. His

benevolence exhibited itself in making as little trouble wherever He went as possible; and consequently when in the house of Martha and Mary, He manifested no disposition to have the sisters give up their time to preparing good dishes for his entertainment. But He commended Mary for listening to his instructions, and reproved Martha for giving herself up to carefulness for his entertainment. Take any person you please, and let him be filled with the love of God, and he will naturally and certainly exhibit a lovely exterior instead of that which is unseemly. If riding in a stage coach, if in a steam boat, a railroad car, at a public house, at home, or abroad, in public, or in the family circle, he will exhibit a disposition to accommodate, to prevent all unhappiness, and all sin, and to make every body comfortable, and holy, and happy. He will not be boorish and unmannerly, rough, outrageous, and unseemly; but will exhibit that wisdom that cometh down from heaven, which is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

A seventh characteristic is, that it "seeketh not her own." Its supreme object is the promotion of the universal good and happiness of all. Of course it will not be selfish, but will manifest itself in the most assiduous endeavors, to make all around as comfortable, and as happy, and as holy, as possible.

An eighth characteristic is, it "is not easily provoked." Of course benevolence will not easily quarrel with its object. It is not quickly impatient, and ready to scold, but is extremely calm and forbearing.

A ninth characteristic is, that it "thinketh no evil." It not only does not meditate any evil, but does not surmise or suspect evil where all appearances are right. A selfish mind is always suspecting hypocrisy in others, because it is conscious of hypocrisy in itself. A hypocrite, a liar, a knave, or dishonest man, is apt of course to suspect others, because he naturally judges others by himself. But an honest, upright, benevolent mind, thinketh no evil, unless there is some appearance of evil.

A tenth characteristic is, that it "speaketh no evil." This is not especially mentioned by the Apostle in this connection, but it is a doctrine abundantly taught in the Bible. And if it were not, the very nature of true benevolence, renders it certain, that it speaketh no evil. Speaking evil, is speaking either truth or falsehood, which is prejudicial to the character of any one, with a selfish intention, and when the circumstances of the case do not demand such speaking as a dictate of benevolence. Now benevolence is the choice of the universal good of being. It is therefore impossible that benevolence should be guilty of evil speaking. It is tender of every man's reputation as of the apple of its own eye, and would as soon pluck out its own eyes, as to inflict a needless wound upon the character of any one.

Another characteristic is, that it "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth." As all iniquity is injurious to the universe, benevolence must deplore it of course, and cannot rejoice in it. But as truth is the instrument of universal good, benevolence must of course rejoice in the truth.

The Apostle goes on to say it, "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." I cannot enlarge upon these particulars. He concludes by saying, charity or love "never faileth;" that is, it abideth. From its very nature, it is a state of mind, and is not fitful and evanescent like emotions. The emotions of the mind are naturally like an effervescence, thrown into an excitement, and then naturally and quickly subside. On the contrary, "charity never faileth." It is the supreme, deliberate choice of the mind, or abiding, permanent state of the will; instead of that feverish excitement which people talk of experiencing, and which they falsely denominate true religion.

REMARKS.

1. From this subject we learn the delusion of an Antinomian religion. Vast multitudes of professors of religion suppose religion to consist in frames and feelings, instead of good-willing. They can relate what they call a good experience. They can talk of their views, and raptures, and peace of mind; and in these things they manifestly suppose true religion to consist. Now, I have already

said, and wish here to repeat it, that as these frames consist in emotions, and are only indirectly under the power of the will, they are the very lowest forms of virtue, and doubtless may exist, where there is no true religion at all. They may arise solely out of a mistaken view of God's character and relations, and of our own character and relations. The Universalist doubtless exercises the love of complacency toward the God which he worships. The Antinomian feels complacency in God, as he understands his character. Thus every form of enthusiasm, fanaticism, and delusion, may be united with complacency in an imaginary God. Indeed it is very easy to see, that almost any possible or conceivable state of the emotions, or mere feelings, may be produced, by mistaken views of things. Now as the mere feelings or emotions of the mind depend upon the views and opinions which are entertained by the mind, very little dependence can be placed upon them, even as evidences of true piety. Much less should it be supposed, that true piety consists in them. Many persons are carried away with dreams, and entertain the strangest and most absurd opinions on religious subjects; but their emotions will be found to correspond with their views, thoughts and opinions. And these emotions will sometimes be exceedingly deep and overpowering, and it matters not at all whether these opinions are true or false. Persons will feel just as deeply in a dream, in view of the most absurd and ridiculous things that a dreaming mind can imagine, as if those things were actual realities. Now it would be strange indeed if the reality and depth of these emotions should be depended upon as evidence of the reality of their objects. The solemn fact is, that there is a great, very common, but ruinous mistake upon this subject, in making religion to consist in emotions, and what are very commonly termed affections, instead of consisting, as it really does, in the state and actions of the will.

It appears to me, that Pres. Edwards has committed a sad mistake upon this subject, in confounding the sensibility with the will, and has laid a foundation for a vast amount of delusion.

And here let me be understood. Emotions, or frames and feelings, are the certain and necessary results of a right state of the will, or of the benevolence or goodwill that constitutes true religion. If the will is right, it will direct the attention of the mind to the consideration of those subjects that will naturally and necessarily beget lively and deep emotions of gratitude, complacency, godly sorrow, and all those states of mind of which Christians speak, and which they are so apt to conceive as constituting true religion. But these constitute the

happiness, rather than the virtue of the mind. They are rather the reward of holiness than holiness itself. To be sure, they are virtuous so far as they are indirectly under the influence of the will. But they are only virtuous on that account, and are so, therefore, in no other sense than thoughts, and the decisions of conscience may be virtuous. Thought is the spontaneous & necessary acting of mind when the will directs the attention to an object of thought. The decisions of conscience are the necessary decisions of reason when the attention of the mind is directed by the will, to a consideration of those subjects that come under the jurisdiction of conscience. Both the thoughts and the decisions of conscience are necessary, when the attention of the mind is thus employed by the will. These actions of the mind are, therefore, moral actions, in the same sense that the outward or bodily actions are moral actions. The muscles move at the bidding of the will. And whenever any state of mind, or motion of the body, is under the control of the will, there is a sense in which these actions have moral character. But separate them from the actions of the will, and they have no moral character at all. Now if the will be right, there is a sense in which the thoughts, and decisions of conscience, and outward actions may be virtuous; and if the will be wrong, there is a sense in which they are all vicious.

It should, however, be borne continually in mind, that the praise or blameworthiness lies in the voluntary actions of the mind, or in the decisions of the will; and, properly speaking, in the decisions of the will alone.

2. From this subject it is easy to see, that where there is true religion, there must of necessity be a corresponding life. The emotions do not control the actions of body or mind. Consequently, if religion consisted in emotion, it might exist in the mind in its reality and strength, without being evinced in the outward conduct. For we know, that men often exercise the deepest feelings and emotions on subjects, while they refuse or neglect to act in conformity with their feelings. But the same cannot be said of the actions of the will. Men always act outwardly in conformity with their volitions. Their outward actions are connected with the actings of their will, by a natural necessity. Good-willing, therefore, or true religion, always manifests itself in a holy life. Inaction and supineness in religion are absurd and impossible, where true religion exists. Benevolence, or good-willing, must produce action and good action, by a natural necessity. It is therefore absurd and ridiculous to say, that a man has true religion, and yet is not employed in doing good, where he is able to act at all. Remember, I beseech you, that religion is benevolence or good-willing, and not mere feeling or emotion;

and because it is good-willing, it necessarily produces good acting. So that the very essence of religion is activity, exertion, or effort of heart and life, to promote universal good. A religion of supineness is therefore not the religion of Christ. Antinomian inaction is as opposite to true religion as light is to darkness. And a person can no more be truly religious, and give himself up to inaction, and ecstasy, and peace, and joy, than he can do any thing else that involves a contradiction. Religion consists in the state or actings of the heart, or will; and is, therefore, in its very nature, essential activity. I mean as I say. Religion is activity itself. It is the mind, willing the good of universal being.

3. You see also the great delusion of making religion to consist in a complacent love of God and of Christians. I have already said, that complacency is an emotion, and where the will or heart is right, will always be exercised towards God. But it is rather the effect, than the essence of true religion. It appears to me, that many mistake in supposing, that the love of the brethren, which is so largely insisted on in the Bible, is complacency rather than benevolence. But a little consideration will show, that the love of the brethren and Christians, insisted upon by Christ and his Apostles, is benevolence, and not complacency. It is spoken of as the same kind of love with which Christ loved us. Hence, it is said, that "as Christ laid down his life for us, we should be ready to lay down our lives for the brethren." But the love of God and of Christ for the world was benevolence, and not complacency. It was a love exercised to enemies, and not to those that were holy, and consequently must have been benevolence.

4. We see the mistake of those who excuse themselves for the want of love to the brethren, because they say they do not see in them the image of Christ. The love that we exercise to the image of Christ is complacency. And this excuse shows that those who make it suppose the love required of them to be complacency and not benevolence; and that, consequently, where there is no holiness manifest, there is no obligation to exercise love. Now this is a ruinous mistake. For the love which we are required to exercise to the brethren is good-will, or benevolence, and therefore does not respect their moral character. So that a true Christian exercises deep and permanent affection for the brethren, whatever may be their spiritual state. There are many persons who seem to give themselves up to the most censorious and denunciatory speaking of heartless professors of religion, and seem to think, that this is all well enough, because they are all backsliders or hypocrites. Now, I would humbly ask, is this benevolence? Is this love?

To this benevolence the love of complacency is added, where there is a foundation for it, or a manifestation of holy character. And complacency will render it still more certain, that he who exercises it will avoid all evil speaking. But benevolence itself, where there is no manifestation of holy character, as I have already shown, will naturally avoid speaking evil, or "working ill to our neighbor."

5. You see from this subject, the delusion of those who profess to be religious and yet transact business upon selfish principles. Selfishness and benevolence are exact and eternal opposites. Said a professional man to me, not long since, "I have been surprised, that the religion of those who have been long religious does not do more to overcome their selfishness." This is just the same thing as to express surprise, that those who have long professed to be religious have no religion. The fact is, that the very beginning of religion, or the new birth itself, is the overthrow of selfishness, as the reigning principle of the mind. It is the establishment in the mind, as a permanent state of the will, of the antagonist principle of benevolence. Hence, it is said, that "whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world," and that "he who is born of God cannot sin, for his seed remaineth in him, so that he cannot sin, because he is born of God." By this I do not understand the Apostle to mean, that a soul that is born of God cannot be seduced into occasional sins, by the power of temptation; but that he cannot live in sin. He cannot transact his daily business upon selfish principles, which are the essence of all sin. It is therefore absurd and impossible, that a benevolent or truly religious mind should transact business upon selfish principles.

6. Love, or benevolence, and its necessary fruits, is the whole of religion. I say necessary fruits, because the actions of the mind and body are connected with the actions of the will, by a natural necessity; so that the fruits of holiness are the necessary products of a right state of the heart, or will.

7. Where there are no fruits there is no true religion. It is in vain for unfruitful souls, Antinomians, and persons who sit down in inaction, to pretend to be pious. They talk in vain of their views, their experience, and their raptures. Unless the fruits of benevolence, or good-willing, are upon them; unless, like Christ, they go about doing good, when they are able to go about at all, it is a delusion and nonsense for them to suppose, that they are truly religious.

8. We see from this subject the delusion of those individuals, and churches, and ecclesiastical bodies, who seem to be given up in a great measure to

ensoriousness and vituperation, engaged it would seem, in little else than watching for the haltings and the errors of their brethren, and who seem to be abandoned to a spirit of fretfulness rather than of love or good willing. In this remark, I do not of course mean to accuse the whole Church of being in this state, but speak of those who really are in this state.

9. You see the delusion of those editors of news papers, whose columns savor of gabble rather than of the sweet benevolence of God. Look into their pages: is that the "love that worketh no ill to his neighbor"? Why, instead of working no ill to his neighbor, it would work the ruin of the world if people had any confidence in what they read in such periodicals. No thanks to some of the editors of the present day, if their papers do not work unlimited mischief. It will only be because the readers have ceased to confide in them. I do not of course design this remark to be of universal application, but that there are lamentable cases to attest the truth of this remark, will be acknowledged with sorrow by those who truly love the Lord.

10. We see the delusion of those whose religion consists in desiring the happiness of those who are at a distance, while it neglects the happiness of those in its immediate neighborhood. Multitudes of individuals will go to the Monthly Concert and pray for the heathen, will give money to send the Gospel or the Bible to the heathen, but their prayers seem always to overlook those right around them, and who are more immediately and necessarily affected by their conduct. Their own domestics or clerks, or laborers, are perhaps daily rendered unhappy by their malevolence and peevishness. They are left in a great measure unprayed for, unwarned, unblessed by them. They seem to be engaged in anything but promoting the happiness of those within their reach, and yet suppose themselves to be truly religious. But herein is a great delusion. It is the religion of the imagination and desires. It is like the piety of a man who contemplates going on a foreign mission--feels deeply as he says for the heathen, but never bestirs himself to save the souls of men at home. He can go through with his education as lazily as a drone. He can let his own class-mates and perhaps his own room-mate go down to hell unblessed and unwarned. He can let his own neighborhood and his own kindred sink down to death and hell around him, and yet imagine himself to feel truly benevolent and to long for the salvation of the heathen; never promote piety and revivals of religion at home, and yet work himself into the belief that he shall do it abroad. But again I say this is the religion of the imagination, and a deep and ruinous delusion. Let such

a man go on to heathen ground and be surrounded with the naked and cold realities of heathenism, and he will find at last his sad mistake; and were it not for his pride of character and fear of the loss of reputation, he would soon find his way back to Christian lands, and the repose and indolence of a contemplative life. How many there are who are in the constant neglect of the happiness of all in their immediate neighborhood, whose prayers and efforts seem always to overleap the heads of all within their reach, and light down upon distant and unknown lands. Now true benevolence embosoms all mankind, but it always concerns itself for the time being, to secure the well-being of those most immediately within its reach. Those that compose the domestic circle are the objects upon which it necessarily and primarily exerts itself. Through these it flows abroad to all that are near, especially, and ceases not till it reaches those that are afar off. In this sense it is true that "charity begins at home," but not in the sense in which this is generally understood. This saying is generally supposed to mean that charity regards self-interest first and most, but the very fact that the term charity is used which is synonymous with benevolence, shows that the true meaning of this saying is, that benevolence begins by seeking the happiness of those in its immediate neighborhood, and continues to extend itself until it reaches those that are afar off.

11. The kind of religion or rather of irreligion of which I have just been speaking would be of no benefit if the world were full of it. Suppose that all mankind had this kind of religion, each one desiring and praying for the happiness of those beyond his reach, but neglecting and trampling upon the happiness of all within his reach. Who then would be happy? Every one employed in making those immediately in contact with him unhappy, and only seeking the happiness of those at a distance, who are in their turn rendering themselves and those immediately around them unhappy while they are desiring and praying for the happiness of others at a distance. Such religion as this would leave the world in wretchedness if every man on earth possessed it.

12. You can see how real religion makes its possessor happy. There is a sweetness and a divine relish in the exercise of benevolence itself, and in addition to this the emotions of the mind will, ordinarily, be in accordance with the state of the will or heart. And thus true religion necessarily results in the happiness of its possessor.

13. You see what a truly religious family, neighborhood or universe would be.

Every one employed in making those around him happy to the full extent of his power. A most divine religion this! Take but a single family, where benevolence is the law of every inmate. See the husband and wife, brothers and sisters, and all the inmates of the family, how careful they are not to injure each other's piety, or unnecessarily to wound each other's feelings--how kindly they watch over each other for good--how watchful they are to each other's interests and happiness--how pleased each one is to deny himself to promote the general good. The law of kindness dwells ever on their tongues. Such a family is a little picture of heaven. Wherever such a family is found, it is an oasis, or a little green spot in the midst of a vast wilderness of moral death.

14. You see the utter unreasonableness of infidelity. Infidels affect to disbelieve the necessity of a change of heart. But what do they mean? do they not know by their own observation that mankind are by nature supremely selfish? And can they be happy without a radical change of heart? A world of selfish beings make up heaven! The idea is absurd and ridiculous. It is self-evident that without that change of heart which consists in a radical change of character from selfishness to benevolence, mankind can never be saved.

15. You see from this subject how to detect false hopes. False professors are either inactive in religion, or manifest a legal spirit in opposition to the spirit of love. There are two extremes that should always be well guarded in religion. The one is antinomianism, which satisfies itself with frames and feelings while it makes little or no exertion for the salvation of the world. The other is a legal zeal that bustles about often harshly and furiously and professes to be working for God, when there is a manifest dash of bitterness and misanthropy in the countenance and manner and life. This is not the love that worketh no ill to his neighbor. It is not the benevolence and spirit of Christ; and all such religion is spurious however zealous, however active, and however apparently useful it may be.

16. Spurious conversions often throw the mind into a state of fermentation and deep feeling which of course soon subsides. But true conversion consists in a change of choice, and is of course an abiding state of mind. Where there are revivals of religion the chaff may be easily discovered from the wheat when the effervescence of excited emotion has passed by. You can then see whether the will is under the control of truth. While the emotions are strong they may induce a series of volitions which would lead for the time being to the conclusion that

the will or heart is really changed, but as soon as these emotions subside, if the heart is not changed, the selfish preference will again resume its control; and just in proportion as the excitement ceases will it become apparent in the man's life, and spirit, and temper, and especially in his business transactions, that his selfish heart or preference is not changed, and that he is still an unregenerate man. The fact that the emotions very often induce volition, and many times a series of volitions inconsistent with the governing preference of the will or heart, renders it impossible for us, in the midst of the excitement of a revival, to distinguish clearly between true and false conversions; but as the excitement subsides, if we are willing to be guided by the word of God, we can clearly distinguish between those that are born again, and those that are not. And we are bound so to distinguish, and to deal faithfully, and promptly, and energetically with those who are seen still to remain in selfishness.

17. You see the vast importance of distinguishing that which constitutes true religion, and all those frames and feelings upon which so much stress is laid in many portions of the Church, who are yet inactive in the cause of Christ and who suppose themselves holy simply because they know not what holiness is. They do not understand that their frames are the result of their views and opinions, and whether their opinions are right or wrong, cannot be known by their frames or emotions, but by the actings of their will. They may have love in the form of emotion--they may have peace, and joy, and even ecstasy in the form of emotions, without one particle of true religion. And if they are not really in a state of efficient good-willing--if they are not engaged in doing good, in promoting individual and general happiness to the extent of their power, it is absolutely certain that they are not truly religious. O that this were understood! O that it were known that religion is benevolence--the love that is willing to lay down the life for its neighbor! How much that is called religion is working continual ill to its neighbor! But blessed be God, true religion worketh no ill to its neighbor. Give me then religious neighbors, and I am content. Give me irreligious neighbors, and I will try to do them good. Let him hear that hath an ear to hear. Amen.

[Back to Top](#)

Self Denial
Lecture XXVIII
March 17, 1841

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Texts.--Luke 9:23: "He said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."

In this discussion I shall show:

- I. What self-denial is not.*
- II. What it is.*
- III. What is implied in it.*
- IV. What is not taking up the cross.*
- V. What is taking it up.*
- VI. What is implied in it.*
- VII. What following after Christ is not.*
- VIII. What it is.*
- IX. What is implied in it.*
- X. That these are indispensable conditions of salvation.*

I. What self-denial is not.

1. It is not the giving up of one form of selfishness for the sake of another form. In other words, it is not the triumph of one form of selfishness over another form of the same principle, &c.

(1.) Breaking off from any form of sin, for fear of the consequences of indulgence to self, is not self-denial; for this, after all, is only consulting self-interest.

(2.) Breaking off from any form of sin, from the expectation of reward, is not self-denial, but only consulting self-interest.

(3.) Forsaking any form of indulgence for prudential reasons, such as regard to the health, wealth, reputation, &c. This is not self-denial, but only a regard to self-interest. It is only one form of selfishness triumphing over another.

(4.) Self-denial does not consist in either doing or omitting any thing whatever from selfish motives. For it is impossible to deny self for selfish reasons. It is absurd to talk of denying self to promote self-interest; for this is not self-denial, but is only denying self in one respect, for the sake of gratifying self in another respect. Self is after all at the bottom. And self-interest is the grand reason of every change of this kind.

(5.) Self-denial, therefore, does not consist in abandoning the use of whatever is injurious to us, because it is so.

(6.) Nor does self-denial consist in giving to others that for which we have no use, or the use of which could be of no service to us. There is no denying self in this.

(7.) Nor does self-denial consist in giving or doing that which subjects us to no privation, inconvenience, or trouble. What self-denial is there in this?

(8.) Nor does it consist in that which subjects us to any degree of expense, inconvenience, trouble, reproach, or even death itself, if it be for any selfish reason; for in this case it is only consulting, upon the whole, self-interest. It is self-indulgence, instead of self-denial.

II. What self-denial is.

1. It is the denying of self, not for the sake of a greater good to self, but for the sake of doing good to others. This is really denying self.
2. Self-denial is a real sacrifice of self-interest, from disinterested motives; that is, from a singleness of eye, to glorify God, and do good to others.

III. What is implied in self-denial.

1. True holiness of heart, or supreme disinterested love to God. If God's glory is so preferred to our own happiness or convenience, that we deny ourselves for the sake of glorifying Him, it proves that our love to Him is supreme.

2. Self-denial implies disinterested love to men. If we deny ourselves for the sake of promoting their happiness, whenever their happiness is a greater good than our own, it shows that we love them according to the requirement of the law of God.

3. It implies the giving up of that which might be a real good to us. It is no proper denial of self, unless we might be benefited by the thing which is given up. If, as I have before said, the use of it would be an injury to us, and it be abandoned for that reason, this is rather self-indulgence than self-denial.

4. Self-denial implies the joyful giving up of what we need, or what might contribute to our comfort, for the purpose of doing a greater good to others. For example--here is a man who has been to the baker's, and purchased a loaf of bread for his supper. He has been laboring hard, and really needs the bread. But in passing a miserable habitation of poverty, a little, pale, emaciated child stands at the door, and, stretching out its little beggar hands, asks for bread. He is induced to enter this abode of wretchedness, and finds a widowed mother, sick and famishing, surrounded with her starving babes. He is hungry himself; but they are starving. He has no more money. If he gives his bread, he must retire without his supper. If he gives all that he has, it will afford but a scanty pittance to this starving family; but he gives it instantly. He gives it joyfully, and absolutely retires to bed without his supper, with tears of joy and gratitude, that by denying himself he has been able to keep a fatherless family from absolute starvation. This is self-denial. It was self-denial in God to send his Son to die for sinners, and self-denial in Christ to undertake and accomplish the great work of man's salvation.

5. Here it should be remembered, that if what we possess will be less beneficial to others than to ourselves, or if depriving ourselves of any thing will promote the good of others less than it will detract from our own, enlightened benevolence would forbid the sacrifice. For example--it would not be enlightened benevolence for a man to give up his life for a mere

brute. For a man's life and happiness are worth more than the life and happiness of a beast. Nor would it be virtuous in a man to starve himself for the sake of feeding his dog.

6. Every sacrifice of lawful enjoyment, of ease, convenience, health, time, talents, property, reputation, and whatever might be lawfully enjoyed, from a disinterested desire to promote the glory of God and the greater good of the universe, is self-denial.

7. In short, self-denial implies, the death of selfishness. That is--self-denial and selfishness cannot exist in the mind at the same time. They are exact opposite states of mind.

IV. What is not taking up the cross.

1. It does not consist in the performance of the social and public duties of religion.

2. Nor in crossing the bodily appetites for the good of the soul.

3. Nor in crossing our pride for the good of our soul.

4. Nor in crossing any of our inclinations for the same reason.

5. Nor in crossing ourselves in any respect, nor in any degree, for any selfish reason whatever.

6. Nor does it consist in submitting to any kind or degree of evil, persecution, or privation, for any legal or selfish reason, with respect either to our temporal or eternal interests; for all such things are only some modifications of selfishness.

V. What is taking up the cross.

1. It consists in crossing self, from disinterested benevolence.

2. It consists in suffering reproach and persecution meekly and joyfully, for the same reason; that is--from true benevolence to men and supreme love to God.

3. It consists in crossing natural and artificial appetites and inclinations, lest their indulgence should dishonor God and injure the souls of men; and that

by thus crossing ourselves we may possess the means and opportunities of doing a greater amount of good to others. Thus bearing the cross is only a modification of self-denial. There is but a shade of difference between self-denial and cross-bearing. And this is true of all the Christian graces. They are only modifications of one great principle, benevolence.

VI. What is implied in taking up the cross.

1. It implies true holiness of heart, or disinterested benevolence to God and man; just as self-denial does.
2. It implies deadness to the influence of appetite, to the influence of the world, and to a regard to reputation. A man will never take up the cross, in the denial or crossing of his appetites and in meekly suffering persecution and reproach, unless he has become dead to such things.
3. Cross-bearing implies the death of selfishness in general.
4. It implies true faith or confidence in Christ. Certainly no man will bear the cross of Christ, and patiently and joyfully suffer persecution for his sake, unless he has great confidence in Christ.
5. It implies such an attachment to Christ as to be willing to suffer shame, and the total loss of reputation in the world, for his sake.
6. It implies the doing of this with joy and not reluctantly. It is said of the Apostles when they were scourged by the Sanhedrin, and almost hissed through the streets of Jerusalem, that they departed "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name."
7. It implies a state of mind that is ready to forsake all things, and endure all things, for his sake, as an affectionate wife would forsake all things, and joyfully go into banishment with her husband, and count herself happy in so doing; feeling, that if her husband was spared to her, it mattered little of what else she was deprived. In short, the true spirit of cross-bearing for the sake of Christ, is a state of mind that feels Christ to be such an all-sufficient portion as to perfectly satisfy the soul, in the absence of all things else.

VII. What following after Christ is not.

1. It is not a change of place. When Christ was upon earth, following Him

might imply going after Him, from town to town, to attend upon his personal instructions. But even then, the mere following Him from place to place, was not what was intended; for it was the state of mind upon which the Savior had his eye. Then a man might have followed Him from place to place with selfish motives. And following Christ, in the text, implies a certain state of mind.

2. It does not consist in following Him for reward, as he accused some in his own day, of following Him for the loaves and fishes.

3. It does not consist in any service of any kind rendered from any legal or selfish motives. Christ was not selfish; and no selfish mind can in any proper sense be said to follow Him.

4. It does not consist in imitating his life, from any fear of evil, or hope of reward. He was influenced by no such motives.

VIII. What following after Christ is.

1. It consists in having the same mind, spirit, motive, and end that Christ has.

2. It consists in being as truly and as disinterestedly devoted to the glory of God and the good of the universe as He is.

3. Following Christ is to possess the zeal and activity of the Son of God, in promoting this great end.

4. It consists in denying self as Christ did, for the glory of God and the good of men.

5. It consists in using the same means, from the same motives, with the same diligence, and in the same temper of mind for the promotion of the same end.

6. In short, it consists in imitating his example, both as it respects the spirit and life, together with the motives for exertion.

IX. What is implied in following after Christ.

1. Following Christ implies great confidence in Him.

2. It implies self-renunciation. A man must renounce himself, before he will follow Christ. Christ pleased not Himself. He sought not his own glory, but the glory of Him that sent Him. Hence, let no man think that he follows Christ, until he has renounced himself.

3. It implies a trust in Him for the supply of all our wants. It is the giving up of our own interest as the object of pursuit, and devoting ourselves to the glory of God and the good of the universe; cheerfully and confidently leaving our own good and all our interests to be provided for and disposed of by Him.

4. Following Christ, then, implies the death of selfishness.

5. It implies not merely and negatively the death of selfishness, but also true holiness of heart and life; or a supreme, disinterested benevolence to God, and equal benevolence to men.

6. It implies the final forsaking of all else for his sake--the everlasting renunciation of all ways, ends, employments, and things, inconsistent with the glory of God and the highest good of men, from truly disinterested love to Him and to the souls of men.

7. Daily following Christ implies, that it is not a mere experiment, for a day, or a month, but an embarkation for eternity; an eternal committing of the whole being to the same great end that Christ is pursuing.

8. Observe, the text assures you, that you must daily take up your cross and follow Christ. It is to be a permanent state of mind; a state of mind in opposition to a single exercise.

X. These are indispensable conditions of salvation.

1. Because nothing short of this is virtue.

2. Because any thing short of this but confirms selfishness.

3. The nature of the case shows, that these conditions are naturally indispensable to salvation. The prime idea of salvation is deliverance from sin, and confirmation in a state of holiness. And as those states of mind called self-denial, bearing the cross, and following Christ, are holiness itself, it is self-evident, that they are naturally indispensable to salvation.

4. The text itself is an affirmation, and a confirmation of this truth. "He said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross DAILY, and follow me."

REMARKS.

1. From this subject, it is easy to perceive the mistake of those who suppose that self-denial implies selfishness. In preaching, a few years since, in the congregation of a brother minister, I had occasion to remark, upon the self-denial of God in the work of Atonement. Some of the members of the church were disturbed, with the idea that God could exercise self-denial, supposing that self-denial implied selfishness, and that none but a selfish being could deny self. I was informed, that one of them went to his minister, to see whether he accorded with me in my views of self-denial. He informed him that he did not agree with me, and that he thought it wrong to affirm that God exercised self-denial, inasmuch as it implied selfishness in God. Now it pains me to be obliged to say, that for a long time it has been growing more and more evident to my mind, from personal observation, reading, reflection, and prayer, that to a most alarming extent, the very nature of the Christian graces is radically mistaken by the Church and by multitudes of ministers--that in innumerable cases mere emotion is mistaken for religion--and that to an extent truly shocking, selfishness, in one or another of its modifications, is mistaken for true piety. Not long since, the question was seriously proposed by a brother, as a question to be considered and discussed, whether a mind in a state of entire sanctification could exercise self-denial at all, and whether any thing could be possibly called self-denial in one who is entirely benevolent. Now what a wonderful mistake is this. What? Query, whether a benevolent mind can exercise self-denial! Why, it is the most manifest thing in the universe, that self-denial implies benevolence, and that that cannot be self-denial that does not deny self, from motives of disinterested benevolence. It is, therefore, so far from being true, that self-denial implies selfishness, that selfishness is entirely inconsistent with self-denial. They are exactly opposite states of mind, and can no more co-exist than light and darkness can co-exist. This mistake is very extensively made in the Church; and I do not hesitate to say, that in just as far as it is made, it is a fundamental error. It is putting darkness for light, and sin for holiness; and I must confess, it is extremely difficult for me to understand how a mind that has ever truly exercised self-denial, could fall into so strange a mistake--how a man who has ever known what it was to deny himself, from disinterested benevolence, should ever

afterwards suppose that self-denial implied selfishness--and that to deny one form of selfishness for the sake of gratifying another form could be self-denial.

2. True self-denial implies entire consecration, or entire sanctification. I do not speak now of continued, or permanent, but of present sanctification. To deny self from motives of disinterested benevolence, is for the time being to obey God. It is to do your duty. In other words, it is to be in a state of entire conformity to the will of God. Nothing short of this is denying self, taking up the cross, and following Christ.

3. The fact that so few persons know what self-denial is, by their own experience, shows how few there are who exercise self-denial.

4. It would seem as if ministers are the only men, in the estimation of the Church, who are expected really to exercise any self-denial. They only are expected to labor without wages, from motives of disinterested benevolence. The churches do not pretend, in scarcely any case, to give the ministers any thing like a compensation for their labors. And in multitudes of cases they give them nothing at all. They feel as if ministers are to labor for the glory of God and the good of souls, and not for "filthy lucre." It seems to be generally understood, what self-denial in ministers is. It seems to be known, that they are to labor from motives of disinterested benevolence. They may visit the sick, and spend as much time as the physician, or more than he does, without its being so much as dreamed by any one, that they ought to have any compensation for this expenditure of time and strength. They may travel about the country, and, at the earnest request of the churches, spend a Sabbath, a week, or even a number of weeks, in laboring almost night and day, until they are prostrated and ready to die with fatigue, without so much perhaps as their traveling expenses being paid. In all this they are expected to labor from disinterested benevolence. They will spend as much time and strength in promoting the good of souls, as a lawyer would do in attending to secular affairs, where his charge would be five hundred or a thousand dollars; and if the minister should ask for a dollar of compensation he would be accused of selfishness, and laboring for "filthy lucre;" while it would not be so much as expected, that a lawyer or a physician would expend so much time and strength, without charging enough to buy him a farm. Now the question is, how comes there to be such a public sentiment as this? What would be said of a minister, if he made a charge of attending on the sick and officiating at funerals--if he should charge as physicians charge, or as lawyers charge, for

services rendered at home or abroad. And should he do this, when he has no salary and no earthly means of support, it would not alter the case in the public estimation; but he would be denounced as a hireling, a selfish, and an ungodly minister. Now I ask again, how came such a public sentiment as this to exist in the Church and in the world? I answer, it is founded in this fundamental mistake, that ministers, and ministers alone, are expected to serve God and men from motives of disinterested benevolence.--That ministers are bound to do all they can to glorify God and save the souls of men, whether they receive any earthly compensation or not, I admit and fully maintain.

I also maintain, that the churches are as solemnly bound to contribute to their support, and give them what is reasonable and just for their services as they are to support their own families, to pay their physician's bill, or the laborer that tills their ground. I am not advocating the principle, that ministers should either be allowed, or find it necessary to make a charge for preaching a sermon, a Sabbath, a week, or a month, or for visiting the sick, or for any such services. But I intend to maintain, that for all these services, they have the same right to expect a compensation from men, as lawyers, doctors, merchants, and mechanics have--that all other men are bound to be as self-denying, to perform all their services from as disinterested motives--to be willing to spend and be spent, and used all up in works of benevolence, just as ministers are bound to do. Any man, and every man has a right to expect such compensation for his labors as is reasonable and just, under the circumstances of the case. But no man has in any instance a right to make his wages the end at which he aims, and that without which he would not perform the service. The minister is to preach and labor for the glory of God and the good of souls, and not for the sake of a salary. The mechanic, the merchant, the lawyer, the physician, are all to do the same. And no one of them has a right to demand or expect any compensation, when, under similar circumstances a minister might not do the same. And now the thing I wish to impress upon your minds is this, that this public sentiment of which I am speaking reveals this alarming fact, that the Church has to a great extent lost sight of that which constitutes true religion in every body else but ministers. They expect and insist upon that in ministers, which really constitutes true religion; but that which they expect of themselves, and require of others than ministers, is nothing but sheer selfishness. They have set up one standard for ministers, and another for laymen and women. And this last has not a particle of true religion in it; for selfishness is the substance and essence of all sin; and

disinterested benevolence is the substance of all true religion. And in such a world as this, to say the least, there cannot be any true religion without true self-denial. And what shall we say, when the real spirit of self-denial is so far lost sight of, and misunderstood, that only so far as it is applicable to ministers, does it seem to be recognized as even obligatory.

5. But no man can be saved, without the true self-denial for the good of others, which he feels that a minister ought to exercise. Whatever be your calling, except you pursue it from as disinterested motives, as much for the glory of God and the good of men, as you feel and know that ministers ought to do, you cannot by any possibility be saved. The same rule is applicable to both. What will ruin a minister's soul will ruin your soul. The requirement with respect to both is, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." And now let me ask you, in how many instances have you charged and received pay for services, when it would in your own estimation have ruined a minister to have done the same? Would you not feel an abhorrence of and contempt for a minister, and be one of the first to complain, and avow your convictions of his hypocrisy, should he charge for his services as you have charged for yours, and show the same reluctance to laboring without wages as you yourself do.

6. From this subject it is easy to see, that self-denial does not abridge the happiness of those who exercise it; but that, on the contrary, it is the readiest way to promote it. To be sure, our own happiness must not be the object at which we aim; for this would not be self-denial. The Lord Jesus Christ has said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," and it is truly blessed to deny self for the good of others. Take the case of the man who gave the loaf to the starving family, of whom I have already spoken, and tell me, did he not experience a more noble, elevated, and soul-satisfying happiness, in saving that famishing family from starvation, than he would have done to have eaten the bread himself, although hungry and really needing it? Who can doubt it, if he was really benevolent and disinterested? I do not hesitate to say, that he who can doubt it, knows not what benevolence and self-denial are. Just so it is with all acts of real self-denial. They always afford the mind more satisfaction than an opposite course would have done; that is--the denying of self, for the sake of doing good to others, is that course of conduct most supremely pleasing and gratifying to a benevolent mind. To suppose the contrary, is a downright absurdity, a contradiction, and an overlooking of the very nature of benevolence and self-denial.

7. True self-denial is wholly indispensable to happiness in this world. Certainly a man cannot be happy, in any proper sense of the word, who is not benevolent. But if he is truly benevolent, in such a world as this, the wants, and woes, and ignorance, and wickedness of those around him, would keep him in a state of unspeakable agony, unless he were making self-denying efforts to do them good. Can a man act continually against the supreme, the strongest affection of his soul, without being made wretched by it? No, he cannot. Then a truly religious man, in other words, a man who is truly and disinterestedly benevolent, cannot be at peace with himself, only so far as he lays himself out for the glory of God and the good of men. I might indeed say this of all men, whether they are benevolent or not. But it is absurd, and a contradiction, to say, that in a world of wo and want like this, a truly benevolent mind can be otherwise than miserable, only as it puts forth the most strenuous exertions to relieve the woes, instruct the ignorance, and save the souls of men.

8. It is impossible that a truly benevolent mind, a truly religious man, should not exercise self-denial in a world like this. Benevolence is good willing. It is willing or choosing the good of others, in proportion to its relative value. The will governs the conduct. If a man, therefore, wills the good of the community in which he lives, more than he does his own individual good; if he loves his neighbor as himself, and all his neighbors as much more than he loves himself as their happiness is more valuable than his own; it is as impossible that he should not exercise self-denial for their good, as it is that he should act against his will. This brings out the demonstration that no man is a truly religious man who does not live a life of self-denial.

9. From this subject we see why it is, that so many seem to suppose that self-denial must necessarily abridge our own happiness. It certainly is only because they do not understand what self-denial is. They call that legal constrained giving up one form of selfishness for another self-denial. When they are really whipped out of some form of selfishness, and driven by the terrors of conscience, the thunders of Sinai, or a regard to reputation, to deny themselves some indulgence, for the sake of avoiding some great evil, or attaining some great good, they call this self-denial. And being conscious, that it is to them a grievous privation and vexation, they of course suppose that self-denial is a great burden. I have often thought, that most professors of religion secretly feel as if God's service was a hard service; as if Christ's yoke was hard, instead of being easy; and his burden heavy instead of being light--that wisdom's ways are not, in

their estimation, "ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace;" that religion is a task, an irksome, difficult, up-hill, laborious business. It is fully manifest, that that which many call religion is really such a heavy burden; but is this the religion of the Bible? Is it true religion at all? No it is slavery, legality, selfishness, death! Enough of it would make up the very essence of hell!

10. The real enjoyment of self-denial is the true criterion by which its character may and must be tested. If you do not enjoy it--if it is not a real pleasure to you--that in which you delight and choose for its own sake--if, as a matter of fact, in any particular case it is not more grateful to you than any other course it is no true self-denial, but only selfishness. Be sure to remember, that self-denial consists in denying self, from motives of disinterested benevolence. If, then, you deny yourself, from such a motive, it must of necessity promote your happiness; as it is doing the thing you supremely love to do. Let it be for ever remembered, then, that that is not self-denial, which does not promote your present happiness more than self-gratification would have done. But here again, let it be noticed, that your own happiness must not be the object at which you aim; else it is not self-denial, but self-gratification, which you practice. There is a distinction as broad as daylight, ever to be remembered, between pursuing and finding your happiness in the duties of religion.

11. You see from this subject that God can and has exercised self-denial in the great work of Atonement, and probably in innumerable instances in the creation and government of the universe.

12. You see from this subject the great self-denial of Christ in all his sufferings and labors for the glory of God and the good of man.

13. We see that in all probability the holy angels have exercised and do continue to exercise great self-denial for the same object. The Apostle informs us that the angels "are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation."

Now in all their conflicts with the powers of darkness, in all their journeyings to and fro--in all their watchings over, and laboring for the good of the saints, they are no doubt called to frequent acts of self-denial--to be absent from scenes in heaven that might greatly interest and benefit them--to forego many privileges, and endure much toil that is real self-denial for the sake of saving men.

14. We see that no one needs to pity those who are called to great self-denial for the glory of God and the good of men, for it is to them a real source of happiness. It is to them a greater good than any other course they could pursue. Christ is spoken of in the Bible as really enjoying the work of Atonement. It is said that "For the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross despising the shame." By this I do not suppose we are to understand that his personal enjoyment was the great end He had in view; but simply that as a matter of fact He counted it a pleasure and a joyful undertaking to deny Himself and bear the pains of death for sinful men. So in the case of the Apostles and primitive saints and martyrs. Their self-denial was to them a source of real and soul-satisfying enjoyment. Paul speaks of being exceedingly joyful in all his tribulations.

15. We are nevertheless under great obligations of gratitude to those who exercise self-denial for our good, and under the greater obligation by how much the more happiness they experience in self-denial. If they did what they do grudgingly, and in such a temper as to find no happiness in it, just in that proportion we might be certain that they were not disinterested and did not aim with a single eye at promoting our good. They are happy precisely in proportion to their disinterestedness. They are happy in denying themselves for our good in just as far as they are virtuous and really aim at our good instead of their own. Hence it follows that we are under obligations of gratitude precisely in proportion to the real happiness they experience in laboring for our good.

16. You see it is a great mistake to suppose that if God and the angels and the saints really find a superlative pleasure in serving us, that this diminishes aught of our obligation to make what return we can for their labors of love. If a minister loves you well enough to labor for your good from disinterested motives, and really enjoys his labor even more than you do in receiving his instructions, nay, if he is made supremely happy in laboring day and night for your good, insomuch that he asks nothing, expects nothing, and desires nothing for his labor, it by no means follows that you are under no obligations of gratitude, and to bestow such temporal goods upon him as may add to his comfort or usefulness, or the usefulness or comfort of his family. Why, beloved, because the Father freely gave up his Son for us all; because He did it joyfully, willingly; because He found an infinite satisfaction in it; because the blessed Son of God gave his back to the smiters and his cheek to them that plucked off the hair; because he gave Himself an offering for sin, and found a superlative pleasure in becoming for your sake a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;

because he could delight to die for you, and drink of the bitter cup prepared for you, do you suppose yourselves relieved from obligations to love and serve and glorify Him forever? Nay, who does not know that for these very reasons your obligations to gratitude are infinitely increased.

17. Let no one hope for salvation who does not live a life of daily self-denial. Observe what Christ says in the text: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." It is not sufficient then to practice occasional self-denial. Self must be set aside and crucified, and denied daily and continually. Your happiness must consist in disinterested endeavors to make others happy, or you never can be saved. I beg of you to understand this. Denying yourself daily, taking up your cross daily, and following Christ daily, are indispensable conditions of salvation. And the doing of this daily is as indispensable as doing it at all. Observe, Christ does not say, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself occasionally; take up the cross occasionally; and occasionally, in seasons of special excitement and revival follow me; but the doing of these things daily is here expressly made an indispensable condition of salvation. Let me impress this upon you, for it seems generally to be understood, that if persons go so far as now and then to practice what they call self-denial--now and then to take up some cross, and occasionally, in seasons of special revival, follow Christ--that these are the conditions of salvation, and about as much as can be expected of Christians in this world. Now mark, this common opinion is a fatal error. The unalterable condition of salvation is, that these things shall be done daily--that this shall be the state of the mind, and the habitual course of life--that self-interest shall be rejected as the grand end of life--that self shall be daily denied, and that daily you shall bear the cross and follow Christ.

18. Let it also be noticed that bearing the cross implies dying to our own reputation, and this is to be habitual, the daily abiding state of our hearts. It does not say merely that once in a while we shall have a season of humiliation, breaking down before God, and making ourselves of no reputation; but it implies so thorough a death to our own reputation, as that this regardlessness to our own reputation shall be the habitual state of our minds.

19. Observe that following after Christ must also be daily. You must daily aim at the same end from the same motives that He does. You must give up all your powers to the promotion of this end as He does. And this is to be done daily as

an unalterable condition of salvation.

20. How infinitely diverse from this are the general notions of professing Christians in respect to the conditions of salvation. The general idea of professors of religion seems to be that if they only once in a while wake up as they call it--if they are revived now and then, at long intervals, and once in a while bluster about, and perform their duty as they call it, this will suffice as a sufficient ground of hope. And living in this way they expect to be saved. How amazing it is, that with the express declaration of Christ before them, they can dare to hope in the face of his most solemn declarations. Why, professor of religion, as sure as your soul lives, such loose notions as those that are common among professors of religion in respect to the conditions of salvation, will if you trust to them, land your soul in the depths of hell. I say again, remember that the daily doing of these things is just as expressly and indispensably a condition, as that you should do them at all. What then do you mean, to dream of eternal life while you indulge your selfishness and lust, with only now and then a spasmodic effort, when conscience can remain no longer silent, and the Spirit of God forces upon you the conviction that you are one of the greatest sinners out of hell. Then you set to blustering about and seem to suppose yourself to be religious enough in a few weeks to set off against years of selfishness and lust. Why, what do you mean?

21. How ridiculous it is for persons to call such things as they often do, self-denial and bearing the cross. Some persons will abandon the use of alcohol because its use has become disreputable, or because it is injurious to their health, or because their conscience torments them in the use of it, or because they fear they shall become drunkards, disgrace and ruin themselves, and lose their souls. And this they call self-denial, when it is after all, only denying one form of selfishness for the sake of gratifying another form. In other words, they are denying one form of selfishness for the sake of promoting self-interest on a larger scale. "Verily they have their reward." Others will abandon the use of tea, coffee, tobacco, and many such-like articles, for similar reasons, and call it self-denial. But who cannot see through this?

22. Others call it taking up the cross to pray in female prayer meetings, to speak in public, or do any thing that mortifies their pride. Now, it should be known that taking up the cross implies the death of pride--that pride or a regard to our own reputation is already dead. If this is not so, it is nonsense to talk of taking up the

cross.

23. Our Lord Jesus Christ differed radically from multitudes of reformers. Reformers in general seem to aim at making as many proselytes to their peculiar views as possible, and are not wont to be so particular and searching as to render it very difficult for persons to fall in with and adopt their views. But Christ on the contrary, when multitudes seemed to be converted, professed to believe in Him, and to follow Him, would turn upon them and cut to the very quick, informing them plainly that they could not be his disciples at all unless they forsook all that they had; unless they would deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him--that no man could be his disciple unless he would not only forsake all that he had, but would hate his dearest earthly relations, and even his own life for Christ's sake. This certainly was a very different policy from that which is pursued by many ministers of the gospel. They, instead of insisting upon daily self-denial, the renunciation of selfishness, and a life of entire consecration to God, as indispensable conditions of salvation and church membership, seem to leave these express conditions of Christ almost entirely out of view. And for the sake of increasing the members of the Church, practically at least, hold out very different, and almost infinitely lower conditions of salvation. Brethren, how dare you do this? I ask you solemnly before God and the Savior Jesus Christ if you do insist upon a life of daily self-denial, cross-bearing, and following Christ--if you do insist that unless men forsake all that they have and renounce selfishness in their business transactions and in all their ways, and that unless they live a life of entire consecration to God, they can by no possibility be saved, and have no right to a standing in the Church of God? Do let me ask what is the practical standard to which some of you, my brethren, as a matter of fact require persons to conform as conditions of church-membership and of salvation? Do you not virtually plead for and allow sin? Do you not virtually deny or leave out of view the great truth upon which Christ every where and so often insisted, that "except a man forsake all that he hath, deny himself and take up his cross daily, he cannot be my disciple?" Instead of making this a condition of salvation as Christ does, I ask you my brethren, and I ask the churches who hear you preach if some of you do not virtually maintain or make the impression that a state of entire consecration to God, is so far from being an indispensable condition of salvation, that it is as a matter of fact never attained in this world; or at least, that it is never attained as a state in which men do as a matter of fact for any length of time continue? Now my beloved brethren, if this is true, let me get

down at your feet, and beseech you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to consider what you are doing. How many of you are afraid to admit, avow, and maintain the doctrine of entire sanctification or consecration to God in this life? You are even afraid to allow that this state is ever attained and continued for any length of time by the best saints that ever lived on earth. But let me ask you, is not this state as a state made by the Lord Jesus Christ in these passages that I have so often quoted, an express and indispensable condition of salvation? If it is not, I beg of you, and conjure you to show what these passages do mean. What does Christ mean when he says "except a man forsake all that he hath he cannot be my disciple?" The Lord willing, I intend soon to give the Church my views of this declaration of Christ. When I say that this as a state is insisted on by the Lord Jesus Christ as an indispensable condition of salvation, I do not mean that the condition is that no occasional sin through the force of temptation is consistent with a state of real grace and with final salvation; but I do mean and maintain, that a state of entire consecration to God, or sanctification as a habitual state of mind is in the gospel, insisted upon as an indispensable condition of salvation; and that it is so far from being true, that this state as a state, with only occasional interruptions through the force of temptation, is never attained by the saints in this life, that under the gospel no one can be saved, nor ever has been saved, who has not attained and lived, and died in this state; a state in which entire sanctification is the rule, and sin only the exception.

If this is not the doctrine of these texts, I ask what is? Do not understand me now to affirm that a person's falling into occasional sins through the force of temptation is fatal to his salvation; but I do wish to be understood as affirming that regeneration itself is an act of entire consecration to God--that a state of entire consecration to God is the habitual state of every real saint; and that nothing less than entire consecration to God, as a habitual state of mind ought to be insisted on as a condition of salvation. To make the impression that any thing less than this can ensure salvation is false, anti-christian, and at war with every principal of the gospel.

And now if this is so, how much blood is already in the skirts of the ministry. My brethren, I feel as if I for one ought to look to this--that I am bound to look not only to some, but to all the conditions of salvation as laid down by Christ in the gospel, and that as I value my own soul and souls of my hearers--as I value the approbation, and dread the wrath of God, I am bound to lay down no other conditions of salvation, either in doctrine or practice, than this; that unless a man

forsake all that he hath--except he deny himself and take up his cross and follow Christ daily, he cannot be saved. My brethren, dare any of us require in theory or in practice any thing short of this? If we can, we are building upon Christ's foundation, wood, hay and stubble, and in the day that shall try every man's work what it is, the fruits of his labor shall be burned up.

24. What an infinitely terrible thing it is for ministers and professors of religion to be engaged in opposing the doctrine of entire sanctification or consecration to God in this life. I am amazed and distressed beyond measure to hear them speak of the dangerous tendencies of preaching this doctrine. I find it impossible to express the pain that sometimes comes over my mind when I see them hunting after and eagerly seizing upon every thing which they suppose exhibits the dangerous tendency of this doctrine. At the same time overlooking the world of facts most distressing and appalling that bring out with the force of a thousand demonstrations the dreadful tendency of the opposite doctrine. My brethren, would it not be well for us to look a little upon the other side of this question and see what is the actual tendency as developed in myraids of facts of preaching that a state of entire and continued consecration to God is not to be expected or attained in this life. Why is it that such great reaction follows revivals of religion? Why is it that the truth of the gospel can bring people along so far as to effect their conversion and then leave them to backslide. I answer unhesitatingly, that beyond that point the gospel is not preached. Instead of holding up the perfect standard of the gospel as a thing to be aimed at, actually attained and maintained, as an indispensable condition of salvation, instead of being encouraged to go right on to perfection until they stand and remain complete in all the will of God, no such end is presented to them, no such object of pursuit or of expectation is held up before them. But on the contrary it is either expressly insisted or strongly intimated that no such state ever was or ever is expected to be attained in this life. And thus discouragement is thrown in their way. A stumbling block is laid before them that just as certainly results in their backsliding as any cause produces its effect.

My dear brethren in the ministry, who among you dare to quote and enforce with the expectation that it will take effect, the following language of Paul: "Ye are the temples of the living God, as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people." "Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you and be a father unto you, and ye shall be

my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Now, my brethren will you suffer me to ask, whether you follow the example of Paul, whether in view of the exceeding great and precious promises, you do exhort, encourage, and command Christians to cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God? Observe the Apostle expected them to do this in this world; for it was "from all filthiness of the flesh," as well as "spirit" that they were to cleanse themselves. Now my beloved brethren, do you and do your churches know that you explain to them what this and similar passages mean? Do you make the impression that you expect them to do this, as you do upon sinners that you expect them to repent? How dare you, with this and multitudes of similar passages before you, stumble and talk as some of you do about the doctrine of Christian perfection? Why, some of you seem to be horrified at the very idea of expecting Christians to perfect holiness in the fear of God. The very term Christian Perfection seems to be an abomination to you, and a thing neither to be understood nor seriously insisted upon as a truth and a command of God. O, my brethren, I ask you how you dare to do this? How can you find it in your heart to do it? Will you consider these texts and tell your churches what they mean?-- Will you expound, enforce, and crowd them home, and expect your churches to receive and obey these truths? Why, how can it be possible that so many of the professed ministers of Christ are stumbling at, opposing, and even ridiculing the doctrine of Christian Perfection? My soul trembles for you. It would seem as if your attention was so taken up with the fancied dangers of enforcing the doctrine and duty of Christian Perfection, that you count it an arrant heresy, for any man to teach or expect Christians to cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, and this in the face of the church.--My brethren, is this the work of the gospel ministry?

About a year ago there was a powerful revival in a church not far distant from this. In the fulness of my heart I wrote to my brethren who were engaged in promoting it, beseeching them to insist upon total abstinence from sin and to press the converts up to a state of entire and continued consecration to God. I insisted upon this as the only course they could take to secure the revival against a reaction. I felt at the time agonized with the thought that there should be a reaction in that place, and could have washed the feet of the brethren with my

tears, if it could have availed to persuade them so to press the converts up to a habitual state of entire consecration, as to have prevented their backsliding. But all in vain. Within a few weeks or months, the pastor began to preach himself and suffer others to preach against the doctrine of Christian Perfection in his pulpit. The result was just what might have been anticipated with as much certainty as any other event whatever. And now, although scarce a year has elapsed since the revival was all in its glory, I have heard with unutterable pain that the pastor has confessed in public, that out of the many converts that joined his church, only a comparatively small number of them are ever seen in his meetings. And yet this same dear brother seems to be still alarmed only at the tendency of preaching the doctrine of entire sanctification or consecration to God in this life. Strange to tell, he sees not, feels not, acknowledges not, the awful tendency of preaching as he has preached, and maintaining that it is a dangerous error to expect to live in a state of entire sanctification to the will of God in this life. O tell it not in Gath; let not the sound reach Askelon, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. Toward this brother, toward all of my ministerial brethren, I have none but feelings of the utmost tenderness. But yet I am grieved and pained, my soul is sick with the course that many of them are taking. Afraid to do as Paul did, press the church right up to cleansing themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and perfecting holiness in the fear of God, they merely satisfy themselves with saying it is a duty, it is naturally possible, but still not to be expected. Is this like Paul? Is this like Christ? Paul would say, come on, "having these promises, dearly beloved, let us, (for we can do it and must do it,) cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." And Christ could say, "Be ye therefore perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." And yet, O dreadful to say, multitudes of ministers are opposing and even ridiculing the doctrine of Christian Perfection or entire consecration to God in this life, holding it up as a dangerous heresy, and even denying ministerial and Christian fellowship to those that believe it. Oh what a state of things is this!

[Back to Top](#)

The True Service of God
Lecture XXIX

March 31, 1841

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Josh 24:19: "Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord: for He is a holy God."

In this discussion I will show:

I. In what the holiness of God consists.

II. That there are two kinds of service, both of which claim to be rendered to God.

III. Which constitutes the acceptable service of God.

IV. What is implied in it.

V. How these two kinds of service cannot, and how they can be distinguished from each other.

VI. If any man would serve the Lord, he must begin by making his heart holy.

I. In what the holiness of God consists.

1. It consists in benevolence, love, or good-willing; willing the universal good of being.
2. All his moral attributes are modifications of benevolence, and his holiness consists in a disposition, under all circumstances, to do just that which is upon the whole best to be done, and most promotive of the general good, to whatever self-denial and exertion it may call Him.

II. Two kinds of service, both claiming to be rendered to God.

Legal and gospel services. Legal service is a course of life pursued, not from supreme love for and delight in it for its own sake, but from other considerations, sometimes originating merely in constraints or restraints of conscience, hope, fear, regard to reputation, personal safety, and multitudes of such like considerations.

Gospel service is not a constrained, but a joyful compliance with convictions of duty, from supreme love to the path of duty, and delight in it for its own sake. The first is regarded by the mind, as, after all, only a choice between two evils, neither of which is supremely lovely and desirable to the mind for its own sake. This is slavery, and this kind of service turns upon the very same principle upon which the service of slaves is rendered. They prefer laboring for their masters, to the evils which would result from their refusal. They therefore, upon the whole, choose to labor as they do; but it is only a choice between two evils. As liberty is out of the question, they must labor, or suffer the consequences. They therefore prefer to labor. But this, after all, is slavery. This kind of service rendered to God, is bondage and slavery.

The last, or gospel service, is regarded by the mind as supremely good or lovely, and desirable for its own sake. This is true liberty. It is the very course of life which the mind would prefer, if left free to choose between all possible courses of life; and that solely on its own account, or for the sake of its intrinsic value. I know not how to illustrate the difference between these two kinds of service, more naturally and familiarly, than by adverting to the conduct of children. They will labor, rather than be frowned upon by their parents. But labor is not regarded by them as desirable for its own sake; but is only chosen as the less of two evils. They would prefer play to labor, if left wholly to themselves. They love their amusements for their own sake. Now such is the true service of God. It is not submitted to as the less of two evils. It is not regarded merely as something that must be done, however irksome the task. It is not an up-hill business, a grievous labor, in which there is no satisfaction. But, like the plays of children, it is delighted in and loved for its own sake.

III. Which constitutes the acceptable service of God.

1. Supreme devotedness of heart to the same end to which God is devoted. God is love, or benevolence, and is supremely devoted to the good of universal being. His heart is full of zeal, and his mind is wholly bent in promoting universal good, as far as it can possibly be done. Now the true service of God consists primarily in a heart of supreme benevolence, or of supreme devotedness to the glory of God and the interests of the universe.
2. It consists in the supreme devotion of the whole being to the same end to which God devotes all his attributes--to promote his own happiness and glory, not because it is his own, but because it is infinitely the greatest good

in the universe--to promote the holiness and happiness of moral beings, and the universal good of sentient existence, is that to which God has devoted his entire being.

3. It consists in devoting the whole being to this end, for the same reasons for which God devotes Himself to the promotion of this end. Suppose you employ a servant who labors only for his wages, and feels no interest in the end which you are aiming to promote. He takes no interest in your business, for its own sake--has no disinterested desire to promote the end at which you aim; but simply labors for his wages. He begins as late in the morning, rests as long at noon, labors as sparingly, and breaks off as early at night as will possibly do, without being curtailed in his wages. Now you rightly say this man is serving himself and not you. He is a mere eye-servant. He is entirely selfish, and has an entirely different end in view, from what you have. And now suppose the end you have in view is not selfish, is not your own aggrandizement, the promotion of your own interests of happiness, but the promotion of the general good--would you not blame such a servant for not taking an interest in the end itself? Would you not regard his selfishness with abhorrence? Would you not regard him as engaged in self-service, and as deserving the severest reprobation? Suppose a king to be entirely disinterested, and engaging all his attributes, and all his wealth, and all his time, in the disinterested promotion of the public interests--suppose him to say to his subjects, "Here, lay hold and help me to forward this great work, and as your individual interests are parts of the public interest, I will see that you have your reward. But the thing I require of you is, that you take an interest in the end for its own sake. If you do not take an interest in the end for its own sake, your labor will all be selfishness and slavery. If you do not love the work on its own account, it will of course make you miserable. It will hang heavily on your hands, and you will long for the going down of the sun. But let your heart be deeply imbued with the spirit of doing good; let this be the grand object of your life--love it for its own sake, and your labor will be to you a continual feast." Now suppose that the subjects should take hold of the work as mere mercenaries, caring for nothing but their wages, taking no interest in the public happiness and well-being; but simply serving for reward. This would be a selfish, eye-service, and not heart-service. This would be serving self, and not the king.

Now the true service of God consists, not only in devoting the whole being

to the promotion of the same end, but also with the same motives, or for the same reasons; that is, from supreme benevolence, or an absorbing disposition to do good for its own sake, and because it is good.

4. It consists in doing all this with the same feelings with which God engages in this work. If the heart is fully devoted to this work--if the whole being is given up to it, as God's being is given up to it--and if this is done for the same reasons, and from disinterested love to the work itself, the feelings with which we engage in it will naturally and necessarily be the same in kind as those in which God engages in it. The feelings with which we engage in it and pursue it, must depend upon our motives for engaging in it. If our motives are the same with God's, our feelings will be the same in kind with his.

IV. What is implied in acceptable service to God.

1. This kind of service in sinners, implies a radical change of heart, from selfishness to disinterested benevolence. Here let me be understood. By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that the mind feels no interest in it; but I mean the direct opposite of this--that the mind does take the deepest, nay, a supreme interest, in promoting the good of being, for its own sake and on its own account.

2. It implies a deep and efficient sympathy with God, in regard to the great end of life. By deep, I mean, not a mere superficial sympathy, consisting in the emotions, but a sympathy of heart, a sympathy lying in the deep foundations of moral action. Persons may have emotions and desires, that consist merely in the effervescence of an excited mind, while the heart, or the deep fountain of moral action, is after all supreme selfishness. By a deep sympathy, then, I mean a sympathy of heart, of will, of preference, and purpose. By an efficient sympathy, I mean an energetic, active sympathy; one that produces active and energetic effort, to glorify God, save the souls of men, and promote universal good.

3. This kind of service implies a continual manifestation of this state of mind, by most strenuous and self-denying efforts to promote the universal good of being.

4. It implies the same feelings in kind, towards whatever hinders or

promotes the work. For example--It implies supreme complacency in God. God, knowing Himself to be infinitely benevolent, has a supreme complacency in Himself. Therefore every benevolent mind in the universe will feel a supreme complacency in God, because He is benevolent. We naturally and necessarily feel complacency in a being whose character is in all respects just as we would wish it to be.

5. It implies complacency in the character of Christians, so far as benevolence is discernible in them.

6. It implies grief and indignation at sin and sinners, and whatever is inconsistent with the highest good of the universe.

V. How these two kinds of service cannot, and how they can be distinguished from each other.

1. They are not always distinguishable from each other in their outward manifestations, or in the visible conduct of men. The servant who labors merely for his wages, may to most human eyes appear just as well as one who is truly disinterested in his labors. A mere legal religion may be strictly punctilious in all the outward duties of life. Such to a great extent were the Pharisees. And such have been great multitudes in every age of the Church.

2. They cannot always be distinguished by the amount of zeal upon religious subjects. The Pharisees were very zealous. They would compass sea and land to make one proselyte. Paul testifies, that Jews had a "zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." Paul seems to have been as zealous before his conversion as afterwards. His legal and his gospel religion could not then be distinguished from each other, in the amount of zeal which he manifested while under the dominion of each.

3. Not always in their visible results and effects. A legal zeal may be very punctilious in the discharge of outward duty, may make many proselytes, may bring multitudes under conviction, and to embrace a legal religion. It may bring multitudes under the dominion of a religion of resolutions, and self-dependent efforts to serve the Lord. The law has its converts as well as the gospel. Persons may be baptized unto Moses as well as unto Christ. And thorough legal laborers may promote extensive apparent revivals. And indeed, they may be real revivals, so far as they go; a revival of conviction

in the Church; a revival of confession; a revival of zeal; a revival of resolutions; a revival of conviction among sinners; a general awakening to religious subjects, and a revival of obtaining hopes, and engaging in the legal service of God. But all this, without a solitary conversion to Christ and his gospel; and perhaps, with scarce an instance of bringing an individual from a state of legal slavery into the liberty of the blessed gospel. Now so far as the number of converts is concerned, so far as the number of revivals is concerned, and so far as most visible appearances go, these two kinds of service may so far resemble each other as not to be distinguished the one from the other. But--

4. They may be distinguished by the kind of zeal. It was the kind, and not degree of Paul's zeal, that distinguished his Christian from his legal character. His Christian zeal was benevolent, mellow, kind, compassionate, heavenly. His legal zeal was boisterous, denunciatory, censorious, hardhearted, fiery, earthly, sensual, devilish. Thus a truly Christian zeal may always be distinguished from a legal zeal, in the manifestation of deep benevolence and compassion, a mellow, chastened, heavenly sensibility to the wants and woes of men.

5. Gospel service may be distinguished from legal service, by the fact, that it affords to the mind the fulness of a present satisfaction and happiness. It is the mind's present solace and joy. It is its own present reward and happiness. In proof of this I observe--

(1.) That from the very nature of the case it must be so. The acceptable service of God is doing just that which the mind views in its own nature, as supremely desirable and agreeable. It is that which the mind loves for its own sake, and therefore naturally and necessarily makes the mind happy. The more intently the mind is engaged in this employment, the more full and perfect is its joy, from the laws of its own being. And here I must remark, that a very singular objection has been stated to this view of the subject; which is, if the mind loves the service of God for its own sake, there is no more virtue in that state, than there is in eating our food, because we love it. To this I answer--our appetite for food is constitutional, and not something in which we are voluntary; and therefore, partaking of our food because we love it

is not virtuous. If our love of the service of God were involuntary and constitutional, as our appetite for food is, the service of God would not be virtuous. But it should be ever remembered, that the appetite, or disposition to serve God, consists in benevolence, or good-willing; and is therefore entirely voluntary. Indeed the very appetite is itself a choice. It is therefore in the highest degree virtuous. If our appetite for food were voluntary, and depended upon our own voluntary choice, both the exercise and the gratification of our appetite, from correct motives, would be virtuous. The virtue of serving God, then, lies in the exercise of benevolence, or in choosing to do good for its own sake. The very exercising and carrying out of this benevolence in the active service of God, necessarily brings with it a present and essential happiness. God's happiness consists in his benevolence. God has always found his happiness in the exercise of benevolence. He does not need to wait till he has done his work, before he enjoys it. He is not waiting to complete his toils, and expecting happiness only when He can sit down in supineness and inaction. The more glowing and deep his benevolence, the greater is his happiness. Just so it is with a gospel service. The mind engaged in this service feels that "an excellent oil is distilled" upon it, in the very exercise itself. It feels itself fanned by the breezes and moistened by the dews of heaven. It feels itself to be in an atmosphere of love. Its very labors are essential sweetness, and it drinks from the river of life, while it pushes its efforts to promote universal happiness.

(2.) It is a course of life in which all the powers of the mind harmonize; which harmony of soul is necessary and essential happiness. Why, it is love. It is the love of God. It is the temper and spirit of God. It necessarily produces the very happiness of God in kind; and but for outward trying circumstances, would be as perfect as that which God experiences, amid his own labors of love.

(3.) In proof of this position, I quote from the Bible. Job 27:10: "Will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he always call upon God?" Here it is mentioned, as one of the marks of the hypocrite, that he does not delight himself in the Almighty. It is truly wonderful to what an extent the Bible exhibits true religion as affording present joy and delight. I will only quote a few, out of the great multitude of passages

upon this subject, that may serve as specimens of the light in which the Holy Scriptures present this subject: Isa. 32:17: "The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." Isa. 54:13: "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children." Isa. 66:12: "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream." Isa. 26:3: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee." Ps. 37:4: "Delight thyself in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart." 40:8: "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart." Heb. 10:5: "When He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me." Ps. 119:14, 16, 35, 47, 70, 92, 97, 111, 127: "I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies as much as in all riches. I will delight myself in thy statutes; I will not forget thy word. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight. I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved. Their heart is as fat as grease; but I delight in thy law. Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction. O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thy testimonies have I taken as a heritage for ever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart. I love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold." Ps. 112:1: "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments." Job 15:11: "Are the consolations of God small with thee? Is there any secret thing with thee?" Ps. 19:8-11: "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is thy servant warned; and in keeping of them there is great reward." Acts 13:52: "The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost." Rom. 14:17: "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Rom. 15: 13, 29: "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." 2 Cor. 1:24: "Not for that we have

dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand." 2 Cor. 2:3: "I wrote this same unto you, lest when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice; having confidence in you all, that my joy is the joy of you all." 2 Cor. 8:2: "In a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality." Gal. 5:22: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Phil. 1:3, 4: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making request with joy." Heb. 12:2: "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." 1 Pet. 1:8: "Whom having not seen ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." 1 John 1:4: "These things write we unto you, that our joy may be full." 2 Cor. 7:4: "I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation." Heb. 10:34: "Ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance." Deut. 28:45-47: "All these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee; and they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, and upon thy seed for ever. Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things," &c. In this last passage the terrible curses of the law are represented as coming upon the children of Israel, because they had not rendered that service to God which made them happy. They had not joyed and delighted in the service of God. Phil 3:1: "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." Phil 4:4, 10: "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again: wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity." I Samuel 2:1: "Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the Lord: mine horn is exalted in the Lord; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation." Ps. 16:9: "My heart is glad, and my glory

rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope." Acts 5:41: "They departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." From these and multitudes of other passages, it is most manifest, as well as from the very nature of the case, that the acceptable service of God must constitute the present happiness of the soul.

6. These two kinds of service may be distinguished from each other in the fact that a legal service affords to the mind very little present satisfaction, which consists in a self-righteous peace, and the anticipation of future happiness. In proof of this I observe that the very nature of the case shows that it must be so. Inasmuch as it is not chosen for its own sake and that in which the mind supremely delights on its own account, it is often a laborious and irksome business. It is something submitted to which is not pleasant in itself, but on account of an anticipated reward. Such a man is religious for the same reason that some people take bitter medicine. The medicine is disagreeable in itself; but submitted to for the sake of an anticipated good. It is taken as the less of two evils. So a man may toil hard for the sake of his wages; but toil is not desired for its own sake, but only submitted to for the sake of the end. Just so with a legal religion. It is an uphill business. It is regarded as the less of two evils. It is something that must not be omitted, but attended to from the dire necessity of the case. But not consisting in benevolence, not being disinterestedly loved for its own sake, it cannot, in the very nature of the case, constitute the mind's present happiness. And the principal happiness which the mind can feel in it, is just that kind of satisfaction which a man may take in labor for the sake of the end he has in view. He would gladly forego the labor, could the end be obtained without it; but since it cannot, he submits to the labor, just in proportion as he regards the end. So when a man's convictions of the validity of religion, of the danger of hell, and the desirableness of heaven, are vivid in his own mind, he engages in the duties of religion, with a good degree of alacrity, feeling, and sensible satisfaction. Just as a man would feel a kind of satisfaction in his labor, who had a prospect of a great reward. But as soon as his convictions of sin, of danger, &c., subside, just in this proportion his religion becomes an irksome business. His prayers are short and far between, and the whole round of what he calls his religious duties drags heavily, and are a sad weight upon his shoulders. In short, his religion

is slavery. It is more tolerable than hell; but it has not in it the unction and sweetness of heaven.

VI. If any man would serve the Lord, he must begin by making his heart holy.

1. God says to the wicked, "Make to yourself a new heart and a new spirit." This is the very beginning of all religion, to give up selfishness and become supremely, disinterestedly benevolent.

2. As a holy heart consists in this, it is impossible that any other service can be acceptable to God. Indeed it is in reality the only service that is really offered to God. A legal service is self service. It is laboring for wages. It is not doing good for the love of doing good, and for the sake of the good, but merely for the sake of the wages, and is therefore not the service of God but of self. Those therefore who have unholy hearts "cannot serve the Lord, because He is a holy God." Until they are holy they cannot engage in a holy service. When Joshua told the people they could not serve the Lord, because He is a holy God, he did not intend to tell them that they could not become holy, but that remaining unholy, they could not serve the Lord. You, therefore, who are unholy, must not think to set about the acceptable service of God without first becoming holy. This is your first work.

3. It is the only service that can do you any good. God cannot honestly reward a legal service by the gift of eternal life, because there is not a particle of real virtue in it. Nor can He possibly reward a legal service with eternal life; for what is eternal life but holiness and its necessary results. It is absurd, therefore, to suppose that God can give you eternal life as the reward of legal service. Nor can you receive eternal life as the gift of grace, while your heart is not holy and you are not rendering to God a holy and acceptable service. It should be forever understood that if a man does not find his happiness in benevolence and in that course of life which God requires, he neither deserves to be happy, nor is it possible for God to make him happy. If he does not love his work, he does not deserve any reward for it, because his heart is not in it. Nor is it possible that he should be rewarded for his labor, unless he finds a sweetness and an enjoyment in the labor itself. Why heaven will not consist in supineness and inaction, in giving yourself up to the exercise of sweet emotions and ecstasies without benevolence and effort, but must consist in the service of God. If you are

not engaged in that kind of service here which makes you happy, the same kind of service will not make you happy in heaven.

4. If your legal service does good to others, it is no thanks to you. If through your legal and selfish efforts others are blessed, really converted and saved, it is not because you have had this end supremely in view, as one desired and chosen for its own sake. Therefore whoever may be blessed, you are not blessed and do not deserve to be. The conversion of souls does not fill you with joy and satisfaction, because it is not the end which you have chosen for its own sake. You do not find your reward in the very luxury of promoting the good of others. You are deceiving yourself in the anticipation of a future reward for mere legal services. This is a horrible delusion.

5. But in all probability you will do no good in this state of mind; for it seems to be a universal law that "like shall beget like"--slaves shall beget slaves--that being a legalist yourself, you will beget proselytes in your own likeness. Christ said of the Pharisees, "ye do compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him two fold more the child of hell than yourselves." If you have not in your own experience, gone any farther than a legal religion, your spiritual children will be legalists. You may make converts, but they will not be Christians. They may be zealous, a great change may occur in them; but they will not be converts to Jesus Christ. They will not know what the true mind of God is, because you have never really and fully exhibited it to them, either in your preaching, or your temper and life. Your converts will as a general thing, fall even below you, and be two fold more the children of legality and of hell than yourself.

REMARKS.

1. If your religion does not afford you present happiness, if you do not feel that there is real salvation in it, it is a legal and not a gospel religion. Beloved, there is a sad mistake upon this subject among professing Christians. Instead of finding their religion a peace-giving, soul-satisfying employment, they think themselves to be engaged in what they call the Christian warfare, and expect to be made happy when they get to heaven, and can cease from their irksome labors. They drag on against their feelings, and elaborate a most distressing religion. The more they have of it, the more miserable they are. They keep up a continual controversy between their conscience and their hearts, supposing this inward struggle to constitute the Christian warfare. They bless themselves with

the idea that their painful service will soon be over, and they shall have nothing to do but sit down in the midst of the joys of heaven.

Now the Christian warfare consists in conflicts with those temptations, persecutions and besetments, that endeavor to draw us aside from the labor in which we take so much delight. The true Christian's religion is his life. When he is left to pursue his course of doing good without opposition or temptation, he finds the service itself to be the delight and satisfaction of his soul. He knows full well that the grand difference between heaven and this state of existence lies in the fact that there he will have less interruption, temptation and resistance, and can therefore give himself up uninterruptedly and without fighting Satan, to that service in which he has so long had supreme delight. Is this your religion?

2. There is reason to believe that many of what are called revivals of religion go no farther than to make the converts mere legalists, and that the converts never get fairly into the kingdom of God. They are awakened and more or less deeply convicted, but never come to be possessed of the idea that religion is love, while their hearts remain entirely selfish. They are deceived by the vividness of their emotions and the excitement of their minds, into a belief that they are truly converted to God. In proof of this position, observe--

(1.) The spirit with which what claim to be revivals are often conducted--the class of motives presented are merely legal. The spirit in which they are preached is merely legal, and the whole tendency of the preaching and of the manner, together with illustrations used in endeavoring to impress the minds of inquirers with the true nature of religion, of submission and true conversion, are altogether calculated to induce only a selfish religion, to bring the converts under bondage to law and to sin, instead of bringing them into the glorious liberty of the children of God. I could give multitudes of illustrations of this method of conducting revivals, that would naturally lead a reflecting mind to the conclusion that such partial exhibitions of truth, the exhibition of such a legal spirit and zeal, as are constantly presented to the minds of inquirers would have a tendency only to a legal, selfish, self-righteous religion.

(2.) Another fact to show this, is that the spirit of the converts of such revivals is often manifestly a mere legal spirit. As a matter of fact they are not brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God. But instead of Gospel liberty, they are brought into legal bondage. By a little conversation

with them, it appears, almost at first blush, that their religion is not love, that it is not mellow, holy, heavenly, meek, humble, broken-hearted, but is on the other hand hard-hearted, selfish, constrained, severe, unkind, sectarian and censorious.

(3.) Sometimes the inquirers are told not to expect happiness in religion, but to be willing to wait for happiness till they get to heaven; and when those who have professed submission begin more than to suspect that their submission is not of the right kind, and to complain that they don't feel right, that their hearts are hard, that they have little or no enjoyment in the duties of religion, that they are very little inclined to labor and to pray for the conversion of souls, and that as a matter of fact they do not enjoy or find themselves blessed and happy in the service of God, they are flatly told, when thus convicted by the Holy Ghost of being wrong, that they are not to expect to be happy in this world--that labor is their great business, whether they enjoy it or not--that they must not regard the feelings with which they labor, but act up to their convictions of duty, whether they enjoy this service or not. And sometimes they even go so far as to tell them that the less enjoyment they have in religion, the more virtue there is in it, as in that case their religion is not selfish, but disinterested. Now I do not hesitate to say, and I say it with grief, that in this kind of instruction there is a radical and most ruinous error, and such teaching, from its very nature, is calculated as fatally to mislead the soul as Universalism or even more so, for while it is equally false, it is much more specious than Universalism. It entirely overlooks the nature of true religion. It sets aside entirely the idea that religion is love, and that nothing but love and its necessary fruits are religion. It holds up the idea that religion consists in a mere legal conformity to convictions of duty. It is true that persons are not to wait for particular emotions of any kind, nor to be stumbled in the discharge of their religious duties, because they do not at all times experience the same inward emotions in the discharge of duty. But it is also true, that all religion is love or benevolence, and that the exercise of benevolence naturally and necessarily produces happiness, and that there is a divine sweetness, peace and soul-satisfying happiness in the very exercise of benevolence itself. When therefore a professed convert finds as a matter of fact his religion hangs heavily, and that his religious duties lay as a weight upon his hands--to tell him this is just what he may expect--that this is no evidence that he is wrong-

-that this laborious and irksome business may after all be true religion, is to inculcate upon him an abominable delusion and as fatally to deceive him, as if he were taught that he could go to heaven without a change of heart.

(4.) In all such cases it is of fundamental importance to discriminate clearly between seeking happiness in religion and actually finding it. The Bible most clearly teaches us and we may learn the same from common sense and from the nature of the case, that if permanent happiness is the object of pursuit, and the grand motive which leads the mind to engage in religion, this is working for wages. It is self-righteousness, self-service, and not the true service of God. But it is also true that if the heart is truly benevolent, if the service of God is chosen and loved for its own sake, if to do good for the sake of the good and from a desire to promote the holiness and happiness of being for its own sake, be that which the mind supremely desires and chooses on its own account, it is impossible that the duties of religion should not afford an exquisite relish in themselves, and that a course of life so highly valued for its own sake, should not afford a relish of a permanent and blessed happiness. If then the convert complain that he does not enjoy the service of the Lord, he should be instantly and plainly told that he is not engaged in the service of the Lord, that "wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace," that "the path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day," and that if these are not conscious realities in his own experience, he is deceiving himself--that true religion is love or benevolence--that there is a divine sweetness and relish in benevolence--and that if he does not find in the service he renders to God, that "in the keeping of God's commandments there is great reward," it is because he does not keep them. Nothing can be of greater importance than to make the impression at once that he is a legalist and has not been born again. But instead of this, professed converts are often encouraged to rest in a legal religion as the true religion, and are only exhorted to persevere, be faithful in the discharge of duty, binding and supporting themselves by oaths and promises and resolutions, and not to expect happiness in religion till they get to heaven. O, what a terrible delusion is this. And now let me ask if this is not, as a matter of fact, the real history of many in revivals.

(5.) Another consideration that establishes the fact that multitudes of professed converts have only a legal religion is, that they so suddenly

backslide and as it is commonly expressed "grow cold in religion" as soon as the effervescence of excited emotion subsides. Now whether their religion is of the heart, or merely of the emotions, can only be known as the greatness of the excitement subsides. Strong feelings or very highly excited emotions, may induce volition or a series of volitions at variance with the state or permanent preference of the will or heart. A miser may be so affected in view of some spectacle or wretchedness as to exert such a temporary influence over his will, as that by a single volition he will relieve the sufferings before him, in view of which he is so greatly excited. But this volition has been induced by an excitement of feeling in opposition to the permanent state of the will. Now as soon as the excitement has subsided, he calls himself a fool for having been thus induced to part with his money, and almost curses himself for his folly. Now in revivals of religion, it often happens that strongly excited feeling will induce for the time being a series of volitions, that will so shape the life as really to lead us and to lead the subject of them to believe, that the heart is truly changed, that the deep moral preferences of the soul are reversed, that selfishness is given up, and that benevolence has taken its place. But let excitement fully subside, and then you will be able to discern clearly and distinctly, whether the heart is changed, or whether the volitions of the mind were only induced by temporary excitement. If it is found that the deep currents of the soul are benevolent, that selfishness in heart, life, business, and social intercourse is abandoned, and that love and disinterested benevolence, a supreme disposition to do good to all around is the real state of the heart, then you may be certain that there is true conversion, that that soul has truly entered upon the service of God, and that he is not a mere legalist, and serving for wages.

3. Converts should always be made to see, that the more disinterested they are in religion the more happy they will be; of course the less they seek happiness the more they will find it. And the less regard they have to their own happiness, the more self-sacrificing and disinterested they are, the greater will be their joy, and the fuller the tide of their blessedness. Suppose a man comes across, in the street, an object of the deepest distress and compassion. Being touched to the very quick with the spectacle before him, and from unmingled benevolence, he steps into a provision store and purchases a basket of provisions, and sets at the feet of this object of poverty and distress. The fainting starvling lifts up his streaming eyes of gratitude, speaks not, but looks unutterable thanks. Now the happiness of

this benefactor would be precisely in proportion to the strength of his benevolence and disposition to do him good. If his benevolence was strong and disinterested, and he longed to do him good for its own sake, his happiness would be full and unmingled and he would find his happiness to be in proportion to his disinterestedness, and that in this thing he had found most exquisite happiness simply because he sought it not. Upon the principle that he who would lose his life for the sake of doing good, shall find it and keep it unto eternal life.

4. You can see the secret of the perseverance of the saints. They persevere in religion because they love it for its own sake.

5. You see also the secret of the apostacy of legalists. When their excitement subsides, their religion is too irksome a business for them. They abandon it because they have no heart in it. "They went out from us," says John, "because they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have remained with us." Now the same Apostle affirms that "he that is born of God doth not commit sin, because his seed remaineth in him, so that he cannot sin because he is born of God." The seed which remains in him is the love of God, the same benevolence that is in the heart of God.--This has taken the place of selfishness, has come to be the supreme ruling disposition of his soul.--And because his seed remaineth in him he cannot live in sin. And if it is found that he can live in sin, it is certain that he is not born of God.

6. Whether your religion is of the right kind or a mere legal religion, will be attested by your own consciousness. You cannot but know if you will be honest with yourselves, whether your religion is liberty or slavery. Would enough of the same kind make heaven? Or if you should multiply it a thousand fold would it not increase your wretchedness?

7. The legality of professors is a great stumbling block to sinners, seeing as they do, that there is little, or nothing of enjoyment in the religion which they observe in some persons, they conceive of God as a hard master, of religion as a hard and cruel service, as destitute of every thing that is pleasant and sweet and soul satisfying, infinitely less delightful than the pleasures of sin; and therefore to be postponed as long as possible, and yielded to only when dire necessity forces it upon the soul. It is manifest that they look upon religion as only the less of two evils. It is better than to go to hell, but much less valuable in itself than the pleasures of the world. Now where do they get this idea; how comes it to be so almost universally prevalent among the impenitent? Why, the fact is, they

receive their notions of what religion is, from what they observe among professors of religion, what they behold in their parents and relations and friends around them, who profess to be in the service of God.

8. And you can see why sinners are so reluctant to give up the pleasures of sin, and why young persons are apt to conclude that religion would set aside all their happiness. Why, this is the very idea of some professors themselves. The mother of a gay young lady, a professor of religion, a few years since was distressed that her daughter became convicted and hopefully converted in a revival of religion. "O," she said, "what a pity that such a charming girl, should be so early cut off from all the pleasures of the ball room, and secluded from the gaiety of her young friends, and shut up to the sameness and solemn performance of religious duties." I trust there are not many professedly religious mothers who would say as much as this, or even think it. And yet, if they did not, it might be, that a mere natural fear of the loss of the soul, rather than a rich experience of the joys of God's salvation, would prevent their saying it. The fact is, that multitudes of professors of religion know not what enjoyment in religion is. To them it is after all a naked reality that God is a hard master, that they have short keeping and hard labor, that they live on husks, and their father does not feed them. But this is not the religion of the gospel.--It is not the religion of love. It is self righteousness and ruin.

9. You can see how few professors of religion have truly embraced the gospel; so few indeed that when here and there a soul is found that truly enjoys the service of God, and feels constrained to speak of the joys of God's salvation, he is looked upon as a wonder, as having a great deal of animal feelings, and as being well nigh deranged. He is not unfrequently rebuked and even despised for talking so much about enjoyment in religion. He is suspected and publicly accused of selfishness, and as serving God for the loaves and fishes, without considering at all, that it is his disinterested love and labors of love that constitute his happiness.

10. There is a kind of happiness that is not religion. And wherever it appears, needs and deserves rebuke. It is the opposite extreme of a legal religion. It is antinomianism, the religion and happiness of emotions, ecstasies, and a false peace, amounting to a kind of quietism, that does little or nothing to glorify God or benefit mankind. Now between this state of feeling and the happiness of true religion there is a distinction as broad and palpable as the noon day light. The

one consists in the emotion, and effervescence of excited feelings which does nothing, and the other consists in the exercise of good willing, of benevolence, and in labors of love, together with those states of the emotion that naturally and necessarily result from this state of the will. The happiness of one consists in doing nothing for the glory of God and the good of men, but simply giving up the mind to the influence of imagination and excited emotion, while the other finds its happiness in giving up the whole being to active exertions, for the promotion of the glory of God and the salvation of men.

11. You see the necessity of a class of ministers that know, and continually experience the joys and the power of God's salvation. That such an experience is important to the promotion of true religion is evident, from the very nature of the case. How shall a man describe what true religion is, unless he has it in his own experience? How shall a man preach Christ, who does not know Christ?--How shall a man preach a religion of love, and make people understand it, who is not himself in the enjoyment of it? Isaiah says: "Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head; they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away." The Psalmist says: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit: Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee."

The grand reason why ministers promote a legal religion is, that they are themselves legalists.--They preach as far as they know, and having only the baptism of John, they have need that some one should expound unto them the way of God more perfectly. They testify what they have seen and experienced, and this, they consider to be true religion. They inculcate it upon others; being themselves in bondage, they beget children in their own likeness. They are born and continue slaves.--Nothing is more alarming to them than the idea of getting above their sins. They would even manifest indignation at the profession of sanctification on the part of any soul. They would think that surely he knows little or nothing of the evils of a wicked heart, and would look upon him as in a most deluded and self-righteous state. Why, they have never so much as conceived of gospel liberty. A religion of love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, temperance, meekness, and all the graces of the Holy Spirit, what do they know of these? "Being rooted and grounded in love, and

comprehending with all saints, what is the length, and breadth, and height, and depth, of that love of God, that passeth knowledge." O, what do they know of this? Alas, the poor slaves! No, reader, they regard the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life as a most dangerous heresy; it is so infinitely at variance with their own experience, and with all that they call and really suppose to be religion, that they look upon such a sentiment, as ridiculous, and dangerous. I say then, we must have a class of ministers, the state of the Church and of the world imperiously demand it, that know what gospel liberty is. Look at Wesley and his coadjutors, at Luther and his coadjutors. Read their writings; look into Luther's Commentary, on the Epistle to the Galatians. Read the history of the life and times of those holy men.--Witness the effect of their labors. And what is the secret of all their success. The fact that they walked with God, that they were in the liberty of the gospel, that they distinguished clearly between a legal and a gospel religion, that they distinguished between the righteousness which is by faith and the righteousness of the law. In short, they pressed upon their hearers, the great idea, that God is love, that religion is love, not emotions or complacency, but benevolence, and this succeeded under God in kindling up among mankind the very fire that lives in the heart of God.

12. The truly religious man need not, and does not want to get to heaven before he is happy. He is happy here. He finds, that to be true in his own experience which James declares: "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."

13. Unless self-denial, and the carrying out of your benevolence, work out in you a soul-satisfying happiness, you are not truly converted.

14. Great multitudes make up their minds to serve God, without understanding definitely what it is to serve God, and many ministers preach on such texts as this: "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve," when they press sinners up to the point of decision, in respect to whose service they will choose, but omit accurately to discriminate between a gospel and a legal service. Now men are in the habit of seeing others serve for reward, and of serving themselves for reward. And as all their notions of service on every subject are selfish, and they have little or no idea of any other service than a selfish service, it is of indispensable importance, and fundamental to their salvation that a discrimination as clear as light be made, between a selfish and a disinterested service. And as their notions

are all selfish, no pains should be spared to possess their minds fully of the true idea of a gospel service, as distinguished from a legal service. They should be shown that one is holiness and the other is sin, that one is serving God and the other is serving self, that the one is true religion and the other arrant wickedness.

15. And now, dearly beloved, as I have spread out this subject before you, let me ask you where you are. What is your true character? What is your religion? Are you a real servant of God, or are you serving yourself? Are you a legalist, or are you a Christian? Are you converted, or are you not converted? Are you free, or are you a slave? Do you walk with God in the liberty of the gospel, or are you wearing the galling yoke of the law, and in bondage to sin? O, beloved, walk up to an honest answering of these questions.--Remember, that God has said, "sin shall not have dominion over you, because you are not under the law but under grace." Does your experience test the truth of this? Can you honestly say "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ, hath made me free from the law of sin and death," or are you still crying out in the legal experience portrayed in the 7th of Romans: "O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"--My perishing and beloved souls, rest not a moment in such a state as this. This whole matter of a legal experience is full of death. It is the rottenness of a legal religion, which will lead you down to the gates of hell. O, remember that "there is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

If then your own heart condemns you, remember that God is greater than your heart, and will condemn you. "Shall mortal man be more just than God?" "Escape for your life," and rest not till you are rooted and grounded in love.

[Back to Top](#)

Entire Consecration a Condition of Discipleship

Lecture XXX

April 14, 1841

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Luke 14:33: "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."

In this discussion I design to show:

- I. What is not implied in forsaking all for Christ.*
- II. What is implied in it.*
- III. What is intended by being a disciple of Christ.*
- IV. That being his disciple is an indispensable condition of salvation.*
- V. That forsaking all is an indispensable condition of discipleship.*
- VI. We have no right to profess discipleship nor to ask for divine teaching, only so far as we live in a state of entire consecration to God.*

I. What is not implied in forsaking all for Christ.

1. It does not imply the abandonment of our possessions and friends to go on a pilgrimage.
2. It does not imply that the actual parting with all our possessions is indispensable to being a disciple of Christ.
3. Nor is it a mere barter or exchange, a giving up of worldly things in exchange for eternal life. Many persons seem to have an idea, that forsaking all for Christ is merely giving up worldly things, for the sake of obtaining heavenly things. This would turn upon the mere principle of speculation, and is by no means the thing intended in the text.

II. What is implied in forsaking all for Christ.

1. A radical change of heart, from selfishness to benevolence. In other words, a forsaking, abandoning self-interest as the end of pursuit--an absolute and everlasting giving up of self-interest and self-gratification, as the end of life; and the entering into the views, sympathies, and designs of Christ, in promoting the glory of God, and the interests of his kingdom.

2. It implies the abandonment in heart and life, of the principle of self-ownership. Sinners are continually acting upon the principle of self-ownership; and practically insist upon their right to dispose of themselves as they please, without being accountable to God or man. Christ abhors this course of conduct, denies their right thus to dispose of themselves, claims them as his own, as having been at first created by Him, and afterwards redeemed by his blood. He therefore insists, that they shall cease to contend, in theory and practice, that they are their own, and have a right to dispose of themselves as they please.

3. It implies the renunciation of the claim of absolute proprietorship in any thing--that you recognize the truth, that you have nothing that you can properly call your own--that every thing is God's, and that you are his steward.

4. It implies the hearty and practical recognition of universal stewardship--that every thing you have and are--your being--life, health, body, soul, time, possessions, friends, all, are to be regarded and treated by you as in the highest possible sense belonging to God; and that for every thing, you are to give Him, as his steward, a strict and impartial account.

5. It implies that you as really feel, that all your possessions are God's, and that you have no right to dispose of them, only by his order, as you would feel in regard to a farm, a house, or any piece of property which you had sold, and of which you had given title deeds, and only remained in possession as a tenant at will. Suppose you had sold your farm or your house; title deeds had been executed, delivered, and recorded, and you were only allowed to retain them, till the owner comes or sends some one to take possession. In such a case, you understand very well in what light you would regard his property. If you are an honest man, you would not think of selling it, or making any disposition of it whatever, except to husband it to

the best advantage for the owner--that whenever he should appear or send to take possession, you would have no thought of demurring to his right to take possession. You would feel all the time, "This is not mine." This would have a practical bearing upon all your conduct. You would expect of course, at any time, to deliver possession at the call of the owner, without gainsaying or resistance.

6. It implies a course of conduct in all respects corresponding to the state of mind of which I have just spoken. It is a state of mind in which you would no more think of disposing of the things in your possession without consulting God, and being satisfied in respect to his will upon the subject, than you would think of going and disposing of your neighbor's goods without consulting him. The man who forsakes all, in the sense of the text, feels, that with respect to his fellow men, his possessions are his own in reference to them; but in reference to God, his conscious and practical feeling is, that these things are no more his--that he has no more right to dispose of them, but at the bidding of God, than he has to dispose of his neighbor's things.

7. It implies the doing of all this from love to God, and not, as I have said, upon the principle of barter and exchange. It is to be done upon the same principle upon which an affectionate wife would forsake all that she has, and go into banishment with her husband, from affection to him, and not because she expected a reward.

8. It implies the joyful, and not constrained doing of this. It is to be considered, not as the least of two evils, but as that which is right in itself, just, useful, and to be chosen and loved for its own sake. It really is strictly just, for as a matter of fact you are not your own, and are mere tenants at will, with respect to all your possessions. It is therefore, really a matter of strict justice--that you should forsake all that you have, in the sense explained. It should be done by you, because it is just and right, and from a love to right--not from fear of punishment if you do not do it.

9. It implies entire consecration to God of yourself and all that you have and are; and nothing short of this is implied in forsaking all for Christ.

III. What is intended by being a disciple of Christ.

1. A disciple is a pupil. Therefore, to be a disciple of Christ is to be his pupil, and have Him for a teacher.
2. To be a disciple of Christ, is to be a Christian--a follower of Christ--one devoted to his interest--one who embraces his principles, believes his doctrine, and follows his example.

IV. Being Christ's disciple, or divine teaching, is an express and indispensable condition of salvation.

1. The doctrine of the indispensable necessity of the teachings of the Holy Spirit, to the salvation of the soul, is abundantly taught in the Bible--so abundantly, that I need not take up your time in quoting proof texts.
2. It is also evident from the nature of the case. Words are only signs of ideas. They possess us of no ideas, where we have no experience. They are a mere foreign language, unless we have the idea in our mind which they are designed to represent, or unless we have some experience that shall enable us to understand the meaning of the words used.
3. Words expressive of spiritual truth are figurative, as a thing of course; and but for the influence of the Holy Spirit, we should not get hold of the real meaning of words any farther than our natural experience of things would place us in circumstances to understand it. A selfish mind may and does understand enough to convict and condemn it, and enough to enable the mind, were it disposed, to render an acceptable obedience to God. But as the unregenerate man is wholly indisposed to obey God, as a matter of fact, he does not and will not understand enough of divine truth to induce him to change his heart, without the teachings of the Holy Spirit. Hence, the necessity of being taught by Christ.

V. Forsaking all is an indispensable condition of discipleship.

1. The text--"Whosoever he be of you, that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."
2. The nature of the case:
 - (1.) Nothing short of this is conversion, or regeneration. Regeneration consists in renouncing selfishness, and becoming supremely

benevolent. It consists in a change of heart.

(2.) Nothing short of this is virtue; because, nothing short of this is right. A man has not done right until he has done all that justice requires. Justice requires entire renunciation of self-interest, as the great end of life, and a cordial and universal consecration of self and all that we have to God. Until a man has done this, he has in no sense done right. Till he has done this, he is a dishonest man; a defrauder and robber of God; and there is not and cannot be a particle of virtue in him.

(3.) It is naturally indispensable to salvation. The prime idea of salvation is holiness. A man can neither be holy nor happy, without forsaking all he has, in the sense in which I have explained it. Without this, he can be at peace neither with God nor with himself. It is just what God demands, what his own conscience demands, and what the universe demands of him. Until he does this, it is impossible that he should have peace.

3. It is indispensable to divine teaching:

(1.) Because the renunciation of selfishness, as the rule of life, and a state of entire consecration to his service, are naturally indispensable to a right understanding of his views, sentiments, and instructions.

(2.) There must be a similarity of views, feelings, and experience, between two persons, or they cannot fairly understand each other. Now if you are selfish, and He supremely benevolent, there is of necessity such an exact contrariety in your views, feelings, and states of mind, as to render it next to impossible for you to understand Him. All your habits of thinking and reasoning, all your understanding of language, is in accordance with the supremely selfish state of your heart. How, then, will you understand the language of one whose state of mind is in all respects the exact opposite of your own? How remarkable it is, that as soon as a person becomes thoroughly converted, the Bible, which had before been to him a dead letter, becomes at once so plain and simple, that that which was before read without any interest or understanding, appears all new, plain, glorious; and the mind is filled

with wonder, that the Bible has never appeared so before. This is the natural result of being in a state of mind similar to that of the writers of the Bible. When persons speak to us in our own language, and upon a subject in which we strongly sympathize with them, we understand them with the utmost ease. But if in the opposite state of mind, we almost invariably misunderstand them.

(3.) Without this state of mind, Christ cannot teach you; because you will not study. It is in vain for any one to attempt to teach another, if he will not yield up his mind to the investigation and consideration of the subject. Therefore, except you forsake your selfishness, become truly benevolent, and engage heart and soul with Christ, in building up his kingdom, you will have no such interest in the end as to give up your mind to the study and understanding of the means by which the end is to be obtained.

(4.) Unless you forsake all that you have, Christ cannot teach you, because you will not be candid. What he says will not be received by you with honesty, candor and a disposition to know and do the truth.

(5.) Nor will you be diligent, without this state of mind, in searching out his meaning.

(6.) Nor will you understand the doctrines of self-denial which He teaches. Without a self-denying state of mind, without that state of mind which forsakes all that we have, and abandons selfishness in every form and degree, we shall not of course understand the doctrines of self-denial as taught by Christ.

(7.) Without this state of mind, you will resist, when he rebukes your prejudices, selfishness and lust.

(8.) The doctrines of the cross cannot be received without the spirit of cross-bearing. Hence cross-bearing is forever indispensable to discipleship.

VI. We have no right to profess discipleship, nor to ask for divine teaching, only so far as we live in a state of entire consecration to God.

1. Because this is the express condition of discipleship.

2. Because the Bible invariably represents the beginning of true religion as an act of entire consecration. It is, in the Bible, spoken of as a radical change of moral character, as a change of heart, as a new birth.

3. The nature of the case shows that nothing short of this can be either virtue or obedience to God.

4. It is tempting God to profess discipleship without possessing that state of mind which is the expressed and indispensable condition of discipleship.

5. It is tempting God to ask for divine teaching, or to ask Christ to be our teacher, unless we fulfill the condition upon the fulfillment of which alone, we can become his disciples. Certainly He has a right to impose such conditions upon us. Nay, He is bound to do so. Both justice and the nature of the case render such a condition indispensable. And is it not insulting Him to ask for divine teaching, to profess to be his disciples, while as a matter of fact, we do not fulfill the expressed condition of discipleship? Have we a right to retain our selfishness--to live in any form of sin--to reject the condition--and yet claim to be his disciples, and come to Him for instruction, as if we fulfilled the condition? Surely we have no such right, and every such expectation is vain.

6. All professions of discipleship without the spirit of entire consecration, are regarded by Christ as highly abominable and dishonorable to Him. To all such persons He says, "I would that thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

REMARKS.

1. Entire consecration and entire sanctification are the same thing. I have been amazed many times of late to hear persons contending for the doctrine of entire consecration to God in this life, who pretend to reject the doctrine of entire sanctification, as if they were different things. Now the very meaning of the term Sanctification is consecration. This is the meaning of the term as used both in the Old and New Testaments. It is really astonishing to see how much play there can be upon a word among professedly good men. They dare not deny the doctrine of entire consecration to God in this life, but having committed themselves against the doctrine of entire sanctification, they try to preserve their consistency

in holding to the one and rejecting the other, thus assuming what is certainly contrary to fact, that they are different things.

It is not a little curious that some writers in the religious periodicals of the day, are opposing the doctrine of entire sanctification, while they profess that all ought to preach the doctrine of entire consecration, not only as a thing attainable, but as something which we are to expect to attain in this life. I say again, to sanctify is to set apart; to consecrate to the service of God. Consecration and sanctification to God are words of precisely similar import.

2. So far is entire sanctification from being unattainable or a rare attainment with real Christians in this life, that it is the very beginning of true religion in all the saints. It is the very first act of obedience. This has been substantially insisted upon by all the leading orthodox writers for ages. Pres. Edwards says upon this subject, in his treatise upon the "Religious Affections," vol. 5 of his Works, pp. 264-5:

"And this point may be farther illustrated and confirmed, if it be considered, that the holy scriptures abundantly place sincerity and soundness in religion, in making a full choice of God as our only Lord and portion, forsaking all for Him, and in a full determination of the will for God and Christ, on counting the cost; in our hearts closing and complying with the religion of Jesus Christ, with all that belongs to it, embracing it with all its difficulties, as it were hating our dearest earthly enjoyments, and even our own lives, for Christ; giving up ourselves with all that we have, wholly and for ever unto Christ, without keeping back any thing or making any reserve. In one word, sincerity consists in the great duty of self-denial for Christ; or in denying, that is, as it were disowning and renouncing ourselves for Him, making ourselves nothing that He may be all. Mat. 5:29, 30: 'If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.' Mat. 6:24: 'No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.' Mat. 10:37-39: 'He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me;

and he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it.' Mat. 13:44-46. Luke 14:16-20, 25-33, and 16:13. Rom. 6:3-8. Gal 2:20, and 6:14. Phil. 3:7-10. 1 John 2:15. Rev. 14:4. Gen. 12:1-4, with Heb. 11:8-10. Gen. 22:12, and Heb. 11:17, 24-27. Deut. 13:6, and 33:9. Now surely having a heart to forsake all for Christ, tends to actually forsaking all for Him, so far as there is occasion, and we have the trial. Having a heart to deny ourselves for Christ, tends to denying ourselves in deed, when Christ and self-interest stand in competition. A giving up of ourselves, with all that we have, in our hearts, without making any reserve there, tends to our behaving ourselves universally as his, as subject to his will, and devoted to his ends. Our hearts entirely closing with the religion of Jesus, with all that belongs to it, and as attended with all its difficulties, upon a deliberate counting of the cost, tends to a universal closing with the same in act and deed, and actually going through all the difficulties we meet with in the way of religion, and so holding out with patience and perseverance."

Now here President Edwards expressly maintains all that is asserted in this discourse in respect to the real meaning of this text, and fully confirms the idea that entire consecration in the sense here explained is implied in "sincerity" in religion, and that it is indispensable to the existence of true religion in the soul. Indeed, he here fully asserts all that any of us at Oberlin have ever pretended to teach on the subject of entire sanctification; for observe, that he teaches in this paragraph, where he is discoursing particularly upon the nature or attributes of true religion, not only entire, but also continued sanctification. This Pres. Edwards says is indispensable to "sincerity or soundness in religion at all." And let me ask, suppose any person to be just what Pres. Edwards here asserts to belong to and implied in the very existence of religion in the soul, what more does God require of him? Just read over the paragraph again, and see if the orthodox Pres. Edwards does not teach the very doctrine, in all its length and breadth, for which we have contended. He is not speaking of some rare attainment in religion, but of that which is indispensable to the very beginning of religion, as that without which there is no "sincerity or soundness in religion."

President Edwards, then, with all his fears of the doctrine of Christian Perfection, when describing true religion, asserts and maintains the very sentiment for which we contend, only changing the phraseology, but manifestly meaning the same thing.

3. What a deplorable state of things is that when the church and its ministers, many of them, seriously call in question the practical attainability, in this life, of that which constitutes the very beginning of true religion.

4. Nor is the fact that religion consists in entire consecration, at all inconsistent with growth in grace. To grow in grace is to grow in favor with God, for this is the meaning of the language. A child may consecrate all its little powers to God, and yet continue to grow in grace, that is, in the favor of God. This is asserted to have been actually the case with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The word rendered "in favor," in the case of Christ, being that which is elsewhere rendered grace. As knowledge extends, holiness will ever extend; and thus the saints will grow in grace to all eternity.

5. You can see why Christ found fault with the members of one of the churches for having left its "first love." Their first love was right. It was entire consecration. And He regarded their having left their first love as an act of apostacy, for which He threatened them with destruction.

6. As regeneration consists in entire sanctification, or consecration to God, the only question that can reasonably be agitated is in respect to its permanency--whether, as a matter of fact, we may expect to continue in our first love--whether we may expect to abide in a state of entire consecration, or whether backsliding is a thing to be expected of course?

7. Who, after all, can really doubt that, by the grace of God, a convert may avoid backsliding? Who can really doubt, if he be properly instructed, that he may continue to grow in grace, as he grows in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, until he becomes rooted and grounded in love?

8. But this would be a state of permanent or continued sanctification. To my mind it is really shocking, that the Church should be alarmed when it is taught that persons are to expect to attain a state of entire sanctification in this life. It is certainly a monstrous error, to maintain that any thing short of entire consecration to God is regeneration. If any thing short of this is admitted by the teachers of religion to be true religion, it will inevitably lead the Church into a fatal error. And here I could inquire of my brethren upon my knees in agony, whether it is not true that the preaching of the present day often makes the impression that entire consecration to God is a rare attainment--something to be aimed at indeed--but seldom if ever reached in this life--that the best services of

the saints, and the best states of mind in which they are, are mingled with much that is wrong--and that they hourly, nay, continually offend and even sin in their most holy performances. Now how infinitely dangerous is such teaching as this. How many thousands of souls have gone to hell, because they have been led to believe they could be truly religious and yet be conscious of sin all the time. They have been convicted, felt condemned, and conscious indeed that their best performances were sinful. But they have been taught that this is the case with all true saints, and that a consciousness of present sin is not at all inconsistent with their being saints. Nay, that the more deeply conscious they are, of sinning daily, in word, thought and deed, the greater is the evidence of their humility, knowledge of their own hearts, and of the soundness of their piety. Now I humbly ask is this the standard God has set up? Does this look like complying with the conditions of this and many similar texts? Is this daily living in sin consistent with being a disciple of Christ? I beseech you, my brethren, look to this, and see whether the blood of deceived professors is not to be found in your skirts. Why, some of you talk about the dangerous tendency of preaching the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life. What can it mean, my brethren, that you do not perceive the dangerous tendency of preaching the opposite doctrine--the absolutely ruinous tendency of admitting, for one moment, that any thing less than a state of entire consecration, is at all acceptable to God, or at all consistent with the existence of true religion. Here I wish to be understood. I do not mean to be understood, that a person's occasionally falling into sin, is entirely inconsistent with his ever having been converted, or with his being a true Christian. But I do mean, and I solemnly believe, that Christ meant to teach, that nothing is acceptable to God, short of entire obedience; and that every act which is really acceptable to God implies entire consecration to God. I have so recently addressed you upon this subject, that I need not enlarge upon these thoughts.

9. Continuance in your first love, or in a state of entire consecration, or sanctification to God, is indispensable to the enjoyment of divine teaching. Remember, I beseech you, that this is the express condition, upon which alone you are to expect the teachings of Christ. Unless, therefore, you continue in this state, daily and hourly fulfill this condition, you have no right to come to Christ, expecting to be taught of Him. If you do expect it, you will not receive it. If you pray for the teachings of the Holy Spirit, you will not receive his influences, unless you live up to his divine instructions, obey all the light you have, and thus live in a state of entire consecration.

10. You see why so few persons really enjoy the continual teachings of the Holy Spirit--why they so often pray for the Spirit to teach them, and are not taught by Him. Why is it, that you, my brethren, so often ask for the Holy Spirit, and pray for divine guidance and teaching, and do not receive what you ask? I can answer for you. It is because you do not fulfill the condition, upon which alone you are to receive his influences. You are indulging some form of selfishness. You do not literally forsake all that you have. If you did, you might approach Christ, at any time, with the assurance that He will teach you. But as it is, He says to you, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things I say?" "Why do you claim me as your teacher, and come to me for instruction, when you do not comply with the expressed conditions, upon which alone I have promised to teach you?"

11. You see that whenever you go to pray for divine teaching, that this question must be distinctly before you, whether you so live in the fulfillment of the condition, that you have a right to ask for his instruction? Many persons live in selfishness. They are as conscious, that they do not live in a state of entire consecration, as they are that they live at all. And yet they continue to pray for divine teaching, as if they fulfilled the condition. Sometimes they deceive themselves, by thinking they are taught of Christ, when they are only amusing themselves with their own delusions, or following the suggestions of Satan. At other times they so often pray for divine teaching, with a consciousness that they do not receive it, as to become discouraged, and feel as if praying was of but very little use. They really doubt, whether the promises of Christ mean what they say. In all this they overlook the fact, that there is an express condition to these promises, although not in all cases immediately connected with them. Yet, in our text, and in multitudes of similar passages, it is expressed in the plainest language; with which they do not comply.

12. You see why the Bible is so little understood, even by the Church of God. While the church is in such a state as to doubt whether, as a matter of fact they are expected to live one single day without sin, it is no wonder they do not enjoy divine teaching. How can they understand the Bible without the Spirit of God? And how can they have the Holy Ghost without being in a state of entire consecration, or in other words, without living in all respects up to the best light they have? When you obey one truth, Christ will teach you another. And of what use is it for Him to continue to teach, while you refuse to obey?

13. You can see why so few persons make a thorough proficiency in Theological

study. If young men in the study of Theology, or ministers of any age, neglect to fulfill the conditions, and live in a state of entire consecration to God, they will not, and cannot of course enjoy divine teaching, and of course, will make very little proficiency in Theological study.

14. You can see why ministers are so often at a loss to know what to preach; seem to be so dull and dark, and feel it so difficult to prepare for the pulpit. If they lived in a state of entire consecration, their feelings would be the very reverse of all this. They would enjoy the continual teaching of Christ. They would continually feed the Church with knowledge and understanding. And out of their belly, as Christ has said, would flow rivers of living water.

15. You can see from this subject, what great injustice a minister does to Christ, and to the Church to which he ministers, if he does not live in a state of entire consecration to God. Why, suppose a Church employ a minister, and instead of his living in such a manner as to enjoy divine teaching, he indulges selfishness, appetite and lust, and thus deprives himself of the teaching of Christ. How infinitely does it endanger souls! How greatly does it dishonor God!

16. How much of the praying for the influence of the Holy Spirit is really mocking and tempting God. See that band of selfish professors of religion. They are assembled for a prayer meeting. Every one of them perhaps, is as conscious that he does not live up to the best light he has, that he does not forsake all that he has and live in a state of entire consecration to God, as he is of his own existence. Now what are they assembled for? Why, to pray for divine teaching, for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them and upon others. Indeed. And is not this tempting God? You ought to remember the word of the Lord in Ezek. 14:3: "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling-block of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them?" Now see these same professors daily around the family altar, praying for divine teaching, without so much as seriously intending to live for a single day in a state of entire consecration to God. Why do they make such prayers? Why do they indulge the expectation of mercy, the influence of Christ's Spirit to instruct them? I answer, because they are not themselves thoroughly and continually taught, that a state of entire consecration is the indispensable condition of being a disciple of Christ. Why, instead of this, the impression is made upon them, that a state of entire consecration is the rarest attainment in the world. And thus they live on, dragging their way down to death and hell, afraid

of the doctrine of entire consecration to God in this life--and well, with their views, they may be, for surely it is something entirely inconsistent with their experience. And when shall they ever have a different experience, unless the teachers of religion thoroughly awake to a state of entire consecration themselves, and to the duty of insisting universally upon entire consecration as the indispensable condition of discipleship?

17. Now, beloved, is it not one of the most astonishing things in the world, that with this and so many similar texts upon this subject in the hands of the Church, a state of entire consecration should be so little insisted upon, as indispensable to any degree of true religion?

18. Forsaking all that you have, deadness to selfishness, and to other lovers, is indispensable to the enjoyment of God and of Christ. A wife enjoys the society of her husband just in proportion as her heart is swallowed up in him. His presence is no satisfaction to her if she does not love him. If she have other lovers, the presence of her husband is but an annoyance to her. Just so with you. Unless you are supremely devoted to Christ, his presence would be but an annoyance to you.

19. You see why He so often cuts off every dependence on an idol. He is jealous over you with a godly jealousy. If He sees you going after idols and other lovers, He will often interfere and remove them out of the way.

20. The doctrine of entire consecration or entire sanctification in this life is no new doctrine. It is as old as the Bible, and as old as true religion. And as I said before, the only question respects the continuance and permanency of this state in this life, and not at all whether a state of entire consecration is attained in the present life.

21. Sinners can see what they have to do to become Christians. You must renounce your selfishness and become supremely and disinterestedly benevolent. You must change your heart, forsake all that you have and consecrate your all to Christ.

22. To refuse or neglect to do this is to continue in a state of high-handed injustice and rebellion against God. It is refusing to render to God that which belongs to Him. It is to refuse to become an honest man, to do what is right because it is right. Until you do this, God cannot and ought not to forgive you.

23. And let me remind you all once more, that when you go to God in prayer, if you would be heard, you must go with the consciousness that you fulfill the condition; and remember, that if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." I Jn. 3:20-22. Now, therefore, I beseech you, remember to fulfill the condition, that you may enjoy the teaching of Christ. Except you be his disciple, you cannot be saved. And you cannot be his disciple, only as you "forsake all that you have."

[Back to Top](#)

A Seared Conscience- No.'s 1 & 2

Lectures XXXI & XXXII

April 28, 1841

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 Tim. 4:2: "Having their conscience seared with a hot iron."

In this discussion I will show:

I. What conscience is not.

II. What it is.

III. What is intended by a seared conscience.

IV. The evidences of a seared conscience.

V. How it becomes seared.

VI. Consequences of a seared conscience.

I. What conscience is not.

1. It is not the mere knowledge of right and wrong.
2. It is not the mere knowledge of whether we do or do not, have or have not done, or been, or said, or felt right or wrong.

II. What conscience is.

1. Conscience may be regarded, either as a power or as an act of the mind. In the former case, it is that power of the mind that affirms and enforces moral obligation, and that pronounces upon the desert of obedience or of disobedience. Conscience is not a legislator that makes law, but a judge that convicts of guilt, passes sentence, in respect to the past, and decrees and enforces moral obligation to obey law, in regard to the future. Conscience, as a judge, smiles upon obedience, and frowns upon disobedience.

As an act of the mind, conscience is an affirmation or testifying state of the reason, in respect--

- (1.) To the agreement or disagreement of the will with the law of God.
- (2.) With respect to the moral character of this agreement or disagreement of the will with the law of God.
- (3.) With respect to the good or ill desert of this agreement or disagreement.
- (4.) With respect to our moral obligation to obey in future. In short, it is the conscious affirmation or felt testimony of the reason upon these points. It seems sometimes to be used in the Bible as including that state of the sensibility, compunction, and distress on the one hand, or of conscious peace and happiness on the other, that is naturally connected with the emphatic affirmations of reason. The Bible is not given in philosophical language; but for the most part in popular language. And I am persuaded, that the popular understanding of the term conscience often, if not always, includes that state of the sensibility which we call remorse, or approbation. I do not, in this definition, intend to speak in strictly scientific language; and what I have said is sufficiently accurate for the purpose of possessing the minds of those who do not study metaphysics, of what is intended by conscience.

III. What is intended by a seared conscience.

1. It is the refusal or neglect of the reason, or that power of the mind, whatever you may please to call it, which makes the affirmations of which I have just spoken, to enter into judgment, and make these emphatic representations of moral obligation or of guilt.
2. A man may know his duty, without feeling impelled by an emphatic affirmation of moral obligation to do it.
3. He may know that he is or has been wrong, without the consciousness of being arraigned, convicted of guilt, and condemned. This state of mind clearly indicates a seared conscience.
4. The figurative language of the text implies, a state of insensibility to moral obligation, and of ill desert for moral delinquency.
5. A seared conscience may be general or particular; that is, the mind may become generally insensible to moral obligation and the ill desert of sin; or this insensibility may be confined to particular sins.

IV. What are evidences of a seared conscience.

1. A general apathy on moral subjects, is conclusive evidence of a generally seared conscience, and is a most guilty and alarming state of mind.
2. Apathy on particular moral subjects, is an evidence of a seared conscience, in respect to those particular subjects.
3. When questions that concern our own well-being, or the well-being of others, are not regarded and treated as moral questions. For example--when the Abolition of Slavery, Temperance, Moral Reform, Politics, Business Principles, Physiological and Dietetic Reform--when these, I say, are not treated as moral questions, and as imposing moral obligation, the conscience must be in a seared state.
4. When questions that respect our own usefulness, or the usefulness of others, are not treated as moral questions, it is because the conscience is seared with a hot iron.
5. When the choice of a profession, companion for life, or any thing else,

that must increase or diminish, or in any way have a bearing upon the moral influence we are to exert upon the world, fails to be regarded and treated as a moral question, of serious and deeply solemn import, and as imposing moral obligation of awful magnitude, conscience must be seared with a hot iron.

6. When you can neglect to inform yourselves, on such subjects, without a sense of guilt; especially when the means of information are within your reach; and still more especially, if the subject be presented to your consideration, if, under such circumstances, you can remain quiet in ignorance, in respect to any question of usefulness or duty, without a deep sense of guilt, it brings out the demonstration that your conscience is seared with a hot iron.

7. When you can neglect any known duty without the bitterness of remorse, your conscience is seared with a hot iron.

8. When you can trifle with your health; go out in the snow or wet, with thin shoes and hose, or in any way inappropriately clothed, unless you are under the necessity of doing so, your conscience must be seared with a hot iron. When you can neglect to ventilate your room, see that you have not too little or too much fire--in short, when you can in any way trifle with your health, that precious gift of God, without conviction of guilt, your conscience is alarmingly seared.

9. When you can trifle with your time; spend it in reading plays, and novels, mere slang in newspapers, or in any other way, squander an hour or a moment of your precious time, without compunction, your conscience is already seared.

10. When you can hinder others and trifle with their precious time, without remorse, your conscience is seared. Suppose you have an appointment to meet others on business, and are behind your time, and hinder them; what an evil is this. If you can be guilty of it without remorse, your conscience is seared as with a hot iron. If you have boarders, and do not prepare their meals punctually, but hinder them by not having their meals in readiness at the specified moment; you have done them and the cause of God an injury. And if you do not feel condemned for this, it is because your conscience is seared.

11. If you do not feel condemned for coming late to meeting, and disturbing the worship of God's house, it is because your conscience is seared with a hot iron. Especially is this true, if you are a minister, and are in the habit of being behind your time.

12. If you can stand and talk with and hinder a man while at work, or in any way cause him to spend a moment's time in vain, without remorse, it is an evidence that your conscience is seared.

13. When you can squander your possessions in any way, and consume them upon your lusts, without remorse, your conscience is seared as with a hot iron. If you can spend God's money for tobacco, or any unnecessary and unwholesome articles of luxury or dress, without deep compunction, it shows conclusively that your conscience, upon those subjects, is seared with a hot iron.

14. When you do not feel that you are stewards, and absolutely and practically regard yourselves in this light, in respect to all the possessions you have, it is because your conscience is seared with a hot iron.

15. When you can in any way disregard the rights of others, in things never so trifling, it indicates a seared conscience.

16. When you can neglect to pay your honest debts, or when you can consider yourself as not to blame for being in debt, especially when your debts were not contracted under the pressure of an absolute necessity, it is because your conscience is seared with a hot iron.

17. When you can lay a stumbling block before a brother, without compunction or remorse; when you can indulge in any course of life that has a tendency to mislead him--when you can unnecessarily try his temper, say or do any thing that has a tendency to lead him into sin, it indicates a seared conscience.

18. When you can suffer difficulties between yourselves and others to remain unsettled, without using every Christian means to adjust them, it proves that your conscience is seared as with a hot iron.

19. When you can be in the habit of borrowing and using your neighbor's tools, without perceiving and feeling the injurious tendency of such

conduct, and without realizing the pernicious principle on which such a practice turns, it is because you have a seared conscience. Many persons act as if they supposed that conscience had to do with but one side of this question--that it is the lender exclusively, and not the borrower, who is to look to his conscience, and see that he does not violate the principles of benevolence. But let us look at the principle contained in this. If you borrow money of a man, you expect to pay him interest, or at least to restore the same amount you borrow; but if you borrow a man's coat or tools, that are injured by wearing, it is the lender and not the borrower, that has to pay the interest, and often a very high rate of interest too. Many a man has lost his tools, and paid at the rate of twenty-five per cent for the privilege of lending them. Now suppose a man has a hundred dollars in money. Money is scarce, and a hundred men desire to borrow it, every one in his turn. And now suppose each one should wear a dollar out of it. The man's hundred dollars are soon used up. But suppose a man should come to you and ask you to lend him money, and insist upon it that you should pay him interest, instead of his paying you interest, and you should say, "Why, I never heard of such a request! Do you ask me to lend you money and pay you interest besides?" Now any man would be ashamed, and would have reason to be ashamed, to make such a request; and his naked selfishness would in such a case be most manifest to every one. And who would think of accusing the lender of selfishness, in such a case, if he should refuse to let his money go for nothing, pay interest besides, and finally take the trouble to go after it. And yet this involves precisely the same principle upon which many persons conduct, in the neighborhoods where they live, in continually borrowing and using up their neighbors' tools, and perhaps compelling them to go after them, and that too without compunction or remorse. Nay, so far are they from feeling compunction or remorse, and perceiving that they are actuated by the most unpardonable selfishness, that they would complain, and suppose themselves to have a right to complain of the selfishness of a neighbor who should refuse to indulge them in acting upon such principles.

By this I do not mean to say, or intimate, that it is not proper and a duty, in certain cases, for neighbors to borrow and use each other's tools. But this I do say, that the practice as practiced, is unjustifiable. Borrowing should not be resorted to, except in cases where a man might, without any cause for

blushing, ask a man to lend him money, not only without interest, but also ask him to pay interest.

20. When you can neglect secret prayer, without feeling condemned, and a great sense of guilt resting upon you, it is because you have a seared conscience.

21. The same is true when you can perform secret prayer slightly, with little or no feeling, faith, or earnestness.

22. The same is true, when you can indulge wandering thoughts, and use words in prayer without scarcely knowing what you say, and all this without deep compunction and remorse. This state of mind is a certain indication of a seared conscience.

23. When any duty is urged upon you, without your feeling the force of moral obligation to perform it--when truth and argument do not take hold of your mind, and deeply impress you with a sense of responsibility--and when, in such a case, you do not feel the impressive affirmations of conscience, impelling you to the discharge of duty, it indicates a seared conscience.

24. When you can satisfy yourselves with the outward performance of duty, while your heart is not right--when you can satisfy yourselves with the mere form of religion and duty, while your heart is not deeply engaged in it, and this without a deep sense of guilt, it indicates a seared conscience.

25. When you can neglect the means of grace, or attend upon them carelessly, in a prayerless, heartless manner--when you can indulge wandering thoughts under preaching or in reading your Bible; when you can go to and return from meeting, without earnest prayer, that the word may be blessed to you--when you can hear and soon forget what you hear, without solemnly laying it to heart, with a fixed purpose of entire obedience--when these things can be without deep compunction, it is because your conscience is seared with a hot iron.

26. When you can satisfy yourself with any thing, as a performance of duty, while you are not actuated by love, without compunction, it is because your conscience is seared, and become very superficial in its affirmations.

27. When light upon any subject does not cause your conscience to enter into judgment, strongly affirm moral obligation, and pronounce its sentence upon you, if you neglect your duty, it is because your conscience is seared with a hot iron.

28. When evidence makes but little impression upon you--when it does but little good to reason with you--when light, truth, argument, seem to pass over your mind, without lodging in it--when you are not convicted and converted, by a reasonable degree of evidence--when you do not feel yourself shut up to the necessity of yielding to a preponderance of evidence, or falling under deep condemnation, it is because your conscience is seared.

29. When the discussion of any important practical question can be postponed, and give place to matters of less importance--when you can lay up such a question for future consideration, and go on in courses that are at least questionable, merely designing at some future time to examine and settle the question--when this can be done without a deep sense of guilt, it shows that the conscience is seared with a hot iron.

30. When any form of selfishness can be indulged, without compunction, it is because you have a seared conscience.

31. When you can transact business upon selfish principles, take advantages in business, that shall put money in your own pocket at the expense of another--when you can enrich yourself by any employment, without regarding the interest of those with whom you deal, as you do your own, your conscience is seared with a hot iron.

32. When you can complain of a want of conviction of sin, this is evidence of a seared conscience.

33. When you can neglect to make confession of your sins to those who have been injured by them, and thus persist in your injustice and wickedness, without remorse, your conscience is seared with a hot iron.

34. When you can make excuses for not confessing--when you do not feel impelled by a sense of duty to make full confession--when you can satisfy yourself with a heartless, constrained, or partial confession--when you can be satisfied with a private confession, when it ought to be public--when you can be satisfied with confession, without repentance--your conscience is

seared with a hot iron.

35. When you can neglect to make restitution, to the extent of your ability--when you can retain in your possession that which in equity belongs to another--in short, when you can hold on to possessions that were obtained by a violation of the great law that requires you to love your neighbor as yourself--when you can hold on to them, without restoring them to their rightful owners, when it is in your power, it is a demonstration of a seared conscience.

36. When you have no sense of moral obligation in respect to those habits of life, that have an influence upon your brethren, your family, the community in which you dwell, and upon the world at large, it is because your conscience is seared. For example--if you have no conscience on the subject of retiring to rest in due season, and rising in the morning also at such an hour as best consists with health--if you can habituate or allow yourself, on any occasion, without necessity, to sit up late at night and rise late in the morning--if you can have no system in this respect, no principle, no conscience about it--if these things are left without consideration or reflection, to the neglect and injury of your own health, the injury of your family, and of course to the injury of the Church and the world, your conscience must be seared with a hot iron. If you have no conscience in respect to observing these things, for your family's sake; and if you do not require them and all under your control to have system, principle and conscience upon these subjects, from which they will no more depart without imperative necessity than they would go without their necessary food, it is because your conscience is seared.

37. When you have no conscience in regard to your modes of dress--if you can compress your chest with tight lacing, or in any other way expose your health, for the sake of personal appearance, without compunction of conscience, it is because it is seared with a hot iron.

38. When you can wear ornamental dress, consult appearance rather than utility, in your dress and equipage; can have regard to the fashion, rather than to health, utility, or Christian economy, without compunction, your conscience is seared.

39. When you can neglect cleanliness, in respect to your person, your dress,

your house, or your furniture, your conscience is seared.

40. When you can neglect to attend to things in their proper season, or only transact your business in a careless and slovenly manner--when you can leave your tools where you use them, without putting them in their place--when you can leave them exposed to the weather, leave your barn doors open, and things around you in a state of confusion and disorder--when you can waste any thing--in short, whenever you can neglect to attend to every duty that belongs to you, at the right time, in the right manner, and in all respects as it ought to be attended to, without feeling condemned for this neglect, it is because your conscience is seared with a hot iron.

41. Whenever you can, through any neglect or carelessness, break any thing, injure the tools, furniture, or any thing else with which you are entrusted, whether it belongs to yourself or any one else, without compunction, your conscience is seared.

42. When you can neglect to ventilate your rooms, air your beds and clothing--neglect to exercise, labor, or rest, or to attend to any thing else that your health and highest usefulness demand, without a sense of guilt and condemnation, your conscience is seared.

43. When you can neglect to support the institutions of the gospel, to the extent of your ability, to pay your minister's salary, to aid in the support of the expenses of the church--when you can see the house of God lie waste, the doors and windows out of repair, the house in a filthy state, the stoves out of order, and things at loose ends--when you can suffer these things to be, without deep compunction of conscience, your conscience is seared with a hot iron; and when a church is in a state to suffer such things, without deep remorse and self-condemnation, the conscience of the church is seared.

44. But to notice again personal habits, if you have no system, no conscience, no principles in respect to the hours of eating and drinking, but allow yourselves to consult convenience rather than physiological law, taking your meals at one time many hours apart, and at other times within three or four hours of each other, thus recklessly violating the laws of God established in your own constitution, your conscience is seared.

45. If you have no conscience in respect to the kinds of food and clothing, with which you attempt to supply the physiological wants of your system, if you can neglect to inform yourself in respect to what your habits ought to be in order to secure your highest health and usefulness, if you can make your depraved appetites the guide and measure of indulgence, without deep remorse, it is because your conscience is seared with a hot iron.

46. When you can waste God's money in administering to your lusts, when you can buy tobacco, tea, coffee, and such like fashionable but pernicious articles without deep compunction and remorse, your conscience is seared with a hot iron.

47. When you can say you have no conscience on these subjects, when you can give countenance to these practices, and to the use of these articles at home or abroad, when you can use them yourselves, or furnish them for your friends, and thus countenance practices by which the Church is expending a hundred or a thousand times as much in poisons, and in the gratification of depraved artificial appetites, as it is for building up the cause of Christ and saving deathless souls from hell, when you can hear the wail of hundreds of millions of immortal beings coming upon every wind of heaven and crying out for the bread of life, and still have no conscience on the subject of the use of these pernicious articles, by which the Church is poisoned, and the heathen robbed of the everlasting gospel of the blessed God--if you have no conscience on such subjects as these, it is because your conscience is seared with a hot iron.

48. When you can see the Church indulging in such things and not reprove them, at home or abroad, especially by the impressive lesson of your own example, you must be extremely hardened, and your conscience seared as with a hot iron.

49. When you can neglect to scrutinize your motives of action, and go on day after day without self-examination in this respect, when you can neglect to exercise a godly jealousy over yourself, without remorse, your conscience is seared.

50. When you can speak evil of a neighbor, when you can publish his real or supposed faults without necessity, and do this without remorse, your conscience is seared.

51. When you can suffer sin upon a brother without faithfully reproving him and yet not feel compunction of conscience, it is because it is seared.

52. When you can feel contempt for the person or talents of any one without deep remorse, it is because your conscience is seared.

53. When you can think of sin without horror, something as they would feel at such a thought in heaven, it is because your conscience is seared. How think you an angel would feel if the thought should come over his mind--to-day I shall sin against God? How would a saint in heaven feel under the same impression? Why, it would come over all heaven like the shock of an earthquake. They would all stand aghast and grow pale, would hang up their harps, and wail out with pain at the thought that one of their inhabitants should sin against God. Now what state of mind must that be when you can expect to sin without the deepest horror, without feeling a chill come over you and your blood almost coagulate in your veins. What, sin against God! Why, if the thought does not shock and agonize you, if the expectation that you shall sin does not seem even more terrible to you than death, where is your conscience--in what state of mind are you? Have you any sympathy with heaven? No, indeed. And perhaps I might and ought to say that if you can think of sinning without the most excruciating agony, you are even more callous than they are in hell.

V. How the conscience becomes seared.

1. The conscience becomes seared by the will resisting the affirmations of reason. The conscience is now generally supposed to be a function of the reason. Whether it is regarded in this light or not, it is certain that it becomes seared when the will opposes itself and continues opposed to the decisions of the reason.

2. Especially does the conscience become seared, when the will persists in courses directly denounced or condemned by the conscience. In such cases the conscience soon becomes indignantly silent and leaves the soul stupefied to pursue its course of disobedience.

3. It is often seared by an individual's resorting to sophistry to justify any course of disobedience.

4. It becomes seared by breaking resolutions. When you allow yourself to

break over or violate a resolution to do your duty, you have done much to sear and stifle your conscience.

5. When you violate your promise on any subject you have done much to sear your conscience. If you persist in this violation your conscience will become seared with a hot iron.

6. Conscience becomes seared by diverting the attention of the mind from the moral character of your own actions. If you suffer yourself to pass along without attending to the moral quality of your actions, your conscience will soon become seared with a hot iron.

7. Indulgence in known sin of any kind will greatly and rapidly sear your conscience.

8. Especially indulgence in presumptuous sins or those sins already put under the condemning sentence of conscience. Whenever conscience has called your attention to the sinfulness of any act or course of action and you still persist in it, this is a presumptuous sin, and such a course will soon cause your conscience to become seared with a hot iron.

9. By indulgence in that, the lawfulness of which is regarded as doubtful by you. In speaking on the subject of meats offered to idols, the Apostle says "he that doubteth is damned (or condemned) if he eat," manifestly recognizing the principle that whatever is of doubtful lawfulness, is to be omitted on pain of condemnation, and if persisted in, the conscience will soon become seared. Thus many persons indulge in things, the lawfulness of which they at first doubt; but directly their conscience becomes so seared that they no longer think with any degree of uneasiness whether it is doubtful or not, and they come to have no doubts about it, simply because their conscience has become seared with a hot iron.

10. By hypocritical professions conscience becomes seared--by insincere professions of friendship, or by any insincerity whatever, the conscience will soon become so seared that it can be practiced without remorse.

11. By holding on to hope already, and perhaps often, pronounced hypocritical by the decisions of conscience, it will be seared, and the hope, perhaps, grow firmer and firmer. Less and less doubt will be entertained of its genuineness in proportion as the conscience becomes seared.

12. By indulging the appetites and passions conscience becomes seared. When persons allow themselves to eat too much, at improper seasons, and improper kinds of food, merely to gratify their appetites, their conscience will soon become so seared, that they can indulge in such things without compunction. They can then go on and break down their health, and even destroy their lives by these indulgences, and then stupidly and madly ascribe their broken down health and premature death to a mysterious providence.

13. By indulging evil tempers, pride, vanity, envy, jealousy, ambition, prejudice, hatred, whatever unholy temper is indulged, will soon so sear the conscience as to leave the mind in a state of great apathy in regard to its moral character.

14. By indulging evil habits of any kind, using tobacco in any form, or intoxicating drinks, indulging in solitary sins or secret wickedness of any kind, the conscience becomes seared in an awful and alarming manner. How often do we find persons who can indulge in the use of tobacco, and sometimes even ministers of the gospel, can indulge themselves in that filthy abomination without remorse.

15. Conscience is seared by evil speaking. When you allow yourselves to speak unnecessarily of a brother's faults, or even uncharitably to speak of the wickedest man on earth, you do much to sear your conscience and blunt your moral sensibilities.

16. By self-justifying excuses conscience becomes seared. Whenever you resort to any form of excuse for sin, you not only harden your heart but sear your conscience, until by and by you may come into such a state as to be in a great measure satisfied with your own excuses, and fatally deceive your own soul.

17. By procrastinating the performance of duty. Whenever you defer the performance of present duty or decline or neglect to attend to that now which ought to be done at the present time, you sear your own conscience.

18. By attempts to defend error conscience becomes seared. How often men have begun only to attempt the defense of that which they knew to be error, and have ended in believing their own lie to the destruction of their souls. It

is a fearful thing to attempt to defend error on any subject, and very few courses are more certain to result in a seared conscience, a hard heart and a ruined soul than this.

19. By watching for the halting of others, the conscience becomes seared. How many men by giving up their attention to the sins of others, have overlooked their own sins until their conscience has become seared with a hot iron. In this state of mind they can see enough to blame in others, but very little in themselves. They can become censorious and denunciatory, and wonder at the long-suffering of God in sparing others in the midst of their awful iniquity, almost insensible of the fact that they themselves are among the greatest sinners out of hell.

20. By neglecting to administer reproof to those whose sins are known to us. The conscience soon becomes so seared that we can indulge in the same things ourselves with very little compunction.

21. By resenting or resisting reproof when admonished by others, by calling it censoriousness and denunciation, caviling at the manner and spirit of reproof, instead of exclaiming with David when reproved by Nathan--"I have sinned against the Lord." This is one of the ways in which I have observed that ministers are exceedingly apt to sear their own conscience. You may have observed that they are particularly apt, at least some of them to resist and resent reproof, and sear their own conscience in a most alarming manner, while they are not ashamed to manifest a spirit under reproof which they would not hesitate severely to rebuke in anybody else.

22. By mocking God in prayer and in other devotional duties. This also is one of the ways in which church officers and especially ministers of the gospel, are exceedingly in danger of searing their conscience. If they suffer their religious exercises to become professional rather than strictly devotional, if they suffer themselves to pray and preach and exhort because it is their business, when their hearts are not deeply imbued with the spirit of devotion, then conscience soon becomes so seared that they are ripe for ecclesiastical denunciation, excision, opposition to revivals, and almost every species of reform. How often and how distressingly has this been manifest. And what is worse than all, the conscience becomes so seared, that for these things they will not suffer reproof if faithfully administered and with the utmost kindness, without manifesting great indignation and

perhaps a spirit of revenge. O, with what pain do I say this of some of the ministers of the everlasting gospel.

23. By grieving and resisting the Holy Spirit many sear their conscience. Many persons stifle and quench conviction until they have very little more moral sensibility than a beast.

24. Again by neglecting and refusing to act up to light as fast as received.

25. By neglecting to reach after light on every question of duty.

26. By neglecting universal reformation. If reformation be not universal, it cannot truly go forward at all. "Whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point he is guilty of all." The indulgence of any form of sin renders all obedience for the time being impossible. It is a state of mind the direct opposite of holiness. If in any thing therefore you neglect reformation, if you do not extend it universally over the whole field of moral obligation, your conscience will soon become seared with a hot iron.

27. By transacting business on worldly principles. No man can adopt the common business maxims of the world, and act upon them with a clear conscience. The law of God requires you to love your neighbor as yourself. Who then can adopt the principle of making the best bargain possible, consulting only self-interest, without deeply and rapidly searing his conscience?

28. By engaging in party politics. By this I do not say that all attention to politics will sear the conscience. For as human governments are necessary, politics are to be a part of every man's religion. But mark what I say. No man can go with a party as a party, vote for the candidates and support the measures of a party, without rapidly and deeply searing his conscience. How many young converts have rapidly and ruinously backslidden by engaging in party politics and by transacting business upon worldly principles. Why it is as certain as that your soul lives, if you do these things your conscience will become seared with a hot iron.

29. By exaggeration, or putting a false coloring upon facts related by you, or a hypocritical covering up of the real truth, where truth ought to be known, conscience becomes seared.

30. By dishonesty in small matters, taking trifling advantage in weights and measures, little negligences in the transaction of business for others, coming late to labor, squandering scraps of time, by standing still or other inattention to business when in the employment of others, and by thousands of nameless little dishonesties, the conscience becomes deeply and ruinously seared.

31. By speaking evil of others, by receiving much good at the hand of others without any endeavor to repay them or do them good. I might pursue this part of the subject to any length, but must break off here.

I am reluctantly compelled to omit the remaining head and some remarks till the next.

LECTURE XXXII.

May 12, 1841

A SEARED CONSCIENCE--No. 2

Text.--1 Tim. 4:2: "Having their conscience seared with a hot iron."

In continuing this subject I am to show:

VI. The consequences of a seared conscience.

1. A certain delusion in regard to your character and deserts. If your conscience becomes so seared as not to call your particular attention to the moral quality of your actions, you are already under a deep and damning delusion in regard to your real character before God.
2. A false security, arising out of a delusion in respect to your real deserts.
3. A false hope may be, and probably will be another result of a seared conscience. If your conscience is seared, you will almost of course mistake a mere Antinomian religion for the true religion, and hold on to a hope that is but as a spider's web.
4. A false peace, or mistaking a mere apathy on moral subjects and in respect to the moral quality of your actions, for that peace which they have who love the law of God.

5. An abandonment by the Spirit of God. Indeed, the very fact that your conscience is seared, is an evidence that the Spirit has forsaken you. And when your conscience becomes seared, it may prevent his return for ever.

6. You may be given up to the buffetings of Satan, until he may bewilder, harass, and deceive you; till he has led you to destroy your own life.

7. You may be given up to believe a lie, that you may be damned.

8. False anticipations in regard to your future usefulness. If your conscience has become seared, you may rest assured, you will do little or no good in the world. And as a general truth, you will be useless, in proportion as your conscience is seared.

9. Another consequence may be, a broken down constitution. If you have, and will have no conscience in regard to your physiological and dietetic habits; if you will neglect or resist the light, and even sneer at these reforms, you may expect, sooner or later, to experience at least the penalty of violated physical law, in a broken down constitution, and a premature grave.

10. Another consequence may be, a worse than useless life. Do but persist in your dietetic errors, trample down the laws of your being, and madly presume upon the strength of your constitution, until you become a dyspeptic, or until some form of chronic disease has seized upon you, and ten to one if your life is not worse than useless in the world. In such circumstances, you may be so hardened, and your conscience so seared, as not to be ashamed to complain of your ill-health, and think yourself abused, if you do not have the sympathy and assiduous attention of all around you. But mark what I say. In such cases, God as deeply abhors the diseased state of your body, as if you had those forms of disease that are universally known to be a consequence of vile indulgences. If you had one of those diseases, you would expect contempt, rather than pity and sympathy. And how is it, that your conscience is so seared with a hot iron, that you can have any other form of disease, which is the result of a reckless violation of physical law, without shame and deep remorse? For myself, I cannot be sick, unless I have been placed in such circumstances as necessarily to overwork my organs, without feeling the deepest shame and remorse. All sickness is the result of violated physical law; and when that violation can

be avoided, that is a deep sin and shame, that produces sickness. But all this you may overlook, and will overlook, if your conscience becomes seared. And you may go down to your grave and to hell, under the deep abhorrence of God, for your reckless violations of the laws of your being; pitying yourself, and ascribing both your disease and death to a mysterious providence.

11. If you sear your conscience, your influence will be pernicious upon all who come within its reach. If they have confidence in you, they will be emboldened to practice what they see you practice, to say, do, and neglect, what they behold in you. And thus you may become a pest and a curse to the community in which you live.

12. You may become a great annoyance to those who are around you. I would as soon have a pestilential disease in my family as a person with a seared conscience, who can violate the Sabbath by improper conversation, improper reading, a trifling and gossiping spirit, who has no conscience in respect to attending to those things that are expected of him--can say, do, and omit many things that are inconsistent with the law of love, and yet have no conscience about it. Such a person is an insufferable annoyance and a nuisance in any family.

13. If your conscience is seared, you may in all probability ruin your posterity, if you have any. Your reckless violations of the law of love will inculcate lessons upon them that will probably ruin their souls.

14. If your conscience is seared, you will entail ruin upon the country in which you dwell, just in proportion to the amount of your influence. Are you a minister, a deacon, an elder, a man or woman of leading influence--how dreadful must be your recklessness when your conscience has become seared with a hot iron. Perhaps you can use or vend intoxicating drinks; perhaps you can use or vend tobacco; perhaps you can encourage the Church and community in the use of tea and coffee, and other worse than useless articles of luxury, and have no conscience about it--you can listen to the appeals and wails of six hundred millions of heathen, and complain of hard times, and yet have no conscience on the subject. Perhaps in a great measure through your example, the Church and the community of which you are a member are expending vastly more, merely to gratify their appetites, and indulge their lusts, than to save a world from eternal hell, and

you have no conscience about it. "O shame, where is thy blush?" O man, where is your conscience?

15. If your conscience becomes seared you will certainly do much to depress the standard of holiness, to resist the principles of reform, and hinder the conversion of the world. You will be right in the way, and yet perhaps the last man to be sensible of it. You will be a real and terrible curse to the world, and yet imagine that you are in a good degree useful.

16. If your conscience becomes seared, you may, as Achan did, bring the curse of God upon the community to which you belong.

17. If you are impenitent sinners, if your conscience becomes seared, it will effectually prevent your conversion.

18. If you have ever been converted, and your conscience becomes seared, it will effectually prevent your sanctification.

19. If it becomes seared, it may lead you into a deep delusion in respect to the degree in which you are sanctified, and you may vainly imagine, that you live without sin, while you are in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity.

20. If your conscience becomes seared, you will feel very little horror at the idea of sinning against God. With a seared conscience, you can expect to sin, more or less, as a thing of course, from day to day, without feeling such abhorrence of sin as to make you avoid it as you would avoid the gates of death. Nay, if your conscience becomes seared, you may plead for sin, defend it as something unavoidable, which nobody is expected to live without; and may wallow in your iniquities with very little more remorse than a swine.

REMARKS.

1. From this subject we see why many persons have no conscience on a great variety of moral questions. Few things are more common, than to find even professors of religion, when expostulated with about certain habits and practices, which are as manifestly sinful, when viewed in the light of God's law, as any thing whatever, reply, that they have no conscientious scruples, and indeed that they have no conscience upon the subject. They can practice many forms of

intemperance, trifle with their health, squander their time and money, neglect to save, and do much to injure the world, in many ways, and yet have no conscience about it.

2. Their having no conscience on such questions, is no proof that they are not guilty in the sight of God, and that their practices are not contrary to the law of God. Their consciences are seared, and, for the time being, maintain an indignant silence. But does this prove, that what they are doing is not displeasing to God?

3. A silent or a seared conscience is a conclusive evidence that you are wrong. Conscience is never silent with respect to what is right, and will always smile its approbation, and fill the mind with peace, when you do right. When, therefore, you have no conscience at all, upon a subject--when you are not impressed with a sense of doing either morally right or wrong--when you are neither filled with peace nor stung with remorse, you may rest assured that you are wrong, and that conscience is maintaining an indignant silence.

4. A professor of religion with a seared conscience is more injurious to the cause of religion than many infidels. Who professes to look to an infidel as an example on moral subjects? But let a professor of religion have a seared conscience, and make no scruple to practice any form of intemperance, trifle with the Sabbath, become excited in party politics, transact business upon selfish principles, engage in novel reading, squander his money upon his lusts, throw away his time, speak evil of his neighbors, or indulge in any form of sin, and his example is a thrust at the very vitals of religion. Why, he is a professor of religion! It is therefore taken for granted, that almost any thing he may do is right, or that to say the least it is not inconsistent with salvation. And thus multitudes are emboldened in sin.

5. You see that many persons mistake a seared for an approving conscience. They profess to be conscientious in what they are doing, evidently meaning by this that they feel no compunction in doing as they do, while it is manifest that they have not the peace of God, the deep approbation of conscience in the course they are pursuing. Now the absence of the approving smiles of conscience should teach them, that they are laboring under a delusion in supposing themselves to act in accordance with the dictates of conscience.

6. You see from this subject how it is that many professors of religion manage to retain their hope, notwithstanding they are as manifestly in their selfishness and

sin, as they are in the world. The fact is, that their conscience has become seared with a hot iron. And having very little sense of moral obligation, they pass along securely with a lie in their right hand. To them the words of the prophet apply with great emphasis: "A deceived heart hath turned them aside so that they cannot deliver their soul, nor say, have I not a lie in my right hand?"

7. There are many persons whose consciences are seared on almost all moral subjects, and seem to have been so for a long time. They seldom or never appear to be impressed with the deep conviction that they deserve the damnation of hell. Others seem to have a conscience measurably awake on some subjects, but profoundly asleep upon other subjects, where they have for a long time resisted truth and indulged in sin.

8. It is easy to see why persons become Universalists, and reject the idea that sin deserves eternal punishment. I doubt whether there was ever a case, since the world began, in which a man became a Universalist until his conscience became seared. Nay, I doubt whether it is naturally possible for a man, with a thoroughly developed and active conscience, to doubt the justice of eternal punishment.

9. You see the importance of cultivating, especially in children, a quick, sound, thorough conscience. Their reason should be developed as early as possible, so as to give conscience, at the earliest possible hour, an influence over their will, before their habits of indulging the flesh have become too much confirmed to render it hardly possible for them to be converted.

10. You see why there is so much indulging the flesh among professors of religion, without remorse, notwithstanding they are expressly commanded to "put on Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." Yet, as a general thing, I cannot perceive that they are not just as eager in their inquiries and efforts to obtain those things that will gratify their appetites, as most of the ungodly are. They are as great epicures, seem to take as much pains, and are at as much expense to gratify their tastes, and seem to lay as much stress upon mere gustatory enjoyment, as if to gratify their appetites is the end for which they live. Many of them will manifest as much uneasiness, and even disgust and loathing, at a plain, simple, wholesome diet, as ungodly sinners do. And yet, they appear to have no conscience on the subject. And farther, they can, not only gratify their appetite for food or drink, but their hearts seem set upon gratifying all their animal appetites and passions; and instead of "keeping their bodies under, and bringing them into subjection," they seem to have given up the

rein to appetite. An Apostle might say of them, "Their god is their belly, they glory in their shame, and mind earthly things."

11. You see why so many can allow themselves to be ignorant on so many important practical questions, without remorse. Why they never have examined many questions of great moment that have often been pressed upon their attention, and when the means of knowledge are within their reach, and yet have no conscience about them.

12. When the conscience becomes seared upon one subject, it will in all probability become seared upon other subjects. And by a natural process, it will ultimately become generally seared, and prepare the way for embracing Universalism and infidelity. I might easily explain the philosophy of this, but have already said so much in this discourse that, at present, I must defer the explanation.

13. You see the infinite importance of a quick and searching conscience. It is wholly indispensable to growth in grace. There can be no such thing as a healthy piety without it.

14. But especially is a quick and searching conscience important to a gospel minister. If his conscience is seared, many sins will be practiced by himself, and suffered to exist among his people, without his reproof or even seeing them.

15. This subject shows why so many forms of sin are suffered to exist in some churches; so much selfishness, worldly-mindedness, pride, vanity, luxury, speculation, novel reading, party going, evil speaking, and many forms of sin, are allowed to exist from year to year, without rebuke, and without hardly appearing to be perceived by the minister. Now who does not see, that such a minister is "a blind leader of the blind?" His conscience is so seared, that he has very little moral sensibility. If his conscience were awake, such a state of things would wring his heart with insupportable anguish. He could not hold his peace. He would cry out in his pangs. His soul would be in travail day and night. He would lift up his voice like a trumpet, and rebuke those iniquities, come on him what would.

16. You can see the grand secret of the barrenness of many ministers. Having a seared conscience they know not how to bring the Church under conviction for their sins. They do not know how to develop the conscience, either of saints or

sinners. They know not how to enter into the secret workings of the human heart, and ferret out the various forms of iniquity that are lurking there. They do not know how to carry the light of the law of God into every department of human action, and so to develop conscience as to send a thrill of agony along every fibre of the moral nature, while indulging in any form of sin. The fact is, that if a man would get at the conscience of others, he must have a conscience himself. And again, I say, a minister with a seared conscience is "a blind leader of the blind."

17. Let this subject be a warning to young men who are in a course of preparation for the gospel ministry. My dear brethren, I beseech you to remember, that your consciences need to be cultivated as much as your intellect. And do remember, that a thorough preparation for the ministry implies, the education of the whole man. And unless your moral powers be developed, your conscience quickened, and kept in a state of intense sensibility, however great your intellectual progress may be, you can never make a useful minister.

18. We see from this subject, why so few young men do, as a matter of fact, make thorough, efficient and successful ministers. Why, in how many forms of sin do they habitually indulge, while in college, and indeed through all their course of education. While they are disciplining their intellect and acquiring a knowledge of the sciences, they are benumbing and searing their consciences. They are, as it were, putting out the eyes of their minds, on moral subjects. In short, they are doing just what will effectually disqualify them for, and render it impossible that they should ever make successful ministers. My dear young brethren, if in your education, you indulge any form of sin; if you do not as assiduously cultivate a tender conscience, as you pursue any branch of education whatever, you not only entirely overlook what constitutes a thorough course of preparation, but, on the contrary, are taking a course that is a mere burlesque upon the idea of a thorough preparation for the ministry.

19. We see that it is utterly in vain to talk so loud and boastingly about a thorough course of training for the ministry, while so much sin is allowed among the young men in the course of training, and so little pains are taken to develop and quicken their consciences and sanctify their hearts. As a matter of fact, the present courses of education for the ministry are, to a great extent, a failure. It is in vain to deny this. It is worse than in vain--it is arrant wickedness, to deny it. "Facts are stubborn things." And the average rate of ministerial usefulness,

throughout the whole of Christendom, affords a demonstration of this truth, that ought to alarm and agonize the Church, and cause those of us who are engaged in educating ministers to tremble, and inquire upon our knees before the blessed God, what it is that makes so great a majority of the young men who are trained under those influences so nearly useless in the Church of God. Will this be called censoriousness? It is the solemn truth. I say it with pain and agony; but say it I must, and say it I would, if I knew it would cost me my life. Why, beloved brethren, unless there is more conscience in the Christian ministry--a broader, deeper, more efficient, and practical knowledge of the claims of the law of God--a deeper, quicker, more agonizing insight into the depths of iniquity of the human heart--a greater abhorrence of every form of sin--a more insupportable agony in view of its existence in every form and in every degree--the world and the Church too, will sink down to hell, under our administration. I appeal to you, my brethren, who are already in the ministry; I appeal to your churches; I appeal to the lookers on; I appeal to angels and to God, and inquire, how many forms of sin are allowed to exist in you, and in your churches, without any thing like that pointed rebuke which the nature of the case demands? Why, my brethren, do not many of you satisfy yourselves simply with preaching against sin, while you are afraid so much as to name the different forms of sin that exist among those to whom you are preaching? Do you not preach against sin in the abstract, with very little or no descending to particulars? Do you arraign selfishness in all the various forms that it exists among your people? Do you rebuke their pride, self-indulgence, vanity, luxury, speculations, party spirit; and, indeed, my brethren, do you name and bring the law and gospel of God fully to bear upon the various forms of iniquity, in the detail, that exist among your people? Or are the consciences of some of you so seared, as to render you almost blind to any thing like the details of sin as they exist around you? Said a discerning man in my hearing, not long since, Our minister preaches against sin; but he does not tell what sin is. He preaches against sin in general; but never against any particular sin. He denounces it in the aggregate; but never meddles with it in the detail, as it exists among his people. I do not give the words, but the substance of his remarks. Now, my beloved brethren, of how many of us could such a testimony as this be borne with truth? And how many such ministers, think you, would it require to convert the world? Of what use is it, I pray you, to preach against sin, or in favor of holiness, in the abstract, without so far entering into the detail as to possess our people of the true idea of what sin and holiness are?

20. You see the importance of praying continually for a quick, and tender, and powerful conscience.

21. You see the importance of great watchfulness, lest we should abuse and seduce our conscience, by indulgence in sin.

22. You see the great importance of faithful dealing with the consciences of all around us, so as to keep our own and their consciences fully awake, and as quick and sensitive as the apple of the eye.

23. You see the importance of self-examination, in regard to the real state of our consciences, whether they are fully awake to the whole circle of moral duties and obligations, or whether they are asleep and seared, on a great many questions that come within the cognizance of the law of God.

24. You see one grand design of preaching the gospel. It is to develop and quicken conscience, until it gains the ascendancy in the mind, and exercises that influence over the will that belongs to it.

25. You see why converts backslide, so soon after a revival of religion. It is because so little pains are taken, to quicken, develop, and keep their consciences awake on every subject. If they are allowed to practice any iniquity; if they are not urged up continually to a full and complete renunciation of every form of sin; if they are not urged to aim at holiness, and expect to get away from all sin, they will assuredly indulge in various forms of sin. Their consciences will become more and more seared, until they can shamelessly backslide and disgrace the cause of Christ.

26. You can see what infinite evil has resulted to the Church, and is still resulting, from the denial that men are expected to live without sin in this life. Why, this denial is to my mind one of the most death-dealing errors that can be held up before the eyes of sinners. What! are men to be generally taught that they are not to expect, and even that it is a dangerous heresy to expect to live, even for a single day, without going into rebellion against Almighty God? Are they thus to be taught to expect to sin? Who does not see, that this must result in their indulging in sin, with very little remorse or self-abhorrence?

27. You see how the doctrine of sanctification in this life appears to one who has a quick and sensitive conscience. Only let a man's conscience become so thoroughly awake as that the thought of sinning is to him as terrible as death, so

that conscience will roll a wave of unutterable pain across his mind, and weigh him down with agony, at every step he takes in sin--let his conscience be in such a state as to agonize his soul to a degree that will cause the perspiration to pour out from his body almost in streams, as is sometimes the case, and then present to that soul the offer of a full salvation. Tell him, if he will confess his sins, "Christ is faithful and just to forgive his sins, and cleanse him from all unrighteousness"--announce to him the fact, that the gospel has provided a salvation from sin in this life, and he will perhaps answer you at first, "This is too good news to be true--O that it were true!" But turn the subject over, and present the scripture promises, and with what eagerness he will grasp at them. O, he will cry out, "this is indeed a gospel suited to the circumstances and character of man. This is a salvation worthy of the Son of God."

28. You see how this doctrine can be doubted by the church without absolute horror. Why, beloved, suppose a man's conscience thoroughly awake, until sin should appear to him in a great measure as it does to the inhabitants of heaven. Then announce to that soul that he must expect to live in sin as long as life lasts--he must expect to sin against God every day till he dies. Why, methinks, he would shriek, and scream, and faint, and die with agony. "O horrible," he would exclaim, "with such a conscience as this, inflicting on me the pangs of the second death every time I sin, must I continue to sin as long as I live? Is there no hope that I shall escape? Has the gospel made no provision for my entire sanctification in this life? Then woe is me! I am undone. And if it is heresy to believe I shall escape from my sin before I die, O that death would come upon me this moment." This has been the actual feeling of many whose consciences have become thoroughly awake, and who were taught that there was no such provision in the gospel as that they might reasonably expect a present deliverance from all sin. Indeed, the denial of the attainability of a state of entire sanctification in this life, to an individual whose conscience is thoroughly quickened and full of power, would agonize him like the thrusting a poisoned dagger to his heart. It seems to me that within the last two or three years, I have sometimes felt as if I could not live if I did not believe the doctrine of a full salvation from sin in this life.

29. We see what the spiritual state of those must be who manifest an unwillingness to have this doctrine true. There are those who manifest the greatest want of candor in weighing the evidences in its favor, and seem disposed to resort to any shift to disprove it. It were easy to show that their

writings and their sayings have every mark of an utter unwillingness to have this doctrine true. Now I ask what must their spiritual state be? What is the state of their conscience? How much do they sympathize with the inhabitants of heaven in regard to the exceeding sinfulness of sin? Do they feel horror-stricken at the idea of sinning against God? Do they know what it is to have the perspiration flow like rain when they fall into the slightest sin? Are they crying out in their prayers for a deliverance? No, but they are denouncing those that do, and who are reaching after and expecting a full salvation, as heretics and fanatics, and as explaining away the law of God!

30. You see that until the conscience of the church is quickened, but little can be done for the salvation of the world. See that tobacco-chewing minister, see that whiskey or cider drinking deacon. Why, how many forms of luxury and self-indulgence are allowed in the Church without any conscience, while the world is going down to hell. Even agents of tract, missionary and other societies for the spread of the gospel, will go through the country, smoking and chewing tobacco, drinking tea and coffee, and thus by their example encouraging the Church in the use of these pernicious articles, and in spending more, and perhaps ten times as much, every year for these pernicious luxuries, as they give for the spread of the blessed gospel.

31. It is amazing that tobacco-chewing ministers can (as they have in some instances, as I have been informed,) find fault with others for letting down the claims of the law. They seem at the same breath to find fault with others, for insisting upon physiological and dietetic reform, and indeed, for pressing the subject of reform so extensively as they do, and yet complain that their teaching is letting down the claims of the law of God. One of the eastern papers, but a few months since, in reviewing one of my sermons, protested in the most earnest manner against my extending the claims of the law too far. The writer said the law of God was itself strict enough, and that he must protest against its being extended beyond its real meaning. My beloved brethren, what consistency is there in maintaining at the same time two such opposite sentiments as are often maintained upon this subject? But let me say again that until the conscience of the ministry and of the church of God is thoroughly quickened upon the subject of universal reformation, the world can never be converted.

How is it possible that ministers can waste God's money, set such an example to the church, and abuse their own bodies and souls by the habitual use of tobacco,

one of the most hurtful and disgusting practices that ever disgraced mankind, without compunction of conscience, and yet complain of any body's letting down the claims of the law of God, and even go so far as to write pastoral letters against the heresy of letting down the law of God, while they have no conscience on the subject of such practices. How can men be so engaged to defend the purity, the strictness, and the honor of the law of God while in the very face of their churches and in the face of heaven, they can indulge in such things as these. I would say this, with the utmost kindness and yet faithfulness to them and to God, to the church, and to my own soul. I must say it though with unutterable grief.

32. It is strange that so many churches who are living in the habitual indulgence of so many forms of sin, can manifest so much alarm at the idea of letting down the claims of the law of God. They hardly seem to have ever thought of practicing any self-denial, keeping their bodies under, crucifying and mortifying the flesh. Almost innumerable forms of sin are allowed to exist among them without their blushing or being at all ashamed of them. And yet they manifest a great degree of alarm lest the claims of the law should be let down, and some forms of sin allowed to escape detection, and pass without rebuke. There are many things in the present day that strongly remind one of the conduct of the scribes and Pharisees, whose fears were greatly excited on the subject of our Lord Jesus Christ's letting down the law of God. They accused him of violating the Sabbath, having a wicked spirit, and of even being possessed of the devil, and seemed to be horrified with his loose notions of the claims of the law of God. They were exceedingly zealous, and cried out with great vehemence and bitterness against his want of principle and firm adherence to the law of God. I would not on any account make any such allusions as this, or say one word unnecessarily to wound the feelings of any one. But it seems to be important at the present time to call the attention of the church to the great inconsistency of exclaiming against this letting down the law of God, while they are indulging with so little remorse in great multitudes of most manifest and even flagrant violations of the law. And while we contend for universal reformation, and obedience to the law of God, they are opposing us on the one hand for our strictness, and on the other for our looseness. Nor can they contend that our strictness extends only to some subjects of minor importance, for we do insist upon universal obedience to the law of God, in heart and life.

33. It is impossible for me to understand how persons should really be in love

with the law of God, earnestly and honestly engaged in supporting it in all the length and breadth of its claims, and yet indulge in so many forms of violating it with so little compunction. Is there not, my beloved brethren, some delusion in the thing? Can any man be deeply and thoroughly honest in defending the purity and strictness of that law that says--"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," who can hold slaves, use or vend alcohol as an article of common use, and encourage the church in using tobacco and other worse than useless narcotics and filthy things, to the great injury of their health, and to the robbing of the treasury of the Lord?

34. You see the mistake of supposing that conscience will always admonish us when we do wrong. When it has become seared on any point we may continue in that form of iniquity without experiencing the rebuke of conscience.

35. We see the danger of this belief. If you take it for granted that you are not sinning, because you are not rebuked by your conscience, you will probably sleep on until you are in the depths of hell.

36. There is no safety in stopping short of universal reformation in heart and life.

37. A generally seared conscience is a fearful evidence of a state of hopeless reprobation.

38. A mind with a seared conscience is like a tub without a bottom. Truth flows right through it, and there is no such thing as influencing the will by truth. You may as well expect to influence a mere brute by moral considerations as a man whose conscience is asleep, or seared.

39. You see why so many can ridicule many important branches of reform, and even scoff at them.

40. You see why many persons cry out upon many branches of reform as legal, as self-righteousness, as something which overlooks the gospel. Here it is of the utmost importance to remember, that to do any thing from a mere constrained compliance with the demands of conscience without a love to what is right for its own sake, is by no means obedience to the law of God. Conscience enforces moral obligation and love complies with it. Conscience decrees oughtness, or that you ought to do thus and thus, and benevolence walks up, joyfully and instantly, to meet the imposed responsibility. It should never be forgotten or overlooked that love is the substance of all obedience to the law of God, and that

whenever the dictates of conscience are outwardly complied with for other than disinterestedly benevolent reasons, this is in reality regarding neither the demand of conscience nor of God; for conscience demands that right shall be done, and done from love to God and love to right. Whatever is not of love is not obedience to God. But again I must say, that love or benevolence, without a most strict regard to the injunctions of conscience, is a downright absurdity. Benevolence, without universal obedience, is absurd. If there is love, there will be a most punctilious wakefulness to every affirmation of conscience. And I do not hesitate to say, that he who can call this a legal, instead of a gospel righteousness, is an Antinomian. He is guilty of a fundamental and soul-destroying error.

41. Conscience will not always remain silent. A man may in this life pervert and silence his conscience, and even destroy his moral agency, by making himself a lunatic. But let it be understood, that the time is coming when God will secure the fixed attention of the mind to those great moral truths that will arouse and arm the conscience with a thousand scorpions. When it awakes in eternity, its rebukes will be terrible beyond all description and imagination. How often it awakes even here towards the close of life, and inflicts the sharpest and most unutterable pangs upon subjects where it has long been silent. Cases have occurred under my own observation in which conscience has been so quickened upon some subjects, on which it had been nearly entirely silent, as to pierce the soul with such agonies as were almost entirely insupportable. Instances have occurred where persons have fallen like dead men, under the rebukes of conscience. In some cases men who have been the most hardened, whose consciences have been for years seared with a hot iron, have been made to wail out, even in this life, like a soul in the prison of despair. O, sinner, O, professor of religion, do not suppose that you can always, through time and eternity, stupefy and benumb your conscience, and drown the clamors of your outraged moral nature. It will, by and by, speak out with terror and in a voice of thunder. It will sit and gnaw upon your soul, and prove itself to be "the worm that never dies." It will transfix your soul as with the arrow of eternal death.

[Back to Top](#)

Conditions of Being Kept

Lecture XXXIII

May 26, 1841

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 Peter 4:19: "Let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."

In this discussion I design to show:

I. In what sense the trials, temptations, and sufferings of the saints, in this life, are according to the will of God.

II. What is intended by committing the soul to Him.

III. What is intended by committing the soul to Him in well doing.

IV. If the soul be thus committed to Him, it will inevitably be kept.

V. Notice several mistakes into which many fall, upon this subject.

I. In what sense the trials, temptations, and sufferings of the saints, in this life, are according to the will of God.

1. Not in the sense that God has any pleasure in them for their own sake. God does not regard pain or suffering of any kind as a good in itself. He never takes pleasure in the sufferings of any being on their own account.

2. The trials and sufferings of the saints are not to be regarded as according to the will of God, in such a sense that He does not sympathize with the saints in their sufferings; for He really does, with all the kindness of parental feeling.

3. Nor are they to be regarded as according to the will of God, in such a sense, that He does not regard them as evils in themselves; for they doubtless are looked upon by Him as serious evils in themselves.

4. Nor in such a sense, that He does not feel afflicted with their afflictions,

as perfectly good parents would feel in view of the afflictions of their children, were all the results of these afflictions present with them as they are with God.

5. Nor in the sense, that He, in all cases, approves the means by which they are afflicted; for He often feels utterly opposed to the means by which his people are afflicted.

6. Nor are these sufferings according to his will in such a sense, that He would not prevent them, if He wisely could. But--

7. They are according to his will in the sense, that under the circumstances, He regards them as the less of two evils. They are evils in themselves; but are regarded by God as a less evil than would result from his interfering to prevent them.

8. They are according to his will in the sense, that He often sees them to be indispensable to the highest good of the saints themselves. The moral tendency of these afflictions is such, as oftentimes to teach his people lessons which in no other way they will learn; and, consequently, are often an indispensable condition of their sanctification and salvation.

9. They are, therefore, regarded by Him as upon the whole, most for his glory, and the highest good of the universe. No thanks to those who are the guilty instruments of afflicting the saints; for they do not mean to glorify God. They are earthly, wicked, and selfish in their intentions; but God often overrules and calls in the wrath of man to praise Him, and the remainder of wrath He will restrain.

10. They are according to his will in the sense, that upon the whole, under all the circumstances of the case, He prefers they should take place. That is, He prefers it as the less of two evils, and considers it a less evil, under all the circumstances, than for Him to interpose by his omnipotence and prevent it.

11. He views these afflictions, temptations, trials, &c., as that in which, with the results, all present to Him, He rejoices. Or strictly, it should be said--that in the results He rejoices, and not in the means, on their own account, but only as the necessary means of effecting his benevolent ends.

II. What is intended by committing the soul to God.

1. The word rendered commit, in this text, is a form of the same word that is often rendered faith in the New Testament; and in this connection conveys a very correct idea of the real meaning of the term faith, or of the true nature of faith. It means, to trust, confide. It is not a mere emotion of the mind--but is an act of the will; a yielding up, or giving over the soul to God, for safe keeping. It is like the committing a treasure to any one, to be kept for us.
2. It is like a bride committing herself to her husband, a giving herself away, committing her honor, her all, into his hands, and thus uniting her destiny with his.
3. It is a state, or an abiding trust or confidence, in opposition to a single act of will. It is such a state as keeps the soul at rest or in peace.

III. What is intended by committing the soul to God in WELL DOING.

1. It is the delivering up of the whole being to doing and suffering the whole will of God, joyfully and calmly; leaving results with Him. Observe, the will controls the actions of body and mind. This committing the soul to Him in well doing, is that act of the will by which all the powers of body and mind, so far as they are under the control of the will, are delivered up or consecrated to the service of God, delivered up to do his whole will; calmly and unhesitatingly leaving results entirely with Him.

As an illustration of what is intended, take the case of Abraham, when he was commanded by God to forsake his country and his kindred, for a land that God would show him. Without stopping to be informed as it respected the land, how far off, where it was, or what sort of a country it should be, he instantly obeyed, and went forth at the bidding of God, not knowing whither he went; taking it for granted, as a thing settled beyond all question, that God would guide him aright. He obeyed implicitly, and thus committed his soul to God in well doing; that is, in implicit obedience. So in the case of his being commanded to offer up Isaac, his son of promise, "his only son Isaac, whom he loved." What a wonderful trial of his faith! That this son of promise, of whom it had been said he should be the father of many nations, should be destined to be slain by his own father's hand, previous to his being a father at

all, was placing Abraham under circumstances immensely interesting and trying. But behold his confidence; how he committed every thing to God in implicit obedience. He went forth, prepared to render unqualified obedience to God--trusting that if he was slain God was able to raise him again from the dead; from whence also he virtually received him; or as God expresses it, "received him in a figure."

2. It is confidence reposed in God, upon his own conditions. God has informed mankind, that they may trust in Him for safe-keeping, upon conditions of implicit obedience, and not otherwise. He does not allow people to repose confidence in Him, that He will keep and save them, if they disobey Him. "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things I say?" It is, then, upon his own conditions that the soul is to be committed to Him, and this is the thing the Apostle requires in the text.

3. It is giving yourself up to the promotion of his glory and the good of the universe, with the steadfast confidence, that your soul and interests in his hands are safe.

4. It is thus giving yourself up in implicit obedience, with the fullest assurance, that you need not concern yourself about results.

5. It is thus giving yourself up, with the entire willingness that the results shall be in all respects according to the will of God.

6. It is the actual going right forward in the discharge of every duty, in the exercise of such confidence in God, in respect to results, as to feel no anxiety or carefulness as respects the disposition God will make of your soul.

IV. If the soul be thus committed to God, it will inevitably be kept.

1. It will be kept, because God is a faithful God. He is described in the text as a faithful Creator. There is no reason to distrust Him. He will not, cannot abuse your confidence. He is not only faithful, but infinitely faithful, and will heartily and certainly fulfill all his pledges, and keep that which you commit to Him in well doing.

2. He is able to keep your soul. He is described in the text as the Creator of the soul. If He was able to make it, He is certainly able to keep it.

3. He is willing; certainly, He is infinitely willing to keep it, or He would not have given his Son to die to redeem it. He would not take so much pains to get possession of it. He would not use so many means, with such long-suffering, and exercise such great self-denial as to give the life of his well beloved Son, to redeem the soul from the hands of public justice, and to persuade man to commit his soul to Him, unless He was willing with all his heart to keep it, when committed to Him upon his own conditions.

4. His honor demands that He should keep the soul when thus committed to Him in well doing. Moral beings, from the very constitution of their natures, regard a breach of sacred confidence, or trust, as a most dishonorable and hateful offense, as deserving the severest reprobation. What an infinite dishonor it would be to God, to suffer a soul to be lost which was committed to Him upon his own conditions for safe keeping.

5. He regards every soul thus committed to Him as He does the apple of his eye. He says, he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.

6. God regards the soul as worth keeping. He has given an intimation of the light in which He regards the value of the soul, in the Atonement of Christ. O who should know the value of the soul but God, who made it? Who knows what eternity is but God? Who can form an idea of what an immortal soul can suffer or enjoy, but God? Whose eye has beheld, whose heart has pondered, and whose mind has compassed the capabilities of the soul to endure or to enjoy, but God? And shall not God keep a soul--a deathless soul--a soul made in his own image--a soul for whom his Son has died--shall He not keep it when committed to Him upon his own conditions? Shall He carelessly throw it away? Shall He neglect it, and suffer any to pluck it out of his hands? O tell it not in Gath. It cannot be.

7. If thus committed to Him God will keep it, because He knows you will not keep it yourself; but that if it be left with you, it will be lost forever. Nay, He sees that you have lost it already; that you have sold it into perpetual slavery--that it is already bound over, and sentenced to eternal death--that unless it is committed to Him, it must inevitably lie down in everlasting sorrow. How infinitely important, then, that the soul should be instantly committed to Him in well doing.

V. Mistakes into which many fall, upon this subject.

1. Many have an Antinomian faith. They trust that God will keep and save their souls, and yet they have not complied, and do not comply with the only conditions upon which they are at liberty to trust in God. Instead of committing their souls to Him in well doing--instead of implicitly obeying God, they think that Christ's righteousness will answer for Himself and them too; so that they shall be saved on account of Christ's obedience, whether they render a personal obedience or not. This is a horrible delusion. An imputed righteousness in this sense, is one of the grossest blunders, and most shocking errors, the world has ever fallen into.

2. Others are not expecting to be saved without good works, but are taking a passive attitude, and waiting for God, in some mysterious way, to move upon them and influence them to obey Him. Thus, instead of going forward actually to the exercise of their own agency, they are, as they suppose, trusting in God while professedly waiting for divine influence. Is this committing the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing?

3. Others engage in what they call well doing from mere considerations of duty, without any of that faith that works by love. They have in reality, no faith in Christ. They do not commit the keeping of their souls to him in affectionate confidence, but go about what they call the discharge of duty, impelled by other considerations than those of faith and love. They have no rest, no deep peace of mind in what they call their well-doing. Now, this shows, that they are mere legalists, and know not what that faith is, which is spoken of in this text.

4. Many mistake emotions of assurance that they shall be kept, for faith. An emotion of assurance is wholly an involuntary state of mind. It is by no means to be confounded with faith. Faith is an act of the will, as I have already said, and because it is an act of the will, it is connected with its outward manifestations by a natural necessity. It is impossible that real faith should not produce corresponding outward conduct, as impossible as it is that our bodies should not be influenced by our wills. There may often be high wrought emotions of assurance, without any real faith, and yet nothing is more common, than for persons to confound these two states of mind, and mistake the one for the other, but they are entirely different states of mind. Faith, as I have already said, is an act or choice of the will, a committing or giving up the soul to God in implicit obedience. Every thing

therefore, which is called faith, that does not, as a matter of fact, manifest itself in obedience to God, is not the faith of the gospel. It is a mere antinomian faith. It is an emotion and not an act of the will at all.

5. Others mistake a single act of faith for that state of faith which habitually trusts or commits the keeping of the soul to Him in well doing, all the time. Now there is certainly a difference between a first or single act of faith, and a state of confidence. Let the case of a wife illustrate what I mean. Suppose a woman, under circumstances of excitement and being pressed hard by the persuasion of her friends, to consent to become a wife, and by one act to commit herself to the honor, protection, and guidance, of her husband. But, suppose that she should soon fall back, and lose her confidence in him, become distrustful insomuch that she could not trust him out of her sight without fearing he was in company with some other woman or engaged in what he ought not to be, keeping herself in continual trouble, lest he should be guilty of some act of infidelity to her, or be unable or unwilling to support her, and thus she should become full of tossings night and day. But suppose, on the other hand, that she had so fully committed herself as that she could honestly say, from that time forward, that never, for one moment she had distrusted her husband in any respect, or in the least degree, whether at home or abroad. In whatever company, and in whatever circumstances, she had had the most implicit and unshaken confidence in him, insomuch that her soul had been as entirely at rest in respect to him as if she had known it was naturally impossible for him to do wrong, or betray her confidence. Now, it should be remembered that this committing the soul to Him in well doing must not merely be a single act, but a continuous act or state of the will. Unless it be a continued state that holds out to the end, God has not promised to keep the soul.

6. Others again, are attempting to get faith by works. Instead of at once confiding in God, by a simple act of committing all to Him, they go to work, and by laborious efforts, try to force themselves into the exercise of those emotions of assurance which they suppose to constitute faith.

7. Others are speculating about the philosophy of faith to the neglect of the objects of faith. They give up the attention of the mind to a dissecting of their mental exercises, and to the settling of certain philosophical questions, instead of pouring the intense energies of their mind upon those truths that

are to be believed. Instead of looking at Christ and attentively considering the truths of his precious gospel, they are turning their attention within themselves, and looking into the darkness of their own minds, for light upon the subject of faith. This is about as wise as if a man should shut up his eyes in the midst of noon-day, and turn in upon an examination of the anatomy and physiology of the eye, with the philosophy of vision, seeking for light.

8. Others still are trying to live by faith without works. They forget that a faith without works is dead, or that it is a mere emotion and not an act of the will, and therefore has no virtue in it. "Show me your faith," says James, "without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works--wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead."

It should always be remembered that faith works. It is an active principle. It is itself an action, an effort of the will, and of course exhibits itself in works. Some, indeed, are endeavoring to live by faith without works, and others by works without faith. And O, how rare a thing is it to find those who have the faith that works by love.

REMARKS.

1. It cannot be too distinctly understood and borne in mind, that all the Christian graces, properly so called, are acts of will, and connected with their outward manifestations, in a corresponding course of action, by a natural necessity. As I have already said, faith is an act of the will and connected with corresponding works, and works of love, by a natural necessity. Therefore no other faith than that which works, and works by love, is evangelical or saving faith. It is a trusting or committing the soul to Christ in well doing. How infinitely important is it that this be borne in mind.

2. What numerous blunders have been made by theological writers on the subject of faith. Some holding it to be a passive state of mind, thus confounding it with the perception of truth--others have confounded it with emotion, or a full assurance that the gospel or the promises are true--others still have made it voluntary only indirectly and have supposed it to have moral character only because it is indirectly produced by an act of the will, in directing the attention to the examination of the evidence. It seems to have been quite extensively understood to be synonymous with conviction of persuasion of mind that a thing

is true. These and similar blunders upon this subject, have led so many Antinomians and heartless professors of religion to settle down upon the supposition that they are Christians, taking it for granted that they can have true faith, true love, and true repentance, and yet that these graces may exist without manifesting themselves in benevolent outward conduct. How infinitely important it is then to understand that repentance, faith, love, are all acts of the will, of choices; and must of necessity manifest themselves in a corresponding outward conduct. The love that constitutes religion is good willing, or benevolence, and not complacency in God or any other being. We are as entirely involuntary in the exercise of the love of complacency toward God, as we are in the exercise of complacency in any other object, that is to us naturally beautiful and lovely. So repentance is an act of the will, and does not consist at all in those emotions of sorrow that are often supposed to be repentance. Repentance, when properly considered, and resolved into its proper elements, is precisely synonymous with regeneration or a change from selfishness to benevolence. Sorrow for sin is a mere consequence, connected with repentance by a natural necessity just as complacency in God is with benevolence and faith. Whoever overlooks, therefore, in his own experience, or in his account or estimation of his character, the fact that all the Christian graces, properly so called, or all that in which there is true virtue, consist in acts of will, which must of course and of necessity manifest themselves in corresponding outward acts, will totally deceive himself.

3. As it is true that no faith is evangelical except that which works by love, so also it is true, that no works are acceptable but works of faith. Any works not connected with and originating in faith, or any committing of the soul to God in well doing, are only works of law, by which no flesh can be justified.

4. This text is a beautiful description of true religion. It is admirably guarded and beautifully expressed. It sums up the whole of it in the short sentence--"commit the soul to Him in well doing."

5. This is the very direction, amplified, explained and illustrated, that answers the important question, "what shall I do to be saved?"

6. This text says nothing about waiting for mere feeling or emotion. It requires at once an act of will which is directly within our power. If there is any thing in the universe over which a man has control, it is over his own volitions. It is absurd and contradictory to say he cannot will. The thing then to be done--the thing

required in the text, is at once to put forth the act of committing the soul to God in well doing.

7. All faith and trust in God that does not work, and work by love, is tempting God. It is trusting Him without complying with his express conditions. It is presumption, and a blasphemous abuse of God. It is the greatest dishonor to God, and that which He supremely resents and abhors, that any one should claim or pretend to trust in Him, without habitually obeying Him.

8. So all works without faith are tempting God; for they are setting aside his conditions, and a wicked attempt to be justified directly or indirectly by works of law, which he has declared to be impossible.

9. The afflictions, temptations and trials of the saints are designed and calculated to strengthen their faith. When they have passed through those scenes and have had much experience of the faithfulness of God, they can speak from experience. The faithfulness of God with them is not a matter of theory, but of certain knowledge.

10. The sharper the trial, the greater the triumph, and the deeper the rest of the soul, when it is over. This is the natural result of learning by experience the great faithfulness of God.

11. But "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

12. God sometimes suffers persons to fall into sin, because they are presumptuous in running into temptation. They pray "Lead us not into temptation," and then rush right into it. And because they do not watch, God suffers them to fall. Nay, He cannot by any possibility prevent their falling, unless they will watch.

13. It is impossible that a faith that does not work, and work by love, should be a saving faith. In other words it is impossible for God to save the soul through the medium of faith that is not holy, or does not consist in an act of will and connected with a corresponding course of life by a natural necessity. If the Christian graces were mere emotions instead of choices they might exist forever without any virtue or holiness in the mind. If faith were a mere antinomian perception of the truths of the gospel, a mere emotion or felt assurance of being

kept or saved which Antinomians have, there would be no tendency to salvation in it, nor would there be any possibility that salvation should be connected with it. All virtue consists in intention or acts of will. And a faith that is not an act of will is a dead faith, a faith connected with damnation and not with salvation.

14. It should always be remembered that whenever you are living in the neglect of duty or in any form of disobedience, your faith is vain, i.e. it is no faith, it is a mere emotion and not an act of will, for if it were an act of will it would be connected with a discharge of all known duty by an act of necessity.

15. One grand reason of keeping the saints for a time in this world is to develop and strengthen their graces, to confirm them in holiness. Holiness is always pure in kind. It is always obedience to God. It may intermit and acquire permanence by the teaching and discipline that confirms and perpetuates faith and all those states of mind and acts of will, of which faith is the condition.

16. In this state of existence the saints are educated for future usefulness. It may be and probably is true, that the saints will hereafter be employed in works of love, under circumstances that will require just that degree of knowledge and strength of virtue which they acquire in passing through the scenes of tumult with which they are surrounded in this life. They are here made familiar with temptation and with the faithfulness of God. And they will doubtless hereafter need this experience, in order that they may act well their part in the labors to which God shall hereafter call them. We may rest assured that our discipline here is not in vain, and that God would not leave his children to pass through such scenes if it could be wisely avoided.

17. The sufferings of the saints in this life are eminently calculated to prepare them for the enjoyments of heaven.

18. It is a great evil and a great sin to cast away your confidence in an hour of trial. You have heard of the patience and confidence of Job. Satan accused him, before the sons of God, of having a selfish religion: "Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast thou not made a hedge about him and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land; but put forth thine hand now and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord. And there was a day when his

sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: and there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them; and the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword: and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burnt up the sheep, and the servants, and hath consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house; and, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. Then Job arose and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."

Now see the great confidence of this man of God. In an hour of trial and temptation he did not, like many professors of religion now, cast away his shield. But his trial is not yet ended: "Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord. And the Lord said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause. And Satan answered the Lord, and said, Skin for skin; yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life; but put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life. So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils, from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes. Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still

retain thine integrity? curse God, and die! But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips."

How affecting and remarkable it is, that Job's confidence should have been so unwavering under such trials as these. One messenger comes upon the heels of another--and while one is yet speaking another comes, and another, and another, and another--bringing intelligence still more afflicting and overwhelming. He was very rich; but one thing goes after another, till he is left a beggar. Still his children are left to him; but while the intelligence of the destruction of the last remains of his fortune is still in his ears, a messenger comes to inform him of the instantaneous death of all his children. He then stands naked before the Lord, and cries out, "Naked came I into the world, and naked shall I go out of it. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

But still his wife is left--his dearest earthly friend, his richest earthly treasure, is still left. She is not only alive, but she has not forsaken him. Her countenance, her support, and her counsel, are still with him. But ah! when Satan but touches his person, then she forsakes him. His three friends come to taunt him. He is accused of being a hypocrite, and his wife, confident of his sincerity, and thinking him abused, advises him to curse God and die. But hear the man of God: "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" "Although He slay me," says he, "yet will I trust in Him."

Now how infinitely unlike many professors of religion, in the present day, was this conduct of Job. Many professors seem to be like soldiers, who carry their shield when there is no danger; but as soon as they come into danger, where they have occasion to use it, they cast it away and flee; give up their confidence in God, "which hath great recompense of reward," and turn their backs upon God, and shamefully apostatize.

Suppose a man were going to sea, and God should inform him that he would encounter great storms, and go through much tribulation; yet, nevertheless, he should ride them all out in safety, and "not a hair of any man's head should perish." With this promise in his hand, he embarks and sets his feet upon the deck of the ship, and feels that he is as safe as if upon eternal rock. But he is scarcely out of sight of land before a tempest arises. The heavens gather blackness, the blazing lightnings flash around him, and now he is lifted upon the

mountain wave, and anon the ocean yawns as if it would lay bare its very bottom, to receive the plunging and struggling bark. The tempest roars so loud, that the voice of the thunder cannot be heard. The captain, with his trumpet, is obliged to shout at the top of his voice, in every man's ear, to be heard and understood. The elements are conspired against him. The rattling hail, the forked lightning, the deafening roar of the tempest, the mighty wrestlings of the waves, all exhibit around him a scene of terror and consternation, indescribable; but God rides upon the storm, and amid the mighty rollings of the ship, when the daring seamen from the highest yards are rolled and pitched as if to be thrown to a great distance, by the mighty sweepings of the sea; why, if his faith is firm in God, the man can stand upon the deck, and in every rolling and lurching of the ship cry out, "Hold on, for God has spoken, and not a hair of any man's head shall perish. I believe in God. Let the winds blow on, and let the elements conspire against this trembling ship; though every joint shall groan, and every butt should seem about to spring--though sea after sea should make an entire breach over us, from stem to stern; yet, as God is true, the hair of no man's head shall perish." Why, with the promise of God in his hand, he could ride the world around in the midst of the most terrific hurricane, and be as calm as if sitting by his fire at home.

But suppose that, with such a promise as this in his hand, and with the express intimation that he must pass through great storms, and great tribulations, to enter the haven of rest, the man had so little confidence in God, that unless it was fair weather all the time, he was in a state of continual distrust. Every appearance of a storm would make him tremble. He would cast away his confidence, and before the whole ship's crew he would dishonor God, and give up all for lost. O, the shipmen and the passengers would say, what sort of a Christian is this, and what must he think of his God, to have no confidence in the stability of his promise? He must see with his eyes, that there is no danger, or he is in a state of continual distress. O the miserable unbelief, the God dishonoring distrust and casting away of confidence with which the Church of God is cursed. How greatly this grieves the Spirit of the Lord, and how greatly it offends against the generation of God's children. What a stumbling block to the saints, and what ruin it brings upon the world.

Beloved, when you are called to pass through trials, and deep waters of affliction, these are your golden opportunities to honor the blessed God, and exhibit the value and power of your religion. These are the bright spots in your

history, in which you have an opportunity to make the deepest impression upon the world. Why, have you never known, that "the blood of the Martyrs was the seed of the Church?"--that their confidence in God, in the midst of the fires of martyrdom, were to the bystanders the overwhelming demonstration of the truth and value of their religion? What, then, do you mean, to cast away your confidence in an hour of trial? Why do you not hold on? Why do you not, then, when you have the opportunity, show yourself a good soldier of Jesus Christ?

1. "I am a soldier of the cross,

A foll'wer of the Lamb;

And shall I fear to own his cause,

Or blush to speak his name?

2. Shall I be carried to the skies,

on flow'ry beds of ease,

While others fought to win the prize,

And sail'd through bloody seas?

3. Are there no foes for me to face,

Must I not stem the flood;

Is this vain world a friend to grace,

To help me on to God?

4. Sure I must fight, if I would reign;

Increase my courage, Lord,

To bear the cross, endure the shame,

Supported by thy word.

5. The saints, in all this glorious war,

Shall conquer, tho' they die;
They see the triumph from afar,
With faith's discerning eye."

--Watts

[Back to Top](#)

National Fast Day

Lecture XXXIV

June 9, 1841

PREACHED ON THE DAY OF THE NATIONAL FAST, MAY 14

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Isaiah 58:1 "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins," &c. &c.

My design is not to enter into a critical exposition of this chapter, but merely to make it the basis of some remarks upon private and public FASTING. In doing this I shall show:

- I. What is implied in an acceptable fast.*
- II. The importance of abstinence from food on such occasions.*
- III. That human governments are a divine institution.*
- IV. The principle upon which God deals with nations as such.*
- V. Notice the design, propriety, and use of national fasts.*
- VI. Point out the duty of citizens, and especially of Christians as citizens, in respect to them.*
- VII. Notice some of the national sins which call this nation to fasting, humiliation and prayer.*

I. What is implied in an acceptable fast.

1. It implies repentance. Fasting without repentance must be an abomination.
2. It implies such a degree of sorrow and concern as to destroy, for the time being, the appetite for food. Every one is familiar with the fact, that when

the mind is strongly exercised, and a high degree of emotion exists, it, for the time being, destroys the appetite. Children, arising in the morning to go a journey, are too much excited to eat. So when persons lose their friends, or any thing else occurs that produces a strong excitement of mind, they naturally reject their food. This fact is easily accounted for on physiological principles. When the mind is strongly exercised, there is a strong determination of blood to the head. When the appetite for food is excited, there is a determination of blood to the stomach. When, therefore, the mind is strongly exercised, there is a want of appetite for food of course; because, in ordinary circumstances, there is not that determination of blood to the stomach which produces a craving for food. Therefore,

3. Acceptable fasting implies abstinence from food, for the time being.
4. It implies confession of sin to God, and to those who have been injured.
5. It implies restitution, so far as restitution is in your power.
6. It implies reformation.

II. Abstinence from food important.

1. If the requisite state of mind exists, the health demands abstinence from food. When the brain is strongly exercised by the mind, if food be taken into the stomach, it will not, ordinarily, be digested; for the reason, that there is so much blood flowing to the brain as to deprive the stomach of that amount of excitement, and determination of blood to that organ, that is demanded for the purposes of digestion. In such cases food should not be taken, as it will seriously impair the health.
2. In such cases, food cannot be taken without serious detriment to the state of mind required. If the blood be diverted from the head to the stomach the strong exercise of the mind must necessarily, in a great measure, cease; but if the blood be not diverted from the head sufficient for digestion, the fermentation of food in the stomach, although it may not actually annihilate those exercises of the mind, must necessarily greatly impede them.
3. In such cases, abstinence greatly favors the healthy action of the mind, and leaves it free to pursue its investigations, and to exercise its affections, without being under the necessity of competing with the stomach, in its

efforts to retain a sufficiency of blood for the brain. Who does not know, that when he has taken a full meal, he is disqualified, for a time, for close and vigorous thought? This is a physiological result. The stomach must have the excitement of a considerable determination of blood to that organ, or the process of digestion cannot go forward. And if, soon after eating a full meal, your mind be, by any means, lashed into a state of powerful excitement, you are nearly or quite sick in consequence.

4. Judicious fasting greatly aids the mind in gaining an ascendance over the bodily appetites and passions. This, also, is a physiological fact, easily explained. But into this I cannot here enter.

III. Human governments are a divine institution.

I remark upon the divine authority of governments in this place, because of the manifest propriety of recognizing them, upon a celebration of a National Fast. You will indulge me in speaking more at length upon this head, as their divine authority has of late been questioned. And I will quote from my recently published *Skeletons on Theology*:

FIRST. Human governments are a necessity of human nature.

1. There is a material universe.
2. The bodies of men are material.
3. All action wastes these material bodies, and consequently they need continual sustenance.
4. Hence, we have many bodily wants.
5. Hence, the necessity of worldly goods and possessions.
6. There must be real estate.
7. It must belong to somebody.
8. There must, therefore, be all the forms of conveyancing, registry, and in short, all the forms of legal government. to settle and manage the real estate affairs of men.
9. Men have minds residing in a material body, and depending upon the

organization and perfection of this body for mental development.

10. The mind receives its ideas of external objects, and the elements of all its knowledge through the bodily senses. It therefore needs books and other means of knowledge.

11. Hence, for this reason also men need property.

12. Moral beings will not agree in opinions on any subject, without similar degrees of knowledge.

13. Hence, no human community exists, or ever will exist, who on all subjects will agree in opinion.

14. This creates a necessity for human legislation and adjudication, to apply the great principle of moral law to all human affairs.

15. There are multitudes of human wants and necessities that cannot properly be met, except thro' the instrumentality of human governments.

SECOND. This necessity will continue as long as human beings exist in this world.

1. This is as certain as that the human body will always need sustenance, clothing, &c.

2. It is as certain as that the human soul will always need instruction, and that the means of instruction will not grow spontaneously, without expense or labor.

3. It is as certain as that men of all ages and circumstances will never possess equal degrees of information on all subjects.

4. If all men were perfectly holy and disposed to do right, the necessity of human governments would not be set aside, because this necessity is founded in the ignorance of mankind.

5. The decisions of legislators and judges must be authoritative, so as to settle questions of disagreement in opinion, bind, and protect all parties.

6. The Bible represents human governments not only as existing, but as giving their authority and power to the support of the Church in its most

prosperous state, or in the Millenium. It proves that human government will not be dispensed with when the world is holy:

Isa. 49:22, 23: "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up my hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their faces toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me."

THIRD. Human governments are plainly recognized in the Bible as a part of the moral government of God.

1. Dan. 2:21; "He changes the times and the seasons; He removeth kings and setteth up kings; He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding."

Dan. 4:17, 25: "This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones; to the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men." "They shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will." Dan. 5: 21, Shows that this was done.

Rom. 13:1-7: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works but to the evil. Wilt thou then not, be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in

vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath but also for conscience sake. For, for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor."

Titus 3:1: "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work."

I Peter 2:13, 14: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by Him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well."

These passages prove conclusively, that God establishes human governments, as a part of his moral government.

.

2. It is a matter of fact, that God does exert moral influences through the instrumentality of human governments.

3. It is a matter of fact, that He often executes his law, punishes vice, and rewards virtue, through the instrumentality of human governments.

4. Under the Jewish Theocracy, where God was King, it was found indispensable to have the forms of the executive department of government.

FOURTH. Whose right and duty it is to govern.

1. I have said that government is a necessity. Human beings are, under God, dependent on human government to promote their highest well-being.

2. It is his right and duty to govern, who is both able and willing, in the highest and most effectual manner, to secure and promote individual and public virtue and happiness.

3. Upon him all eyes are or ought to be turned, as one whose right and whose duty it is, to sustain to them the relation of ruler.

FIFTH. In what cases human legislation imposes moral obligation.

1. Not when it requires what is inconsistent with moral law.
2. Not when it is arbitrary, or not founded in right reason. But -
3. It always imposes moral obligation when it is in accordance with moral law, or the law of nature.

SIXTH. It is the duty of all men to aid in the establishment and support of human governments.

1. Because human governments are founded in the necessities of human beings.
2. As all men are in some way dependent upon them, it is the duty of every man to aid in their establishment and support.
3. As the great law of benevolence, or universal good-willing, demands the existence of human governments, all men are under a perpetual and unalterable moral obligation to aid in their establishment and support.
4. In popular or elective governments, every man having a right to vote, and every human being who has moral influence, is bound to exert that influence in the promotion of virtue and happiness. And as human governments are plainly indispensable to the highest good of man, he is bound to exert his influence to secure a legislation that is in accordance with the law of God.
5. The obligation of human beings to support and obey human governments, while they legislate upon the principles of the moral law, is as undeniable as the moral law itself.

SEVENTH. It is a ridiculous and absurd dream, to suppose that human governments can ever be dispensed with in the present world.

1. Because such a supposition is entirely inconsistent with the nature of human beings.
2. It is equally inconsistent with their relations and circumstances.
3. Because it assumes, that the necessity of government is founded alone in human depravity; whereas the foundation of this necessity is human ignorance, and human depravity is only an additional reason for the

existence of human governments. The primary idea of law is to teach; hence, law has a precept. It is authoritative, and therefore has a penalty.

4. Because it assumes, that men would always agree in judgment, if their hearts were right, irrespective of their degrees of information.

5. Because it sets aside one of the plainest and most unequivocal doctrines of revelation.

Objection. The Kingdom of God is represented in the Bible as subverting all other kingdoms.

Answer. This is true, and all that can be meant by this is, that the time will come when God shall be regarded as the supreme and universal sovereign of the universe; when his law shall be regarded as universally obligatory; when all kings, legislators, and judges shall act as his servants, declaring, applying, and administering the great principle of his law to all the affairs of human beings. Thus God will be the Supreme Sovereign, and earthly rulers will be presidents, governors, kings, and judges, under Him, and acting by his authority, as revealed in the Bible.

Objection. It is objected, that God only providentially establishes human governments, and that He does not approve of their selfish and wicked administration; that He only uses them providentially, as He does Satan, for the promotion of his own designs.

Answer 1. God nowhere commands mankind to obey Satan; but does command them to obey magistrates and rulers.

Rom. 13:1: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers: for there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God."

1 Pet. 2:13, 14: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well."

Answer 2. He nowhere recognizes Satan as his servant, sent and set by Him to administer justice and execute wrath upon the wicked; but He does this in respect to human governments.

Rom. 13:2-6: "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same. For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid: for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the MINISTER OF GOD, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For, for this cause pay ye tribute also; for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing."

Answer 3. It is true indeed, that God approves of nothing that is ungodly and selfish in human governments. Neither did He approve of what was ungodly and selfish in the Scribes and Pharisees; and yet Christ said to his disciples, "The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatsoever things they command you, that observe and do; but go ye not after their works, for they say, and do not." Here the plain common sense principle is recognized, that we are to obey when the requirement is not inconsistent with the moral law, whatever may be the character or the motive of the ruler. We are always to obey heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men, and render obedience to magistrates for the honor and glory of God, and as doing service to Him.

Objection. It is objected, that Christians should leave human governments to the management of the ungodly, and not be diverted from the work of saving souls, to intermeddle with human governments.

Answer 1. This is not being diverted from the work of saving souls.

The promotion of public and private order and happiness is one of the indispensable means of saving souls.

Answer 2. It is nonsense to admit, that Christians are under an obligation to obey human government, and still have nothing to do with the choice of those who shall govern.

Objection. It is objected, that we are commanded not to avenge ourselves, that "Vengeance is mine, and I will repay, saith the Lord." It is said, that if I may not avenge or redress my own wrongs in my own person, I may not do it through the instrumentality of human government.

Answer 1. It does not follow, that because you may not take it upon you to redress your own wrongs by a summary and personal infliction of punishment upon the transgressor, that human governments may not punish them.

Answer 2. Because all private wrongs are a public injury; and irrespective of any particular regard to your personal interest, magistrates are bound to punish crime for the public good.

Answer 3. It does not follow, because that while God has expressly forbidden you to redress your own wrongs by administering personal and private chastisement, He has expressly recognized the right and made it the duty of the public magistrate to punish crimes.

Objection. It is objected, that love is so much better than law as that where love reigns in the heart, law can be universally dispensed with.

Answer 1. This supposes, that if there is only love there need be no rule of duty.

Answer 2. This objection overlooks the fact, that law is, in all worlds, the rule of duty, and that legal sanctions make up an indispensable part of that circle of motives that are suited to the nature, relations, and government of moral beings.

Answer 3. The law requires love; and nothing is law, either human or

divine, that is inconsistent with universal benevolence. And to suppose that love is better than law, is to suppose that obedience to law sets aside the necessity of law.

Objection. It is objected, that Christians have something else to do besides meddle with politics.

Answer 1. In a popular government politics are an indispensable part of religion. No man can possibly be benevolent or religious, without concerning himself, to a greater or less extent, with the affairs of human government.

Answer 2. It is true, that Christians have something else to do than to go with a party to do evil, or to peddle with politics in a selfish or ungodly manner. But they are bound to meddle with politics in popular governments, for the same reason that they are bound to seek the universal good of all men.

Objection. It is said, that human governments are nowhere expressly authorized in the Bible.

Answer 1. This is a mistake. Both their existence and lawfulness are as expressly recognized in the above quoted scriptures as they can be.

Answer 2. If God did not expressly authorize them, it would still be both the right and the duty of mankind to institute human governments; because they are plainly demanded by the necessities of human nature. It is a first truth, that whatever is essential to the highest good of moral beings in any world, they have a right and are bound to do. So far, therefore, are men from needing any express authority to establish human governments, that no possible prohibition could render their establishment unlawful. It has been shown, in my lectures on moral government, that moral law is a unit--that it is that rule of action which is in accordance with the nature, relations and circumstances of moral beings--that whatever is in accordance with the nature, relations and circumstances of moral beings--that whatever is in accordance with, and demanded by the nature, relations, and circumstances of moral beings, is obligatory on them. It is moral law, and no power in the universe can set it aside. Therefore, were the

scriptures entirely silent on the subject of human governments, and on the subject of family government, as it actually is on a great many important subjects, this would be no objection to the lawfulness, and expediency; necessity, and duty of establishing human governments.

Objection. It is said, that human governments are founded in and sustained by force, and that this is inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel.

Answer 1. There cannot be a difference between the spirit of the Old and New Testaments, or between the spirit of the law and the gospel, unless God has changed, and unless Christ has undertaken to make void the law, through faith, which cannot be. "Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law."

Answer 2. Just human governments, and such governments only are contended for, will not exercise force, unless it is demanded to promote the highest public good. If it be necessary to this end, it can never be wrong. Nay, it must be the duty of human governments to inflict penalties, when their infliction is demanded by the public interest.

Objection. It is said, that there should be no laws with penalties.

Answer. This is the same as to say, there should be no law at all; for that is no law which has no penalty, but only advice.

Objection. It is said, that church government is sufficient to meet the necessities of the world, without secular or state governments.

Answer 1. What! Church governments regulate commerce, make internal improvements, and undertake to manage all the business affairs of the world!

Answer 2. Church government was never established for any such end; but simply to regulate the spiritual, in distinction from the secular concerns of men--to try offenders and inflict spiritual chastisement, and never to perplex and embarrass itself with managing the business and commercial operations of the world.

Objection. It is said, that were all the world holy, legal penalties would not be needed.

Answer. Were all men perfectly holy, the execution of penalties would not be needed; but still, if there were law, there would be penalties; and it would be both the right and the duty of magistrates to inflict them, should their execution be called for.

Objection. It is asserted, that family government is the only form of government approved of God.

Answer. This is a ridiculous assertion:

1. Because God as expressly commands obedience to magistrates as to parents.
2. He makes it as absolutely the duty of magistrates to punish crime, as of parents to punish their own disobedient children.
3. The right of family government is not founded in the arbitrary will of God, but in the necessities of human beings; so that family government would be both allowable and obligatory, had God said nothing about it.
4. So, the right of human government has not its foundation in the arbitrary will of God, but in the necessities of human beings. The larger the community the more absolute the necessity of government. If, in the small circle of the family, laws and penalties are needed, how much more in the larger communities of states and nations. Now, neither the ruler of a family, nor of any other form of human government, has a right to legislate arbitrarily, or enact, or enforce any other laws, than those that are in accordance with the nature, relations, and circumstances of human beings. Nothing can be law in heaven--nothing can be law on earth; nothing can be obligatory on moral beings, but that which is founded in the nature, relations, and circumstances of moral beings. But human beings are bound to establish family governments, state governments, national governments, and, in

short, whatever government may be requisite for the universal instruction, government, virtue, and happiness of the world.

5. All the reasons, therefore, for family government, hold equally in favor of state and national governments.

6. There are vastly higher and weightier reasons for governments over states and nations, than in the small communities of families.

7. Therefore, neither family nor state governments need the express sanction of God, to render them obligatory; for both the right and duty of establishing and maintaining these governments would remain, had the Bible been entirely silent on the subject. But on this, as on many other subjects, God has spoken and declared, what is the common and universal law, plainly recognizing both the right and duty of family and human governments.

8. Christians, therefore, have something else to do, than to confound the right of government with the abuse of this right by the ungodly. Instead of destroying human governments, Christians are bound to reform them.

9. To attempt to destroy, instead of reforming human governments, is the same in principle as is often plead by those who are attempting to destroy, rather than reform the Church. There are those, who, disgusted with the abuses of Christianity practiced in the Church, seem bent on destroying the Church altogether, as the means of saving the world. But what mad policy is this!

10. It is admitted, that selfish men need and must have the restraints of law; but that Christians should have no part in restraining them by law. But suppose the wicked should agree among themselves to have no law, and therefore should not attempt to restrain themselves nor each other by law; would it be neither the right nor the duty of Christians to attempt their restraint, through the influence of wholesome government?

11. It is strange, that selfish men should need the restraints of law,

and yet that Christians have no right to meet this necessity, by supporting governments that will restrain them. What is this but admitting, that the world really needs the restraints of governments--that the highest good of the universe demands their existence; and yet, that it is wicked for Christians to seek the highest good of the world, by meeting this necessity in the establishment and support of human governments! It is right and best, that there should be law. It is necessary, that there should be. Therefore, universal benevolence demands it; but it is wicked in Christians, to have any thing to do with it! This is singular logic.

EIGHTH. The reasons why God has made no form of church or state government universally obligatory.

1. That God has nowhere in the Bible given directions in regard to any particular form of church or secular government, is a matter of fact.
2. That he did not consider the then existing forms, either of church or state government, as of perpetual obligation, is also certain. He did not give directions in regard to particular forms of government, either church or state:

(1.) Because no such directions could be given, without producing great revolutions and governmental opposition to Christianity. The governments of the world are, and always have been, exceedingly various in form. To attempt, therefore, to insist upon any particular form, as being universally obligatory, would be calling out great national opposition to religion.

(2.) Because, that no particular form of church or state government, either now is, or ever has been, suited to all degrees of intelligence, and states of society.

(3.) Because the forms of both church and state governments, need to be changed, with any great elevations or depressions of society, in regard to their intelligence and virtue.

NINTH. The particular forms of church and state governments, must and will depend upon the virtue and intelligence of the people.

1. Democracy is self-government, and can never be safe or useful, only so far as there is sufficient intelligence and virtue in the community to impose, by mutual consent, salutary self-restraints, and to enforce by the power of public sentiment, and by the fear and love of God, the practice of those virtues which are indispensable to the highest good of any community.
2. Republics are another and less perfect form of self-government.
3. When there are not sufficient intelligence and virtue among the people, to legislate in accordance with the highest good of the state or nation, then both democracies and republics are improper and impracticable, as forms of government.
4. When there is too little intelligence and virtue in the mass of the people, to legislate on correct principles, monarchies are better calculated to restrain vice and promote virtue.
5. In the worst states of society, despotisms, either civil or military, are the only proper and efficient forms of government.
6. When virtue and intelligence are nearly universal, democratic forms of government are well suited to promote the public good.
7. In such a state of society, democracy is greatly conducive to the diffusion of knowledge on governmental subjects.
8. Although in some respects less convenient, and more expensive, yet in a suitable state of society, a democracy is in many respects the most desirable form, either of church or state government:

- (1.) It is conducive, as has been already said, to general intelligence.
- (2.) Under a democracy, the people are more generally acquainted with the laws.
- (3.) They are more interested in them.
- (4.) This form of government creates a more general feeling of individual responsibility.
- (5.) Governmental questions are more apt to be thoroughly discussed

and understood before they are adopted.

(6.) As the diffusion of knowledge is favorable to individual and public virtue, democracy is highly conducive to virtue and happiness.

9. God has always providentially given to mankind those forms of government that were suited to the degrees of virtue and intelligence among them.

10. If they have been extremely ignorant and vicious, He has restrained them by the iron rod of human despotism.

11. If more intelligent and virtuous, He has given them the milder forms of limited monarchies.

12. If still more intelligent and virtuous, He has given them still more liberty, and providentially established republics for their government.

13. Whenever the general state of intelligence has permitted it, He has put them to the test of self-government and self-restraint, by establishing democracies.

14. If the world ever becomes perfectly virtuous, both church and state governments will be proportionally modified, and employed in expounding and applying the great principles of moral law, to the spiritual and secular concerns of men.

15. The above principles are equally applicable to church and state governments. Episcopacy is well suited to a state of general ignorance among the people. Presbyterianism, or Church Republicanism, is better suited to a more advanced state of intelligence, and the prevalence of Christian principle. While Congregationalism, or Spiritual Democracy, is best suited, and only suited to a state of general intelligence, and the prevalence of Christian principle.

16. God's providence has always modified both church and state governments, so as to suit the intelligence and virtue of the people. As churches and nations rise and fall in the scale of virtue and intelligence, these various forms of government naturally and necessarily give place to each other. So that ecclesiastical and state despotism, or liberty, depends

naturally, providentially, and necessarily upon the virtue and intelligence of the people. That form of government is obligatory, that is best suited to meet the necessities of the people:

(1.) This follows as a self-evident truth, from the consideration, that it is necessity alone that creates the right of human government. To meet these necessities, is the object of government; and that government is obligatory and best, which is demanded by the circumstances, intelligence, and morals of the people.

(2.) Consequently, in certain states of society, it would be a Christian's duty to pray for and sustain even a military despotism; in a certain other state of society, to pray for and sustain a republic; and in a still more advanced stage of virtue and intelligence, to pray for and sustain a democracy; if indeed a democracy is the most wholesome form of self-government, which may admit a doubt.

TENTH. The true basis on which the right of human legislation rests.

Under this head, I need only to repeat the substance of what has already been said, that the right of human legislation is founded in the necessities of mankind--that the nature and ignorance of mankind lie at the foundation of this necessity--and, that their wickedness, the multiplicity and variety of their wants, are additional reasons, demanding the existence of human governments. Let it be understood, then, that the foundation of the right of human governments lies not in the arbitrary will of God; but in the nature, relations, and circumstances of human beings.

ELEVENTH. Revolutions become necessary and obligatory, when the virtue and intelligence, or the vice and ignorance of the people demand them.

1. This is a thing of course. When one form of government fails to meet any longer the necessities of the people, it is the duty of the people to revolutionize.

2. In such cases, it is in vain to oppose revolution; for in some way the benevolence of God will bring it about. Upon this principle alone, can what is generally termed the American Revolution be justified. The intelligence and virtue of our Puritan fore-fathers rendered a monarchy an unnecessary

burden, and a republican form of government both appropriate and necessary. And God always allows his children as much liberty as they are prepared to enjoy.

3. The stability of our republican institutions must depend upon the progress of general intelligence and virtue. If in these respects the nation falls, if general intelligence, public and private virtue sink to that point below which self-control becomes impossible, we must fall back into monarchy, limited or absolute; or into a civil or military despotism; just according to the national standard of intelligence and virtue. This is just as certain as that God governs the world, or that causes produce their effects.

4. Therefore, it is the maddest conceivable policy, for Christians to uproot human governments, while they ought to be engaged in sustaining them, upon the great principles of the moral law. It is certainly stark nonsense, if not abominable wickedness, to overlook, either in theory or practice, these plain, common sense, and universal truths.

TWELFTH. In what cases human legislation is valid.

1. Human legislation is valid, when called for by the necessities--that is--by the nature, relations and circumstances of the people.

2. Just that kind and degree of human legislation which are demanded by the necessities of the people are obligatory.

3. Human legislation is utterly null and void in all other cases whatever; and I may add, that divine legislation would be equally null and void--unless demanded by the nature, relations, and necessities of human beings. Consequently, human beings can never legislate in opposition to the moral law. Whatever is inconsistent with supreme love to God, and equal love to our neighbor, can by no possibility be obligatory.

4. We may yield obedience, when the thing required does not involve a violation of moral obligation.

5. We are bound to yield obedience, when legislation is in accordance with the law of nature.

6. We are bound to obey, when the thing required has no moral character in

itself; upon the principle, that obedience, in this case, is a less evil than revolution or misrule. But--

7. We are bound, in all cases, to disobey, when human legislation contravenes moral law, or invades the rights of conscience.

IV. The principles upon which God deals with nations as such.

1. Each nation is regarded by God as a unit. Nations are regarded as public persons.

2. They are regarded as amenable to Him for their conduct.

3. As bound by the principle of the moral law--that is, they are bound to legislate and adjudicate in accordance with the law of nature, or that rule of conduct that requires every moral being to love God with all the heart, and his neighbor as himself.

4. His dealings with nations are only providential, and necessarily confined to this world. Nations as such, do not exist in a future world. And, of course, this must be with nations a state of retribution, instead of being a state of trial or probation.

5. As nations, He treats them according to their outward conduct. This is a thing of course. Nations as such, have no private character. Their character is public. They are regarded as public persons, and treated according to the manner in which they outwardly demean themselves towards God and his government. Upon this tenure the Jews manifestly held their worldly possessions. And God's treatment of nations as such, in every age, has demonstrated the truth, that nations are providentially treated according to their public acts. Indeed as nations they have no other than public acts. For what individuals do is not regarded as national acts, unless these individuals are heads of government, and acting in a governmental capacity.

6. As the righteous and the wicked are mingled together in human governments, they are providentially treated alike, it being improper and impossible, when dealing with a nation as such, to make a distinction between the righteous and the wicked.

7. In eternity, God will treat rulers and ruled, according to their private

characters, as they shall appear in the light of the moral law.

V. The design, propriety, and use of national fasts.

1. It is no part of the design, either of private or public fasting, to make amends for past wrongs by doing penance.
2. But they are designed as a public recognition of national responsibility to God.
3. They are designed as a public confession of national sins.
4. As a public profession of national repentance, and renunciation of them.
5. This is eminently proper in respect to national sins. For, as national sins are always public sins, they should always be as publicly confessed and renounced. This should be done by the Executive Magistrate of the nation. Indeed, there seems to be no other way to put away national sins, so as to dispense with the necessity of national judgments, but by the appointment of national fasts, national confessions, and national repentance. As national sins are not private sins, private repentance will not meet the demands of the divine government. If God does not punish nations for their sins, there must be some public reason for withholding his judgments. And as this is with nations a state of reward, God's relation to the universe demands, that He should visit national sins with national judgments, unless they are nationally renounced; that is--renounced by a national public appointment of a fast, which is the most emphatic form of making a national confession.
6. National fasts are useful, as they often avert the judgments of God. The case of Nineveh is an illustrious example of this.
7. They are a public and national rebuke of infidelity, and a public acknowledgment of the existence, government, and goodness of God.
8. They tend to arouse and quicken the public conscience.
9. They give ministers an opportunity to expose and rebuke national vices.

VI. The duty of citizens, and especially of Christians as citizens, in respect to fasts.

1. It is their duty to abstain from the ordinary business of life. Public fasts

are to be publicly celebrated. Both magistrates and people are bound to lay aside their ordinary business, and attend on the solemn and public confession of their sins.

2. It is their duty to attend public worship, and unite in public confessions. And were it possible for this whole nation to assemble at Washington, and there, with the President at their head, unite in the public confession and renunciation of their sins, it would undoubtedly be their duty. On such occasions, and on this occasion, it would no doubt be eminently proper for the governors and heads of departments in the several states--for the houses of congress, to be assembled, and thus the representatives of the whole people appear before the Lord, to make public confession of the sins of the nation.

3. It is the duty of all citizens, to use whatever appropriate means are within their power, to bring about a complete national reformation.

VII. Some of the national sins which call this nation to fasting, humiliation, and prayer.

1. The outrageous injustice with which this nation has treated the aborigines of this country. The shameless wickedness of this nation, in respect to the manner in which the Indians have been duped in making treaties with them--the shocking and disgraceful manner in which these treaties have been violated by this government, is almost too bad to name. Who can mention or think of these things, without grief and indignation? How these helpless Indians have been trampled down, and in multitudes of ways oppressed and injured, until their cry has come up into the ears of Jehovah!

2. I notice the hypocrisy of this nation, in shedding British blood in defense of principles which, when applied to their own wrongs, they have always denied. As the very basis of the Revolution, they publicly declared, that "ALL MEN were born free and equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights--among which are life, LIBERTY, and the pursuit of happiness." Now, at the very time at which this declaration was made--the very men who made it--and the nation that proclaimed these truths, as an excuse for revolution and war, stood with their unsanctified feet upon the necks of the prostrate slaves! And from that day to this, this nation as such has continued, publicly and practically, when these wrongs were held up to

view, to deny the principles upon which the Revolution was based; while, at the same time, she has, in view of the wrongs received from the mother country, strenuously maintained them--thus at the same time both maintaining and denying these great truths--when herself oppressed, maintaining them and fighting in defense of them--when accused of oppression, denying them, and ready to fight in support of the opposite doctrine.

3. I notice the national treatment of the question of the abolition of slavery, as another of those heinous sins for which this nation ought to blush. Is it not astonishing, that in this government the friends of the oppressed are not even allowed to petition? Our government will not so much as suffer itself to be asked to "undo the heavy burdens." "Concerning oppression they speak loftily." And could we this day meet with the public assemblies in the city of Washington, we might perhaps hear the conduct of Abolitionists, in seeking the abolition of slavery, pointed out as one of the great sins of the people, in endeavoring, as they would express it, "to dissolve the Union."

4. The great wickedness in forming, and in attempting to support a Union upon such principles. It is "a league of iniquity." The nation never had a right, in their constitution or in any other way, to recognize the lawfulness of slavery, and guarantee the protection of states in holding their fellowmen in bondage. The compact was an utter abomination. The union was a league against God. And now our public men make this excuse for supporting slavery, that by the stipulations of the constitution, they are bound to do so. Now admitting that the constitution does ever so expressly contain such stipulations, are they, can they be binding? What! can it be obligatory on the nation, or any set of men, to violate the great law of love, because they have promised to do so. Suppose the different states had entered into a stipulation to carry on the slave trade for ever--could such a promise as this be binding on any of them? Suppose each state had promised to fit out and keep, upon the high seas, a certain number of pirate ships, to rob all the nations of the earth, to supply the public treasury with funds--could such an abominable compact be binding? Would any state have a right to abide by such a stipulation as this? No, no more than a contract to keep up a perpetual war with heaven could be binding. The fact is, that neither individuals nor nations can ever bind themselves by any promise to do wrong, to violate the law of love. Can a man render it lawful for him to murder, by promising to

murder? If this be so, any sin may cease to be sin, become obligatory, and consequently a virtue, simply by promising to do it. It is lamentable and shameful, that this nation should try to preserve a union, based upon such principles as these. If the union cannot be preserved, except by abiding by a stipulation to sustain slavery, or not to interfere with it, let it be given up. It is in the highest degree rebellion against God, to attempt to support it upon such principles.

5. I call your attention to the national desecration of the Sabbath, especially by the Post Office Department. In this department of our government, our nation has literally "framed iniquity by a law," and absolutely legislated in direct opposition to the law of God. It is by no means wonderful that this department is so often crippled in its movements--that its accounts are so often embarrassed.--The curse of God is upon it. This is just what might be expected, for it is managed by a host of Sabbath breakers. If this department of government be not yet more sorely rebuked than it has been, and if the government should in general continue in its present form--if the Post Office Department continue its shameless violation of the Sabbath, I shall be disappointed if God does not mark it yet more signally with his curse.

6. Again, I notice the national love of money, which is the root and foundation of this public desecration of the Sabbath. This nation has seemed to be ready to go almost any length in obtaining wealth, and to set aside the law of God whenever it has interfered with its grasping after worldly goods.

7. I notice the notorious licentiousness and intemperance of many of our rulers. It is commonly reported, and I suppose truly, that during the sessions of Congress, the city of Washington exhibits a scene of most disgusting licentiousness and intemperance on the part of many of those who are entrusted with, and voluntarily put into places of power, and made the conservators of the public morals.

8. I notice duel-fighting and murderous deeds that are almost every year practiced in Congress. Is it too much to say that no nation is so wicked as this? Where can a nation be found, so enlightened on religious subjects as this nation, yet so recklessly, perversely, and even wantonly trampling down the government of God?

9. I notice the wickedness of political contests, and especially the great sins that were committed during the election of the late President. We are assembled to celebrate a fast appointed in view of the recent death of that President. Now who can wonder that he was taken away by a stroke of Divine Providence, in the very beginning of his official career? Who ever witnessed such disgraceful and bacchanalian scenes as very generally disgusted the eyes and grieved the hearts of the friends of virtue during that political struggle? What low, vulgar, indecent, and in many instances, profane measures were resorted to? They are too bad to name. Who does not know that "Tippecanoe" and "Hard Cider," and almost every other abomination, were the watch-words and the measures for carrying that election? My soul mourns when I say it. God forbid that I should say it to bring a railing accusation against my country. Were they not already public I would never make them so. I call your attention to them that they may be confessed among the guilt and God-dishonoring sins of this nation.

There are numerous other sins of this nation to be confessed and put away. But I have not time to call your attention to any more at present.

REMARKS.

1. As Christians, we ought to confess and lament the sectarianism and divisions of the Church, as lying at the foundation of, and as giving countenance to the strivings, slang and slander of party politics. Who can look into the religious periodicals without agony, at seeing that there is almost as much party spirit, division, censoriousness, and slander in the Church, as among party politicians. Indeed the difficulty is, the politics existing in the Church are continually keeping in countenance those political contests that are working the destruction of this nation. I say this with humiliation and trembling, because it has become so common to accuse those who would deal faithfully with the sins of the Church, of being slanderers.

2. As Christians, we ought to confess the wickedness of the Church in view of its bearing toward and treatment of those national sins of which I have spoken. What is the conduct of the Church as a body, and what is her attitude in respect to the dreadful sin of slavery. O tell not the shameful story in Gath, nor let the sound reach Askalon, that the American Church is to such a shameful extent, an apologist for slavery. And what has the Church, as such, ever done to reprove and rebuke this nation for its treatment of the Indians? Why has not her voice

been heard? Why has not the Church as a body respectfully remonstrated? Why has she not at least lifted up her voice and wept in view of these abominations? And what is the conduct of the Church in respect to party politics? Why, there have always been professed Christians enough in this country to hold the balance of power. It has always been in the power of Christians to elect or defeat the election of any candidate for President who has ever been proposed. Would the Church only be in earnest in maintaining correct principles, would they be agreed in letting the world know that they would vote for no man who did not fear God, no party in that case would think of proposing a candidate of loose, or even of doubtful character. If they would be united in going always for a man of the highest moral standing, such candidates, and such only, would be proposed by the respective parties. But as it is, they have adopted the miserably wicked policy of choosing between two moral evils. Instead of choosing the best of two good men, they consent to vote for the least immoral of two bad men, thus rendering themselves responsible for the sins of this nation. It is completely within the power of the Church effectually to rebuke and put away all the sins that disgrace the nation. And how long shall the skirts of the Church be defiled with these abominations?

3. The righteous may well be expected to be included and share largely in national judgments. They really deserve it.

4. How absurd it is to say, that Christians have nothing to do with human governments. They should immediately set about the moral reformation of government. But here the question arises, how can such a reformation be brought about? I answer:

(1.) It never can be brought about by that kind of party movement--such party men and party measures as have brought this nation to such a pass of wickedness. Such party measures can never work a reformation of public morals. They are of themselves a vile and loathsome offense to public morals.

(2.) The needed reformation can never be brought about by contending for truth in a wrong spirit. There is something very remarkable in the Providence of God in this respect. Facts in the history of the world demonstrate that God would rather even truth should suffer a temporary defeat than triumph when maintained in a bad spirit. Besides there is something in the spirit which in such instances contradicts the truth, and prevents it from being received as

truth. Whenever any set of men, however much truth they may have on their side, get into a wrong spirit, in the proclamation and defense of it, they may expect that God will give them up to defeat. Men who hold the truth are very apt to be presumptuous, to take it for granted, and to boast, that they shall prevail because they have the truth. But mark me, and mark the fact when you will, that in this they will be disappointed. The truth will indeed eventually prevail, but not in their hands. God will give them over as individuals and as a party, to ultimate defeat, and in his own time, through other instrumentalities, cause his truth to prevail.

(3.) This reformation must be brought about and may be brought about by promoting union among Christians, and by extending correct views on the subject of Christian responsibility in regard to their relation to government. Any thing that will unite the Church, and consolidate her efforts, and direct them wisely on this point, will correct the national morals, and nothing else can.

5. The private views, character, or motives of the rulers in appointing a fast have nothing to do with the obligation of citizens in respect to its observance. If the ruler were an infidel, or whatever his private views or designs might be, in appointing a public fast, it is the business and duty of the people to celebrate the fast, confess and lament the real sins of the nation. If the present chief magistrate of the United States had been consulted in respect to the sins he would have the people confess, it is very probable that among them he would have mentioned the efforts of abolitionists to effect the overthrow of slavery, or as he would more probably have expressed it, the heinous crime of northern interference with the domestic institutions of the South, and an unrighteous attempt to divide the Union. Now with his private opinion on such questions the nation has nothing to do. Our business is to confess, among other enormities, the disgraceful and God-provoking sin of slavery, together with the wicked opposition of this nation to the efforts of abolitionists to bring about its overthrow.

6. Before I close this discourse, I must add a few words on the necessity of abstinence from food, as in many cases entirely indispensable to a right state of religious feeling. If the alimentary organs be continually taxed to the amount of their capability, the mind can be exercised to but a limited extent. Especially is it next to impossible, that much emotion should exist, while the digestive organs are laboriously employed in the process of alimentation. As I have before

remarked, so great a determination of blood to these organs, is imperiously demanded during the process of digestion, that the mind, whose organ is the brain, must be, comparatively, and in many instances, to a great degree sluggish in its operations. Who has not learned, by his own experience, that if he is about to make a great mental effort, he must not indulge himself in a full meal immediately preceding it? Many persons, either because they are so much under the dominion of their appetite, or because they have imbibed a false notion, that to drop now and then a meal will seriously impair their health, continually and regularly load their alimentary organs to such an extent, as to render it impossible for their minds to be strongly exercised on any subject. Fasting is often useful, and sometimes indispensable, as a means of giving the mind a thorough opportunity to exercise itself, without being impeded in its action by a determination of the blood to the alimentary organs.

7. Persons in fasting should always guard against a self-righteous state of mind. Self-righteous fasting is worse than no fasting at all.

8. Fasting, either public or private, without reformation, is a great abomination to God. It is to be hoped, that our President did not intend to substitute national fasting for national reformation. But we shall see, what course they will take in regard to slavery, the treatment of the Indians, the sanctification of the Sabbath, licentiousness, dueling, intemperance, & c., at the next session of Congress. Our rulers may expect, of course, that the people will have their eye upon them, and anxiously wait to see whether they expect to escape the judgment of God, by fasting without reformation. O, it would be dreadful, if, notwithstanding their fastings, they should persist in their sins! If they should forget that the fast was a national fast, and merely expect the reformation of individuals, without national reformation, it would be but the more offensive to God; and our fasting would but hasten our destruction.

9. Let Christians every where continue to pray, that God may reform the nation, and that our rulers may not be guilty of so gross a hypocrisy as to appoint a national fast, and then persevere in our national abominations. If they do this, it will not be surprising, if the nation should soon be called to mourn the death of another President, or that some judgment infinitely more deplorable than this, should soon desolate our country.

10. We are to be especially on our guard in contemplating the sins of this nation, certainly those of us who are, and from principle always have been opposed to

those sins, lest we imbibe a censorious, angry spirit, instead of feeling a deep and real sorrow for those sins. It is of no use to scold about our national sins. Our business is to lament them, to warn, entreat, respectfully expostulate, petition Congress, and petition God, that they may be put away.

11. Let no man say, that ministers are out of their place in exposing and reproving the sins of this nation. The fact is, that ministers, and all other men, not only have a right but are bound to expose and rebuke the national sins. We are all on board the same ship. As a nation, our very existence depends upon the correct moral conduct of our rulers. And shall they deafen their ears to our petitions, expostulations, and entreaties? Shall ministers be told, shall any man be told, that he is meddling with other men's matters, when he reproves, and rebukes the abominations of slavery? As well might a man be accused of meddling with that which does not belong to him, who is on board a ship in the midst of the Atlantic ocean, because he should expostulate with and rebuke a man who should attempt to scuttle the ship.

[Back to Top](#)

Mediatorship of Christ

Lecture XXXV

June 23, 1841

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 Tim. 2:5: "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

In discussing this subject, I shall--

I. Show what a mediator is.

II. Some things implied in the existence of that office.

III. What are essential qualifications for the office of mediator.

IV. On what conditions the end of the mediatorial office can in any case be accomplished.

V. Apply these principles to Christ as mediator between God and men.

I. Show what a mediator is.

1. A mediator is one who undertakes to bring about a reconciliation between contending parties. If there be no controversy, there is no room for a mediator, and no reason for the existence of such an office.
2. A mediator is not an arbitrator. An arbitrator is one to whose judgment both the law and the facts are submitted, for adjudication, in a case of right. A mediator is one who interposes in behalf of the offending party, and undertakes to bring the parties into a state of reconciliation, where the fact, or question of right, is already decided, and the thing to be accomplished is to remove difficulties, fulfill conditions, and effect a reconciliation, upon the acknowledged principles of right, or public justice.

II. Some things implied in the existence of that office.

1. The existence of the mediatorial office implies the existence of two or more parties.
2. That a controversy exists between them.
3. That there is some difficulty in the way of their adjusting their own difficulties in proper person. This difficulty may arise:
 - (1.) Out of an indisposition in one or all the parties to adjust their differences; or,
 - (2.) It may arise out of the inability of the offending party to make the satisfaction which is rendered indispensable by the relations and circumstances of the offending party.

III. Essential qualifications for the office of mediator.

1. A mediator must be in circumstances to understand the whole controversy, in all its bearings and tendencies.

2. He must possess the confidence of all the parties. If he has not their confidence, they will not voluntarily submit the question in dispute to his mediatorial adjustment. Therefore the confidence of the parties is indispensable to his success.
3. He must sustain such relations to the parties, as to be the suitable person to discharge the functions of that office.
4. He must be both able and willing to fulfill all the indispensable conditions of the reconciliation.

IV. On what conditions the end of the mediatorial office can, in any case, be accomplished.

1. He must be consecrated to the office by the consent of parties.
2. The consent of the mediator to undertake and accomplish the work of bringing about a reconciliation.
3. The acceptance, by the parties, of the conditions proposed by the mediator.
4. The actual fulfillment of these conditions by the parties.

V. These principles applied to Christ, as mediator between God and men.

1. I said, the office implies the existence of two parties. Both parties are mentioned in the text: on the one hand, Jehovah--on the other, man as a race. These are the parties, between whom Christ is appointed to act as mediator.
2. I said, the existence of a mediator implies, that a controversy is existing between the parties. That there is a controversy between God and men, is one of the most notorious facts in the universe. It is impossible, that God should approve the conduct of mankind. It cannot be, that He does not disapprove, and that He is not highly displeased with the course of conduct pursued by our race. He cannot but know what the conduct of mankind is. He cannot but approve or disapprove their conduct. For Him to approve their conduct would be to be as bad as they are. He cannot possibly be a virtuous being, unless He highly and infinitely abhor the selfishness of mankind.

Nor can it be possible, that selfish men, remaining selfish, love God. They are hostile to God, because He is so holy as to require of them entire benevolence, on pain of eternal death. This He ought to require. Nothing less than this can He require and be virtuous. But, for this very requirement, men hate Him; and because they hate Him for his goodness, He must certainly, and, if He be a good being, must necessarily abhor them. But the actual state of things in the world shows, that the world is full of blasphemous opposition to the government of God, on the one hand, and that, on the other hand, God is sweeping the nations, from time to time, with the besom of destruction. It is manifestly open, outrageous war, between God and men--God exercising as much forbearance all along as the nature of the case admits--while men, encouraged by his forbearance, are pushing their desperate opposition in the most fool-hardy and blasphemous manner. To maintain, that there is no controversy between God and men, is to deny one of the most universally evident facts that exists in the universe.

3. I said, that the existence of a mediator implies a difficulty in the way of their coming together and adjusting their own matters in difference, and that this difficulty might arise out of an indisposition in one or both the parties to have the matter adjusted, or out of the relation of the parties to each other. Hence, I observe:

(1.) The necessity of a mediator between God and men did not arise out of any unmerciful disposition on the part of God, or any disinclination on his part to pardon sin, if it could be safely done in consistency with the stability of his government. God is love, and of course infinitely disposed to do good whenever He wisely can. It is absurd to say, that an infinitely benevolent being should not be merciful in his disposition, and that He should not actually exercise mercy in the pardon of crime, whenever it can be done consistently with the public interest.

(2.) But on the part of man, there actually is, and always has been, a most pertinacious indisposition to have this matter adjusted, and to become reconciled to God. Therefore, if they ever are to be reconciled, some one must undertake the mediatorial office, who is able to bring about the requisite change in the temper of their mind towards God.

(3.) A difficulty arose out of the relation of the parties to each other, or rather, out of God's relations to the universe. As God is the law-giver, public justice demanded, either that He should execute the law when it was violated, or provide a substitute, that would as effectually sustain the government, as the execution would do. Hence, from the relation of God to the universe, it is plain, that He must exact a condition as indispensable to effecting a reconciliation between Him and men; which condition mankind could not fulfill. The necessity, then, of a mediator, was two-fold:

(a) To meet the demands of public justice, and provide a substitute for the execution of law upon mankind. And,

(b) To subdue the selfish and turbulent spirit of the offending party--to humble mankind, make them willing to confess, repent, and be reconciled to God.

4. I said, a mediator must possess a nature and be in circumstances to understand the whole controversy, in all its bearings and tendencies. Now Christ had the omniscience of God, together with the experience of a man, and was, therefore, the only being in the universe who, in the same sense, could understand the precise attitude of affairs between God and men. As God, He knew and had always known the precise adaptedness of the law to the nature and circumstances of mankind. He had seen sin at its first entrance into the world; and beginning with the first human pair, He had seen it, like a fountain opened in a mountain, running and spreading itself as it advanced, first a rill, then a brook, next a river, and finally an ocean, extending through all the ranks of mankind, and filling the earth, and finally pouring the immense stream of human population over the vast cataract of death, to be swallowed up in the dreadful vortex of damnation.

As man, He had the experience of a man--knew all the difficulties in the way of rendering perfect obedience to the moral law, under circumstances of the severest temptation. If any allowance should be made under the government of God for sin, in the circumstances in which mankind were placed, the man Christ Jesus had the opportunity to know, and must of necessity have tested the question in his own personal experience.

5. I said, a mediator must sustain such relations to the parties, as to be the person to whom the office naturally belongs.

(1.) Christ sustained to the universe the relation of an Executive Magistrate. It was therefore his duty to execute the law, or to provide a substitute for its execution. That He sustains this relation to the universe is evident from his own assertions. It is said of Him, "The government is upon his shoulder," that "He is head over all things to the Church," that "all power in heaven and earth is in his hands," that "the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son," that "He will judge the world," and distribute the rewards of eternity. He commissions ambassadors, which none can do but the Supreme Executive Magistrate. These, with many other considerations that might be adduced, render it certain that Christ sustains to the universe the relation of the Supreme Executive. It therefore belonged to Him either to execute the law, or to provide such a substitute for its execution as fully to meet the demands of public justice.

As God, He was infinitely concerned to secure the stability of his government, and the virtue of the universe.

Being also man, and sustaining the same relation to men that He did to God, rendered it peculiarly proper, that He should interpose his influence with his Father, who in this respect sustained the relation of the law-giver, in behalf of his fellow-men.

6. I said, a mediator must possess the confidence of both parties. That Christ actually possesses the confidence of the Father, we have the fullest assurance in the Father's own assertions: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye Him." That He deserves the confidence of men will be questioned by none but infidels. And I may farther say, that He actually possesses the confidence of every man who is benefitted by his mediatorial interposition. Every one knows, that faith, or confidence in Christ, is every where in the Bible insisted on, as wholly indispensable to being interested in his salvation. So that, as a matter of fact, the mediator must and does possess the confidence of all the parties who are to be, or can be benefitted by his interposition.

7. I said, a mediator must be able and willing to fulfill the indispensable

conditions of reconciliation. Christ being God, and sustaining to the universe the relation of the Executive Magistrate, He could, by offering his own person, more than satisfy the demands of public justice; that is--his death, as their substitute, would be a higher evidence of his regard to the law, and determination not to relinquish its claims, than would be the infliction of its penalty on all mankind. Public justice demands, that the law should be sustained, for the protection of public and private interests. Law is public property, and every subject of any government is interested in the execution of any law, when its penalty is incurred. The very establishment of government is a pledge, on the part of the law-giver, that he will protect the public interests, and do all that the nature of the case admits, to secure public virtue and happiness; or, in other words, to secure universal respect and obedience to the laws. The execution of the penalty is designed and calculated to prevent future breaches of the law--to secure respect and obedience to the law, by demonstrating both the intention and the ability of the law-giver--to redeem his pledge and protect the public interests. Now who cannot see, that if the law-giver himself will consent to suffer as the substitute of his guilty subjects, it will do much more to sustain his government, to create confidence, love, and energetic attachment to him, than merely to execute the law upon the offenders? Mercy must not, and in a perfect government cannot be exercised, and the penalty of law set aside, without such a satisfaction made to public justice as will be equivalent to the execution of the law.

Let me illustrate this, by supposing a mighty earthly sovereign at the head of an immense army, and marching to effect some all-important object. Discipline in his army is altogether indispensable. Therefore, his orders must be most rigorously enforced, or insubordination will defeat the enterprise. But on one occasion he issues an order, against which a whole regiment rebel. Now what shall be done? It is a valuable regiment. The sovereign pities them, and yet abhors their disobedience. Either his authority must cease, that regiment must be put to the sword, or some governmental expedient must be devised, that will as effectually secure future obedience as the execution of the law would do. An order is issued for the whole army to form a hollow square. In the center of this a vast scaffold is erected, over which an immense velvet pall is thrown. The implements of punishment are prepared. The whole army with trailed arms and standards dragged in dust,

muffled drums, and solemn death marches, are gathered, as they suppose, to witness the execution of the rebellious regiment. They wait in breathless expectation, for the order for the regiment to be put to death. In the mean time, this regiment is drawn out and paraded by itself alone around the scaffold. Every thing is gloomy. Sorrow fills every countenance. Every heart is heaving. Deep sighs are heard on every side, and the whole mass of mind is heaving with excitement, and agonized with the dismal prospect. At this moment, the sovereign, attended by his guards, is seen to ride within the square. He dismounts, lays aside his royal robes, uncovers his head, and arrays himself in the humble attire of a servant. Every eye is upon him. Unutterable astonishment and wonder fill every mind. No one can imagine what is now to be done. Leaving his attendants behind him, he meekly ascends the scaffold, unattended, unarmed, and thus addresses the rebellious regiment: "You have disobeyed my orders. You deserve to die! But my compassions bleed over you. To wholly set aside the penalty which you deserve, simply upon your bare repentance and return to duty--I cannot, dare not, and must not offer you forgiveness on any such conditions. My authority must be sustained. Discipline in my army is wholly indispensable. So much do I regard public justice, that sooner should heaven and earth pass away than I would set aside the execution of law, in a manner that would weaken my authority. But on the other hand, so much do I compassionate your case--so much do I love and pity you, that for the sake of being able to offer you a pardon, upon conditions that will not destroy the discipline of my army, I am willing, and about to suffer in your stead."

So saying, he uncovers his shoulders and receives upon his naked back one hundred stripes, until the blood flows down and stains the pall beneath his feet. Indeed he suffers, until a universal wail is heard--the army refuses to look on. They cover their faces, and cry out in agony, until he bids the executioner stay his hand. He resumes his garments, bows to the army, and retires to his quarters. Now what think you, would be the effect of a transaction like this upon the discipline of his army? Who would dare thereafter to rebel, and which of that rebellious regiment, or who, of his whole army, would not instantly die, to protect their sovereign, or rather than disobey him.

Now the design of Christ was, to satisfy the demands of public justice, at once to demonstrate the infinite compassion of God for his rebellious

subjects, and at the same time his unalterable determination to sustain his government and enforce obedience to his law--to protect and bless the innocent--to punish and destroy the guilty. And his relation to the universe was such, that his death, I may say, was an infinitely higher expression of his compassion, on the one hand, and of his justice on the other, than could have been given in his execution of the law upon sinners.

8. I said, the mediator must be not only able, but willing to make any sacrifice necessary in order to remove the obstacles out of the way of such reconciliation. The Atonement has been looked upon by many, as an incredible doctrine, and aside from right apprehensions of the moral character of God, it is altogether the most incredible thing in the universe. That God should consent to suffer for man, would beggar all credibility, but for the fact, that his whole moral character is love or benevolence. When this is well considered--and it is a truth taught by all the works, and all the ways of God--the doctrine of Atonement is altogether the most reasonable and credible doctrine that can be conceived. If He is benevolence, it is certain, that He must be disposed to exercise mercy. But if He is benevolence, it is also certain, that He would exercise mercy with a due regard to public justice, and upon such conditions as not to endanger his authority. If God is love, it must be certain, that if infinite wisdom could devise a plan, whereby the ends of public justice might be consistent with the offer of pardon, He would not hesitate to adopt that plan, although it might call Him to the exercise of great self-denial. If his suffering in their stead a less amount than must necessarily be inflicted upon them, would not only render it proper to offer them mercy, but would prevail to bring them to repentance and make them virtuous, his being love would render it certain, that such would be the course of conduct He would pursue. Christ, then, was not only able but willing to offer his human nature a sacrifice to public justice. His human nature being taken into union with his divine nature, became a part of Himself. His blood was, therefore, the blood of God. His Atonement was the Atonement of God, in offering up his human nature unto death, that He might give to man eternal life.

9. I said, the parties must consent that He should sustain to them this relation; or, in other words, that He should be consecrated to this office by consent of parties. The Father, who is the offended party, has nominated and sent forth his own Son, and proposed that He should act as Mediator

between God and men. He has consented to accept what He has done as satisfactory on the part of the government of God, as wholly removing out of the way, on the part of the divine government, every objection to a universal offer of pardon to all that will repent and return to their duty. And now the question is submitted to you, to every sinner, whether you will consent on your part to receive Christ as your Mediator. This you are to do by faith. Are you willing to do it?

10. I said, that another condition, upon which the accomplishment of the great object of Christ depends, is the actual fulfillment of the conditions decreed by Him as indispensable to the effecting of this reconciliation. These are on your part, sinner:

(1.) Repentance, or an unqualified turning yourselves, both in heart and life, from all iniquity, and making a consecration of your whole being to God and his service for ever.

(2.) Faith in Christ's Atonement, as the foundation of your pardon and acceptance with God.

(3.) Your perseverance in holiness, or true obedience, to the end of life.

This is a summary statement of the indispensable conditions, upon the fulfillment of which depends your eternal salvation. And now what do you say? It is in vain for you to pretend to consent to the mediatorial office and character of Christ unless you consent to and fulfill the conditions imposed by Him upon you, as indispensable to your being justified through Him. This, I say, is a question for you to decide. No one can decide it for you. God, on his part, has consented. Christ as Mediator, has thrown the door wide open before you, and stands as a daysman between you and the throne of God. He, as it were, lays his hand on both the parties. The Father has committed to Him the adjustment of this difficulty, on the part of the divine government. Now will you commit to Him the keeping of your soul? Will you submit yourself to his government and control? Will you give your case into his hands, to be advocated, managed, and adjusted by Him? Will you consecrate your whole being to God, and from this time know, and prove by your own conduct, that the controversy between you and God is at an end. Now, therefore, "as an ambassador for Christ, pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

REMARKS.

1. In the light of this subject you see the disinterested love of Christ. O how infinitely wonderful, that He should consent to undertake such an office as this, fully knowing as He did the immense sacrifice to which it would call Him--the immense amount of shame, persecution, agony, and death and for what? For Himself?--to promote some selfish interest? No! But from disinterested love to you and me. What an exhibition of self-denial, his whole life being only an accumulation of sufferings, reproach, ridicule, and opposition. How great his mental agonies must have been. In the midst of a world created by Him, and yet ruining themselves with their blasphemous opposition to Him!

2. From this subject you can see for what we are to trust Christ as Mediator:

(1.) We are to look to Him for sanctification, for that measure of grace that will thoroughly cleanse us from all our sins.

(2.) We are to look to Him for justification, that is, pardon and acceptance in respect to all our past sins.

(3.) We are to look to Him for preserving grace, to quicken and sustain us to the end.

3. You see from this subject, what it is to be a Christian. It is heartily to consent to the mediatorial work of Christ, and to comply with the conditions upon which he offers to save.

4. From this subject you can see the security of the saints. The controversy between them and God is at an end. Being justified by faith, they have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. And now what shall be able to separate them from the love of Christ? "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us. For I am

persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

5. From this subject also we see the certainty of the final damnation of all unbelievers. Why, sinner, by your rejection of Christ--the controversy between you and God, so far from being ended, is only made worse. Your guilt and final damnation are awfully aggravated, by your rejection of the mediatorial interference of Christ.

6. How infinitely foolish and mad are the saying and expectation of some, that if Christ has made an Atonement sufficient for all, that all will be saved, as a thing of course. Why, sinner, it would be just as reasonable, if you were starving, and invited to a feast, to which you obstinately refused to go, for you to affirm that the provision was ample, had actually been made, enough for all, so that no one need to famish with hunger; that therefore it mattered not whether you went to the feast or not. Why, sinner! are you crazy? Can it be possible, that the mediatorial work of Christ will save you without your own consent? Surely it cannot be. It is virtually and for ever impossible.

7. From this subject you see the wickedness and danger of delay. Sinner, God urges now upon you the obligation and necessity of instantly deciding, whether you will consent to this plan of salvation or not. This may be the last opportunity you will ever have, to make your salvation sure. Now what do you say? Do you call heaven and earth to witness, and to record on your soul, that you now, in the presence of God, of angels, and of men, from the inmost recesses of your being, consent to the mediatorial work of Christ, and accept the conditions of salvation? Do you so decide? And is the response of your heart, "So help me God!"

8. From this subject we can see the meaning of the context, which has been in some instances, much perverted. The apostle begins the chapter by saying: "I exhort, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority: that we may live a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."

From this passage it has been inferred by some, that all men will inevitably be saved. But the plain meaning of this passage, when taken together, is, that God desires the salvation of all men. The word rendered will, may with equal propriety be rendered desire, as it often is. God really desires the salvation of all men, as a thing desirable in itself; and has therefore set forth his Son to be a mediator between Himself and mankind in general, "who has given Himself a ransom for all, to be testified (or, as in the original, a testimony or witness,) in due time." He was given as a witness or testimony of the righteousness and infinite love of God to dying men, "So that God may be just and still justify him that believeth in Jesus."

Now, sinner, you have before you as condensed and simple an exhibition of the gospel as I can give you in one discourse. Will you accept it, or do you reject it? "I call heaven and earth to record this day upon your soul, that I set before you life and death, blessing and cursing." Therefore, choose this day, and O, choose life, that you may live!

And Christian, do you see your privilege? Do you see your obligation to Christ? Do you see your dependence upon Him? Do you understand your security in Him? Why you are to ask in his name? Why you are to approach God through Him? Do you understand the gospel? Then cleave to the Mediator, that the river of life may flow continually through your soul!

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing*

Christians (LECTURE XII).

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I).*

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI).*

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV).*

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII).*

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III).*

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

End of the 1841 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1842
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Lecture I. [Thy Will Be Done](#)
Lecture II. [Danger of Delusion](#)
Lecture III. [Ability and Inability](#)
Lecture IV. [God Under Obligation to Do Right](#)
Lecture V. [Ordination](#)
Lecture VI. [Wisdom Justified of Her Children](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Thy Will Be Done

Lecture I

July 20, 1842

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Mat. 6:10: "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven."

1. EVERY system of Theology assumes the truth of some system of Mental Philosophy, and indeed every theological opinion takes for granted, or assumes as true, some principle of Mental Philosophy. And however much any man may rail against metaphysics, still it is true that the railer himself has his system of metaphysics, by which he interprets the Bible, and in consistency with which he frames his theological opinions. It is very common, however, when any attempt is made to overthrow any theological error, or to establish any theological truth, by an appeal to our own consciousness of the laws of mind, and to the Bible as interpreted in view of these laws, for the objector to cry out vehemently against metaphysics, as if this were a conclusive objection to all such argumentation, that it is metaphysical. Now who does not know that the objector himself, in attempting to establish an opposing theory, assumes as true an opposite system of Mental Philosophy, and is no less metaphysical than his opponent, notwithstanding his violent zeal against metaphysics?

2. The fundamental point of difference between the Old and New schools in Theology, respects the freedom of the will. From this point they diverge; and when consistently carried out, the two schemes or schools differ fundamentally on most of the important questions in theology. It is in vain to attempt to cover up this fact; for any one who has not seen it to be true, is yet ignorant of the great principles and legitimate bearing of the points at issue. Few men, however, of either school, are consistent throughout, and nothing is more common than to find old school men zealously contending for doctrines that properly belong only to the scheme of the new school theologians--when it is perhaps just as common to find new school men, as they call themselves, zealously defending dogmas that properly belong to the scheme of the old school, and can, with no consistency whatever, be embraced by a new school man as truth. And thus a strange confusion and inconsistency prevails among theologians of both schools, and it is remarkable, and even wonderful, that there should be so little consistency in the theological views of so great a majority of theologians of all schools.

3. I have stated that the point of divergence between the old and new schools is

the freedom or necessity of the will. Upon this point, the old school maintain that the will always is as the greatest apparent good is; or, in other words, that the mind always chooses that which appears to be upon the whole the most agreeable--and that the choice is always determined by the objective motive, or that which is presented to the mind as a reason for choice. Many of them will not say, that choice is necessitated by motive, while at the same time they maintain that motive is the cause of choice as absolutely as a physical cause produces its effect. And that the difference between the determination of choice by motive and the production of an effect by a physical cause does not lie in the nature of the connection but in the nature of the terms connected--that the certainty is just as absolute in the one case as in the other. And when they explain themselves, it is manifest and self-evident, that the necessity is just as great in the one case as in the other.

4. Those who are truly consistent old school men maintain, and ever have, since the days of Augustine, that men are wholly and naturally unable to do any thing good--that their will is necessarily determined to evil by what they call original sin, or native depravity. They maintain that moral obligation implies no power whatever to act right, or to do the will of God. With them, sin is a necessity of human nature since the fall of Adam. And free agency amounts only to the power of committing sin.

If, according to their view, the will is necessitated by motives, then it follows that all action is necessary as opposed to free, and the doctrine of universal fatalism is true. But if the will is free, as is maintained by the new school, and all moral depravity belongs to moral action, then a system of theology directly the opposite of that of the old school, in nearly every important point, must be true.

That I may give this subject as fundamental a discussion as my time and the nature of the case admits, I will, the Lord willing, as briefly as I can, discuss the following propositions:

I. How we know any thing.

II. What are the primary faculties of the human mind.

III. Wherein human liberty consists.

IV. To what acts and states of mind moral responsibility extends.

V. What constitutes sin.

VI. What constitutes holiness.

VII. What the will of God is.

VIII. How it is done in heaven.

IX. What is implied in the sincere offering of the petition I have chosen for a text.

X. That nothing short of a state of mind that can sincerely offer this petition can be virtue, or true religion.

I. How we know any thing.

1. Consciousness is the condition of all knowledge. I will therefore begin by giving what I suppose to be a correct definition of consciousness. Consciousness may be regarded as a power, or faculty, or an act or state of the mind. As a power or faculty, it is the capacity or ability which the mind has to recognize or know its own existence, acts, and states. As an act, or state of mind, it is the actual notice or knowledge of its own existence and states. Consciousness gives us the knowledge of our own existence. By it we certainly know that we exist. It also gives us the phenomena of our mental states and acts. It also gives us the knowledge of the liberty or necessity of our acts or states. In short, every thing that we do know is given by consciousness.

2. Whatever we know by consciousness we know with certainty. Consciousness gives me the fact of my existence. This is the highest evidence of the fact of my existence. It also gives me the fact of certain sensations, volitions, mental states and acts, and it gives me these with certainty. Whether there be in reality any thing without corresponding with the sensations and mental states within or not, yet the mental states themselves, as given by consciousness, are matters of fact, of which I have absolute knowledge, by my own consciousness. When I think or reason, whether I think or reason according to truth or not, may be doubtful; but it cannot be doubtful whether I think or reason, as I am conscious of thinking and reasoning; for my thoughts and reasonings are matters of fact given me

by my own consciousness, of which I am therefore absolutely certain. In short, every mental phenomenon is given by consciousness. Every act and state of mind is a reality, just as is given by consciousness. And whatever else is true or false, the phenomena of mind given by consciousness must be facts--must be incontrovertible verities--because they are perceived by the mind to be facts.

II. What are the primary faculties of the mind.

Consciousness does not directly give us the faculties themselves, but the mind infers them from phenomena perceived by consciousness. Every phenomenon, act, or state of mind implies a corresponding faculty; that is, that the mind possesses the power of performing that act. In other words, it is able to act in that manner. When, therefore, consciousness gives us certain classes of actions, we affirm with intuitive certainty that the mind possesses corresponding faculties.

There are three primary or fundamental classes of actions, namely--acts or states of the Intellect--acts or states of the Sensibility--and acts or states of the Will. By this language I mean--

1. That men certainly possess a faculty by which they think, reason, judge, and affirm certain truths. The faculty which does these things I call Intellect, and suppose it to include Understanding, Reason, Conscience.
2. By the Sensibility I mean the faculty of feeling. This comprehends emotions, desires, affections, and, in short, whatever we mean by feeling.
3. By Will I mean, the power of choice, or ability to choose or refuse whatever is an object of choice.

Let it be understood, then, that the primary faculties, as implied in the phenomena given by consciousness are Intellect, or Intelligence, Sensibility, and Will.

III. Wherein human liberty consists.

1. This is a fundamental inquiry. And to this question two very different answers are given by the different schools in theology. The old school give this answer--it consists in the power of doing as you will; that is, in carrying out and accomplishing the object of your volitions. With them, human

liberty does not consist in an ability to choose in any direction in view of an object of choice--while they maintain that choice itself is invariably and necessarily determined by motive. But to this definition of free agency or human liberty it is justly objected that it is no liberty at all. Action is necessitated by volition or choice; and a man cannot but do as he wills or chooses. If I will to move, my muscles move of necessity, and there is no liberty between the volition and the action. The will moves the muscles, and a man cannot act against his will; for his will is the cause of his actions. This every man knows by his own consciousness, with absolute certainty. Human liberty, then, does not and cannot consist in doing as you will, irrespective of the question how it comes to pass that we will as we do.

2. Human liberty does not consist in a self-determining power in the will. For the will is not an agent, but only a capacity or power of an agent. It is not the will, therefore, that determines its own choices, but it is the agent himself that wills or chooses.

3. It does not consist in the power to decline all choice in view of motives or objects of choice. The mind is under a necessity of choosing in some way in view of an object of choice, and a refusal to choose, could this be, would be itself a choosing not to choose.

4. Human liberty does not consist in the power to choose without a motive, or object of choice. The mind must necessarily have some object of choice, or it cannot choose; for choice implies that something is chosen; and therefore, to choose without a motive or object of choice is absurd.

5. It does not lie in the necessity of choosing what, in the judgment of the mind, is most worthy of choice. For this we have the testimony of our own consciousness, as we certainly know that very often we do not choose that which in the judgment of our mind is most worthy of choice.

6. Nor does it lie in the necessity of choosing that which appears the most agreeable to the mind. For, as a matter of fact, we certainly know that we often do choose that which, in no proper sense, can be called agreeable to us.

7. But human liberty does consist in the sovereign power of choosing in any direction, in view of any motive or object of choice. In proof of this, I

observe -

1. Nothing else than this can be liberty. For we are conscious that action is compelled or necessitated by choice.

2. To force or necessitate volition (were this possible) is as inconsistent with liberty, as to force action against choice. If I should seize your hand and put a dagger in it, and compel you to stab a man, this action is not yours, but mine. But suppose I had power to force your will to act on your muscles, and should compel you to will to stab a man, and the muscular action and stabbing should follow of necessity, from your volitions, this action would no more properly be your own than if I forced your muscles contrary to your will.

3. We just as certainly know that we are free in this sense as we know that we exist, or that we choose at all. Consciousness gives us not only our existence as a fact, our mental states and acts as facts, but it gives us absolutely the freedom or necessity of our acts. Hence of some acts and states of mind, we say with certainty I could not help it, because we are conscious of being in the most proper sense involuntary in those states of mind. Consciousness always gives us not only our acts and mental states, but also the fact of their freedom or their necessity. And every man knows, when he has chosen in any direction, in view of an object of choice, that, all the circumstances being the same, he was able to choose or might have chosen the opposite.

4. That this is true is manifest from the universal affirmation of praise and blame-worthiness in respect to our moral actions. No man can, by any possibility, blame or praise himself or any body else, except upon the assumption that under the circumstances he might have chosen differently.

5. No man can really doubt the liberty of the will in this sense, and still affirm praise or blame-worthiness of any act.

We have seen then that liberty cannot consist in outward action for, consciousness affirms that this is directly necessitated by choice.

6. Liberty cannot consist in feeling or emotion, for consciousness

testifies that our feelings are involuntary states of mind--that feelings are not acts or states of the will, but of the sensibility. We cannot exercise feelings and emotions directly as we do volitions or choices. If we desire to feel upon any subject, we direct our attention to a consideration of that subject, and corresponding feelings exist in the mind of course, just as naturally as we experience the sensation of vision when we direct our eyes to an object of sight. But we can never directly will emotions or feelings into existence. Nor can we suppress them when they do exist, only by diverting our attention and thoughts from the objects that produce them. Feelings then are always indirectly necessitated or promoted by choice. Human liberty then cannot consist in the feelings.

It cannot consist in acts or states of the Intelligence, or in acts or states of the Sensibility, but must consist in the sovereign power of willing or choosing in any direction, in view of an object of choice.

IV. To what acts and states of mind moral responsibility extends.

1. The law of God is the rule of moral action, and the measure of its claims is the measure of moral responsibility.

2. The law of God levels its claims to the present ability of every subject of God's moral government. Its language is "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself." The true meaning of this law is that every moral being shall consecrate all his powers, whatever they are, at the present moment, to the service of God. Our consciousness informs us that by willing we control the acts and states of the Intellect--that we think, reason, judge, and affirm by voluntarily controlling the attention of our mind. Consciousness also testifies that we feel by directing our attention to objects calculated to excite feeling, and that we act by willing to act. Thus by legislating over the voluntary power of the mind, the lawgiver proposes to secure the entire consecration of the whole being to the great ends of benevolence.

But the thought which I wish to impress here is, that the law levels its claims to present ability. The law does not say, love the Lord thy God with the strength you possessed when you was [sic.] a child, and serve Him only with the powers you then had, but with all the powers you at present have. If your

capacity to serve God, and to promote the great ends of benevolence, has been increased, either by the grace of God or by their diligent use and development in the exercise of your own agency, the law does not satisfy itself with claiming the measure of obedience you might have rendered before this increase of ability, but requires that all your present strength and power shall be completely and unreservedly consecrated to God. So on the other hand, if your ability has been in any way diminished, either by your own act or in any other way, the law requires of you nothing more than that whatever power is left should be consecrated unreservedly and perfectly to God. If your ability has been abridged by your own fault, you are guilty for thus abridging it, and for this you may be punished. But you cannot be held responsible for not doing what you are no longer able to do. For example, suppose it were my duty last week to visit and warn a certain sinner to flee from the wrath to come, but the man is now dead and beyond my reach. For not warning him when I had opportunity I am guilty. But I am now under no obligation to warn him, for the simple reason that I am naturally unable to do so. I may justly be punished for my former neglect, but I cannot be held responsible for not warning him at the present time. If I cut off a hand, I can no longer be required to use it, though I may be guilty for cutting it off, and held responsible for that. In such cases, God requires repentance for the act that abridged our capacity, but in no case requires that which has become naturally impossible.

When a man loses the ability to pay his debts, and that too by his own fault, he is no longer under a moral obligation to pay them any faster than he has power to do so. He may be punished for rendering himself unable, but can no more be under a moral obligation to pay them while unable, than to warn a man who is dead, to flee from the wrath to come. The reason why he is no more under moral obligation in the one case than in the other is precisely the same, namely, that he has no power to do so.

So if a man becomes deranged by his own fault, he is not a moral agent while deranged, and his great sin lies in having made himself deranged.

The spirit of the legal maxim that a man shall not take advantage of his own wrong, is that the guilt of the act which incapacitates a man for duty, is equal to the guilt of all the default of which it is the cause.

It is maintained by some that the law of God does not limit its claims to

present ability, but that it requires the same degree of service now, the same amount of love and zeal, and consequent usefulness in us that it might have required had we never curtailed our ability by sinning, but on the contrary had fully developed our powers by perfect and perpetual obedience. To this I answer,

(1.) That it must be, and so far as I know is admitted by those who hold this doctrine, that to render this degree of service is naturally impossible, in this state of existence.

(2.) That the law might just as reasonably require that we should undo all that we have done, or make up for our default by future works of supererogation, both of which are equally impossible. If the law may require the one, notwithstanding it is naturally impossible, it may with equal propriety and justice require the other.

(3.) If the same degree of service could be required now that might have been rendered had we never sinned, obedience to the law of God is naturally impossible in this state. But there is no reason from the Bible or philosophy to believe, that that obedience, in the case of those who have lived in sin any portion of their lives, will ever be possible. Every one understands that men know much less of God, and are therefore naturally able to love Him much less and to render Him a much less effectual service than they might have done had they always employed their powers of moral agency aright. And if any one affirms that the saint in heaven will not be correspondingly unable to render the same amount of service that he might have done had he never sinned, the burden of proof is wholly upon him who makes the affirmation.

(4.) That the gospel or any thing else can so change our powers, as to make us able to perform, in any world, all that we might have done had we never sinned, is a sheer assumption.

So of our ignorance. We cannot be under obligation to do that of which we are entirely ignorant, although our ignorance is our fault. James 4:17; "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Here it is as fully implied as possible that if a man does not know to do good he is not under obligation to do it. Our obligation is first to know

what duty is and then to do it. To do that of which we are entirely ignorant is naturally impossible and can no more be morally binding upon us than it is to warn a dead man. Nor does it alter the case if our ignorance is our fault. The sin lies in being ignorant, and not in omitting to do that of which we have no knowledge. Therefore the spirit of the legal maxim, "*Ignorantia legis non excusat*," is that the guilt of wilful ignorance is equal to all the default of which it is the cause, and not that a man can be under moral obligation to perform impossibilities.

If the law requires the same amount of love and service that we might have rendered had we acquired all the knowledge possible, I see not how any saint in heaven can ever perfectly obey, for it will always remain true that he might have known numerous truths and relations more than at any given time he will know, had he not sinned in neglecting to know the truth. So that if the law require at present, and will forever require, all of every moral being that might have been required had he never sinned, it must remain true forever, not only that every saint on earth, but for all that appears, that every saint in heaven, will forever continue to fall short of rendering the obedience the law requires, and therefore live eternally in sin.

It is not a little curious and wonderful, that the same mind, as is often the case, should maintain the doctrine of natural ability in man to do all his duty, and yet that it is the duty of every individual to render the same service to God, in kind and in degree, that might have been rendered had he never sinned, and still admit that this degree of service, in this state, is naturally impossible. I not unfrequently meet with persons who call themselves new school men, who strongly contend for the doctrine of natural ability to do all God requires, and who will insist on men's being entirely holy, and urge and command the Church to forsake all sin, and yet inconsistently and absurdly maintain that to forsake all sin, and entirely to obey the law would imply the rendering of the same degree of service that they might have rendered had they never sinned, which they themselves admit to be impossible. I had in substance, the following conversation with a brother.

Do you believe in the doctrine of natural ability--that men are able to do all that God requires of them? Yes, he replied, and I insist as much as you do, upon their doing all their duty and being entirely holy. I asked again--Do

you believe that doing their whole duty and being entirely holy implies entire obedience to the law of God? Yes, be sure I do. And you believe that men are naturally able to do this? Yes, was his reply, and I insist upon it as much as you do. I then asked, "Do you believe that the law of God levels its claims to the present ability of men, so that men are entirely able perfectly to obey? No, he replied, and I think there is your error. You so explain the law as to bring it down to the present ability of man. How else, I asked, should I do? If I insist upon man's natural ability perfectly to obey it, am I not bound so to expound it as to level its claims to their natural ability? But what do you do? Do you believe that the law of God requires of a man just that degree of love and service and efficiency that he might have rendered had he never sinned? Yes, said he, and this is the very point where we differ. I exalt the law, and maintain that God requires that every moral agent, however long he has sinned, however ignorant he may be, and how much soever he may have curtailed his natural ability by sin, should render the same degree of service he would have done had he never sinned; while you, he continued, still addressing me, so expound the law as to level its claims to the creature's present natural ability. And, my brother, I asked, which is most consistent. I so expound the law as to level its claims to the present natural ability of the subject, and then consistently urge him up to immediate and perfect obedience. You maintain that he is able perfectly to obey, but yet that the law requires that which you confess to be naturally impossible, and then absurdly call upon him to perform that which is by your own thus showing naturally impossible. Now what consistency or candor is there in your professing to believe in his natural ability to do all his duty, and then maintain that the law requires natural impossibilities, and all at the same breath denounce him for not keeping the whole law; maintaining that he is able to keep it, and yet inconsistently contending that it requires that which you confess to be naturally impossible? You are bound, as an honest man, to give up the doctrine of natural ability; to publish to the world that men are entirely unable to obey the law of God; and no longer insult their intelligence and outrage their sense of justice, by requiring them to perfectly obey it; or else so to interpret it as to bring obedience within the limit of their natural ability, and cease to denounce those as heretics who consistently and conscientiously do this. I say that you are bound to do this.

And here let me ask, if it is not a shame and a sin for persons to hold and teach the doctrine of natural ability perfectly to obey the law--that the law requires natural impossibilities--call upon men to universally and perfectly to obey the law on pain of eternal death--and accuse those of being heretics and far gone in error, who are consistent enough, while they maintain the doctrine of natural ability, to maintain also that the law levels its claims to the present ability of men, and for this reason call upon all men, every where, unreservedly and perfectly to obey it?

The very language and spirit of the law manifestly levels its claims to present human ability. The question therefore is what are men naturally able to do or avoid? Observe, the point of inquiry before us now is, to what acts and states of mind does moral responsibility extend. As I have shown that the law is the standard and that it levels its claims to present ability, the true inquiry is what acts and states of mind are possible to men, or what acts and states of mind can be avoided by them? We have already seen that consciousness gives us the phenomena of our own minds; and that whatever we know with certainty we know through the medium of our own consciousness. It teaches us that the will is the controlling faculty of the mind--that volition necessitates outward action. Volition also necessitates thought, feeling or emotion by directing the attention of the mind to subjects of thought and to objects calculated to excite emotion. Consciousness then teaches us that whatever is possible to man he can do by willing, and any thing that does not follow the act of his will is naturally impossible to him. If he cannot do it by willing and endeavor, and by sincerely intending and aiming to do it, it is naturally impossible to him. Consequently man cannot be responsible for any thing which he cannot do or avoid, by willing and endeavoring to do or avoid it. For example: If I will to move and my muscles do not obey volition, muscular action is impossible to me. If I will to think and thought does not follow, if I will to feel and direct my attention to corresponding objects and emotion does not follow, thought and emotion at the time are impossible to me. In short, whatever does not follow volition directly or indirectly as the natural and necessary result of volition, is impossible to me. So if I will to avoid any thing whatever, and the thing follows in spite of my volition, it is unavoidable by me. If by will and endeavor I cannot avoid it, the thing is necessary in such a sense that I am not responsible for its occurrence. Man therefore is not responsible,

1. For his nature being what it is;

2. Nor for the existence of the constitutional appetites and propensities;
3. Nor for the existence of the appetites or propensities under the appropriate circumstances of our being;
4. But he is responsible for their guidance, control and subjection to the law of God so far as they are subject to the control of the will.

But to the law and the testimony. The law of God is the rule, and by it we know to what acts and states of mind moral responsibility extends.

1. The law of God is in spirit a unit. Love, or benevolence, is the fulfilling of the whole law. This is repeatedly asserted in the Bible, that all the law is fulfilled in one word.
2. The love which constitutes obedience to the law of God is an act or state of the will, and consists in supreme, disinterested benevolence. This is all that the law requires; and man is responsible, and can be responsible only for this state of the will. If he is perfectly, and universally, and disinterestedly benevolent, he perfectly obeys the law of God. Whatever emotions, thoughts, acts, or states of mind do not follow from this state of the will, as its natural and necessary sequence, are naturally impossible to him, and therefore moral obligation cannot extend to them. Whatever thoughts, emotions, acts, or states of mind come to pass, notwithstanding this perfectly benevolent state of the will, he has no power to avoid, and therefore such acts, emotions, and states of mind, can have no moral character. To maintain the contrary of these positions, is not only to set all true philosophy aside, but is also a flat denial of the Bible itself.
3. It is abundantly taught, and again and again asserted in the Bible, that love, or benevolence, is the fulfilling of the law--that all the law is fulfilled in one word, love. And it should ever be borne in mind, and well considered by all men, that the Bible takes the very same ground upon this subject with true philosophy. Benevolence is good-willing. It is willing the good of being for its own sake, and on account of its intrinsic value; and, consequently, it is the very nature of benevolence to will every good according to its relative value, as perceived by the mind.
4. Every mind is to be guided by its own best judgment in respect to the relative value of different interests, except where God has revealed their

relative value; in which case, this revelation is to decide us. But in applying the great principle of the law of God to human conduct, we are manifestly to be guided, not by the views which God has, nor which angels have, nor which any other beings except ourselves have, of the relative value of different interests. But we must judge for ourselves, under the best light afforded us, what is the relative value of the different interests with which we are surrounded, and how the law of God requires us to demean ourselves in respect to them. And every being wills right, or just as the law of God requires him to will, when he regards and treats every interest just as its relative value, as understood by his own mind, demands. When he wills every good for its own sake, and the promotion of every interest according to its relative value in his own best judgment, he fully obeys the law of God.

5. We have seen that the will necessitates thought, action, and feeling. Therefore, moral character cannot strictly belong to thought, action, or feeling. If I will to stab a man, moral character does not attach to the dagger--to the hand that holds it--to the muscle that moves it--but to the mind in the exercise of willing. The same is true of thought or feeling. Mind is strictly responsible only for its voluntary acts. And the moral character of all acts and states of mind is found in that act of the will that produced them by a natural necessity.

6. We have seen, and know by our own consciousness, that man is free and sovereign. He is, therefore, responsible for any act or state of mind that can be produced or avoided, directly or indirectly by willing and endeavor, and for nothing more or less. For the plain reason that every thing, more or less, is naturally impossible to him. Hence, the law of God makes all virtue to consist in benevolence. And if the Bible did not represent all virtue as consisting in benevolence, a correct philosophy, as learned from our own consciousness, would compel us to reject its authority.

7. If the will, then, is conformed to the law of God nothing can be morally wrong for the time being. For whatever does not follow by natural necessity, from this state of the will, is naturally impossible to us. So, on the other hand, if the will is wrong, nothing can be morally right; for, whatever acts or states of mind result from a wrong choice, by a natural necessity, have the same character, so far as they have any character at all, with the choice that produced them. This is the philosophy of total depravity. We truly say, that if

a man's heart is wrong every thing that he does is wrong. By his heart we mean his choice, intention, purpose. If his intention or choice be selfish, nothing can be morally right; because his character is as his intention is; and it is naturally impossible that the emotions and actions which follow from a selfish intention should be morally right. If this is not true philosophy, then the doctrine of the total depravity of the unregenerate is not true.

8. The doctrine of total depravity as consisting in the selfish state of the will, and of entire holiness, as consisting in the benevolent state of the will, must stand or fall together. If any thing about a man can be sinful, while his will is in a perfectly benevolent state, it must be true that when the will is in a perfectly selfish state, some things or many things in the same mind may be at the same time truly holy. And if a man can be all the while sinning, while his heart or will is in a state of disinterested benevolence, he can all the while be partly holy, while his heart or will is unregenerate and in a state of entire selfishness. If the emotions and actions of a man whose will is in a perfectly benevolent state can be sinful, then the emotions or actions of a man who is in a perfectly selfish state can be holy. So also, if the actions and emotions which follow from a selfish state of the will must of necessity be sinful, so the actions which follow from a benevolent state of the will must in the same sense be holy.

9. Let it be remembered, therefore, that whoever maintains that present sinfulness can be predicated of a man in a perfectly benevolent state of the will, must also admit that holiness may be predicated of one in a perfectly selfish state of the will. This is the doctrine of the Bible, and the doctrine of true philosophy, that true benevolence, or the willing of every good according to its relative value, as perceived by the mind and for its own sake, is the whole of virtue. God's interest is to be willed as the supreme good, and every other interest according to its relative value, so far as we are capable of knowing. And this is holiness, and nothing else is.

V. What constitutes sin.

1. We have seen that the primary faculties of the human mind are Intellect, Sensibility, and Will.
2. We have seen that the mind, in its voluntary actions, has respect to motives--that it is not compelled to choose, but that in every instance of

choice it is free and sovereign.

3. We have seen also, that virtue and vice, or holiness and sin, lie in the choice, or voluntary actions of the mind, and not in outward actions or involuntary states of mind.

4. I now observe, that motives are addressed to the mind, either through the Intelligence or the Sensibility, and in no other way. By this I mean that by the use of the Intellect, or through the medium of the feelings, does the mind perceive any thing which it accounts an object of choice. The Sensibility or feelings, invite the will or mind to seek the gratification of the appetites or propensities as an end, or for the mere sake of the gratification. The Intelligence points to God, and his law, and the Reason affirms that the mind ought to obey God, rather than to seek the gratification of the Sensibility. Through the Intelligence is revealed to the mind the existence, character, and claims of God. And the law of universal benevolence is seen by the Intelligence to be obligatory. Now to will in accordance with the impressions of the Sensibility, and seek as the great end of life the gratification of the propensities, is what the Bible denominates the "carnal mind," or "minding of the flesh." This is the very essence of sin. It is enmity against God. Let it be understood, then, that sin consists in the committal of the will, or in the devotion by the will of the whole being to self-interest or self-gratification. This choice of our own gratification as the supreme end of life is the wicked heart, and all the forms of sin are only developments, and necessary results of this supreme choice or intention of the mind. This is total moral depravity--enmity against God--entire consecration to self-gratification.

VI. What holiness is.

1. It is, in a word, the obedience of the will or heart to the law of God as this law lies revealed in the Intelligence. I have just said that sin consists in the supreme devotion of the will, and consequently of all the powers of the mind to self-gratification. On the contrary, holiness consists in the supreme devotion of the will, and consequently of the whole being to the glory of God, and the good of the universe. This entire consecration to the glory of God and the good of the universe is the whole of virtue in any being, and in every world.

I now come to a direct examination of the text, and inquire,

VII. What the will of God is.

1. The will of God is expressed in his law. He is himself in the same state of mind in which He requires all moral beings to be; that is, in a state of universal and disinterested benevolence. Holiness is a term that expresses the moral character of this state of his will or heart. Love or benevolence is the fulfilling of the law; and conformity of will in any being to the law of universal love is holiness.

2. We have seen that the will of God as expressed in his law, is that every interest shall be willed for its own sake and according to its relative value. This is the will of God, that moral agents should be universally and perfectly benevolent.

VIII. How is the will of God done in Heaven?

We are directed in the text to pray that the will of God may be done on earth as it is done in Heaven. In answer, then, to this inquiry, let me say,

1. Perfectly and universally, so far as it is known.
2. As they are not omniscient they must be of course continually learning new relations, and consequently their obligations must continually increase, corresponding to their increased knowledge.
3. The obedience of heaven, therefore, must keep pace with their increasing knowledge, and therefore its inhabitants must continually grow in holiness.

I come now to a fundamental inquiry,

IX. What is implied in a sincere offering of this petition to God?

What is the real state of mind in which an individual must be, sincerely to offer this prayer?

1. It implies that the petitioner has confidence in the wisdom of God. If he did not believe that God was wise he could not innocently pray that his will might be universally done.
2. It implies confidence in his benevolence. If God is not benevolent, we

have no right to pray that his will may be universally done. And if we do not believe Him to be universally and perfectly benevolent, we have no right to offer such a petition.

3. It implies that the petitioner believes, that the petition is according to the will of God. In other words, that it is the will of God that his will should be done as perfectly on earth as it is done in heaven.

4. It implies a belief in the petitioner, that it is possible that the will of God should be done on earth as it is done in heaven. For if he does not believe it possible, he cannot sincerely pray that it may be so.

5. It implies the belief that grace has made provision for his doing the will of God in earth as it is done in heaven. If he does not believe that such a thing is possible or that grace has made provision for the attainment of any such state, he mocks God in making such a request. And if he does not believe it to be according to the will of God, that persons are to attain to such a state on earth, it is downright rebellion in him to ask it.

6. It implies a willingness that God should require of all men just what He does require, for surely if the petitioner does not heartily consent to the requirements of God, he cannot sincerely pray that He may be universally obeyed.

7. It implies that the petitioner is willing that God should require of him in all respects just what He does require. For how can he sincerely say thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven, unless he is willing that God should require of him just what He does require.

8. As we have seen that willing and doing are connected by a natural necessity, and that a man naturally and necessarily acts as he wills, the sincere offering of this petition implies that the petitioner really does the will of God so far as he knows it, as really as they do in heaven. If the will is in sincere conformity with the true spirit of the petition, every thing else that is under the control of the will must of necessity correspond with this state of the will. Consequently whenever a soul is in such a state as to offer this petition to God sincerely, he must, for the time being, be really doing the will of God, as truly, and in his measure as perfectly, as they are in heaven.

9. It implies that the petitioner holds himself and all that he has, as fully and sacredly and practically at the disposal of God as do the inhabitants of heaven, so far as he knows the will of God.

10. It implies that he actually does all in his power to promote this end, as really, so far as he has knowledge, as they do in heaven.

11. It implies a state of will or heart in perfect conformity with the will of God, so far as he knows his will.

12. It implies the same perfection for the time being, and according to his knowledge, that is in God, and in the inhabitants of heaven. Do not start at this, for the whole of God's moral perfection lies in the benevolent state of his will. And whoever wills in perfect accordance with his will, so far as his will is known, whether on earth or in heaven, is in his measure, as really perfect as God is.

13. This state of mind is not a submission to the will of God as an abstraction, but is true disinterested benevolence. It is the very state of mind required by the law of God.

X. Nothing short of a state of mind that can and does offer this petition sincerely, is true religion.

1. Nothing short of this state of will or heart is conformity to the nature of things.

2. Every thing short of this state of the will is rebellion, and is virtually saying, "Let not the will of the Lord be universally done."

3. As this state of mind consists in willing every good for its own sake, and according to its relative value, nothing more or less than this state of mind can, by any possibility, be virtue.

4. God cannot allow any thing less than this to be virtue, nor can He require any thing more. As his will is in all things perfectly right, He can require nothing less than that every moral agent should be entirely conformed to it, so far as he knows it. He can never discharge any being from this obligation, nor accept that as obedience and call it virtue, that is not precisely according to his will. If it is not according to his will, it must be

opposed to his will, and can, by no possibility, be true religion.

5. Coming into this state of mind is what we mean by conversion or regeneration. It is a change in the ultimate choice or intention of the mind, in other words, from selfishness, or the choice of self-gratification as the great end of life, to disinterested benevolence. This and nothing short of this, is regeneration or the new birth. It is and must be the beginning of true religion. This is holiness. It is sanctification, and the uninterrupted continuance of it is what is intended by a state of sanctification. And if, as new relations are perceived, the will comes into immediate conformity to all these new relations, and remains in this state of conformity, such a mind is in entire harmony with the will of God, and can sincerely say, "Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven."

REMARKS.

1. This petition in the mouth of a selfish being is hypocrisy. It must be in all cases downright hypocrisy for a selfish man to offer this petition to God.

2. This petition is hypocrisy on the lips of any one whose will is not in entire and universal harmony with the will of God so far as that will is known. If there be any thing in which the will is not entirely conformed to the known will of God, in offering this petition, the petitioner is a hypocrite, and abuses, flatters, and mocks God.

3. We see what Christ intended by the command, "Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." Many persons feel shocked at the idea of any one being even for a moment without sin in this life. And to expect to be, in any proper sense, perfect in this life is with them wholly out of the question. From the manner in which they speak of the subject of perfection, it would seem Christ's command to be perfect as God is perfect is a most extravagant requisition, and something which Christ did not so much as expect would be obeyed in this world. If they are consistent also they must suppose that in requiring us to offer this petition to God, He must have intended that we should use the language of hyperbole, and not that we should seriously expect or even suppose it possible that the will of God should be done on earth by any human being as it is done in heaven. But the truth is that Christ simply intended to require men to be truly religious. We have just seen that nothing short of that state of the will that is for the time being as perfectly conformed to the will of God as is the will of the

inhabitants of heaven, can by any possibility be true religion. He meant therefore merely to say, be truly religious. Be what God requires you to be. Do not rebel in any thing against the will of God, but be upright, sincere, or perfect, which is the same thing. It is therefore, as I have before said, true that every moral being that can sincerely offer this prayer is, and must be, in his measure, for the time being, so far as the state of his heart is concerned, as perfect as God.

4. In another sense, every moral being in the universe comes infinitely short of being as perfect as God is. God's knowledge is infinite, and his will is entirely conformed to his infinite knowledge. The knowledge of every other being is finite, and conformity of will to finite knowledge must of necessity fall infinitely short of conformity of will to infinite knowledge.

5. Entire conformity of heart or will to all known truth, is moral perfection, in the only sense in which a moral being is ever perfect.

In a little child who had but one ray of light and the knowledge of but one moral truth in his mind, entire conformity of heart to that truth would be in him moral perfection. Nothing less in him could be virtue, and nothing more could be required. Whether one, ten, ten thousand, or ten thousand million truths and relations are apprehended by the mind, nothing short of conformity to them all can by any possibility be virtue. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." In God nothing can be virtue short of conformity to all the truth known to Him. The same is true of the highest moral agent as well as the lowest. And nothing more or less is properly intended by moral perfection than universal conformity to all known truth.

6. Let not the distinction between perfection as a state and perfection as an act be overlooked. The thing for which we are required to pray in the text, no doubt, is a state of perfection, or of entire conformity to the will of God, and that this may be as universal on earth as it is in heaven.

7. A state of mind that can habitually offer this petition must be in entire conformity to all known truth, or in other words it must be in that state intended by entire consecration to God.

8. If the question be asked whether a state of entire sanctification is attainable in this life, let it be answered by inquiring whether a state of mind that can sincerely and habitually offer this petition to God, is attainable?

9. The petition for pardon in the Lord's prayer, must respect past sin, and cannot respect the state of mind in which this petition can be offered sincerely. For a man cannot be sinning while he is sincerely saying, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

10. What perfect mockery it is to teach thoughtless children to say the Lord's prayer and offer this petition. And what a dreadful influence it must have upon them to teach them to offer this prayer without instructing them with reference to its meaning, and informing them of the great wickedness of insincerity.

11. How this petition sounds as it is used in the Church service and repeated by hundreds and thousands of thoughtless sinners, who neither know nor care what they say. Many offer it and mean nothing by it; and some offer the petition and leave it for others to do the will of God, considering, it would seem, that it is their part to offer the petition, and leave it for others to live according to it.

12. The request for pardon is never lawful and acceptable to God, except only when the mind is in a state in which it can sincerely offer this petition. If this petition cannot be sincerely offered, and the soul cannot sincerely say "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," it is in a state of present rebellion against God, and therefore has no right to ask for forgiveness.

13. The great mass of professors of religion have, I fear, fallen entirely short of conceiving rightly of the nature of true religion, and it is high time that the subject were thoroughly investigated, and that the Lord's prayer in its true spirit and import should be deeply pondered by the Church, and the inquiry should be raised, what is implied in the sincere offering of this prayer to God. Unless these fundamental inquiries are started and pressed, until the Church come to an intelligent understanding of them, false hopes will continue to be cherished, and thousands of professing Christians will go down to hell.

[Back to Top](#)

Danger of Delusion

Lecture II

August 17, 1842

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Heb. 3:1: "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip."

In remarking upon this text, I shall attempt to show:

I. What constitutes true religion.

II. That the true idea of religion is rare.

III. That the existence of the true idea of what constitutes religion is indispensable to the existence of true religion in the soul.

IV. The great danger of losing this idea.

V. How to retain the true idea, and the practice of true religion.

I. What constitutes true religion.

1. It does not consist in any course of outward action. Outward actions, when viewed apart from the intention of the mind, can have no moral character at all. They are always necessitated by the acts of the will. Therefore religion cannot consist in mere outward actions.
2. Moral character does not consist in inward emotions or mere feelings, for these are involuntary states of mind, produced by directing our attention to objects that excite these feelings, by a natural necessity. So that mere feeling or emotion cannot, in itself, possess moral character.
3. True religion cannot consist in opinion, or in holding any system of doctrine. Our opinions are the necessary result of giving or refusing our attention to evidence, and therefore can have no moral character in themselves.
4. True religion does not consist in desire as distinguished from choice. Men often desire what, upon the whole, they do not choose. But desire, as distinguished from choice, can have no moral character, because, it is an involuntary state of mind.

5. But true religion does consist in obedience to the law of God, or in living in conformity with our nature and relations. Universal reason affirms, and no one can doubt, that men are under a moral obligation to understand, as far as possible, their nature and relations, and to conform to them.

Reason also affirms the obligation of all moral beings to exercise disinterested benevolence. By disinterested benevolence is intended the willing of the highest good of being in general, for its own sake--that every good is to be regarded, willed, and treated, according to its relative value, so far as we are able to understand its value. Disinterested benevolence constitutes that which is required by the law of God, and is expressed in the term love. It is choice as distinguished from mere desire. It is willing, as distinguished from mere emotion or feeling. It is willing good for its own sake, as distinguished from willing the good of others for some selfish reason, that is, it is willing them good of being as an end, and not as a means of promoting our own good. It is willing universal good as opposed to willing partial good. It is willing every interest according to its relative value, because it is the willing of good for its own sake, and on account of its intrinsic value. It is synonymous with ultimate intention. By ultimate intention is intended the subjective motive of the mind, or the mind's choice of an ultimate end, to the promotion of which it devotes itself.

Let it then be understood that virtue, or true religion consists always in the supreme ultimate intention of the mind--that a man's character is as his subjective motive, or ultimate intention is. The Bible again and again affirms that all the law is fulfilled in one word, love. And this love, when the term is properly defined and understood, is synonymous with intention, or disinterested benevolent. We therefore judge rightly when we say, that a man's character is as his motive or intention is.

Lest it should be thought from what I have said, that outward action and inward feeling have no necessary connection with true religion, and that it may exist without corresponding feelings and actions, I remark, that the actions of the will, as we know by our own consciousness, necessitate outward actions. If I intend to go to a certain place as soon as I can, that intention will beget those volitions that give motion to the muscles. Therefore while the intention exists, corresponding outward actions must exist. So intentions necessitate corresponding feelings. The attention of the

mind is governed by the will. If I intend to feel upon a certain subject, I direct my attention to it, and corresponding feelings are the necessary result. Therefore where intentions exist, corresponding feelings must exist. It should be observed, however, that sometimes outward actions and corresponding feelings cannot be produced by efforts of the will; for example, outward actions cannot be produced, when there is a paralysis of the nerves of voluntary motion. In such cases, the muscles will not obey volition. So where the excitability of the mind is exhausted, emotions will not be the necessary result of giving the attention of the mind to certain subjects which in other cases would produce them. But except in such cases, feeling and outward action are the certain and necessary results of intention.

Where, therefore, religion exists, it will of necessity manifest itself in corresponding outward actions and inward feelings.

II. The true idea of what constitutes true religion is rare.

This is evident,

1. From the fact that the common notion of men seems to be that true religion consists in emotion or feeling. Consequently when they relate their religious experience, they almost universally give an account of their feelings, or emotions, and so speak of them as to show that they suppose these to constitute religion. And nothing is more common, than to hear persons, in giving an account of what they call their religious experience, pass over entirely, and not so much as once allude to that which constitutes true religion. It is most manifest in such cases, that if they indeed have any true religion, they do not know in what it consists--that if their ultimate intention is really holy, and if they do truly intend to glorify God, and promote the highest good of being, they do not look upon this intention as constituting true religion, but suppose their religion to consist in that class of feelings which are produced by their intention.

2. It is common, and almost universal, for professors of religion to speak of it as something to be experienced by us, rather than to be done, something in which we are passive rather than active. This shows that they do not consider religion as consisting in intention; for who would speak of experiencing an intention? Does any one ever speak of experiencing a choice?

3. It has been a common and almost universal idea that sin and holiness can co-exist in the same mind. But if true religion or holiness consists in supreme or ultimate intention, sin can by no means co-exist with it; for certainly a moral being cannot, at the same time, have a supremely benevolent intention, and a selfish intention. If virtue consists in intention, so must sin. Sin consists universally in a supremely selfish intention, or in aiming at the gratification of self, as the supreme end of life. Selfishness then and true religion, as I have more than once said in former lectures, consist in opposite ultimate intentions, and cannot co-exist in the same mind. When therefore it is supposed that sin and holiness can co-exist in the same mind, it is manifest that the true idea of true religion is not before the mind.

4. The current phraseology of men shows that they suppose religion can really exist in the mind in a dormant state--that like a coal of fire covered up by ashes, it can remain smothered and inactive, and yet be true religion. It is common for all classes of persons to speak of having religion, but not in exercise--that their religion is not active--that it is not in exercise, &c. Now this phraseology shows that at the time they have not the true idea of true religion in their minds, for true religion is nothing else but action, voluntary action, choice, intention. Intention is an act of the mind, and true religion is a supreme ultimate intention, or act of the mind. To talk, then, of a religion not in exercise, a religion not active, is to talk stark nonsense. And when persons use such language, they show to a demonstration, that, at the time, they have not the true idea of religion in their minds.

5. It is very common to hear persons speak of religion as consisting in mere desire, in distinction from choice. Choice always controls the outward conduct. But mere desire, as distinguished from choice, never does. Many persons speak of desiring to live, and act better than they do, and speak of those desires which do not produce corresponding action, as constituting religion. Now, this is a sad and fatal mistake.

6. Only certain gross sins are generally regarded as being inconsistent with the existence of true holiness. It seems to be generally understood that habitual drunkenness, licentiousness, lying, theft, murder, &c., would demonstrate that a person had no true religion. But it does not seem to be at all the general opinion that one form of habitual selfishness is just as

inconsistent with true religion, as another. Men may transact business on selfish principles; they may live in vanity, in various forms of self-indulgence, and these forms of selfishness may be habitual with them, and yet they may regard themselves, and be regarded by others, as being truly religious. But this cannot be. A man can no more be truly religious, and transact business upon selfish principles, and for selfish reasons, than he could be truly religious, and be drunk every day in the week; for it makes no difference, whether he devotes himself to the promotion of self-gratification in the form of obtaining wealth, or in the form of gratifying appetite for strong drink, or in other sensual indulgences. It matters not whether a woman devotes herself to dress, or to the gratification of licentious appetites. A vain woman can no more be religious than a licentious woman. It does not seem to be understood, or hardly so much as dreamed of by the Church in general, that one form of selfishness is just as inconsistent with true religion, as another; and that no form of selfishness whatever can consist with true religion.

7. It often happens that nearly all the reasons urged by ministers and others to induce men to be religious, are mere appeals to their selfishness. Now this shows that often-times religious teachers themselves, have not the true idea of religion developed in their own minds. I might appeal to my readers and ask you, is it common for you to hear true religion accurately defined? Do your teachers make such discriminations as generally to develop in the minds of their congregation, the true idea of what constitutes religion? I hope in many instances they do. And yet I am sure that in many instances they do not. It is the very general fault of religious teachers that they do not succeed in developing in the minds of their hearers the true idea of religion.

8. What is called "revival preaching" often consists very much in appeals to the sensibility of men, while it leaves entirely out of view the idea of what constitutes true religion. In such revivals men are not made disinterestedly benevolent. It is a revival of feeling and not of true religion. There are a great many excitements, often-times, and a great many professed converts, where the plea of disinterested benevolence is not developed, and scarcely a vestige of true religion exists. Every year I live, I am more and more impressed with this, and can have no confidence in the genuineness of those revivals in which the true idea of religion is not thoroughly developed, until it carries the will, and men become truly, disinterestedly benevolent.

9. Sin is often denounced without telling what it is. It is almost always spoken of as something different from selfishness. And when selfishness is spoken of at all as sin, it is only spoken of as being one form of sin. It often happens, that selfishness ceases to be regarded as sin, and very little will be said of it as constituting sin at all, whereas selfishness, under its various modifications, is the whole of sin.

10. Were not the true idea of what constitutes true religion rare, hopes could not possibly be entertained by nor for the great mass of professing Christians. If it were generally understood that religion is nothing else than supreme benevolent intention, that necessarily begets corresponding feeling and action--were it also generally understood that one form of habitual selfishness is just as inconsistent with true religion as another, and that the habitual existence of any form of selfishness whatever, is proof conclusive, of the absence of true religion, how impossible would it be that hopes should be entertained, either by or for the scores of selfish professors, that fill our churches.

11. The common old school notion that sin and holiness consist in the constitutional tastes, or appetites of the mind, and lie back of voluntary intention, is a demonstration that they have not the true idea of religion. By this I do not mean that none of them can be Christians, for they have the idea of supreme benevolent intention, but they do not understand that this constitutes true religion. I trust that many of them know by their own consciousness, what true devotedness to God is, but in theorizing, they make that to constitute virtue, which does not: and hold the "taste scheme," that is, that sin and holiness instead of consisting in choice or ultimate intention, lie in the involuntary appetites and propensities.

12. The words that represent the Christian graces are seldom understood by those that use them; for example, the term love, as used in the law of God, is generally spoken of, as if it meant a mere emotion, or feeling of the mind. Humility is spoken of, as if it consisted in a deep sense of unworthiness, whereas it consists in no such thing. Love, as we have seen, as used in the law of God, means disinterested benevolence. If humility consisted in a sense of unworthiness, the devil might be humble, and doubtless is. Convicted sinners might also be humble, and doubtless are, if this is humility. I scarcely ever in my life, heard a minister speak of humility as if

he had any definitely developed idea of what it is. Humility must consist in a willingness to be known and appreciated according to our real character. The same mistakes are made in regard to repentance and faith. Repentance is generally spoken of as if it consisted in emotions of sorrow, whereas it consists in a change of mind, choice, or ultimate intention, and is precisely synonymous with a change of heart. Faith is very commonly spoken of as consisting either in mere intellectual conviction, or in a felt assurance of the truth of a proposition, whereas it consists in an act of the will, or in confiding, or committing the whole being to the influence of truth.

13. The fact that the 7th chapter of Romans has been so generally understood as descriptive of the Christian warfare, is evidence conclusive, that the true idea of true religion is rare. In that chapter the Apostle is speaking of a legal experience, as contrasted with a gospel experience, of which he proceeds to speak in the 8th chapter. And the fact that the Church have so generally stopped short, and claimed the 7th chapter, as descriptive of a Christian's experience, because it was their own experience, shows to what a limited extent the real idea of true religion has been developed.

I might adduce a great many other reasons, showing that the true idea of true religion is a rare idea: but I must pass to say,

III. That the true idea of religion is indispensable to the existence of true religion.

By this, as I have already intimated, I do not mean, that persons may not be religious, and yet in theory make a mistake in regard to what constitutes real religion. But I do mean,

1. That unintelligent action has no moral character.
2. That the true knowledge of God consists in having correct ideas of Him.
3. God cannot be truly loved, worshipped, or served, any farther than He is truly known.
4. True religion, as we have seen, consists in the choice of a right end.
5. This end must be distinctly apprehended by the mind; that is, the idea must be distinctly developed and kept in view.

6. If this end be lost sight of, there can be no true religion; for if the end be not in view, the intention cannot be right. And as virtue consists in intention, it is self-evident, that where the true idea or end to be aimed at is not kept in view, there can be no true religion.

IV. There is great danger of losing the true idea of true religion.

This is evident,

1. From the fact that the true idea of religion is so rare.
2. All ages and nations have manifested a tendency to lose the true idea of God and of true religion. Even the Jews, who had the living oracles of God, had, before the come of Christ, almost entirely lost the true idea of religion, and supposed it to consist in outward works.
3. The selfishness of mankind creates in them a strong tendency to make religion consist in some modification of selfishness, and to overlook the fact, that religion consists in disinterested benevolence.
4. The selfishness of men creates in them a strong tendency to misunderstand the Bible. The Bible every where promises reward to virtue, and threatens vice with endless evil. But the Bible no where makes virtue to consist in aiming at the reward as an end. It always represents virtue as consisting in disinterested benevolence. Now as mankind are selfish, they are extremely liable to make escape from the penalty of sin, and the rewards of virtue, the great and most influential reasons for their attempts to be virtuous. They set up the rewards of virtue as an end--aim at getting to heaven--and set about the service of God for the sake of reward. But this is not virtue. It is only serving for the loaves and fishes. There is not a particle of true benevolence in it. It is amazing to see to what extent men set about what they call the service of God, from purely selfish motives, and really understand the Bible as an appeal to their selfishness.
5. Unconverted men are universally committed to the indulgence of their feelings rather than swayed by the affirmations of their reason, and decisions of their conscience. Consequently there is a strong tendency in them to consider religion as consisting in strongly excited feelings, rather than in conformity to the law of God as revealed in the reason.

6. The selfishness of men with which we are perpetually surrounded, tends strongly to divert the attention from that which constitutes true religion.

7. Among the millions of aims and intentions which men have, but one of them is virtue or true religion. Christ said, "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to death, and many there be which go in thereat: while strait, is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth to life, and few there be that find it." There is great emphasis in this truth. The wide gate and broad way includes every one that is actuated by any other than a disinterestedly benevolent spirit. While the narrow way includes those only who have a single eye, and are living for one end, namely, the highest good of universal being.

8. In the text the Apostle says, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip." By slip, as it is rendered in the margin, is intended to leak out, to escape. Men are extremely apt to act without considering their ultimate motive, or the great and fundamental reason of their conduct, and therefore to be entirely selfish, without understanding that they are so.

9. Men constantly hear religion represented, in a great variety of ways, as consisting in feelings, in outward courses of conduct, and in almost every thing else, than supreme disinterestedly benevolent intention.

10. Men dislike to retain the true idea of religion just as they dislike to retain the true idea of God.

V. How to retain the true idea and practice of true religion.

1. Inquire after the fundamental reason of your conduct. Reader, do nothing, and commit yourself to no course of action, without raising the inquiry, what is the great fundamental reason by which you are actuated; and suffer not yourself to go forward without the testimony of your own consciousness, that you are disinterestedly benevolent in what you do.

2. Keep Christ's life and temper before you as the great exemplar, the great and powerful instrument of making you benevolent as He was. Faith in the truths of the gospel, unwavering confidence that those things recorded of Christ are true, gives the life and example of Christ the greatest power over you to make you benevolent like Himself.

3. Pray much in the Holy Ghost, and remember, that unless you pray in the Spirit, you are sure to let slip the true idea and practice of true religion.

4. In order to pray in the Holy Ghost, you must watch unto prayer. Unless you watch, you will be sure to grieve the Spirit of God away.

5. Be sure that you neglect no duty. Remember that neglect is just as absolutely a violation of the law of God, as any positive crime is.

6. Maintain a consciousness that you do every thing for the glory of God. This is perfectly practicable. A worldly man is conscious of the great end he has in view in all his ways. He knows why he labors and toils, why he refuses to make this expenditure, and why he makes that speculation.

7. Neither engage nor continue in any business, but for the glory of God. Unless you are conscious that it may be pursued and that you are actually pursuing it, for the glory of God, you cannot be truly religious.

8. Aim not merely at being useful, but at being so in the highest degree. If you are disinterestedly benevolent, it will follow, of course, that you will prefer a greater to a less good, and not satisfy yourself with doing some good, when it is in your power to do more. Therefore remember that unless in your own honest estimation, you are living so as, upon the whole, to promote the highest good you are capable of promoting, you are not in a truly religious state of mind, and if you think you are, it is because you have let slip the true idea of what constitutes true religion. Such inquiries as these should be started and honestly answered. Is my present employment one in which I can be most useful? If not, is there any opening in providence for me to change it for one in which I can be more useful? And in settling these questions, be careful that you are not influenced by any selfish considerations. So on the other hand, take an enlightened view of the subject, before you decide to change your employment, if it be one that is lawful in itself. If your employment be one that is inconsistent with the highest interests of mankind; nay, if it is not one that is useful, you are to abandon it at all events. But if it be one that is useful to men, whether you should exchange it for one that is more useful, must depend upon your qualifications, and all the circumstances of the case. If in deciding all these questions, "your eye is single, your whole body shall be full of light"; but if your eye is evil, in other words, if you are selfish, you will wander on in

perpetual error. You have already lost sight of the true idea of religion, and fallen from all real virtue.

9. If you have not done so, make a public profession of religion. Remember that Christ expressly requires this of you, and that you cannot live in the neglect of this duty, when you have an opportunity to perform it, and still retain the idea and practice of true religion. The very neglect is itself disobedience, and is inconsistent with the existence of true religion.

10. In making a profession of religion, be sure that you are not selfish in joining one or another particular church or denomination. No doubt, as a matter of fact, some persons are guilty of heart apostacy in the very act of making a profession of religion--in uniting with the visible church they actually apostatize from God. Sometimes they are influenced by political motives, sometimes by pecuniary considerations, having an eye upon how their relation to such and such a congregation, will affect their business transactions. Sometimes they are influenced by fear of expense in supporting the gospel, if connected with a particular church or congregation, or, on the other hand, by the hope that in uniting with a particular denomination, their church expenses will be small. Oftentimes, in making a profession of religion, persons are influenced by a regard to the respectability of the church or denomination to which they attach themselves. And indeed there are multitudes of selfish considerations, by which you are in danger of being influenced, and by which, if you are influenced, you really apostatize from God, in the very act of making a public profession of supreme attachment to Him. One of the great reasons why many professed converts immediately backslide, after making a profession of religion, is, that in selecting the church or denomination to which they attach themselves, they were influenced by some selfish consideration, and actually lost both the idea and practice of true religion in making a public profession of it. Be sure, then, always in making a profession of religion, see to it that you are honest, that your eye is single to the glory of God, that you aim at doing the highest good in your power.

11. Avoid sectarianism. Sectarianism is as far as possible from the spirit of true religion. And all the arguments by which the dividing of the Church into different denominations, and continuing them in this state, are supported, are utterly futile, as might easily be shown, were this the place

for the discussion.

In recommending it to you, however; to join some church, it is of course expected that you will join some of the existing denominations. The thing intended here, is, that you avoid a sectarian spirit, that you love all Christians as such, that you have no zeal to build up a party, but that you live for the universal Church, the world, and the glory of God.

12. Avoid every form and also the spirit of papacy. There is an alarming tendency in the different [P]rotestant denominations to adopt and carry out the fundamental error of papacy. The grand mistake of papacy is this: It assumes that the Bible is not a sufficiently popular standard of morals for the multitude. And that therefore there must be some authoritative exposition of its meaning. It assumes that if the unlearned are allowed to form their own opinions of the meaning of the Bible, it will led to endless divisions and heresies. Consequently the Pope and the decisions of councils were set up as authoritative standards by which the Bible is to be interpreted. The next step of course was to take the Bible out of the hands of common people inasmuch as it had been assumed that they were unable to understand it, and were therefore not allowed to interpret it for themselves. Consequently any thing, with papists, is heresy, that is not consistent with this standard, and in trials for heresy papists are not allowed to appeal from those human standards to the holy scriptures, inasmuch as by the general consent of papists, those standards are an authoritative exposition of what the Bible means. This I say is the fundamental error of papacy. And as I said, there is a growing tendency among all [P]rotestant denominations to adopt and carry out this very error. For example: take the Presbyterian confession of faith. That does not in itself, assume to be an infallible standard. But Presbyterians treat it as such, speak of it as such, and in all their public acts they place it above the Bible. Especially is this tendency increasing since the great division of the Presbyterian church. The time was when multitudes of Presbyterian ministers professed nothing more than to receive the confession of faith as upon the whole a correct system of doctrine, while they did not hesitate to declare publicly and positively that there were several points in that confession, from which they dissented. But so much has been said about the "Standards" of the Church, so many accusations have been made of departure from the "Standards" and so many flat denials of this have been reiterated, that it has come now to be common

to treat the confession of faith as an authoritative standard from which if men depart in any particular they are regarded as heretics.

That they give to the confession of faith all the authority which papists attach to decisions of councils and the pope, is evident from the fact that in all the trials that have been had for heresy, the accused is arraigned for dissenting from the "Standards" of the Church and from the holy scriptures. But in no instance that has come to my knowledge, have they allowed the accused to defend himself by an appeal to the scriptures which would set aside the confession of faith. For it is assumed, as far as I know, in all cases, that the confession of faith has settled the meaning of the scriptures. And it is considered as entirely inadmissible to attempt to set aside the confession of faith by an appeal to the Bible. Indeed to such lengths has the Presbyterian church proceeded, to say nothing of other churches, that on trials for heresy, it is assumed both by the accused and the accuser, that the ultimate appeal is to the confession of faith, and consequently the accused feels himself obliged to show that his sentiments are not inconsistent with the confession of faith. Let the trials of Mr. Barnes and Mr. Beecher be looked at as illustrations of this fact. Were they allowed or did they even attempt to justify their sentiments by an appeal to the Bible, or did they defend themselves by attempting to show that what they held was consistent with the "standards?" Were they allowed to say that, whatever the confession of faith might say, such and such was the doctrine of the Bible? By no means.

The fact is that it is high time for the Church to open her eyes upon the appalling fact that the [P]rotestant denominations are assuming the truth of the fundamental error of papacy, are talking about their "Standards" and are using their spiritual guillotine wherever and whenever there is a departure from their "standards."

The next step will be to substitute their "convenient manuals of doctrine" and their human standards in the place of the Bible in such a sense as that the laity may as well be deprived of the Bible.

Not long since I received an invitation from the session of a Presbyterian church to come and preach to them upon the condition that I would preach nothing inconsistent with the Bible as interpreted by the confession of faith. I of course treated such an invitation in the manner in which I supposed I was bound to treat it. I felt shocked that matters had come to such a state in the

Presbyterian church that they dared to demand of a minister that he should interpret the Bible by their confession of faith. What is this but exalting the confession of faith into the very place of the Pope?

Now beloved, if you intend to preserve the idea and practice of genuine religion, be careful that you do not either in theory or practice adopt the great error of papacy and assume that some human standard is to be regarded as an authoritative exposition of the word of God. Read your Bible. Let the opinions of good men, whether expressed in catechisms, confessions of faith, or in any other way, orally or in writing, have with you what weight they really deserve, but call no man master in your views of theology, and let inspiration alone be authoritative with you in matters of faith and practice.

13. Aim at nothing short of universal consecration to God. By universal consecration, I intend the devotion of your whole being and of all over which you have control to the service and glory of God. And remember that nothing short of entire consecration is true religion--that if you hold back any thing from God, you are and must be, for the time being, in a state of rebellion against Him.

14. If you would attain the true idea and practice of religion make every thing give place to communion with God. So arrange all your business affairs, as to have ample time for much secret prayer and communion with God. You will never retain the spirit of true religion unless you make as real and as sacred a calculation, in all your movements, to have time for reading your Bible, secret prayer, and communion with God, as you do for taking your daily food. Men do not enter into such business transactions as to have no time to eat. They know very well that they cannot live without eating. Therefore whatever business they engage in, whatever course of life they devote themselves to, they always make calculation to take sufficient time for their meals. Now it should be universally understood that spiritual life can no more continue without regular and frequent seasons of prayer and communion with God, than natural life can continue without daily food.

15. Beware of conferring with flesh and blood. By this I mean, take heed that you do not give way to a spirit of self indulgence in any form; and remember that the moment the indulgence of any appetite or passion, the love of ease, reputation, or any form of self indulgence whatever comes to be consulted by you and suffered to have a controlling influence, you have

already let slip, if not the true idea, yet the practice of true religion.

16. Beware of the influence of the customs of society and of your own habits. Examine narrowly all your own voluntary habits of eating, drinking, exercise, rest, conversation, the manner in which you spend your time, hours of rising and retiring, intercourse with friends, and in short the whole round of your habits, private, domestic, public, and see that every thing is just right.

17. Beware of the influence of public sentiment. With many, public sentiment is the rule rather than the law of good. Their inquiry seems to be not what will please God but what will please men. This is as far as possible from true religion.

18. Let the Bible be your companion and the man of your counsel. Make yourself thoroughly acquainted with the mind of the Spirit so far as possible in every passage.

19. Seek the most spiritual instruction within your reach. If you live in the neighborhood of different preachers, hear those who are the most spiritual, and decidedly the most evangelical. Let your reading be of a very select character. Be sure that you do not devour and swallow down the mass of the periodical literature of the day. It is as a general thing so sectarian, that it will poison you to death. Select the most spiritual memoirs, and writings of all kinds within your reach. Acquaint yourselves, as far as possible, with books on natural science. Examine works on anatomy, physiology, natural, mental, and moral philosophy, and such books as will make you thoroughly acquainted with the structure and laws of the universe; for all these things declare the wonderful works of God.

20. Do not shrink from reproach for Christ, and for truth's sake. A great many professors of religion seem afraid even to form an opinion, and much more, publicly to avow it, on any unpopular question. This shows that they have a supreme regard to their own reputation, that they love the praise of men more than the praise of God. It is a demonstration that they have no true religion.

21. Above all, learn to live by faith upon the Son of God. You will never practice any of the things I have recommended, only as you live by faith.

And do not make a mistake and think you live by faith, when you do not know what faith is. To live by faith is not merely to hold the opinion that you are to be pardoned and saved through faith in Christ, but it is to repose continual and implicit confidence in Him, and to really expect him to give you continual grace and help in every time of need, and enable you to walk in all his commandments and ordinances blameless. It must be a matter of experience with you and not of opinion and profession merely. You must know what it is to be united to Him as the branch is united to the vine, and to receive constant nourishment and spiritual life from Him, as the branch does from the vine. And when you are exhorted to do any thing else, remember that you will not do it aright, only as Christ strengthens you, which strength you are to receive by faith.

22. Learn to walk in the Spirit. If you read the Epistles, you will find much said of walking in the Spirit. You must know what this is by your own experience, or you will not retain the true idea or practice of true religion.

23. Beware of declining on the one hand, into antinomianism, and doing nothing for the conversion of sinners, and on the other, of running into legality, and bustling about with a legal zeal, devoid of the peace and rest of the gospel. Keep at an equal remove from a sickly quietism, on the one hand, and of a bigoted pharisaism on the other.

24. Aim to be all, as a Christian, that you can be, to exert the highest and best influence upon all around you, and upon the world, that is possible. Keep the thought before you, that to be a Christian at all, your aim, end, or supreme intention must be, to devote your whole being, all that you have and are, to the glory of God and the good of the universe. By this I do not mean that you must intend to be holy, for this in reality is nonsense. You must be benevolent, instead of intending to be benevolent. You must intend good, and aim at doing good. This is holiness; and always remember that it is one thing to be holy or benevolent, and quite another to intend to be so. Almost every sinner expects and intends to be holy at some time. It will not do for you to aim to be benevolent, but you must continue to be so.

25. Remember that you are a witness for God, that you are a living epistle known and read of all men, that unless your life and lips bear testimony in accordance with the grace of God, you are a false witness--a perjured wretch.

REMARKS.

1. True religion, in the lowest degree, implies living up to the best light you have. I say this is not to be looked upon as some high and rare attainment in religion, but is in fact essential to the lowest degree of true religion. He that does not habitually live up to the best light he enjoys, lives habitually in sin, and cannot be a Christian. By living up to the best light you have, is intended, that you do every thing which you acknowledge to be duty, and act up to the standard of right which you acknowledge to be your rule of duty. If you allow yourself in any omission or practice which you acknowledge to be wrong, (I mean where this is habitual with you in opposition to occasional,) you are not, and cannot be a Christian, as the Bible is true.

2. True religion of course hails every branch of reform that promises glory to God, and good to men.

3. The radical principle of all false religion, whatever be its name, is selfishness. No matter whether it be Judaism, Christianity, Mahommedanism, or by whatever name you call it, the radical principle, that which constitutes the end and aim of every false religionist, is some form of selfishness.

4. You see why it is that study, business, &c., are often a snare to the soul. It is not because persons do too much business for God, but because they do business and study for themselves.

5. The state of the world and of the Church is such, and the general strain of preaching such, that even true converts are very apt soon to let slip the true idea, and consequently to fall from the practice of true religion. They see so little of real benevolence, they hear so little about it, they witness such universal selfishness, that they soon get confused, backslidden, and fall into the snare of the devil. How striking and appropriate, then, is the admonition of the Apostle in the text, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip."

[Back to Top](#)

Ability and Inability

Lecture III

August 31, 1842

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Texts.--Joshua 24:19: "And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord: for He is a holy God."

In this discussion, I shall

I. Point out the distinction between the different kinds of ability and inability to obey the law of God, which have been insisted on by different classes of philosophers and divines.

II. Show that this distinction is nonsensical.

III. What is intended by the language of the text and similar passages of Scripture.

IV. Why the Holy Spirit is employed in the production of holiness.

I. Distinction between the different kinds of ability and inability to obey the law of God, which have been insisted on by different classes of philosophers and divines.

1. Natural ability, according to them, is to do as you will, irrespective of the question of ability to will in any direction in view of motive. In their definition of natural ability, they keep entirely out of view, the doctrine which they hold to be true, that the will is invariably and inevitably determined by motives. Some state the doctrine of natural ability, to be the possession of the faculties of a moral being, with the power to use them whenever, and as you are disposed or choose to use them, leaving out of view the how it comes to pass that we are disposed to use them.

2. These statements and definitions are specious. But let it be remembered, that these same philosophers hold also that choice is necessarily determined by motives. They reject the term necessity, and use the term certainty, to

avoid the charge of fatalism; but so explain what they mean by certainty, as to show that necessity is really intended. They, or the leaders of their school, hold, that the connection between motive and choice is the same in kind and efficiency, as that between a physical cause and its effect. So that the difference does not consist in the kind of connection, but in the terms connected. Their proposition is, that the will always and invariably, is as the greatest apparent good is--that whatever appears to the mind to be upon the whole most agreeable, invariably determines the choice of the mind in that direction. Indeed, the leader of this school maintains, that choice is nothing else than the very state of mind referred to, that is, that a thing's appearing to be the most agreeable, and choosing that thing are identical. This, then, is the plain sentiment of this class of theologians: that whenever a thing is presented to the mind in such relations as to appear upon the whole the most agreeable, this is choice, or the determination of the will. And this is what they mean by the will's invariably being as the greatest apparent good.

Now it is very plain, that the very nature of the connection between the physical cause and its effect, is that of necessity. And if, according to them, the connection is the same in kind, between motive and choice, then choice must be determined by necessity. You may call it necessity or certainty, or what you will, the true idea and thing intended, is necessity.

3. Moral ability, according to them, is the presence of such motives as to determine the will by this kind of misnamed certainty.

4. The impossibility of executing our volitions or doing as we will, they term, natural inability. Observe, natural ability, according to them, is the power to do as you will, or to execute your volitions. Natural inability is the want of power to do as you will. If, for example, you put forth volitions to accomplish a certain object, and are unable to execute, or bring about the thing at which you aim, this is natural inability.

5. The absence of sufficient motives to determine the will with this kind of misnamed certainty, they call moral inability. It is called a moral inability, not because it is not a real inability, but because it is inability of will. If there are not sufficient motives to cause the proposed object of choice to appear to the mind upon the whole the most agreeable, or to be the greatest apparent good, in this case, there is a moral inability, that is, an inability to choose in that direction. Whereas, if there are sufficient motives to make

the impression of the most agreeable on the mind, in this case, choice is produced, and here is a moral ability.

6. Another class of philosophers reject these distinctions, and deny both natural and moral ability, but maintain a gracious ability to conform to the claims of God. Their gracious ability consists in this, that through the atonement of Christ, God, by his Spirit, and gracious influences, has removed inability of every kind, and made it possible for men, through this gracious aid, to obey the law of God.

Without this aid they maintain, that fallen or sinful beings have no kind of ability to obey God. Hence consistency drives them to maintain, that but for the atonement and gracious divine influence, men after the fall, would have been under no obligation to obey God, and that those in hell, from whom the gracious influence is withdrawn, are under no such obligation. It is easy to see, also, that if consistent, they must deny that Satan has ever sinned since his fall, or can sin, unless the atonement and gracious ability extend to him.

Observe, I do not intend that all, who professedly belong to either of these schools, are consistent enough, to hold the whole of their theory, as I have stated it. But I have stated the doctrine of natural and moral ability and inability, and of gracious ability just as held by the leading minds of these different schools, if I rightly understand them, which I have taken much pains to do.

II. These distinctions are nonsensical.

1. Their natural ability is no ability at all. Observe, their definition of natural ability is, the power to act or do as you will, leaving out of view the question whether you have power to choose in a given case, or given direction, or not. Now, every one knows, that the power to act depends on the power to choose. If a given course of conduct be proposed to me, it is naturally impossible for me to pursue it, unless I can choose to do so. But, according to them, if such motives are not presented to my mind, as to make that course appear the most agreeable, I am unable to choose to pursue it, and I am, therefore, in the highest sense, naturally unable to pursue that course. Now, who does not see, that an ability to act or do as you will, is no ability at all, unless you have ability to choose in that direction. Is not, therefore, their definition of natural ability which denies

the power to choose in any direction in view of motives, nonsensical? What is it but nonsense to affirm that I am naturally able to do that which I am naturally unable to will to do? Is it not nonsense to affirm that natural ability to do a thing, consists in the power to do it, if you will, while the power to will in any direction in view of motives, is denied?

2. Their natural inability, so far as morality or virtue is concerned, is no inability at all. In morals, the will is the deed. The virtue or vice of any action does not lie in any outward act, but in the choice or intention of the mind. So that if the choice or intention exists, but we are really unable to execute our intention, we are as virtuous or as vicious as if we had executed it. And this is the doctrine of the Bible; "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." It should always be understood that obedience and disobedience in the eye of God consists in acts of will. If a man wills, or really intends, in accordance with the will of God, although he may be unable to do as he wills, or to accomplish the thing he intends, yet the will is taken for the deed, and he is as virtuous as if he did accomplish it.

3. If men act at all, they cannot but act as they will. Will, choice, or volition, necessitates action. If I will to move my muscles, they move of necessity, if they move at all. If there be a paralysis of the nerves of voluntary motion, volition will fail to produce muscular action. So there may be an opposing force, which shall overpower my volition, and prevent its execution. But if I act at all, I act always and necessarily according to my will, and cannot by any possibility act against it.

4. Their moral ability, is no ability at all. For observe, that moral ability, according to them consists in the presence of such motives, as to produce choice, by necessity, or as they say, certainty, which certainty, as I have said, when explained, is nothing else than sheer necessity. There is no magic in words. To call it certainty, and then so explain the certainty, as to make it sheer and absolute necessity, is only to trifle on a momentous subject. The fact is, that their moral ability is nothing else than choice produced by necessity--motive producing choice in the same way, or by a connection the same in kind, that unites a physical cause with its effect. Now, if men are disposed to call this certainty, and tell us to remember that they mean certainty and not necessity, are we to throw away our common

sense, and even our intellectual perception, of the fact, that this certainty is nothing more nor less than sheer necessity.

5. Their moral inability is an absolute natural inability. Observe, moral inability with them, is the absence of sufficient motives to produce choice, by this kind of misnamed certainty of which I have just been speaking. It is an inability to choose for want of sufficient motives to produce choice, or which is the same thing with them, the sense of the most agreeable. In other words, they are unable to choose for want of sufficient motives, and this is called a moral inability, because it is an inability to choose. Now, why call this a moral inability, when it is self-evident, that it is nothing else than natural inability. It is the highest, and most proper and perfect kind of inability, an inability to will, and of course, and of necessity, an inability to act, and is it not nonsensical, by introducing the word moral, to attempt to distinguish this from a natural inability.

6. The gracious ability of the philosophers of this school, has no grace whatever in it, because,

(1.) It is a first truth of reason that moral obligation implies the possession of every kind of ability which is indispensable to render the required act possible. For example, if God requires me to fly, He must furnish me wings. And this furnishing me with wings to enable me to obey the commandment to fly, is not, in view of the circumstances, a gracious ability. He is in justice bound (if He requires me to fly) to give me wings. And it is absurd and nonsensical to call this a gracious ability. Should He require me to fly without giving me wings, the requirement would be unjust, and it would impose on me no obligation. This is a first truth of reason. But if it be true, that he will be unjust to require me to fly without giving me wings, it follows, of course, that the giving of wings in reference to this commandment, would not be grace, but justice. Nor is the case at all altered if I have plucked my own wings, and thereby rendered myself unable to fly. For this He may punish me, but cannot hold me obliged to fly, until He restores my ability. So if He requires me to raise the dead, He must give me power to do so. And unless He confer the power, the command would not be obligatory. Now, in view of the command to

raise the dead it is nonsensical to call the bestowment of power sufficient to obey the command, a gracious ability, for it is not grace, but mere justice. These are first truths of reason. They need no proof, and to call for proof of truths of this class, is absurd and nonsensical.

(2.) If men lost their ability to obey God by sin, and God should still demand service of them, He must, in the first place, in justice restore their ability. He might punish them for destroying their ability, but could not require obedience of them until their ability is restored. It would seem that this class of philosophers admit that God must in justice restore ability before he can require obedience. For they maintain that if the atonement had not been made and divine influence vouchsafed, men would not have been under obligation to obey God. And that those in hell, from whom this divine influence is withdrawn, are under no obligation to repent and love and obey God. Now how nonsensical it is to maintain that without this ability men would be under no obligation to obey God, and still call it a gracious ability. It is what justice in reality demands according to their own view. For God to claim obedience, and yet while justice demands it at his hands, they call it a gracious ability, what is this confusion of terms but nonsense. The very terms gracious ability are an absurdity, for what is grace? It is the bestowment of that which justice cannot claim. But justice does demand that a moral being should possess the requisite ability, whatever that is, to do and be what he is commanded to do and be. And the bestowment of this cannot be grace but justice.

(3.) Where the gospel is preached and the Holy Spirit's influences are enjoyed, God may claim and does claim and ought to claim, corresponding service. But where He claims a higher service, in consequence of increased light, he does not consider the increased light in reference to the enlarged requirement grace, but justice.

By this I do not mean that the atonement and the influences of the Holy Spirit are not grace, but that they really are so, and that they are grace because men have not lost their natural ability to do their duty by sin; that, therefore, the atonement and divine influence, were not necessary to make men able to do their duty, but to induce in them a willingness to do it.

.

(4.) There is no inability whatever, under the moral government of God, to obey Him perfectly. Where the mere light of nature is enjoyed men are able to walk according to it, which is all that God requires of them, and for not doing which He condemns them. This Paul argues at length in his epistle to the Romans.

All moral agents then, in all worlds, are able to obey, and consequently are bound to obey God perfectly, and perfect obedience in a heathen would be, a living up, in all respect, to the law of nature as revealed in the works and providence of God. Perfect obedience in a child, would be a living up in all respect, in heart and life, to the best light enjoyed. The same is true of men under the law, and under the gospel, of the angels in heaven, and of all moral beings in all worlds.

III. What is intended by the language of the text and similar passages of Scripture?

1. Words are signs of ideas, and are always to be understood, of course, according to the subject matter about which they are used. For example; if I say I cannot create a world, every body would understand me to mean by cannot, a natural impossibility. If I say I cannot take twenty dollars for my watch, no man in his senses would understand me to use the term cannot in the same sense in which I did before. He would understand me only as affirming that I was unwilling to sell my watch for that price. He would not so much as dream that I had not natural ability or power to consent to sell my watch for twenty dollars. Now it is very remarkable that on other subjects such language is readily understood by the common sense of men, and no where, but on religious subjects do they seem so widely to depart from common sense, in the interpretation of language, as to make cannot, when applied to acts of will, imply an inability of any kind.

2. With respect to the language of the text, the connection in which it stands shows the sense in which Joshua meant to be understood, when he said to the people, "ye cannot serve the Lord, for He is a holy God." Any one who will take the trouble to read, will see that nothing was farther from his intention than to affirm that there was either a natural or a moral inability in them to serve the Lord, for in the same connection he calls on them to enter into a solemn covenant to serve the Lord, to which they consented upon the

spot.

3. The whole connection shows that they did not understand him as teaching the doctrine of an inability of any kind in them to render an acceptable service to Jehovah. Joshua merely intended, and they manifestly understood him to affirm, that they could not render an acceptable service to Jehovah unless they became holy. But their ability to become holy is as strongly as possible implied in the whole connection and transaction.

4. Let a similar passage in Genesis 19:22, explain this. "Haste thee, escape thither: for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither: therefore the name of the city was called Zoar." --Here Jehovah speaks of Himself in similar language. He says to Lot, "Haste thee, for I can do nothing until thou be come thither." Who can believe that He intended to affirm of Himself an inability of any kind, to destroy Sodom before Lot arrived at Zoar? He manifestly intended merely to say that his mind was made up not to destroy Sodom till Lot was safe, and that therefore, He was unwilling to rain fire and brimstone upon the devoted city until Zoar had closed its gates upon Lot.

5. See also John 1:12. "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believed on his name." In the margin of your Bible, you will see that the word "power," is rendered right or privilege. This passage has, not unfrequently, been quoted as implying an inability in the sinner to become a Christian. But it favors no such idea. It only teaches that those who received Christ, were themselves received to the privileges of adopted sons.

6. See also John 6:44, 45. "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." The 44th verse is often quoted in proof of the doctrine of natural or moral inability. But what inability is here intended? When the two verses are read together, we learn that no man is able to come to Christ unless he is enlightened or taught the way of salvation by Christ. It is certainly a plain truth that a man needs to be informed of the way of salvation by Christ in order to come to Christ. This text does not begin to teach any inability whatever, in those who have been taught, and understand the way of

salvation by Jesus.

Here let me remark that so to explain these passages as to make them teach either a moral or a natural inability is to deny the freedom of the will. But that the will is free we have the testimony of our own consciousness. To come to Christ, to do our duty, in other words to be holy, consists in acts of will. Now to affirm an inability to will in any direction, in view of motives, is to affirm that as true which our consciousness teaches us to be false.

I might quote other passages that have been relied on to support the doctrine of inability, but have said enough to give the candid reader a clue to the right understanding of them all. And for the caviler I am not now writing.

IV. Why the agency of the Holy Spirit is employed in inducing obedience to the moral law.

1. The Bible represents Him as exerting his influence over the mind, by or through the presentation of truth to the mind. In other words, as exerting the influence of a divine moral suasion. 1 Pet. 1:22, 23: "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:" "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." James 1:18: "Of his own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures." John 17:17-- "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." In these and similar passages, we learn that the manner and kind of influence which He exerts, is that of persuasion and not of compulsion.

2. The thing which He is employed to do is not to make them able, but to induce in them a willingness, by a persuasive influence, to submit themselves to God.

3. With many, to deny a physical divine influence in regeneration, to deny that the Spirit of God is employed to make men able, and that He only employs his agency in persuading them to be willing, is to deny the divine agency altogether. What do they mean? I am afraid of these men. It seems as if they were determined to hide away themselves under the plea of inability, and to screen others under the same refuge of lies.

REMARKS.

1. To represent God as requiring impossibilities on pain of eternal death, is to hold up his character and government to irresistible abhorrence. Men are so constituted that, by an unalterable law of their reason, they affirm intuitively, irresistibly, and indignantly, that for any government, human or divine, to require natural or moral impossibilities is unjust and tyrannical. And until the very nature of man is altered, this must forever be the case. It has been publicly affirmed not long since, by a Doctor of Divinity in the Presbyterian church, that moral obligation did not imply any kind of ability whatever to do our duty. Now a more shocking and revolting contradiction of reason, common sense, and the Bible, could hardly be stated in words. Such statements are in exact accordance with the spirit and policy of the devil.

2. It has always been the policy of Satan to misrepresent the character and government of God. He prevails by false hood. He sustains his dominion in this world by gross misrepresentations of the character of God. It has always been of the greatest importance to him and his cause to deceive the Church and induce the leading minds to entertain and publish to the world, views of the character and government of God which are at war with reason and the Bible. He very early succeeded in this, under the Christian dispensation. And who that is acquainted with the opinions and dogmas of the Christian fathers, does not know that they very early began to inculcate the most absurd and revolting dogmas concerning the character and government of God. One of the leading minds among them could say of a certain doctrine, "It is absurd and therefore I believe it." In every age of the Christian Church, Satan has succeeded in influencing a certain class of minds to adopt and shamelessly avow, and zealously to inculcate dogmas as the truth of God, against which the very nature of man cries out with vehement indignation. And this many of them do not pretend to deny, but on the contrary boldly affirm it, and insist that the very nature of man must therefore be changed before he can love God. Instead of representing man as needing to have the voluntary state of his mind changed in respect to God, they represent him as needing to have his very nature changed, by a creative act of physical Omnipotence. And what sentiment can please the devil better than this?

3. When good but unlearned people have listened to such distorted misrepresentations of God and his government, they have hushed down their rising indignation under the impression that it was a mystery. They have piously

chided themselves for having a thought of the injustice and unreasonableness of such dogmas enter their minds. And oftentimes have they diverted their attention and found it indispensable to abstract their minds from the consideration of these dogmas, to prevent the rising remonstrances of their deepest nature, against the injustice of requiring of men natural or moral impossibilities on pain of eternal death.

4. It is remarkable to what extent unconverted but thinking men have become sceptical in view of such representations of the character of God. And ministers that maintain such sentiments are very little aware of the extent to which they preach their unconverted hearers into infidelity. Millions of souls have been ruined by the false representations of the character and government of God, which they have heard from the pulpits not only of notorious heretics, but multitudes of self-styled orthodox.

5. Since the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life has been so much and so pointedly insisted on, multitudes of ministers and others who have heretofore professed to believe and teach the doctrine of ability in every moral agent to do his whole duty, are retiring back to the ranks of those who deny the doctrine of ability. They see and acknowledge that the doctrine of entire obedience to the law of God, or in other words, of entire consecration and sanctification, is only the legitimate application of the doctrine of ability to all the conduct of Christians; that if men are able to obey God perfectly, there is no reason why they should not, nor any ground for the affirmation that they will not. But let not those brethren think to find a resting place, or an apology for sin under the doctrine of inability, for it is abundantly easy to show that of all the absurd doctrines that ever were broached, not one is more contrary to the Bible and to common sense, and more easily refuted than the doctrine of inability.

6. From what has been said it will be seen that the dependence of sinners and of Christians upon God is of such a nature as to afford no excuse whatever for their sins. If the doctrine of inability were true, and the Spirit of God were indispensable to make them able to do their duty, then their dependence would be an apology for their sins. Or what is still more proper to say, until the divine agency was granted, they could not begin to sin, inasmuch as sin must imply the power to be holy. But if, as has been shown, the sinner is able to obey, and the whole difficulty lies in his unwillingness to do his duty, and if the Spirit is employed only as a persuasive agency to induce a willingness to comply with

duty, it is abundantly plain that the sinner's dependence upon the Holy Spirit, affords him not the least shadow of excuse for ever having sinned or for ever indulging in another sin.

7. Until men are willing to confess their sins--that they are able but unwilling to obey God--until they are ingenuous enough to own that their difficulty does not lie in an inability but in a pertinacious obstinacy--until they perceive and allow that the Spirit is not needed to make them able, but only to overcome their voluntary rebellion, they have no reason to expect a divine influence, to lead them to Christ--but have every reason to fear that God will give them up to the agency of Satan, and send them strong delusion, and confirm them in the belief of inability, until they become so utterly blinded as that they cannot "deliver their souls, or say, have I not a lie in my right hand."

8. And now sinner, will you be as ingenuous and as courageous as were the Israelites when Joshua uttered the words of the text? If you read the connection you will see that they believed and avowed their belief that they could render to Jehovah an acceptable service. And when Joshua put the question plainly home to them, whether they would, that day, choose and enter upon the service of God, they rose up and signified their determination to serve Jehovah. And from the history of that generation, it is manifest that many of them, to say the least, were sincere and whole-hearted in the avowal of their purpose. Is it not time for you to decide? Will you become holy? Will you serve the Lord? Will you do it now? Answer in your inmost being, upon the spot. If you say no, or if you refuse to answer at all, remember that God may take you at your word; but if you say yes, and mean it, if you let your heart go with your words, your name shall be written in the "Lamb's book of life."

[Back to Top](#)

God Under Obligation to Do Right

Lecture IV

September 14, 1842

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Gen. 18:25: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

In discussing this subject I will show,

I. What is right.

II. What is implied in God's doing right?

III. That God is under a moral obligation to do right.

IV. That all moral beings are bound to be willing that God should do right.

V. What is implied in being willing that God should do right.

VI. That this state of mind is indispensable to salvation.

I. What is right?

Right expresses the moral quality of disinterested benevolence. Benevolence is good willing or willing the highest good of being. Disinterested benevolence is willing the good of being as an end, or for its own sake, or, in other words, on account of its intrinsic value. A thing is good, that is, naturally good, because it is valuable in itself.--Such, for instance, is happiness. Happiness is a good in itself, that is, it is valuable. Every moral being knows by his own certain knowledge, that happiness is valuable, is good. To will, therefore, the highest happiness or the highest good of being for its own sake, is benevolence. Benevolence, then, consists in willing according to the nature and relations of things. Reason universally affirms that to will thus, to will good for its own sake, to will it impartially or disinterestedly, or in other words, to will every good of every being according to its relative value, is right. Right is the term by which

we express the moral quality of disinterested benevolence. The terms right, virtue, holiness, &c., express the same thing. They denote the moral quality of disinterested benevolence or of that love that constitutes obedience to the law of God. Let it be understood, then, that disinterested benevolence is always right, and that nothing else is right, and that whatever is right or virtuous, is only a modification of disinterested benevolence. Nothing is virtue or right that is not in compliance with the law of disinterested benevolence.

II. What is implied in God's doing right?

Doing right in God, his nature and relations being what they are, must imply the doing of several things by Him that would not be implied in the case of any other being.

1. He is naturally able to do many things that no other being can do. For example: God alone possesses creative power. Benevolence in Him, therefore, implies not merely willing the good of beings already existing, but that He give existence to as many beings as He wisely can. The law of benevolence would certainly require of Him to exert his infinite attributes in the promotion of good. If He did not do so, his own conscience would condemn Him.
2. His nature and relations are such that benevolence in Him requires the establishment and due administration of moral government. He has created a universe of moral beings. The highest good of the universe demands that a moral government should exist. God is able to establish and administer a moral government. Doing right, therefore, in God implies the establishment and administration of a moral government over the universe.

The same is true of many other things which it is unnecessary to mention.

III. God is under a moral obligation to do right.

1. The scriptures represent God as a moral being.
2. If He is a moral being, He must be the subject of moral obligation.
3. If He were not under a moral obligation to do right, benevolence in Him would be no virtue. Indeed there could be to Him no such thing as right and wrong, unless He were under a moral obligation to do right. Doing right in

any being consists in complying with moral obligation. Right, virtue, holiness, &c., in any being, always implies moral obligation, for they are nothing else than a compliance with moral obligation. If God were not under a moral obligation, He could have no moral character. He could be neither praise nor blame-worthy. Nothing would be virtue nor praise-worthy in Him unless it sustained a relation to moral obligation.

4. Nothing could be wise or virtuous in God that is not demanded by the law of benevolence. If God should do any thing that was not required by the law of benevolence, it would be neither wise nor virtuous. If the creation of the universe were not required by the law of benevolence, then the act of creation was not virtuous. But it is impossible that the universe should not have been created in compliance with the law of benevolence. The evidences of a benevolent intention on the part of the Creator are so manifold in all the works of God as to render it certain that it was created in obedience to the law of benevolence, in other words, that the creation of the universe was an expression and a carrying out of the disposition of God to do good.

It is not intended that God was under an obligation to any one above Himself, for no such being existed. But his own self-existent nature is such that He is his own law-giver, and imposes obligation on Himself. His own reason eternally and intuitively affirms that He ought to be benevolent, that He ought to wield his own infinite attributes in the creation of beings and the promotion of their good. He is therefore under law to Himself, his reason and conscience always imposing moral obligation upon Himself. Compliance with this obligation in Him is virtue. A refusal would be vice.

5. In the text, Abraham assumes that God is under moral obligation to do right. God had informed Abraham that He was about to destroy Sodom. Abraham's reply was, "Perhaps fifty righteous persons shall be found therein. Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked. This be far from thee to destroy the righteous with the wicked. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Here Abraham plainly assumes that God was under a moral obligation to distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, and that He had no right to deal with them alike. Or in other words, Abraham assumes that it was the solemn duty of God to deal with the righteous and the wicked according to their respective characters--that to do so would be

right, and that not to do so would be wrong in God.

6. God does not resent this assumption of Abraham, that He was under a moral obligation, but most fully acknowledges it. He did not say to Abraham, How dare you assume and insinuate that I am the subject of moral obligation--that any thing is obligatory on me--that I can be called to the discharge of duty? He gave Abraham no such reproof as this, but freely and fully admits the assumption of Abraham and proceeds to give him to understand, that the Judge of all the earth would do right, and that He knew too well what was obligatory upon Him to consent to destroy the righteous with the wicked.

Some people seem to feel shocked at the supposition that God should be under moral obligation. But they may just as well be offended with the supposition that He has moral character. If He does not owe obedience to the law of benevolence, then benevolence in Him is not right. It is no virtue. If God is above law, He is above virtue. If He is above moral obligation, He is above having moral character, and above being praise or blame-worthy for any thing. The conviction has been many a time crowded upon my mind, that the religion of a great multitude of its professors, is mere superstition. They are shocked with any rational view of God's character. They are offended with his being represented as the subject of moral obligation. They seem not to know at all why He is praiseworthy, and if their view of the subject were true, He would not be praise-worthy. Multitudes of professors seem to praise Him for doing that which they suppose Him under no moral obligation to do. But if He were under no moral obligation to do it--if the law of benevolence did not require it at his hands, it were neither wise nor virtuous in Him to do it, and therefore for doing it He would deserve no thanks.

Whenever I see persons manifest a spirit of opposition to the idea that God is under law, is the subject of moral obligation, and that virtue in Him, as in all other beings, is only a compliance with the great law of benevolence, I know that the religion of such persons must be superstition. It cannot be that they have the true knowledge of God, of his character, relations, and government, and that they either praise or respect Him for any good reason. Their worshiping Him for such reasons as are in their minds, He must consider as injurious and insulting.

7. The Bible every where takes it for granted that right and wrong are as

applicable to God as to any other being, and that virtue in Him, as in every other being is a compliance with moral obligation.

Hence let me say again, that He is not, as we are, under obligation to one above Himself, for no such one exists. But He is under obligation to the law of benevolence as it is imposed on Him by his own reason.

Some seem to suppose that the reason why God cannot sin, is that He is above law, that his arbitrary will is law, and that whatever He wills or can will, must be right simply because his will is law. But such persons do not consider that if this theory is true, He can no more be holy than He can sin, for if there be not some rule of conduct obligatory upon Him, He has no standard of action, nothing with which to compare his own conduct, and can in fact have no moral character. Now the reason why God cannot sin, is not because He is naturally unable to sin, nor because selfishness in Him would not be sin. But it is said He cannot sin, because He is voluntarily holy, infinitely disposed not to sin.

IV. All moral beings are bound to be willing that God should do right.

If He is under a moral obligation to do right, no one can have any right to object to his doing right, for this would be absurd. It would imply the existence of contradictory rights or obligations--that God was under a moral obligation to do that which other beings were under a moral obligation to prevent if they could. It must be that whatever the law of benevolence requires of God, whatever the highest good of being demands that He should do, all moral beings are bound to be willing that He should do.

V. What is implied in being willing that God should do right?

1. It implies the love of right for its own sake.
2. It implies a willingness that He should require of all his subjects just what He does require. He never legislates without good reason. He has no right to do so, and never does enact any laws that are not required by the highest good of being. He therefore does nothing, more nor less, than to comply with his own duty, in requiring of every moral being just what He does. To be willing, therefore, that God should do right, is to be willing that He should require just what He does in all instances, and for the very reasons for which He requires it.

3. It implies a willingness to do whatever He requires. He requires of every one of you just what He ought to require, and if you are willing that He should do right, you are of course willing that He should require this of you. And if you are willing that He should require it, it must be that you are willing to do it.
4. Outward doing is necessitated by inward willing. Therefore a willingness that God should do right, implies the actual doing of whatever He requires of you, so far as you know it.
5. It implies a willingness in you that all events should be disposed of according to his sovereign pleasure--that He should send the finally impenitent to hell, for this is right--that He should send your own children, if they be finally impenitent, to hell, or that He should send you to hell, if the law of benevolence requires it at his hands. If the rule of right, if the highest good of the universe demanded that you be sent to hell, it is God's duty to send you there, and you have no right to object, but are bound to consent with all your heart.
6. It implies in you a spirit of perfect benevolence. No man is willing that God should in all things do right, who is not disinterestedly and perfectly benevolent.
7. It implies in you a spirit of the same uprightness that there is in God--that you love right as He loves it--that you are actuated by the same motives that actuate Him, and that in your measure you have the same regard to right that He has. In other words, a willingness that God should in all things do right, implies, in your measure, the same perfection of willingness that there is in God.

VI. This state of mind is indispensable to salvation.

1. Because nothing short of this state of mind can be virtue at all. If in any thing you are unwilling that God should do right, you are in rebellion against Him.
2. If in any thing you are unwilling that God should do right, it is impossible that for the time being you should have a supreme regard to what is right, or to the authority or will of God. So that there cannot possibly be any virtue or holiness in one who is unwilling that God should

in all things do right.

3. To be willing that God should in all things do right, is essential to happiness, and therefore indispensable to salvation. God will do right whether you are willing or not. If you consent to it and are joyful in it, you can be happy under his government. But if you are unwilling, He will do his duty without asking your leave, and however much it may fret or distress you.

4. His doing right will extend to all beings--to every one of you as well as to every body else. And if in any thing you are crossed or offended by his doing right, there is no remedy for it, for He will do it although it may be the means of destroying you forever.

5. All moral beings will know that God does right--that He does universally and perfectly right, and no one can prevent it. It is self evident that no one can be happy or saved, who is not supremely pleased with his doing universally and perfectly right.

REMARKS.

1. Strictly speaking there is no such thing as a work of supererogation in God or in any other being. By a work of supererogation is intended the doing of something that one was not of right under obligation to do, something not required by law. In morals, a work of supererogation would be something not required by the law of benevolence. Now if there were any such thing as a work of supererogation in God or any other moral being, it could not be benevolence or virtue. It could not be praise-worthy. If it were not required by the law of benevolence, it could be neither wise nor good. But if required by the law of love, it is not properly speaking a work of supererogation.

2. The common notion of the imputed righteousness of Christ, by which many maintain that the saints are to be saved, is a papal superstition. It has no foundation whatever in truth. The fact is that Christ did no more than to comply with the great law of universal benevolence. Both as God and man, his obligation to be universally and perfectly benevolent was complete. He did no more than under the circumstances was his duty to do--no more than the exigencies of the government of God required--no more than to comply with the great law of universal love. Had he done any thing more or less than this, it

would neither have been wise nor good.

3. Do not understand me to say that sinners would have any cause of complaint if He had not died for them. They had forfeited all claims to favor. So far as they were concerned, He might have visited upon them the penalty of the law. But to his own nature He owed the obligation of perfect benevolence. To Himself and to the virtuous universe he was under an obligation to make a sacrifice of Himself, if by so doing he could promote a greater good than the evil He suffered.

4. If there could be such a thing as a work of supererogation, that is, doing that which the law of benevolence did not require, such a work would be sin and not holiness.

5. The spirit of the law and of the gospel is identical--both require universal and perfect benevolence.

6. There is no proper distinction between law and equity. This distinction in morals has no foundation.

7. Strictly and properly speaking there is no distinction between what is lawful and what is expedient. And when Paul says, "All things are lawful for me but all things are not expedient," we are to understand him only as speaking in a general way, and not as designing to affirm that in the most proper sense a thing might be lawful, and yet not expedient. Expediency is that which, under the circumstances, is demanded by the highest good. But this is identically the spirit of the law. A thing may be contrary to the letter of the law which is expedient. But the spirit of the law requires that every interest should be treated according to its relative value--that of two evils, one of which is unavoidable, the least shall be suffered--that of two goods, but one of which can be secured, the greatest shall be preferred. The letter of the law and real expediency may be at variance. But the spirit of the law and true expediency are always identical.

8. There is no law of right separate from the law of benevolence. Justice is only a modification of benevolence. And nothing is just or right that is not in accordance with the law of benevolence. By justice and mercy nothing more is intended than benevolence acting in different relations--the end always being the same, the promotion of the highest good.

9. God sends the wicked to hell for the same reason for which he takes the

righteous to heaven, that is, in both cases He designs to promote the highest good. When sinners come into such relations that the highest good demands that He should send them to hell, He does so for that reason. And when the righteous come into such relations that the highest good demands that He should take them to heaven, He does so for that reason.

10. The Atonement and all that God does for the salvation of sinners, is done by Him in compliance with the great law of benevolence. Had it not been a compliance with duty, it would not have been virtue.

11. See from this subject what constitutes the sovereignty of God. Many persons seem to speak and think of the divine sovereignty as if it consisted in God's acting arbitrarily, without any regard to moral obligation--that in his sovereign acts He has no other reason than that so it seems good in his sight. They speak of his sovereignty as if He had no good reason for willing as He does, but that such is his pleasure, entirely irrespective of the reason why it is his pleasure. Now this is a most odious and injurious view of the character of God. God's sovereignty is and can be nothing else than benevolence acting independently. It consists in his doing his duty without asking the leave of any one. It consists in his doing right without let or hindrance from any one.

12. Those who are not pleased with the sovereignty of God when they rightly understand it, cannot be Christians. If they are not willing that God should consult his own wisdom and do what He regards to be his own duty, they are rebels and the enemies of God and of all good.

13. God will never punish the wicked to gratify any feelings of resentment, in the proper acceptation of the term. I suppose that the very nature of God demands that the finally impenitent should be punished. His reason affirms that he ought to be miserable who is wicked, and that therefore God could not consult the highest good, could not promote his own happiness, nor the happiness of holy beings, unless He acted in conformity with this affirmation of his own reason, and of the reason of every moral being, and inflicted merited punishment upon the incorrigibly wicked. If God is a moral being, as we have shown, we know from our own consciousness as moral beings, that from the laws of his very nature, his reason affirms the justice of inflicting punishment upon the wicked--that punishment and sin ought to go together, and that God cannot be satisfied with Himself, and holy beings cannot be satisfied with Him, unless He inflict punishment upon the finally impenitent. The highest good must

therefore demand that He punish the wicked. This is implied in what Abraham says: "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? This be far from thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Here it is as plainly implied as possible, that to punish the wicked is right.

14. Let it not be thought that God or any holy being has pleasure in the infliction of pain for its own sake. Misery never is and never can be regarded by a moral being as a good in itself. It can never be chosen for its own sake. It can never be chosen as an end by any moral being but only as a means of promoting the blessedness of the universe. Such is the nature of moral beings that they affirm by a law of their nature, over which they have no control, that sin deserves punishment, and that if sinners persevere in sin they must be punished. And although by a law of their own nature, they look upon misery as an evil in itself, yet under a moral government they look upon the punishment of finally impenitent sinners as a less evil than impunity in sin.

15. It should always be understood then that God punishes sinners for public reasons--the nature of moral beings being such that the realization of the idea of public justice is promotive of, and demanded by the highest happiness of the universe. For this reason and for this reason alone God punishes the finally impenitent.

16. For the same reason He forgives and saves the penitent, that is, to realize the idea of right, fitness, and public justice. Every thing considered, it is, upon the whole, best, reasonable, and right, in view of the atonement of Christ and the penitence of the sinner, that he should not suffer the penalty of the law, but that he should be forgiven and saved. Therefore in the salvation of the penitent sinner, public justice is not set aside, but in saving him, God goes upon the principle of public justice, that is, his so doing under the circumstances, is in the highest degree conducive of the public interests. Hence the Apostle John represents the salvation of the penitent as an act of justice. I John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

17. The law of right requires that God should punish the wicked as much and as long as the public good requires.

18. In a government that is to last throughout eternity, the punishment of sin must be endless, for very important and manifest reasons. There will need to be

under such a government, a steady, perpetual, and eternal monument upon which the nature, the demerit, the history and the results of sin shall be recorded. Truth is the great instrument of controlling mind. Let the history of the Temperance Reformation illustrate what I mean. Under a moral government, I suppose it was impossible for God to bring about the temperance reformation, until the nature and tendencies of the use of alcohol, could in some way be known. But when its nature was developed, its tendencies perceived, and its history written in the blood of millions of souls, there were then sufficient materials on hand, with which to assail it and crowd it back--shall I say to hell from whence it came? The monster intemperance, came up upon the length and breadth of the land, clad in a mantle of light. He found his way into every habitation, and smiled, and dealt out excitement, and deceived the nations. Alcohol was every where regarded as a friend. Its presence was deemed indispensable to health and happiness. It was prescribed by the physician almost as a catholicon. It was taken even by the clergy as an auxiliary in the discharge of their holy functions. All classes of persons supposed themselves to be blessed by it. And until it had destroyed its millions, so deep were its deceptive influences, that men could not be awakened to regard it as an enemy. But now its mask is off. It is known. Its history is written in blood, and who does not know that for the use of future generations this history is an indispensable safeguard? Should the present or any future generation succeed in banishing alcohol from the world, by exhibiting in every country its true history, who does not know that except these records be preserved, and the public mind kept sufficiently awake, that the same scenes will, in future, be acted over again, and that nothing can prevent so dire a catastrophe but the keeping in perpetual memory the nature, the history, and the results of using alcohol. As moral beings, it is impossible to preserve future generations of mankind from intemperance, but by the universal presence of information upon this subject. Now for the same reason that the history of alcohol will need to be kept in perpetual memory, for the same reason will the endless history of sin, in its details, and results need to be kept before the public mind. Something must be done that shall be a virtual penciling of the history of sin, in characters of light upon every part of the universe. The dealings of God with the impenitent must be such as to be the subject of eternal conversation and excitement throughout the whole universe. His dealings must be so public, and so perpetual as never to be forgotten. It must be a record that cannot but be read by every moral being. It must teach a thrilling and perpetual lesson to all moral beings in all worlds, as long as moral beings shall exist. And if at any time his

public dealings with sinners should cease and fall into forgetfulness, the impression would of course be done away upon the universe. And who can say that all the horrors of another apostacy from God would not be the result?

19. Those who are not willing that God should send the wicked to hell cannot be saved. If the execution of the sentence upon the finally impenitent will make them miserable they must be miserable.

20. None are willing that God should do right who do not do right themselves. This is self evident.

21. Unless doing right is supremely pleasing to you, you cannot be saved.

22. Anxious sinners are often distressed for fear God will do right. If they remain in sin God will certainly send them to hell. This would be right. This it would be his duty to do. But this is the cause of the sinner's anxiety. He fears God will do what He ought.

23. We see what true submission is. It consists in a willingness to have God do, in all things, with us and ours, through all the universe and to all eternity, just right--to dispose of all we have and are just as the highest good of the universe shall demand.

24. What a glorious consideration it is that the Supreme, Universal Judge of all the earth will do right. He cannot be mistaken. He cannot be bribed. He cannot be deterred. He cannot be prevented. He will never change. He will never cease to be. What a glorious consideration to be under the government of such a being.

25. If his providential designs are displeasing to you, you cannot be saved. He deals with you just as He does, because it is right, because, under the circumstances, the highest good of the universe demands it. Thus He will do without asking your leave. If you are pleased with it, it is well. If you are displeased, there is no help for you.

26. God is equally good in all He does, for the best of all reasons, that He has the same ultimate reason for all He does, namely, the highest good of the universe demands it. In other words, it is right.

27. He deserves as much praise, for sending the wicked to hell, as for taking the righteous to heaven. He deserves just as much praise for what are called his

judgments as for what are called his mercies, for sickness as for health, for death as for life, for hell as for heaven, for pestilence, earthquake, and tornado, under the circumstances in which they occur, as for their direct opposites under other circumstances. One law governs Him in all these things. One principle of action, one motive or intention accounts for the whole.

28. If He send any of you to hell, all heaven will be under an obligation to praise Him for it. If He send your companions or children to hell, you will be under obligation to praise Him for it. If he send your children or even yourself to hell, you will be under an eternal obligation to praise Him for it. It will always be true that He did it because it was right, because the public good demanded it, and it was therefore his duty to do it. He did it in compliance with the great law of perfect benevolence. And shall you not praise Him for being benevolent?

29. There is no good reason for being shocked at the idea, of God's being the subject of moral obligation, and acting in accordance with the dictates of law and of conscience.

30. Unless you are, according to your knowledge, as upright as God is, you are not willing He should do right, you are in rebellion against Him, and cannot be in a state of justification with God.

31. Sinners are so selfish that they would be saved at all events. Whether it would be right or wrong on the part of God to save them they neither consider nor care.

32. If God should save sinners, forgive their sins, and treat them as they desire Him to treat them, He would ruin the universe.

33. The prayers of impenitent sinners for forgiveness, are among the blackest sins in the universe. Nothing is more common than for impenitent professors of religion, and impenitent non-professors to pray that their sins may be forgiven. But to forgive their sins while they are impenitent, would not be right but infinitely wrong on the part of God. Such prayers are a virtual asking of God to commit a great sin, to abandon the public good, to ruin the universe for their sake. Let every one of you then remember that if you pray for forgiveness, when you do not repent and forsake your sin, you are guilty of the grossest insult to God, and of the highest rebellion against Him and his government.

34. Since the Atonement and in view of the promise of God, right is consistent

with, and demands your salvation if you accept of Christ. By this I do not mean that upon the principle of distributive justice you might not be justly punished. But I do mean that upon the principle of public justice, your salvation, upon these conditions, is consistent with, and demanded by the highest good.

35. Unless you comply with these conditions you must be damned, and all the holy will thank God for sending you to hell.

36. How sweet it is to think of God as the Judge of all the earth. And how deep and permanent is the consolation that in all things He will do right. Every holy being in all worlds, at all times, is ready to cry out, Let the Judge of all the earth do right. Amen and Amen.

[Back to Top](#)

Ordination

Lecture V

September 28, 1842

PREACHED AT THE ORDINATION OF FOURTEEN YOUNG MEN, AUG.
22, 1842.

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 Tim. 4:16: "Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."

In remarking upon these words I shall,

I. Point out some of the respects in which a minister should take heed to himself.

II. Some of the respects in which he should take heed to the doctrine he preaches.

III. Show what is intended by continuing in them.

IV. What we are to understand by the last clause of the verse, in so doing he

shall save both himself and them that hear.

I. Some respects in which a minister should take heed to himself.

1. He should not take heed to his own self-interest, as the great end of pursuit. If a minister gives himself up to look after his own interest instead of the interest of God, he will be worse than useless as a minister.
2. He should not take such heed to his reputation as to have his eye continually upon that, constantly raising the inquiry how such and such a thing will affect his reputation. With such a state of mind as this, the minister is a perfect slave to public sentiment rather than the freeman of Jesus Christ. There is scarcely a more hateful character under the sun, than a minister who is constantly taking heed to his own reputation, preparing his sermons, preaching them, and regulating all his movements with an eye to securing a reputation among men. This is a most detestable state of mind, and renders a man worse than useless.
3. Nor should a minister take heed to his own ease. If ministers are afraid of wearing themselves out, afraid to lay out their strength for God--if they are indolent, effeminate, and self indulgent, they are never like[ly] to be of any use to men, nor any honor to God.
4. Ministers should not take such heed to themselves as to indulge any form of selfishness. Selfishness is the direct opposite of holiness, and cannot co-exist in the same heart with holiness. If, therefore, a minister should not be totally depraved, he should not indulge any form of selfishness: but,
5. Ministers should take heed to the motives by which they are actuated in entering upon the great work of the ministry. Be careful, brethren, that you make no mistake on this point. See that your eye is single to the glory of God--that disinterested benevolence be the actuating principle of your life. Unless your eye is single, and your intention supremely and disinterestedly benevolent, you are ungodly men, and have no business in the ministry. Take heed then that you are truly converted men--not merely convicted sinners, but regenerate men, men whose hearts are right with God, and whose great motive in entering the ministry is to glorify God in the salvation of men. Remember if you are not converted men when you enter the ministry, you are almost certain to go to hell yourselves, and, so far as

you have influence, to take your hearers with you. And remember too that it is altogether too common, for it to be taken for granted on all hands that ministers are really converted men, I must say, and dare not say less, that every year's experience and observation forces upon me more and more the conviction that it is becoming alarmingly common in these days of pressing so many young men into the ministry, for multitudes to enter upon that sacred office who are not truly regenerate men. We have had, in this place, instances, not a few, of your men coming to this Institution to prepare for the ministry, who have turned out to have no religion at all--have been here convicted and for the first time converted--young men who had been supposed in Churches from which they came, and by which they were recommended, not only to be truly converted men, but your men of more than common piety, and promising candidates for the Christian ministry. And but for those powerful revivals in this Institution which broke up their delusions, numbers of them would no doubt have been this day, in all their sins, engaged in the sacred office of the ministry. Take heed then to yourselves, brethren, that you know what it is to be born of God, and that you know what it is to have an eye single to his glory in entering upon this sacred work.

6. Take heed that you are called of God in this work. And let me beseech you not to treat the subject of a special call to the ministry lightly, and as an antiquated notion no longer to be heeded. You are not to take it for granted that Christ has called you to the work of the ministry because He has called you into his kingdom. But let your mind be well satisfied that it is the will of God, that you should be separated to the work of the gospel ministry. You should be as well satisfied of this as you are that you are converted.

If you ask how you are to obtain this evidence, I answer from the indwelling [S]pirit of God. If you ask again whether you are to give yourself up to be directed by impulses, I answer, No. You are in nothing to be directed by impulses, but by the sober dictates of your judgments in respect to the path of duty. If God really calls you to the ministry, you will hear his voice; for if He does not call loud enough so that you can hear Him, you have no right to go. If He designs you for a minister of the gospel, He will give you such views of Himself, of the worth of souls, of the great importance of your engaging in this work; in short He will give such an inclination to your mind as to fasten the conviction upon you that it is his voice, and that He calls you

to preach the gospel. Men may call you to the ministry, but consent thou not except God call thee. Too many young men already have been called of men, and what are they doing in the Church but increasing its sectarianism, and grasping after power. We want God-made ministers. Take heed then to yourselves, I beseech you, brethren. See to it that God puts you into the ministry.

7. Take heed that you are especially anointed by God to this great work, and do not confound a call to the ministry with the anointing to the work. Christ's disciples were called to the work long before they were specially anointed and endued with power from on high for its effectual prosecution. Remember conviction is one thing. Regeneration is still another. A call to the ministry is distinct from both. And a special anointing to the work of which I am speaking, is another, and a gift distinct, and by itself. The peace of the gospel, the rest of faith, and communion with God, are entirely distinct from that power from on high with which a minister needs to be clothed to be efficient in his work. A man may be truly pious, ardently so, and know what it is to live and walk with God, without that spirit of power which a minister needs to make his words cut like a two edged sword. Indeed the grand distinction between efficient and inefficient ministers consists more in this than in any thing and every thing else. A man may be learned and pious, and yet inefficient as a minister. He may be unlearned, in the common acceptation of the term, yet with a special anointing for the work, he may be a most efficient minister. I beseech you, then, let this be well settled in your mind, that unless you take heed to be anointed with a special anointing of the Holy Spirit to this work, you will do but little good, and that if we hear from you at all, it will be barely that you are doing pretty well, but that there is nothing special under your ministry. Brethren, you ought to have such an anointing that whenever you open your mouth to preach, the people will feel that you are sent of God. You ought to know that there is such a thing as that. If you are anointed to the work, your hearers will feel that you speak with authority and with power. And by power I do not mean vociferation and noise, but that your words will be sharp, like a two edged sword.

8. Take heed that you give yourselves wholly to the work. Remember if you are called to the ministry, that this is a labor by itself. And that you are not to be diverted from this work without being plainly directed by God. And

here let me warn you against being lightly drawn aside to engage in agencies for benevolent societies and objects. I say lightly, because I suppose it is sometimes true that Christian ministers may be devoted to the performance of some particular branch of Christian reform. But I have long been persuaded that it is a very serious thing for a minister to leave the direct work of preaching the whole gospel, for the purpose of engaging in an agency that will confine him almost exclusively to some one department of religious truth. One of the evils of such a course is to beget in his mind a monstrous development of that particular truth. He soon loses the symmetry and proportion of a Christian man, becomes too much a man of one idea, loses sight, in a great measure, of other branches of reform, and is in danger of becoming censorious, towards all others in whose minds there is not the same monstrous development of that particular truth. This is a dangerous state of mind, exceedingly injurious to his own piety and usefulness, and dangerous to the Church of God. Such men are found not unfrequently to be loudly denunciatory in respect to all Christians and ministers who are not swallowed up, as they are, in that particular branch of reform. They go up and down through the Churches lecturing, making their particular topic a test question, and measuring every thing and every body by the importance they attach to the particular branch of reform in which they are engaged. To them it appears that no body else is doing any good--that nothing else is at the present time of much importance, and that little or nothing can be done for the salvation of the world, until that particular branch of reform is perfected. These brethren seem not at all aware of the state of mind in which they are. They seem not to consider that they have so long dwelt upon the bearings and influence of one branch of reform, that it has in their mind grown out of all proportion as compared with other branches of Christian reform. I beseech you, brethren, take heed lest you come to be among the number of those of whom I am speaking. Do not understand me as speaking against agencies or agents, for no doubt these agencies need to be prosecuted. But I would earnestly warn you against being drawn away from the whole work of the ministry to engage in them, without a manifest call from God. And if you should be called to engage in them, I beseech and warn you to be on your guard against the tendencies of which I have been speaking. Without being at all aware of it, many of the lecturers of different societies have diffused a very unhappy spirit through the Churches, and wherever they go, they seem to plant a root of bitterness, and

to get up a kind of faction, and to embitter the minds of certain classes of professors of religion against the Church in general, and the ministry, and in short against all who have not a single eye to that particular department of reform.

9. Take heed to yourselves that you are studious men. Do not suppose that you can run about without study or reflection during the week--that you can engage in light reading and frivolous conversation, and, for any length of time, interest your people on the Sabbath. You must be deeply studious men. You must think much, think correctly, see that you are master of every subject, before you present it to your people. By this I do not intend that you should neglect pastoral visitation, and other parochial duties than preaching, but I do mean that your people will never be truly benefited by your taking so much time for visitation or other duties as to neglect thorough study. A good minister must be a student.

10. Take heed that you do not encumber yourselves with unnecessary cares. Take upon your hands no business or labor that shall interfere with your high calling. Many ministers, no doubt, with the sincerest intention to do good suffer many responsibilities to be thrown upon them which greatly hinder them in the main work to which they are called. They will undertake to board and prepare your men for college, or engage in society matters, and allow the lay brethren to throw upon them many things of a secular nature, to which the laymen should themselves attend, which greatly hinder them in the work of the ministry. Indeed some ministers seem to take upon them the work not only of the ministry, but also of the elders, in looking after the delinquents in the Church--of the deacons in looking after the poor--of the sexton in seeing that the bell is rung and the house in order for worship. In short, some ministers seem to be minister, and session, and deacon, and chorister, and sexton, and trustees, and almost every thing else that has any care and responsibility attached to it. In this way they wear themselves out with doing a little of every thing and yet nothing to any advantage.

11. Take heed that you do not encumber yourselves with an unsuitable companion for a wife. See that you do not unite yourself with a worldly woman, one who is fond of dress, or property, or worldly society. If you do, she will greatly injure your influence, if not entirely ruin it.

12. Take heed that you do not get an ambitious wife. If you do, she will never prevail for you in prayer. She will be constantly instituting comparisons between you and other ministers--will be envious and jealous lest other ministers should be more highly esteemed than you are--and will be a trouble to you, a disgrace to herself, and to the Church of God. If you have an occasion to employ an evangelist to labor with you, she will be right in the way. She will be on tiptoe, lest you should be thrown into the shade, and the evangelist should be exalted above you in the estimation of the people. If his labors should be blessed among your people, she will be thrown into an agony, lest it should be thought that her husband is not the great instrument of performing the work.

13. Take heed that you do not get a self-indulging wife, one who is afraid of self-denial, afraid of being poor, afraid to work herself or have you work hard for the good of souls. Some minister's wives are always afraid of trouble, of labor, of poverty, of care--so much afraid their husbands will over work themselves as to be always right in their way. Take heed to yourselves that you become not united to such a woman as this.

14. Take heed that you do not get an indiscreet wife. By indiscretion I mean imprudence. Many women as well as many men, seem to lack common sense as to what and when they should speak. Indiscretion in a minister's wife is often a source of much trouble in a congregation. Should the providence of God lead you to marry, choose a wife who is naturally discreet and heedful of the use of her tongue.

15. Take heed that you do not get an incompetent wife--one whose education is in any respect so defective as to be an unsuitable companion for you. By education here, I mean not only school learning, but let her be also what a wife and a housekeeper needs to be.

16. And above all take heed that you do not get a woman of superficial piety. The wife of a faithful minister will naturally have great trials. In a world like this, a faithful minister must meet with great opposition. And from the Church, in its present state, he may expect opposition, as well as from the world. His wife must share it with him. Take heed then, brethren, that you obtain a wife for whom grace has done so much that she can stand the shock of opposition without being intimidated on the one hand and made angry on the other.

17. Take heed that you have a thorough experience of the power of the gospel in your own souls. Do not preach Christ by hearsay. Your preaching will take very much of the character of your Christian experience. If you have but very superficial experience of the grace of the gospel, you will, almost of course, preach a very superficial gospel. If you know but little of the power of Christ working in you, you will convey to your hearers but a faint impression of what the gospel really is. I have long been convinced that the grand defect of the Christian ministry in the present day, is the want of a thorough Christian experience. They judge of the power of the gospel by their own Christian experience. Their opinions and preaching manifest the most deplorable deficiency in this respect. Much that has been written and said by them of late against the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life, shows that they have very little experience of the power of Christ working in them to deliver them from sin. I say it with the utmost kindness, yet for the cause of truth, and the benefit of the Church, it ought and must be said, that, the great difficulty in the way of ministers understanding, and believing the doctrine of entire sanctification lies in a defective Christian experience. When they come to be filled with the Spirit, they will soon get over their philosophical difficulties and embrace and declare the truth upon this subject as it is. But with so superficial a Christian experience, as many of them manifestly have, they will neither understand nor believe it, and should they embrace it as a matter of theory, it might only bring them into deeper condemnation, without benefiting the Church or themselves. Ministers that preach Christ from hearsay, as a mere matter of learning, without a thorough experience of the power of the cross to deliver from sin, often remind me of the seven sons of Sceva the priest, who undertook to exorcise evil spirits "in the name of Christ whom Paul preacheth." "And the evil spirit cried out, Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are ye?" "And the man in whom the evil spirit was, leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded." So ministers are easily overcome by Satan, who know little of Christ except by hearsay. Therefore take heed to yourselves, brethren, that you have a thorough and personal acquaintance with Christ and the power of his gospel.

18. Take heed that you realize your dependence upon Christ. Remember that He has expressly told you, that except you abide in Him, you can do

nothing, but that if you abide in Him you shall bring forth much fruit. Do not depend upon your education, upon your eloquence, or the strength of your intellect. Remember that the eloquence of an angel would not effect the conversion of a sinner nor the sanctification of a saint. And did you possess the intellectual endowments of an angel, without Christ you could do nothing. Take heed that your dependence upon Christ be not a mere matter of theory, without being realized and felt by you. Let it be with you a settled matter of fact, as much as it is that you cannot rise and fly to the clouds, that without the power of Christ dwelling in you and working through you, you will never convert a sinner nor effect the sanctification of a saint. Let this be so thoroughly settled in your mind, that you no more expect to live without Christ constantly dwelling in you, than you expect to live without your daily food--that you make no more calculation upon neglecting Christ or upon doing any thing without Him, than you would calculate upon living without your daily food.

19. Take heed to yourselves that you do not neglect much secret prayer. Unless you are in the habit of coming to your people from the mount of communion, you will do them little or no good. Pray much or you will cease to pray at all. Pray honestly. Pray earnestly. Pray perseveringly. Pray in faith. Pray effectually. Pray in the Spirit. Pray without ceasing, or you will cease to pray at all.

20. Take diligent heed that you grieve not the Holy Spirit of God. Remember, that in every stage of your ministry you are in danger of doing this. If you grieve away the Holy Spirit, you are a withered branch, a cast away minister--laid aside as useless, and only live to swell the number of unprofitable ministers who are seeking in vain for a field of labor, and inquiring in vain for a vacant Church, and who are so manifestly without the Spirit of God, that were all the Churches in the land vacant they would still be out of employment. Were this the place, I might enumerate the many ways in which, as ministers, you are in danger of grieving the Holy Spirit of God, and coming into such an attitude that, as a minister, God must disown you. I can only mention in general this--take heed that you do not array yourselves against any branch of Christian reform. If you do the Spirit of God will leave you. It matters little with what pretense you do this, if so be that light is within your reach. If you array yourselves against the efforts of those who are endeavoring to reform the Church and the world, or stand

aloof and refuse to come up to their help, you may expect the Spirit of Christ to leave you. So well is this settled in my own mind, from my observation of facts, that when I see a minister get on to the wrong side, and array himself against any branch of Christian reform, I expect of course that his ministry will be barren, and his soul in darkness whether he knows it or not, until he repents and lays his hand to the work of universal reform.

21. Take heed that you rule your own spirit. "He that ruleth his own spirit is greater than he that taketh a city." If a minister cannot govern his temper he is like[ly] to do very little good in the world. And it is the curse of many ministers that they give way to passion and often manifest ill temper. Take heed that in this respect you are not in fault.

22. Take heed to yourselves that you govern your tongue. Few things in the world do so much mischief as an unbridled tongue in the mouth of a minister.

23. Take heed to yourselves that you preach out of the pulpit as well as in it—that your whole demeanor out of the pulpit shows that you mean what you say when you are in the pulpit. If this be not so, though you may be called a grand preacher, you will, nevertheless, be a bad minister. It has been said of some ministers that when they were in the pulpit it seemed as if they never ought to go out, and when they were out it seemed as if they never ought to go into the pulpit.

24. Take heed that you be in all things an example to the flock. Do not content yourselves with preaching well, but do well whatever you do. Always be punctual to the hour and moment of your appointments. Never be late at meeting. Never be behind hand with any of your engagements. If you have a house, a garden, a barn, a fence, or whatever you have, see that it is in order just as it ought to be.

25. Take heed to yourselves that you seek not ecclesiastical power. Be not among those who are endeavoring to concentrate ecclesiastical power, and who through the influence of Presbyteries, Synods, Associations, Consociations, Conferences, and Councils, are endeavoring to "lord it over God's heritage." Such ministers are a curse to the Church. Where do you know one of them who possesses the Holy Ghost? Not one of this class seems to be promoting the peace and purity of the Church, or the salvation

of the impenitent. Now mark me, brethren, avoid this or you will grieve away the Holy Spirit. It is no doubt one of the reasons why ministers of the present day are so barren. There are so many efforts among them to grasp at ecclesiastical power. I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you keep clear of this shameful business.

26. Take heed to yourselves that you avoid schisms. You know, brethren, that the Church is bleeding at every pore under the influence of sectarianism, and what is most shocking and revolting is, that ministers are shamelessly apologizing for sectarianism, and even glory in promoting it. Presbyterians exhorting their people to be consistent Presbyterians, and Baptist ministers exhorting their brethren to be consistent Baptists, and Methodist ministers exhorting theirs to be consistent Methodists. Congregationalists, Episcopalians, and Papists, engaged in the same work, while comparatively little is said to induce them to be consistent Christians.

27. Take heed that you be not vain. Vanity is a besetting sin of many persons. And scarcely any thing is more disgusting or wicked than vanity in a minister. And it is wonderful to witness the extent to which even ministers sometimes indulge vanity. Their affected pronunciation--their mincing--their gestures--their attitudes--and the whole costume of their services and pulpit address, as well as their manners and habits out of the pulpit, testify to their insufferable vanity. Their egotism and constant efforts in seeking adulation and flattery, in angling for compliments upon their services and talents, all conspire to render them odious and ridiculous in the estimation of thinking men, and of God.

28. Take heed to yourselves that you be not flattered. It is the sin and curse of many churches and congregations, that they spoil their ministers by flattering them. They compliment them about their splendid sermons, their profound learning, their great eloquence, and even sometimes go so far as to compliment them on account of the elegance of their personal appearance. Ministers are often very little aware how much they are influenced by such things. I have sometimes thought it was the policy of the devil, and have not been without my fears, that it was the policy of certain leading members of churches and congregations, to tie the hands of ministers by flattering them. Every one knows how difficult it is to willingly disoblige or thoroughly to reprove or rebuke one who has been so

much our friend as to often express his approbation of what we have said or done. We come insensibly to feel that the approbation of such a one is of great importance to us, and to have an eye in what we say and do to the manner in which it will affect him. Now, brethren, if you suffer yourselves to be flattered by your hearers, you will find yourselves unwilling to deal faithfully with them. They will soon come to be your dictators, and to lay down rules by which you shall preach, instead of your laying down rules by which they shall live. They will become your masters instead of your spiritual pupils. Do not forget that you are much more in danger of being overcome by flattery, than you are of being put down by direct opposition. Flattering ministers is especially the sin of city churches.

29. Take heed to yourselves that you do not become enslaved by the influence of your ministerial brethren. I have, for years, beheld, with great pain, the growing influence of ministers over each other, and have often thought that I knew of no set of men so servile in this respect as ministers. They form themselves into ecclesiastical bodies, and then either flatter or brow-beat each other until one or two leading minds, in an ecclesiastical body, will lord it over all the rest, and thus there is a Pope in nearly every ecclesiastical body in the land--one, who, by flattery or abuse, or great talents, will come to have an almost unlimited influence over his ministerial brethren. Where there happen to be two or more such minds in an ecclesiastical body, it will almost infallibly work division, and the body will either be torn asunder, or live in a state of almost perpetual jangling.

Ministers will often flatter each other in such a manner as to become exceedingly afraid of displeasing each other. It is becoming common for the ministers in a city, town, or region of country, so to unite themselves together, as that one dares not adopt any measure, preach any doctrine, or pursue any course, without the consent of his brethren. And sometimes they really seem to be slaves to each other, and not to have the moral courage, to act independently upon any question of moment. Let me beseech you by the mercies of God that you avoid all such things as these.

30. Take heed to yourselves that you become not censorious. Censoriousness, when viewed as a state of mind, is a disposition to censure and impute blame to persons. It often manifests itself in an unwillingness to receive any such explanation of an action or course of conduct, as will show

that there was no wicked intention in it. I have observed that many persons who complain much of the censoriousness of others, are themselves exceedingly censorious--will take up an evil report of a brother, and publish it, and afterwards refuse to receive and publish an explanation, being manifestly intent upon fastening blame upon one, whose conduct they have misrepresented. A censorious spirit often manifests itself also in a disposition unnecessarily to publish a brother's faults; also, in a harsh and intolerant manner of speaking of others. I beseech you to take heed to yourselves in this respect, lest you grieve the Spirit of God, and render yourselves useless as ministers.

31. Take heed to yourselves that you preserve a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man. If in any thing you violate your conscience, you, in that proportion, lose your confidence in God, and in yourself, cover your own face with confusion, and tie your own hands, so as to prevent your fearlessly attacking sin in high and low places.

32. Take heed that you cultivate a tender conscience. Your preaching will be of a very superficial character so far as reaching the hearts of men is concerned, unless you cultivate a tender conscience. If your own conscience is asleep, you will be very ignorant of your own spiritual state and of the spiritual state of those around you. You will be blind to the existence of many forms of sin, both in yourself, and in those to whom you preach. But if you cultivate and secure a tender conscience, it will render you sharp sighted in respect to sin both in yourself and others, and tend to give that searching character to your preaching, which is imperiously demanded by the state of the Church and of the world.

33. Take heed that you fear not man, whose breath is in his nostrils, who, when he has killed the body, has no more that he can do. But fear God, who hath power to cast both soul and body into hell. Yea, I say unto you, fear Him. Many ministers are afraid of men, and dare not embrace nor preach the whole truth, without seeming to be at all aware of their being in this state of mind. They seem to think themselves fearless in the discharge of their duty, when, at the same time, it would throw them into a desperate agony, to know that in rebuking sin, they had offended certain men in their congregation. Insomuch that they would set about immediately qualifying, explaining away, and apologizing for what they had done until they had

neutralized the truth, rather than offend man.

34. Take heed to yourselves that you be not rash. Some ministers are exceedingly rash and hasty in forming and expressing their views and opinions on almost every subject--are precipitate and unguarded in their measures--are stiff and stubborn in the positions they take, and can never be long employed as ministers in any one place. They will almost always leave their people in a divided state. This may be true of a minister who thoroughly does his duty, and nothing more. But it may be, and often is owing to downright rashness and indiscretion in the minister. Not long since, a young minister observed to an elderly one, that "he was determined to drive the devil out of the Church to which he was preaching." The aged man replied, "See that you do not attempt to cast out the devil through Beelzebub the prince of devils, and act yourself like the devil in banishing him from your place." Ministers should always take heed that in opposing Satan, they do not come to possess his spirit.

35. Take heed that you hold not the truth in unrighteousness. Remember that you do this whenever you preach what you do not practice. Remember that the "wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness." They hold the truth in unrighteousness, who know what it is, hold and admit, yet do not obey it. And no man is more guilty in doing this, and more sure to have the wrath of God revealed against him from heaven, than the minister, who preaches the gospel and does not obey it.

36. Take heed to yourselves that you hold your entire being in a state of entire and universal consecration to God. Remember that you are called to the work of the ministry. You are about to be set apart by the laying on of hands, and now request us to ordain you to this work in the name of Jesus Christ. And now take heed to yourselves that when we consecrate you to this work, that you consent with all your heart, and here consecrate your whole being to the work. And take heed that you do not at any time desecrate from this service, a precious moment of your existence. Remember that you are God's ministers, set apart by prayer and the laying on of hands. And what is more than all, by the Holy Ghost, to the work of the "ministry of reconciliation."

II. In what respects you are to take heed to the doctrine.

1. Be sure you have a thoroughly developed idea of what constitutes true religion. Nothing is more common than for ministers and people to make a mistake here. It is truly astonishing to see how almost universal the opinion seems to be, that religion consists in emotion and mere feeling, instead of consisting in disinterested good willing. Where ministers preach, and pray, and talk, as if they supposed religion to consist in mere feeling, they preach any thing but the gospel, and give any thing but a correct representation of what constitutes true religion. The thing I wish to impress upon you here, my brethren, is that you have in your own mind, a correct, and thoroughly developed idea of what true religion is, as distinguished from every thing else--that it consists in the supreme ultimate intention of the mind, and not at all in feelings or outward actions, only as these result necessarily from right intention or good willing.

2. Take heed that you thoroughly develop this idea in your hearers. Observe narrowly their daily walk, to see whether they are benevolent. Mark their prayers and conversation, that you may understand whether they distinguish between a religion of feeling and of outward action, and a religion of supremely disinterested benevolent intention. See whether their religion is a religion of sound principle, or consists only in the occasional effervescence of excited feeling. I am more and more astonished every year, to find how few professors understand what true religion is.

3. See that you do not LOSE the idea of true religion, nor suffer those to whom you preach to lose it. Remember that selfishness is so rife in this world, and there are so many forms of selfishness that look very much like benevolence, that persons are in the utmost danger of letting slip the true idea of religion.

4. Take heed that you understand the whole gospel. Do not confound it with the law, nor suppose that it does not embrace the law. I beseech you to understand thoroughly the distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, and keep these distinct in your own minds. Understand what is intended by a religion of works, and what is intended by grace. Never confound these in your preaching or conversation. Never leave this distinction out of view; for if you do, you will promote legality on the one hand, or antinomianism on the other.

5. Take heed that you preach the whole doctrine of the gospel. Many ministers seem able to preach sinners under conviction, but can go no farther. They can make sinners see their sins, but cannot tell them how to get rid of them. Others still can tell sinners how they may be forgiven, but cannot tell Christians how they may be sanctified. And here let me say, brethren, that with very few exceptions, the standard of religious experience in your congregations, will not be above your own standard. Here and there the Spirit of God may lead a praying soul into regions so far above you, as to be a source of annoyance to you. You will look upon them to be verging strongly to ultraism, and to be a little inclined to derangement. But as a general thing, the members of your churches will not rise above your standard. If you are yourselves spiritual children, dwarfs, or skeletons, so they will be. You must be qualified to preach to them the higher doctrines of grace, and to preach them from your own experience, or you can do them comparatively little good.

6. Take heed that you live out the doctrine of Christ. Remember that the doctrine of the gospel is not taught merely in the pulpit. It is often most emphatically and impressively taught out of the pulpit by the temper, spirit, and life of a disciple.

7. Take heed to the doctrine that you avoid looseness in your statements. Many persons seem to consider but very little the importance of a sound and strictly correct phraseology in stating the truths of the gospel. Loose, unguarded statements, and expressions in prayer, preaching, and conversation, will soon be instrumental in begetting in the minds of your hearers a loose indefinite and unintelligent manner of thinking, and consequently a lax manner of living. You cannot be too much on your guard in this respect. On all doctrinal questions, be sure to be strictly accurate in the use of such language, as will convey exactly the right idea of the doctrine, and then sound your hearers in every way within your power, to see whether they get the true meaning of your language. Criticise their prayers and phraseology, if you perceive it to be loose and indefinite, until you correct it. Remember that your great business is to develop correct ideas of religion in the minds of your hearers. This also is the work of the Holy Ghost, and you can be no farther a co-worker with Him, than you use "sound speech," and are correct in your statements of the doctrine of the gospel. It is amazing that many divines, who call themselves New School,

after all, consent to use, and suffer their people to use Old School phraseology. They often preach, and talk, and pray, as if they supposed human nature to be in itself sinful, and regeneration to be a physical change, and wrought by a physical influence. They hold the doctrine of ability, and yet preach, talk, and pray, as if they believed in inability. Indeed, many of them seem to study to use Old School phraseology, lest they should shock the prejudices of the people, when in truth they do not mean by this phraseology what they are understood to mean, and what the language naturally imports. It is wonderful that many ministers are even contending for the use of Old School phraseology, while they reject Old School opinions. They seem to expect to correct the opinions of men, while they studiously use a phraseology, the meaning of which has become stereotyped in the minds of the people. They will find it forever impracticable to correct the opinions of the people only as they correct their phraseology. They must use different words or they will not convey different ideas.

8. See that you understand the true spirit and meaning of the law of God. The real intent and meaning of the law is that every interest is to be regarded and treated by every moral being according to its relative value, so far as that value can be understood by the mind. Now, brethren, remember that this is the rule and the only rule of action for moral beings. It is the sum of the law of God. It is of universal application. The rule is plain, and your business is to make an application of it, and to show how it is to be applied to every concern of life. Remember, brethren, there is a vast want of practical preaching. You may preach faith and repentance, and repentance and faith, sanctification, consecration, or whatever you choose to call it, but unless you descend in the detail, into the practical application of the law of love to all the concerns of life, you will leave your people after all to blunder on under the influence of many gross and injurious mistakes.

9. Take heed, that you do not leave out of view either the rule or law of love in all its detailed applications to the concerns of life on the one hand, nor on the other, the efficient influence by which obedience to this rule is to be secured. If you present Christ, and leave the law out of view, you will promote antinomianism. If you present the law and leave Christ out of view, you will promote legality. These two great truths must always be presented in such a manner, as to keep thorough possession of the mind. The law is

the rule of life, but it is weak and inefficient in itself in promoting obedience. The mind is able to apprehend and perceive the meaning, propriety, and importance of the law; but its motives are inadequate to secure in man, since the fall, the love which is required. The love of Christ, his Atonement, the divine influence of the Spirit, secured to man through the Atonement, are the great and efficient truths, that are able to secure obedience. Christ as the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption of the soul, must constantly be held up, as the indispensable means of securing conformity to the law of love.

10. See that you preach a full gospel. Do not satisfy yourselves, my brethren, with the mere conversion of sinners. Aim at the entire and universal sanctification of saints. Preach a gospel suited to this end. Show what is "the length, and breadth, and height, and depth of the love of God," and that he "is able and willing to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think." Preach not justification merely, but sanctification, in all its length and breadth.

You ought to understand, brethren, that the doctrine of justification by faith, as it is now generally held by the orthodox churches, is a modern invention, and was unknown to the ancient church. It is this, that men are justified by faith in Christ, while they are not sanctified. In other words, that faith is so substituted for holiness, that they are accounted as righteous, while in fact they are not so, but are living in the daily and hourly practice of sin.

The doctrine of the primitive Church was, that men are made righteous by faith. In other words, that they are sanctified, or made holy, by faith, and that they were justified only so far as they were made just by the grace of God through faith. Now this must be the truth. And take heed to the doctrine, brethren, that you do not convey the idea, that men are justified while living in sin.

III. What is intended by continuing in them.

The Apostle says, "Take heed to thyself and to the doctrine; continue in them: for in so doing, thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee."

By continuing in them is meant, the continuing to take heed to yourself and your doctrine. Do not take it for granted, that if for some time, or for any length of

time, God shall be with and bless you, that He will therefore always do so, whether you continue to take heed to yourself and to the doctrine, or not. Remember that if at any time, or under any pretense, you neglect to take heed to yourself and to the doctrine, to continue in them, He will cast you off. "Therefore be not high-minded, but fear."

IV. Show what is intended by the phrase, "In so doing, thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."

1. This may be understood either as a declaration or a promise. It may be regarded either as a declaration, that those who take heed to themselves and their doctrine, shall save both themselves and their hearers, or as a promise that upon this condition, such shall be the result.

2. The language is general and not universal. We are not to understand the Apostle as affirming strictly a universal truth, that all who hear such a minister shall be saved. Judas listened to Christ, who certainly took heed to Himself and to his doctrine, and yet he was not saved. But he lays it down as a general truth, that upon this condition ministers shall not only be saved themselves, but shall be instrumental in saving their hearers. There may be exceptions among their hearers, as there was one exception among the immediate disciples of Christ. But these shall only be exceptions to a general rule.

3. This passage of scripture is the faithful minister's strong hold. It is his consolation amid his trials, his strength and his support. Let him but persevere in the fulfillment of the condition, and the result is as certain as the truth of God. Here let me say, there is often a great mistake among ministers, on account of our limited views of things. Sometimes, in inculcating the truths of the gospel, it seems to us for a time, that the people are waxing worse and worse. We become greatly discouraged and are ready to abandon the field, as if the people were given up of God, when a more extended and correct view of the subject would show, that at the moment when things looked most dark and discouraging, the way is rapidly preparing for a general and glorious change among the people. Be not stumbled by appearances. Keep hold of this and kindred promises, and if the people wax rebellious and resist the truth, hold on in mighty prayer and effort, and press them still the more, and you will see the salvation of God. I have often seen great changes take place in a most wonderful manner in the

midst of the most discouraging appearances, and doubt not that ministers often quit the field in despair, just at the time when mighty faith and prayer would have secured the blessing.

REMARKS.

1. Remember that you are to exercise faith in this and kindred promises--to expect the salvation of your hearers as much as your own salvation--to plead the promise of God in respect to them, as well as in respect to yourselves.
2. Always remember the condition upon which this and other promises are given. You are to believe the promise, as a universal condition, and fulfill whatever other conditions may be expressed or implied. In this case you are not only to believe the promise, but remember that you are to take heed to yourself, and to your doctrine.
3. If you neglect either condition, you will fail. If you take heed to yourself, and do not take heed to your doctrine; or if you take heed to the doctrine, and do not take heed to yourself, or should you do both these, and still disbelieve the promise, in either case, the end will fail, and the blame will be your own.
4. How much it is to the interest of any people that a minister should comply with these conditions, and how unjust the minister is to the people, as well as rebellious against God, and injurious to his own soul, if he neglect to take heed to himself and to the doctrine.
5. What an infinite blessing a true and faithful minister is to a people. From what has been said, it is plain, that as a general truth, the minister has it within his power, not only to secure his own salvation, but also the salvation of those that hear him. What a blessing, then, to any people to have a faithful minister.
6. We see what to think of those ministers who are not instrumental in saving their people. I heard of one minister, whose preaching was so manifestly and uniformly unsuccessful in winning souls to Christ, that it is said he came to the conclusion that he was commissioned to prepare souls for hell, and not for heaven. To meet his case, this text should read, "Take heed to thyself, and to the doctrine; continue in them, for in so doing, thou shalt damn both thyself and those that hear thee."

It is not intended by what I have said, to make the impression that the most

faithful ministers can save their hearers without their consent, or that God will or can convert them if they refuse to be converted. But God knows what can be accomplished by the use of moral means. And when He has promised to secure an end upon a certain condition, we may rest assured, that upon the fulfillment of that condition, He knows Himself to be able to accomplish it. Let it be then, your abiding consolation, that if you take heed to yourselves, and to your doctrine, and continue in them, you shall save both yourselves and them that hear you.

[Back to Top](#)

Wisdom Justified of Her Children

Lecture VI

October 12, 1842

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Luke 7:35: "But wisdom is justified of all her children."

Before I enter directly upon the discussion of the text, I will remark,

1. That the dress, and manner of life of John the Baptist were manifestly typical of the state of repentance and humiliation to which he called the Jews at that particular time, and to which every soul is called before he received Christ, gospel liberty, and joy in the Holy Ghost. It had been common for the prophets of Israel, to adopt modes of life that were typical of the particular truths they were commissioned to announce.

2. Christ does not appear to have differed in his dress and dietetic habits from the mass of the people. It should be remembered, however, that among the eastern nations, modes of dress were not perpetually fluctuating as they are in the west. It is manifest that Christ was observant of the innocent civilities of life, attended marriages, and politely accepted the hospitality of all classes for the purpose of doing them good. He observed the rites of the ceremonial law, as they were typical, and that dispensation was not ended, but he paid no other regard to the superstitious traditions of the elders, than to rebuke them, and to reject their

authority.

3. John's austere habits and manner of life--his severe rebukes and denunciations, were a stumbling-block to the self-righteous Jews. Being righteous in their own eyes, and not, in their own estimation, needing repentance and humiliation, they neither understood his preaching, nor the typical design of his dress, diet, and manner of living. From all these, they concluded that he was a railer and possessed an evil spirit.

4. Christ's preaching and manner of life were no less a stumbling block. Knowing nothing of gospel liberty, and not understanding that all things belong to God's children, and were to be wisely and temperately used by them with thanksgiving, they accused Christ of being a glutton and a wine-bibber. John's preaching and manner of life were designedly legal, in the sense that they were designed to make the Jews feel that they were in a state of condemnation, instead of being in a state of justification by faith in Jesus Christ. Christ's manner of life was a perfect specimen of gospel liberty, in opposition to the legal and conscience bound state in which the Scribes and Pharisees were, which was typified by John's habits and manner of life.

5. In the context Christ illustrates the manner in which the Jews had first treated John and afterwards Himself. "And the Lord said, whereunto shall I liken the men of this generation, and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the market-place, and calling one to another, and saying, we have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, he hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, behold a gluttonous man, and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! But wisdom is justified of all her children." By John, He says, you were called to mourning, but you would not mourn. You resisted his rebukes and appeals, and said he had a devil. By me you are called to liberty and rejoicing, and this you reject as antinomian, and latitudinarian--accusing me of gluttony and intemperance. So that whatever is done for you, you are displeased and stumbled.

6. While the great mass of the Jews were stumbled, and would have been stumbled whatever might have been done for them, it was, nevertheless, true that the truly wise were edified, and saved.

In proceeding to the discussion of this subject, I will endeavor to show,

I. What wisdom is, and who are wise.

II. That that which is wise and true will be justified and approved by the wise.

III. That selfish souls will stumble at what is wise and true, and why they will do so.

I. What wisdom is, and who are wise.

1. Wisdom consists in devoting ourselves to the promotion of the best ends, by the best means.
2. This is exactly synonymous with true religion. Virtue, holiness, or true religion, consists, as has often been shown in my lectures, in disinterested benevolence. Benevolence consists in good willing, choosing, or intending, or, in other words, in devoting ones self to the promotion of the highest good of being for its own sake. In other words, true religion is the devotion of ones being to the glory of God and the highest good of his kingdom. This is wisdom. Therefore all truly religious persons are wise. All else are fools in the Bible sense of the term, devoting themselves to some unreasonable end and course of life.

II. That which is wise and true will be justified and approved by the wise.

1. All the truly wise or truly pious have one and the same end in view. It is this fact which distinguishes them as pious persons.
2. They will, therefore, substantially agree as to the means of promoting this end.

(1.) Because they all have spiritual discernment. "But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man."

(2.) They are free from the bias of selfishness. They have no self righteous and legal prejudices to blind them on the one hand, and no idols to consult or lusts to gratify on the other. In just so far as their eye is single, they will naturally and readily apprehend the truth as it

is. From the very constitution of their mind, they are the less likely to misunderstand the truth, by how much the less they are influenced by any selfish consideration. And the more likely to understand it aright, by how much the more single their eye is to the glory of God. Christ says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me, But a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of stranger." Here Christ plainly teaches that those who are truly his sheep, will not follow strangers; that is, they will not be led away into a fundamental error. The Apostle, in one of his letters, plainly teaches the impossibility of deceiving the elect.

(3.) The fact is, to those who are truly wise, the works, and providence, and word of God are one harmonious revelation of his natural and moral attributes. Having the same end in view that God has, they naturally, and easily understand Him. Being benevolent themselves, having their hearts set on doing the utmost good in their power, the attention of their mind being, of course, directed to that end, they are naturally struck at every turn, with the manifestation of benevolent design, that every where appears in the works, and ways and word of God. Turn their eyes where they will, their attention is immediately arrested with the fact, that God evidently has the same end in view which they have--has gone before them in laying the trains by which their benevolent plans may be carried out, and is, in innumerable ways co-operating with them in the promotion of the great end they have in view. They therefore very naturally come to an easy interpretation of the works and providence and word of God. They all speak a language which is familiar to them. It is the language of benevolence. And shall not the benevolent understand it? Does not love understand the language of love? I tell you that wisdom is justified of all her children.

(4.) To the truly wise, the law and gospel are one consistent scheme of revelation and salvation, and not contradictory and conflicting schemes. A truly pious person will behold at a glance the wisdom and benevolence of God, in the typical manner of teaching the gospel under the old Testament dispensation. He sees at once, that through those types and shadows, a future Christ, and justification by faith in Him, were taught. Truly pious persons see no difference in the way of salvation under the two dispensations--that they only differ in this, that

in the old, Christ was presented through types and prophecies as a future sacrifice, while in the new He is presented in the simple form of history, as having lived and died, and thus set aside the necessity of the typical manner of teaching the gospel. To them God is the same in both dispensations and the spirit of all that He has ever done or said is one and the same.

III. Selfish minds will stumble at what is wise and true; and why they will do so.

1. Their state of mind, or the end for which they live, has a powerful tendency to beget misunderstanding. Being selfish, they naturally overlook the benevolence of God, as it is every where manifested in the works of creation. They have their eye upon the promotion of their own private interests, and see no benevolence in any thing that does not favor the particular end they have in view. They are often fretted with the providence of God. Like the owl in the fable, that wondered why the sun was created, with so much light that he could not see to catch a mouse, the selfish sinner looks upon every thing as very untractable, and ill-natured, that does not fall in with his peculiar ends and aims. In this state of mind, he naturally misunderstands almost every thing that God does and says. If God commands him to glorify Him, he is apt to understand God as being selfish and ambitious, just as the sinner knows himself to be. He does not understand that God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent in such a requirement. He naturally understands all God's commands, promises, and threatenings, as founded in selfishness. He knows his own to be, and therefore naturally thinks of God, as being altogether such an one as himself. Furthermore, when God promises reward to virtue, and threatens evil to vice, he understands these as appeals to his selfishness.

2. Just so with the providence of God. The sinner misunderstands it at every step. If it should happen to fall in with his favorite pursuits and schemes, he looks upon God as being very partial to him, and perhaps thanks God, as we often hear selfish professing Christians do, for being so much better to him, than He is to others--for being so very partial to him in a great many respect. But on the other hand, if God's providence happen not to favor his particular pursuits and schemes, he is apt to look upon God as prejudiced against them and as indulging some pique--as acting towards them upon the

principle of retaliation and revenge. Being conscious, to some extent, of the principles by which they know themselves to be actuated, they very naturally attribute the same motives to God--and thus they perpetually deceive themselves in regard to the divine character. God's works, and providence, and word, are universally good. They tend to one ultimate end--the highest good of being. God aims at promoting every interest according to its relative value. He proceeds upon a vast scale of benevolence, which induces Him to cause his sun to rise, and his rain to descend, upon the evil and the good. The very fact that God is pursuing one end, and the sinner another, leads the sinner, almost continually, to misinterpret God's ways, and works, and word. The wisdom and virtue of God so conflict with the sinner's selfishness, as to keep him in almost a continual fret.

3. The sinner's selfishness naturally tends to make him misunderstand the moral law, to overlook its spirituality, and to consider obedience to consist either in outward acts, or inward feelings. And seldom do sinners understand obedience to the moral law, to consist simply in universal disinterested benevolence.

4. The selfishness of the human heart, led the Jews to misunderstand and misinterpret the ceremonial law, and to look upon it as a religion or works. Instead of understanding it to be a system of typical instruction, by and through which the most spiritual truths were taught, their selfishness led them to regard the splendid temple and the vast round of rites and ceremonies, and costly sacrifices, as a splendid, costly, gorgeous set of rites, such as the great Mogul might institute, or some human deity might cause to be observed, in relation to himself.

5. Being in a selfish state of mind, and not understanding the spirit of the Old Testament, God appears to them, under that dispensation, to have been malignant, revengeful, selfish, bloody. Under the gospel, He appears to them as at the opposite extreme of selfishness, and as exhibiting such an overweening fondness for men, as to be far from exercising even needed severity. They seem unable to understand how it is, that it is the same God, and the same state of mind, that manifests itself under both dispensations. They are far enough from realizing, that the same benevolence required the exterminating wars in the days of Moses, and Joshua, and Samuel, that poured out the Savior's life's blood upon the cross, and manifested such vast

forbearance in the days, and in the person of Christ. Their selfishness is such, that they do not understand how it is that benevolence manifests itself in all the variety of ways, in which God has dealt with men at different times. They do not understand that it is the same benevolence, manifesting itself in a regard to the public good, that sends sinners to hell, and takes the righteous to heaven--that it was the same spirit in Samuel, that led him to hew Agag in pieces, before the Lord, that in other circumstances, in the person of Jesus Christ, could stand in the midst of the fiery furnace of persecution, even unto death, unangered, and sweetly quiet as a lamb.

6. One class of selfish minds are legalists. Having been convicted of sin, their selfishness takes on that peculiar type. They are, perhaps, remarkably strict in the outward observance of the Sabbath, and the ordinances of God's house. They seem to be always dissatisfied with themselves, and with every body else--vexed and harassed with the consideration that they do not meet the demands of their own conscience. They are always confessing their heart sins, but never forsaking them. Having no faith in Christ, they know nothing of gospel liberty. Not knowing what it is to eat and drink for the glory of God, their table becomes a snare and a trap, and a stumbling-block to them. They are uncomfortable themselves, and render those around them so. Cheerfulness looks shocking to them, and appears altogether like unbecoming levity. Encouraging any of the arts, appears to them like conformity to the world, and even the temperate enjoyment of such things as are requisite to health, comfort, and usefulness, appears to them inconsistent with benevolence. They do not seem to know that all these things are parts of benevolence, but look upon them as a spirit of self-gratification, just as a man who knows nothing in his own experience, of eating from any other motives than self-gratification, would not, of course, understand how others could do the same things only as they were influenced by the same motives.

7. Another class of selfish persons are antinomian perfectionists. They have so much faith, as they vainly dream, that they can violate law without sin.

8. A third, and much larger class, are antinomian anti-perfectionists. They expect to be saved by imputed righteousness. They are far enough from intending or expecting to be holy or sanctified, in their own persons. They disclaim all pretensions to any thing more of personal holiness, than barely

enough to support a faint hope that they have been regenerated. If they have been regenerated, with them, it is clear, that they are in a state of perpetual justification, on account of their once having exercised faith in Christ. They do not pretend to obey the law of God themselves, but as they understand it, Christ obeyed it for them, and his personal obedience is imputed to them. They acknowledge the law to be obligatory upon them, indeed, but suppose themselves to be justified by the gospel, while they live in disobedience to the law. Instead of regarding the gospel, as the means of inducing entire obedience to the law, they regard it as opposed to the law, in such a sense, as really to justify one who continues to disobey the law.

9. The same doctrines are understood differently by different persons, according to their different states of mind. The doctrine of self-denial, is understood by some, not as the deposing of self, the enthroning of God in the heart, the devotion of the whole being to Him, and doing every thing, even eating and drinking, for his glory. But to them, the doctrine of self-denial, is a system of penance, of outward retrenchments, of bodily mortifications, a denial and trampling down, of the very nature of man. Fastings, celibacy, and multitudes of monkish tricks, seem to be indispensable to their ideas of self-denial. They do not understand that in all these things, to what extremes soever they may be carried, there is not necessarily one particle of Christian self-denial. But these are oftentimes nothing else than the manifestations of a legal spirit, as may be seen in this. They are connected with an acid and vexed state of mind, a spirit of complaining and censoriousness--a disposition to complain of every body that does not fall in with their particular views, and come up to their particular standard.

10. Others understand the doctrine of Christian self-denial to mean nothing more than abstinency from outward extravagance. And to abstain from extravagance with them, is to keep a little back from going beyond every body else in self-indulgence.

11. But another class who are wise, understand the doctrine of self-denial to be as it is, a total renunciation of selfishness in all its forms, the doing, and using, and being every thing for the glory of God. They understand the doctrine of self-denial to require them to hold every thing, even life itself, at the absolute disposal of God, in so high a sense, as not to count their own

lives dear to them, if the cause of Christ demands that they should be given up--that while they thus hold their lives and their all at the disposal of God, they do not wantonly and recklessly cast their lives away as a thing of nought, but carefully preserve and enjoy their lives, while, in the Providence of God, permitted to do so. And so in regard to every thing else which they have and are. While every thing is held at God's disposal, they do not recklessly cast away and squander, or give away, to be squandered by the improvident around them, the useful things, which God has put in their possession, but temperately and thankfully use such of them, as can conduce to their health, comfort, or usefulness, until the Providence of God shall call for the relinquishment of some or all of them; for his glory. Then they count these things not dear to them, but yield instant possession, not only without gainsaying, but with joyfulness.

12. To one class of selfish minds, the doctrine of Christian liberty is synonymous with the doctrine of indulgences. With them, liberty is license. The denial even of their lusts, is legality and bigotry. They have so much faith, and such Christian liberty, that they can violate the laws of their being, use with impunity the most unhealthy kind of diet, and in the most extravagant and unhealthy quantities--can use narcotic drinks, and even take opium and alchohol, as some of the good things that God has made for their enjoyment. I know a woman, who is a most pertinacious smoker of tobacco. When expostulated with for using it, she calls it her Isaac, says she once laid it upon the altar, and the Lord gave her the privilege of using it. And she imagines that her faith is such, that she can use it without sin. Paying any attention to dietetic reform, or almost any branch of reform, is to this class of persons, legality. Because they are allowed things healthful, comfortable, convenient, they rush into the extremes of self-indulgence. To this class of persons the true exhibition of the doctrine of Christian liberty, is regarded as a license to extravagance, and intemperance in almost all things.

13. There is another class to whom the doctrine of true Christian liberty look suspicious, and at least to border hard upon self-indulgence. Their legal spirit is grieved with it. But the wise understand, and are edified by it. To them the doctrine of Christian liberty is only that of living, eating, drinking, dressing, being, using, and enjoying all really good and useful things, for good and useful purposes, and for the glory of God. To them

there is no tendency to extravagance or intemperance, or licentiousness, in this doctrine, at all.

14. To one class of persons, the doctrine of Christian forbearance, as taught by Christ, and illustrated by his life, is synonymous with the doctrine of ultra non-resistance, that no government, family, state, or divine, has a right to use force, for the public good. To them, force, even in the suppression of mobs, insurrections, or to prevent the most horrible crimes, is inconsistent with Christian forbearance.

15. To another class Christian forbearance means nothing more than that you are to appeal to the civil law, instead of the bayonet or the fist, to secure your selfish ends. While to the wise, the doctrine of Christian forbearance, is nothing more than the true application of the law of universal benevolence to human conduct. There is a considerably large class of persons, the attitude of whose minds is such, that they put such a construction upon particular precepts of Christ, as to make them flatly contrary to the spirit of the law as expounded by Himself. Christ has summed up the requirements of the moral law, and included all moral obligation in the two great precepts; "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself." Now, it is agreed, so far as I know, on all hands, that the true spirit and meaning of the law of God, as thus explained by Christ, is, that every interest shall be regarded and treated according to its relative value. Consequently, that a less interest should always be sacrificed to a greater--that, of two evils, the least is to be preferred, and whenever a less interest comes in conflict with a greater, the less is to be given up, and the greater secured. This is the principle, upon which all just governments are administered. And no power in the universe can render it unlawful to inflict penalties by physical force, where the highest good demands it. But this class of persons would understand the precept, "resist not evil," to require so much, as that governments are not to suppress mobs, or rebellion, by physical force, or that evil should be resisted under any circumstances, and in cases where we have all the evidence we can have, that resistance is indispensable to the public good. Thus they array Christ against Himself, represent Him as giving such an exposition of the moral law, as to require every interest to be regarded and treated according to its relative value, and at the next breath, as saying that whatever the public good may demand, and whatever interest may demand

it, evil is not to be resisted.

16. The doctrine of government, and of self-defense, under circumstances where the law of benevolence demands it, is to some, a license to revenge. To others, it is an antiquated relic of barbarous times--something that would do, under a former dispensation, when God was not as benevolent as He is at present, or when the severe Father, and not the benevolent Son of God, laid down rules of conduct. But with them, the present dispensation is one of an entirely different spirit, as if another God ruled the universe, and as if the present dispensation was designed to rebuke the former.

But to the wise, the doctrine of government, the infliction of penalties for the public good, of self-preservation and defense, where the law of benevolence plainly demands it, is only the true application of the law of love.

REMARKS.

1. The truly wise may be known by the manner in which they are affected by the truth. Preach to them whatever doctrine you will, if it be true they will understand it, be edified by it, and be sure to make a wise improvement of it, self-denial, or Christian liberty, Christian forbearance, or whatever doctrine you will, it will find its counter-balance in their minds--will not carry them to extremes, but will be the instrument of their sanctification. They that are not truly wise or religious will be seen to be injuriously affected by almost every truth you preach. Either they will not be moved by it in any direction, or they will go to such extremes as to develop a monstrosity of character. Wisdom is justified of all her children. I understand this to be a universal truth. And that this is the real characteristic, not only of some of these, but of all of those who are truly wise.

2. The selfish will of course misunderstand the wise. When they pursue outwardly the same course of conduct, they will be supposed to do so from the same motives. If they eat, drink, marry, or are given in marriage, build houses, cultivate land, pursue business of any kind--if they labor or rest, journey or stay at home, walk or ride, sleep or wake, or whatever they do, which is done by those who are selfish, it will be understood by them to be done from the same motives by which they are actuated. But in this they are entirely mistaken. They give themselves credit for just as much piety, as any have or can have, who do outwardly the same things. Their mistake lies in this, that they suppose others to

be actuated by the same motives with themselves.

3. None but spiritual minds understand what Christian liberty is. Paul understood what it was to be free from the restraints and constraints of the ceremonial law. And yet there was no tendency in his mind to a lax morality. A true Christian alone understands what it is to eat and drink, to dress, to walk and ride, to wake and sleep, and live, and be, and do, all for the glory of God. He alone knows how to use the things of this world as not abusing them, and understands the secret of owning all things, and yet selfishly indulging in the use of none of them.

4. Those who have been truly convicted of sin, and have seen the spirituality of the law of God, and are truly converted, if they fall back, generally fall into a state of legality, and find themselves in grievous and iron bondage, while others who have only been excited but not truly slain by the law and converted, will, when they fall from this excitement almost always fall into latitudinarian antinomianism. This last is much the largest class of professors of religion.

5. No doctrine of the gospel can be fully preached by an enlightened and benevolent mind, without frequent and painful apprehensions of the results on certain classes. He must watch with unspeakable solicitude, the developments that are made in different minds, as an almost certain indication of whether they are converted or not.

6. Whenever the mind has fallen into a misapprehension of any doctrine, and has consequently received a wrong bias, any attempt to correct that bias by the exhibition of the truth will shock prejudice, and give pain. For example: let one who has embraced the ultra doctrine of the non-resistants listen to a correct exhibition of the rights, necessity, and duties of government, the true principle of self-defense and self-preservation, and he will feel almost as much shocked as if he should witness the fighting of a duel. So let one who has embraced the idea of the doctrine of self-denial, which has been entertained in different ages of the Church by many persons, as requiring little less than a system of mendicancy--let such a one listen to a discourse on the doctrine of Christian liberty, and he will feel almost as much shocked as if you were granting indulgences to extravagance. So let one who has imbibed wrong notions on the subject of Christian retrenchment, that it requires Christians to give up every thing but the mere necessities of life, with whom it is a violation of Christian principle to use elliptic springs upon his wagon, or a top, or boot--to build a cornice on a house--to have a button on your coat where you do not need to use it--who will not

allow that any thing is due to the eye or the ear--with such an one, improvements in the arts, the cultivation of music, painting, poetry, improvements in the style of building, in orders of architecture, in short almost all improvement in the physical condition of mankind, are regarded with jealousy if not with pain. He would listen to a discourse in which a true application of the law of God should be made to all such things, with unutterable pain, principally because of the perverted state of his mind, by a false view of the subject.

7. The wise feel relieved and refreshed with truth, when mist has been thrown around any subject, by those who are in error. They may have been thrown into doubt and embarrassment for a time, but when the light comes, they will receive it, and be edified and sanctified by it.

8. Every prominent doctrine of the gospel seems to be set for the rise and falling again of many in Israel. The spirit of reform is abroad in the land. The wise are temperately but firmly pushing these reforms. The rash misunderstand them and go to extremes. The conservatives misunderstand them also, and go in an opposite direction. It is curious to see how things move forward under the government of God. The doctrines of the abolitionists, to some minds lead directly to and result in the most ultra views of non-resistance. The doctrine of entire sanctification in this life, in some minds, leads to antinomian perfectionism. But the wise understand. "Wisdom is justified of all her children." And multitudes see no tendency in abolition principles to ultra non-resistance, nor in the doctrine of sanctification to the doctrine of antinomian perfectionism. They hold on the even tenor of their way, in pushing these wholesome reforms upon the attention and to the hearts of men. May the Lord speed them. Amen.

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are

as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE VII). Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians* (LECTURE XII).

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians* (LECTURE I).

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE LXXVI).

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE LXXIV).

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE LVIII).

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

End of the 1842 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1843
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College

Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

HOLINESS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE PRESENT LIFE

- Lecture I. [Prove All Things](#)
- Lecture II. [Nature of True Virtue](#)
- Lecture III. [Selfishness](#)
- Lecture IV. [Christian Character](#)
- Lecture V. [Christian Warfare](#)
- Lecture VI. [Putting on Christ](#)
- Lecture VII. [Way to Be Holy](#)
- Lecture VIII. [What Attainments Christians May Reasonably Expect to Make in This Life](#)
- Lecture IX. [Necessity and Nature of Divine Teaching](#)

Lecture X. [Fulness There is in Christ](#)

Lecture XI. [Justification](#)

Lecture XII. [Unbelief](#)

Lecture XIII. [Gospel Liberty](#)

Lecture XIV. [Joy in God](#)

Lecture XV. [The Benevolence of God](#)

Lecture XVI. [Revelation of God's Glory](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

HOLINESS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE PRESENT LIFE --No. 1

Prove All Things

Lecture I

January 4, 1843

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 Thess. 5:21: "Prove all things: hold fast that which is good."

In speaking from this text, I remark,

1. That it enjoins the duty of fundamental and thorough inquiry on religious subjects. It requires us to know the reason of our faith and practice, that our piety may not be superstition, but the result of intelligent conviction, arising from thorough investigation.

2. In order to fulfill this requirement, the mind must be free from prejudices on religious subjects. So long as prejudices exist in any mind, it is impossible that it should examine religious opinions with any such spirit as will admit of obedience to this precept. All its views will be perverted just in proportion as it is uncandid and prejudiced.

3. This precept assumes the fact of our ability to "prove all things." The ability to comply with any requirement is always implied in the requirement. Otherwise the command is unjust.

4. This precept implies the necessity of correct information on religious subjects. The sentiment that it is immaterial what our opinions are, seems to prevail extensively among men, but it is plainly a mistake. Men can never be expected to remain rooted and grounded in the truth any farther than their opinions are true. All observation and experience prove this, and such is the concurrent representation of the Bible.

5. This command is given to all; not merely to ministers, but to laymen and women. Each is required to examine for himself, and to call no man master, so as to receive his "ipse dixit" as authoritative. It requires each one to know for himself the reasons of his faith.

6. The great mass of mankind don't love to think closely. They would prefer to do almost any thing else. They are like school-boys who shun the labor of study, and go to be taught without having studied their lesson. What they are told they forget before the next recitation.

7. I shall address myself, in this lecture, to those, and those only, who will be at the trouble to think. To address others would but be a waste of time and strength. Those who will not think cannot be saved.

8. I will neither spend my time, nor endanger your souls, by random exhortation and appeal, but strive to follow the spirit of the text.

9. My object is not controversy; I hope wholly to avoid its spirit, and, as far as possible, even its form. On the contrary, it will be my object as far as possible, to present what I honestly believe to be the truth to the consideration of the honest and truth-loving.

10. There is but little obedience to the requirement in the text, and as a consequence great ignorance and error prevail on many questions of fundamental importance. There are very few who can give any rational account of what constitutes sin and holiness, moral obligation, or human responsibility.

11. The terms which represent the attributes of Christian character, or what are commonly called the Christian graces, are almost never rightly defined. The

definitions which are given scarcely ever represent the right idea, for example, of love, faith, repentance, self-denial, and humility. It is manifest that but few know how to define them. Why? Because they have not complied with the requirement of the text. And because these attributes of holiness are not rightly defined, they are misunderstood, and the result is that they are not exhibited in the lives of Christians. We see one picture drawn in the Bible, and quite another in real life. The former is beautiful and glorious, the latter--how sadly deformed. Why? Because the mass are mistaken, and mistaken as the result of incorrect views respecting the nature of true piety.

12. The distinction between natural and revealed theology should be understood and appreciated. Indeed, it is fundamental to an understanding of the Bible, for the Bible both assumes the truths of natural theology, and that we understand them; for example, that we exist, the existence of God, our moral agency, natural ability, the distinction between right and wrong, &c. We do not, therefore, and can not rightly understand the Bible, unless we understand the fundamental truths of natural theology, which are taken for granted in the Bible.

13. Natural theology consists in those truths that we may learn from the book of nature. God has presented us with two books--that of nature, and that of revelation, and they are equally authentic, and mutually confirmatory of each other.

14. The Bible not only assumes, and in various ways confirms the truths of natural theology, but adds many truths not discoverable by unaided reason, but which are recognized as truths as soon as suggested.

15. Many err in supposing that because a truth is seen to be such in the light of its own evidence, when suggested, therefore it might have been discovered without inspiration. There are plainly multitudes of truths revealed in the Bible, which men could never otherwise have discovered, but which, now that they are discovered, are seen to be perfectly reasonable. It is one thing to apprehend and recognize truth, when made known, but quite another thing to discover it.

I bespeak your prayers and attention, while I proceed to show,

I. How we know any thing.

II. How we know every thing which we do know.

III. Some things which we know about ourselves, the truth, and our knowledge of which, are taken for granted by inspiration.

I. How we know any thing.

1. Consciousness is a condition of all knowledge. It is the mind's recognition of its own existence, choice, thoughts and feelings. It is a knowledge of ourselves in the phenomena of our minds. The mind does not first observe its phenomena, and thence infer its own existence, for to attempt to prove this would be to assume as doubtful that which is absolute certainty and which must be so regarded in order to attempt proof or inferences, but it absolutely affirms its own existence, and consciousness testifies to this affirmation, saying, "I exist, I think, I feel, I will." Consciousness give both the I and its phenomena, that is its choices, thoughts and feelings, together with their freedom or necessity. Without consciousness knowledge would be to us impossible, for there is no other way of obtaining knowledge. How and what could one know, without knowing that he knows? and what knowledge would that be, of which you have no knowledge?

II. How we know every thing which we do know.

1. As our existence, and all our mental acts and states are given us by consciousness, it is plain that we know by consciousness every thing which we do know. For example. Suppose I have a sensation: How do I know that I have it? By consciousness. So it is with all our emotions, desires, choices, judgments, affirmations, denials, hopes, fears, doubts, joys, and sorrows. They are all given us by consciousness. I am now speaking what every man knows to be true.

2. Nothing without us is known to us only as it makes an impression upon our minds which impression is revealed to us by consciousness.

3. What we know by consciousness we know with certainty, that is, we know that our existence, acts, thoughts, and feelings are realities.

4. Consciousness is therefore the highest possible evidence. We do, and cannot but rely upon it as conclusive. If I think, feel, or act, I know that I think, feel, or act, and know it absolutely. It is impossible from our very

constitution to doubt its testimony.

5. But we should carefully distinguish between what is really revealed to us by our consciousness, and inferences drawn from such revelations. We may mistake the cause of a sensation, but not the sensation. When God spoke to Christ from Heaven, the people who heard were conscious of the sensation upon the auditory nerve. Here was no mistake. But they mistook its cause. They said, it thundered. So, in forming our various judgments and opinions we may mistake, but when consciousness testifies that we do judge or form an opinion, in this we cannot be mistaken.

III. Some things that we know about ourselves, the truth of which, and our knowledge of which are taken for granted by inspiration.

1. We know that we exist, and we know it so certainly that to ask for evidence is absurd. It is to assume that as doubtful which must be assumed as absolutely true in order to prove any thing true.

2. We know that we perform certain mental acts, and are the subjects of certain mental states. For example: we know that we originate choices and volitions, and are the subjects of thought and feeling.

3. Hence we know that we possess certain faculties and capacities, that is, we are capable of acts, thoughts, and feelings.

4. We know that these faculties, as also their products, are capable of being classified. All men naturally classify them. They never confound thinking with feeling, feeling with willing, nor willing with either of them. No child does this. Nor do they confound the power of thinking, or of feeling with that of willing, or with one another.

5. Hence all men, although they may not understand the terms employed by philosophers to represent the natural faculties, notwithstanding, fully understand the thing intended by these terms. They know themselves to possess those faculties which we call intelligence, sensibility, and free will. We think, feel, and will, and therefore we know that we have the faculties of thinking, feeling, and willing, and mental philosophy is nothing else than an analysis of what all men are conscious of. Under the general term intelligence we include consciousness, reason, and understanding. All thoughts, affirmations, intuitions, judgments, and inferences, are the

product of the intelligence.

6. We are conscious of our own liberty in the sense of having ability to choose in any direction in view of motives--to choose or refuse any object of choice. We know this with absolute certainty. This is an intuition of reason revealed by consciousness, and however men may deny their own freedom, in theory, yet they always act upon the assumption that mankind are free.

7. We are conscious that we can voluntarily control some of our capabilities, and some we cannot; for example; the voluntary, and involuntary muscles. If I will to move my arm, it moves in obedience to my will, but if I will that my heart shall cease to beat it still continues to beat wholly regardless of my will. In like manner we know that some of our capabilities are directly under the control of the will, and some indirectly.

8. We know by consciousness that muscular action is directly necessitated by our will--that there is a necessary connection between volitions and outward action. Some have made freedom to consist in doing as we please, or as we will; but that there is no freedom in this, every one knows, for when I will to move my arm, or to perform any other outward action, the action takes place by a natural necessity. While the volition exists, the outward action must be.

9. We also know by consciousness that thought and feeling are only indirectly subject to the will. Suppose, for instance, you wish to transfer your thoughts from one object to another. You cannot do this directly, and yet you are conscious that you can indirectly through the attention.

Hence by directing the attention to any given subject upon which you wish to think, thought is the necessary result. So if you abstract the attention from an object upon which you do not wish to think you thus indirectly abstract the thoughts from it. Even children know this with absolute certainty. So with feeling of every kind. We are conscious that we cannot directly feel by willing to feel. Suppose, for example, we wish to call into being the feelings of love, hope, fear, joy, or sorrow. We are conscious that we cannot, by direct willing, create these feelings, or even modify them. But, nevertheless, we are conscious that we can indirectly regulate the feelings to a great degree. For example: If we wish to experience the emotions produced by the beautiful,

we turn our attention to a beautiful object, and the emotions arise of course. On the contrary, by turning our attention to an offensive object, we can indirectly produce disagreeable emotions in our own minds. The same law operates respecting all religious feelings. They can to a very great degree be regulated indirectly by the will through the attention, but never directly.

10. We know by consciousness that whatever we can do at all, we can do by willing and that whatever act or state is not connected with the action of our will is impossible to us by a natural necessity. Suppose, for example, I will to move, but suddenly the nerves of voluntary motion are paralyzed, so that they will not obey my will. Then to move is impossible for me. The same is true of thoughts and feelings. If I will to expel certain thoughts and feelings from my mind, and to produce others, I abstract my attention from those objects on which it rests and direct it to other objects. This course will universally change the existing thoughts and feelings, but if it should not, then to change them is impossible for me. So of every thing else. Whatever we cannot accomplish by willing, we cannot accomplish at all. This is universal experience.

11. We are conscious of possessing in our intelligence a faculty, called reason, or the intuitive faculty, by which we perceive and affirm absolutely certain truths which carry with them their own evidence. This faculty gives us, when certain conditions are fulfilled, all necessary, absolute and universal truths. It is so infallible, and uniform in its affirmations, that whenever the terms of a proposition are understood, every reason in the world will affirm the same things. For example, mathematical truths, as that two and two equal four, or things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another. These affirmations are so absolute that the mind cannot doubt them.

12. Among these self-evident truths are all the first principles of morals such as--

- (1.) That there is such a thing as right and wrong, and that the difference between them is fundamental.
- (2.) That the existence of these implies moral law.
- (3.) That men have moral character.

(4.) That moral character implies moral obligation.

(5.) That moral obligation implies moral law and moral agency.

(6.) That moral agency implies natural ability.

(7.) That natural ability implies the existence of intelligence, sensibility and freewill, that is, that moral agents actually know, feel, and will. The mind does not call for proof of these things, but affirms them as absolute verities, and the Bible therefore assumes them as true. It assumes that moral agents do actually know, feel and will.

(8.) That moral character does not and cannot belong to the constitution of either body or mind, since it is impossible that a moral being should be either praise or blameworthy. It cannot thus belong to the constitution.

(9.) That the constitutional appetites, desires and passions can have no moral character in themselves, since they are in themselves involuntary. For example, the appetite for food. Suppose yourself hungry, and in the presence of food. The appetite will naturally demand it from the very constitution, and can therefore in itself have no moral character. The same is true of desires and passions whenever you are in the presence of objects adapted to awaken them.

(10.) This intuitive faculty affirms, that on the will's consenting to gratify any of these appetites, desires or passions under forbidden circumstances, there is sin. For example, when Eve saw the fruit, her appetite naturally craved it. In this there was nothing wrong, but when she consented to gratify her appetite, notwithstanding it was prohibited, this was supreme selfishness. Had it not been prohibited the gratification would have been proper, but being prohibited, it was sin. It is the same respecting the gratifying of any desire or passion whatever.

(11.) This intuitive faculty asserts that moral character cannot belong to any involuntary act or state of mind whatever, nor to any outward actions. If I stab a man, the moral character of the act does not belong to the dagger, nor to the hand which held it, nor to the muscles of the arm, nor to the volition which impelled the arm, but to the intention.

(12.) It also asserts that moral character cannot belong to the states of the sensibility, that is, to the various emotions or feelings, for these are necessary; nor to the states of the intelligence. There is no virtue in the perception of truth. Devils, and wicked, as well as good men, perceive truth, and doubtless think correctly on many subjects, and their reason affirms moral truths, but there is no virtue in this.

(13.) It also asserts that moral character cannot belong to volitions as distinguished from choices, for choice or intuition necessitates volition for the time being.

(14.) But it does assert that moral character belongs to the ultimate intention of the mind. Intention is the choice of an end. The ultimate intention is the last end chosen--that for which every thing else is chosen or done. I will illustrate the difference between ultimate and proximate intention. Suppose a young man laboring, and you inquire what he is laboring for. He says, to get money. This is one end. But ask again, what do you want of money? He says, to buy books. This is another end. Ask again, what do you want of books? He says, to get knowledge. This is another end. But continue the inquiry, what do you want of knowledge? He says, to preach the gospel. This is still another end. But you may ask farther, what do you want to preach the gospel for? He replies, to do good--because the good of the universe is valuable in itself. This is the last end--the ultimate intention, and all the previous ends are only means to this or what are called proximate ends. But in this case the whole moral character of all the process belongs plainly to the ultimate intention. In this all ethical philosophers, worthy of note at the present day, agree. It is plainly the doctrine of the Bible, and thus the Bible and natural theology are at one precisely. The truth is even children understand that character consists in ultimate intention. Pa, says the child in self justification, I didn't mean to do it. And the question between the child and his parent is about the intention. So it is in courts of justice. They always inquire for the "quo animo" or intention. In short, all men, whatever may be their theory, understand and act upon the truth of this doctrine. If a physician gave medicine with a design to cure, he would be universally acquitted of blame, even though instead of curing the disease, it should take the life of a patient. In fact, this doctrine is so

certain that the Bible could not be believed if it disagreed with it.

[Back to Top](#)

HOLINESS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE PRESENT LIFE --No. 2

Nature of True Virtue

Lecture II

January 18, 1843

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 13: 8-10: "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another; for he that loveth another, hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

Text.--Gal. 5: 14: "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

In this lecture I propose to show,

I. What is intended by the term love.

II. That the thing intended is the whole of virtue.

I. What is intended by the term love.

It is of the utmost importance to understand the bible meaning of the term love. It is represented in the text, and the Bible generally, as the substance of all religion, and the only preparation for heaven. What can be more important?

1. I remark, then, in the first place, that the love required in the text is not what is generally called natural affection or the love of kindred. This is manifest (1.) From the fact that natural affection is involuntary. It is true the

will is employed in acting out this love, but the thing generally intended by natural affection is the strong constitutional impulses experienced by parents towards their offspring, brothers and sisters towards one another, &c. But (2.) This natural affection is common to both saints and sinners, and certainly nothing can be religion which is common to the ungodly with the saints. (3.) And I may add that it is participated by brutes.

2. This love is not complacency or esteem. Complacency is that pleasant emotion, or state of the sensibility which is experienced when we see any thing which, from the laws of our constitution, is naturally pleasing to us. For example. If you contemplate a beautiful natural scenery, you experience a pleasing emotion, or delight, from the very nature of your constitution. It is precisely the same in contemplating moral beauty. Men are so constituted that whenever they contemplate a virtuous character, provided it does not in any way conflict with their selfishness, they delight in it--a pleasurable emotion always springs up of course. Now this complacency, or esteem of virtuous character, is perfectly involuntary, and therefore can have no virtue in it. This we know by consciousness which I defined in my last lecture to be the mind's knowledge of its own existence, acts, and states, and of the liberty or necessity of these acts and states. By consciousness then we know that this complacency in the character, either in God or any other virtuous being, is involuntary, and the natural and necessary result of the mental constitution, when brought into certain relations to such characters. Again, this complacency cannot be true virtue, or the love required in the Bible, because it can with propriety be exercised only towards the virtuous, whereas the love which the Bible requires is to be exercised towards all. We are not required to exercise complacency towards sinners, and it would plainly be unjust and absurd if we were, since to delight in a sinful character is impossible. But the text requires universal love. Therefore the love which it requires and complacency cannot be identical. Again, complacency is common to real saints, and to the self-deceived, and impenitent. Much evil is done by denying that sinners have this feeling of complacency towards God and his law, when the fact is they know that they have. Whenever they see the character of God aside from his relation to themselves, they cannot avoid it. It arises by a natural necessity from the mental constitution. The wickedest devil in hell would experience it, if he could view the character of God aside from its relations to himself. It is

absurd to deny that mind would feel thus, for if it would not, it must be inconsistent with itself, which cannot be. Furthermore complacency in virtuous character is consistent with the highest degree of wickedness. It is related of a certain infidel that he would go into ecstasies in contemplating the character of God, and who has not heard the wicked insist on it that they do love God, and found it almost impossible to convince them that they did not love Him with any virtuous love? Why? Because they are conscious of these emotions of complacency towards Him, and mistake it for real benevolence.

3. The love required in the text is not what is commonly called fondness, for this is a mere emotion and therefore involuntary. I know not what else to call a certain development of the mind towards God. Persons often exhibit a fondness towards God, the same as towards any other being. They love Him because He loves them just as sinners peculiarly love those who do them a good turn. And they do not distinguish between this and true religion; but immediately after the strongest exhibition of it, take advantage of a neighbor in trade, or exhibit selfishness in some other form.

The truth is, it often consists with the most fiendish wickedness, as also with the highest irreverence. Persons in this state of mind often seem, in conversing about Him, in their prayers to Him and in every way to regard and treat God merely as an equal. I have often thought how infinitely insulting to Him their conduct must be. Again this fondness is consistent with any degree of self-indulgence. In direct connection with its exercise, persons often show themselves to be the perfect slaves of their appetites and passions. They undoubtedly feel their fondness, but do they love? They say they love, but is their love benevolence? Is it religion? Can that be religion which puts no restraint on the appetites and passions, or only curbs some of them, while it cleaves the more tenaciously to others? Impossible!

4. The love intended in the text is not synonymous with desire. Persons say they desire to love God--they desire to love their neighbor as themselves. No doubt they do, but there is no religion in this, since desire is constitutional and has no moral character. Sinners have the desire and remain sinners still, and every one knows that they are consistent with the highest wickedness. Besides, as it is mere desire, it may exist forever and do no good. Suppose God had from all eternity merely desired to create a

universe and make it happy. If He had never gone further than that what good would it have done? So it will not do for us to say to our neighbors be ye warmed, and be ye fed, but give them not those things which are essential to their well being. Unless we really will what we desire, it will never effect any good.

5. The love required in the text is not pity or compassion to individuals. This is wholly constitutional, and men are strongly exercised with it in spite of themselves. It is related of Whitefield that he often appealed to men with such power in behalf of his orphan-house as to induce those to give liberally who had beforehand determined not to give, nor to be influenced by him. The truth is, his mighty appeals aroused the constitutional susceptibility of pity to such a pitch that they had to give out of self-defense. They were wrought up to such an agony that they had to give to relieve it. But so far was this mere excitement from being virtuous, that perhaps those very persons whom it induced to give the money, called themselves a thousand fools for having done so, after the excitement subsided.

6. Nor is the love required in the text delight in the happiness of mankind. We are so constituted as naturally to delight in the happiness of others, whenever there is no selfish reason to prevent. It is this same constitutional tendency which produces such abhorrence of whatever is unjust and injurious. For example: How men's feelings of indignation swell and boil on witnessing acts of injustice. Suppose, in a court of justice, a judge perverts justice, shamefully wronging the innocent, and clearing the guilty. How would the spectators feel? There was a case, sometime since, in one of our cities, where a man had been guilty of a flagrant outrage, but when it was brought before the court, the justice so insulted and abused the sufferer and showed such a disposition to clear the guilty, that the indignation of the spectators became aroused to such a degree that they could hardly be restrained from seizing, and wreaking their vengeance on him. And these were persons who made no pretensions to religion. So men universally, whether virtuous or not, abhor a liar, or the character of the devil. Who ever contemplated the character of the devil, as it really is, without abhorring it? On the contrary, men universally, whether virtuous themselves or not, admire and delight in virtuous characters. Take, for example, the Jews in Christ's time. How they admired, and manifested their delight in the

character of the prophets who had formerly perished by the violence of their contemporaries. Now how was this? Why, they now saw the true character of those prophets, without its sustaining such a relation to their selfishness as to annoy them and their constitutional delight was naturally awakened in this way. But at the same time they were treating Christ in the same manner that their fathers, treated those prophets and for the same reason. So now multitudes join in admiring and praising such men as Whitefield, and Wesley, and Edwards, who, if they had lived in their day, would have cried as loud as their contemporaries did--'away with them.' Now, why is this? Because the relations of the characters of these men to the world are now changed, and do not directly cross the track of their selfishness, as they did while living. The same principle is manifested in respect to human freedom. For example: Some years ago, during the struggle of the Greeks for their freedom, what enthusiasm prevailed--what earnestness to go and help them. The government could scarcely control the waves of excitement in their favor. But those very men, who were so enthusiastic in behalf of the Greeks, would now hiss at any error to remove slavery from this country! Now why is this? Because, I say again, men are so constituted that when no selfish reason exists to prevent it, men naturally delight in happiness, and sympathize with the suffering. But there is no virtue in this. It is mere natural emotion which is consistent with the highest wickedness.

7. The love required is not a good will to any particular individuals. 'Do not even sinners love those that love them?' They love their friends and partizans, and so do fallen spirits for ought I know, but there is no benevolence in this.

8. This love then must be benevolence. But what is benevolence? It is benevolence--willing the good of being. The attributes of benevolence are,

(1.) Voluntariness. It belongs to the will, and not to the sensibility.

(2.) Another attribute is disinterestedness. By this, I mean that the good of being is not willed for the sake of its reflex influence upon self, but for its own sake. It is recognizing the good of being as valuable in itself, and willing it for that reason. The willing terminates on the good willed.

(3.) Universality, is another attribute of benevolence. It goes out towards all beings. It admits of no exceptions. Wherever there is a being capable of happiness, benevolence wills its happiness, according to its perceived value and for its own sake. Such is God's benevolence. It is universal, embracing in its infinite bosom all beings from the highest arch angel to the sparrow which falls to the ground. He views and really wills the happiness of every being as a good. Indeed, universality is essential to the very nature of benevolence, for if good is willed on its own account, benevolence will of course cover all good known.

(4.) Another attribute is unity. Benevolence is a simple principle. It is the whole heart--an unmixed general choice, as the good of being is a unity--it is a single end, and benevolence is the choice of this one end.

(5.) It is a choice as distinguished from volition. The choice of an end always of course necessitates volitions to accomplish the end, but these executive volitions have no character in themselves, and all virtue or vice belongs to the choice or intention which they are designed to execute. We know this by consciousness.

(6.) It is a choice also as distinguished from desire, emotion, or feeling. As I said in the former lecture, we are conscious that all the states of the sensibility--all desires, emotions, and passions whatever are involuntary, and therefore without moral character. Benevolence then, cannot either wholly or partly consist in these.

(7.) Another attribute is activity and efficiency. Benevolence being choice it must be efficient. Choice necessitates volition. For example; Suppose I intend to go to the post-office as soon as possible. While this choice remains, it of course necessitates all the volitions necessary to its execution. Its very nature is activity.

(8.) Aggressiveness is another attribute of benevolence. Of course if benevolence is willing the good of being, it wills the destruction of whatever prevents that good, and continually makes encroachments in every direction upon every form of wickedness however fortified. It will not only sally out against such sins as licentiousness, intemperance, and profanity, but every form of selfishness however

popular it may be.

(9.) Benevolence is a disposition, or ultimate intention. Intention is the choice of an end. Benevolence is the choice of the highest good of being, and being the ultimate choice, as was illustrated in the last lecture, it is of course a disposition to promote good to the utmost.

(10.) It is supreme to God of course. Benevolence as we have already said, is willing the good of being for its own sake. Of course then it is willing the good of every being, according to its perceived value, for it is agreed by all, to be the correct definition of virtue that it is a disposition to regard things according to their perceived relative value. Now every one must perceive that the happiness of God is the greatest good in the universe, and therefore benevolence must, as a matter of course, will it supremely.

(11.) Benevolence must be equal to men. I do not mean to say that the happiness of every man is equal to the happiness of every other man or that they are equally valuable. The happiness of a man is of more value than the happiness of a brute. It would therefore be unjust to regard them as equal. So some men are of more value than others. For example, the life of Washington was of more value than that of any private soldier; therefore, if either of them must be sacrificed, it should be the least valuable. But what I mean to say is that the good of every being is to be regarded according to its relative value as you understand it.

(12.) Benevolence also regards the good of enemies, as well as friends. The Savior insists on this as essential to virtue.

9. That this love is benevolence is generally agreed, and it is also agreed that this is the only form of love which is voluntary, or can reasonably be commanded. That this, and no other kind of love is voluntary, every one knows by his own consciousness. We are conscious that our emotions are all produced, not directly but indirectly. If a parent, for example, wishes to feel about his family, he must direct his attention to them. The result will be that he will feel about them by a natural necessity, and his feelings will take the type of whatever aspect he views them in. And while his attention is

fixed upon them he cannot but feel. So with every form of love except benevolence. Hatred is produced and perpetuated in the same way. An individual conceives himself injured by another, and keeps his attention upon it; the more he views it, the more emotions of hatred or indignation are felt, so that when urged to give it up, he says he cannot. And it is true that while he keeps his eye upon that particular thing--while his mind broods over it, he cannot; but he can turn his attention off and thus indirectly remove his feelings of hatred or indignation.

10. The love required in the text must be benevolence as it is required towards all beings. This is manifest from what we have already said.

11. God's love to us must be benevolence. It could not be complacency, for instead of feeling complacent towards sinners, He must abhor their character. It was benevolence then which made the Atonement, and all the provisions of salvation.

12. No other kind of love would do any real good. Without it God would never have made the Atonement, nor have done anything else to secure the salvation of sinners, nor would any other moral being. No other love can in the nature of things be universal than benevolence, which consists in willing universal good for its own sake.

13. Benevolence is naturally and universally obligatory, and therefore must be virtue. The good of being is valuable, and therefore to will it must be virtue. To deny this is to talk stark nonsense. It is to deny that we are to treat things as they are, or according to the nature.

14. Therefore the law of God must require it, and would be unjust if it did not. It cannot be otherwise than unjust not to require all moral beings to act according to the nature and relations of things.

15. Nothing else need be required of moral beings, as every thing else possible to us follows its exercise of necessity. This follows from the fact that it consists in choice. If I will right, this will secure corresponding volitions, muscular movements, desires, and feelings as a matter of course, and whatever willing will not secure is impossible to me. To produce the right emotions, I have only to fix my attention on the right objects. If therefore I will right the whole man will be right of course. That such is the

influence of the will we know by consciousness.

16. In short nothing more nor less can be justly required. That nothing less can be required is a certain intuition of every moral being in the universe. Ask whomsoever you will if every one ought not to be required to will the universal good of being, and if he understands the terms of your proposition, he will immediately cry out, "yes," "yes," from the deepest recesses of his soul. That nothing more can be required is equally intuitive. Whenever it is asserted that men can be required to do any thing beyond the power of their will, the nature of every moral being cries out against it as false. This is right and nothing else is right.

II. Benevolence is the whole of virtue.

1. We have seen that this love is disposition or intention.
2. We know that intention necessitates corresponding states and acts.
3. Virtue cannot consist in the outward act, nor, in necessitated mental acts. It must therefore consist in benevolence and this the Bible teaches in many ways.

(1.) In the text, it is asserted that love is the fulfilling of the law, and that all the law is fulfilled in one word even this, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

(2.) It is the spirit of the whole law as epitomized by Christ--"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy strength and with all thy mind and thy neighbor as thyself."

(3.) It is the spirit of every precept of the Bible. It asserts that 'if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not,' that is, a right intention obeys the very spirit of the Bible. If we intend right, the will is taken for the deed. Suppose my intention is to do all the good I possibly can, but I am confined to a sick bed so that I can accomplish but little; notwithstanding I am virtuous. So, on the other hand, the Bible teaches that if people intend wrong, their moral character is as their intention, whatever they may do. Even if good should result from their actions,

no thanks to them because they did not intend it.

REMARKS

1. It may be said that the Bible represents our words, thoughts, and outward actions as virtuous. Answer;

(1.) The Bible makes all virtue strictly speaking to consist in love, and it cannot be inconsistent with itself.

(2.) Words, thoughts, and outward actions are and can be virtuous only in the sense of their being manifestations of benevolence.

(3.) The same may be said in regard to words, thoughts, and actions that are called wicked. The Bible says that 'the ploughing of the wicked is sin.' Words, thoughts, and actions are holy or sinful in no other sense than that they indicate the state of the will. A word! What is a word? A breath--a motion of the atmosphere on the drum of the ear. Can this have moral character in itself? No, but it may be an index of the state of mind of him who utters it.

2. See the infinite importance of understanding that benevolence always and necessarily manifests itself--consisting in choice it is naturally impossible that it should not.

3. See the spurious nature of any religion which does not manifest itself in efforts to do good. Such religion is mere antinomianism. It may be some kind of happiness, but religion it is not.

4. All the attributes of Christian character must belong to the will, just as all God's moral attributes are only modifications of benevolence. They are not modifications of emotion, but of will. His justice in sending the wicked to hell is as much a modification of benevolence, as is his mercy in taking the virtuous to heaven. He does both for the same reason, because the general good equally demands both. So with all that the true Christian does.

5. How false and dangerous are the usual definitions of these attributes. For example: Love is spoken of as a mere feeling. Hence religion is represented as, at one time, like smothered embers, scarcely in existence; at another, in a slight glow, which may be fanned till it breaks out into flame. Now this is not the love

which the Bible requires, since it is nothing but mere feeling, and even if legitimately produced, it is only the natural and constitutional result of religion, and not religion itself.

Repentance is also spoken of as mere sorrow for sin, but instead of this, it does not consist in feeling at all. It is a change of mind. As we say, when we have made up our mind to do one thing, and then change it, and do the opposite, we say in popular language, "I changed my mind." This is the simple idea of repentance. It is an act of the will, and sorrow follows it as a result. So faith is represented as the conviction of the intellect. But this cannot be faith, for the Bible every where represents faith as a virtue, and it must, therefore, be an act of the will, and no mere belief whatever. It is a committing of the soul to God. The Bible says Christ did not commit Himself to certain persons, for He knew what was in them, that is, He did not trust or exercise faith in them. The word rendered commit here, is the same as that rendered faith. Peter says, 'Commit the keeping of your souls to Him in well doing as to a faithful Creator.' When the mind apprehends the true meaning of the characteristics and relations of Christ to the world, this is often mistaken for faith. But the devil may have as good faith as that. This is a mere perception of truth by the intellect, and is, as a condition, indispensable to faith, but it is no more faith itself than an act of the intellect is an act of the will.

So humility is represented as a sense of guilt, and unworthiness. Now, Satan is doubtless humble if this is humility, and so is every convicted sinner, by a natural necessity. But humility is a willingness to be known and esteemed according to your true character. These illustrations will show how dangerous are the mistakes prevalent respecting the attributes of Christian character.

6. There is no such thing as religion, not in exercise. Persons often talk as though they had some true religion about them, although they are conscious of exercising none. They have a good enough religion to be sure, but it is not in operation just now. Now this is a radical mistake.

7. How many persons are living on frames and feelings, and yet remain perfectly selfish.

8. Many are satisfied with no preaching but such as fans into existence certain happy emotions. These are a kind of religious epicures. Whenever we preach so as to lay bare the roots of selfishness and detect its secret workings, they are not

fed. They say this is not the gospel, let us have the gospel. But what do they mean by the gospel? Why simply that class of truths that create and fan into a flame their emotions. And those who most need to be searched are often most unwilling to endure the probe. They make their religion to consist in emotions, and if these are taken away what have they left? Hence they cling to them with a death grasp. Now let me say that these emotions have not one particle of religion in them, and those who want simply that class of truths which fan them into existence are mere religious epicures, and their view of the gospel is sheer antinomianism. If the world were full of such religion it would be none the better for it.

9. Religion is the cause of happiness but is not identical with it. Happiness is a state of the sensibility and of course involuntary, while religion is benevolence and therefore powerful action.

10. Men may work without benevolence, but they cannot be benevolent without works. Many persons wake up occasionally, and bluster about, get up protracted meetings, and make mighty efforts to work themselves into a right state of feeling by dint of mere friction. But they never get a right spirit thus, and their working is mere legality. I do not mean to condemn protracted meetings, nor special efforts to promote religion, but I do condemn a legal engaging in these things. But while persons may work without benevolence, it is also certain that if they are benevolent they will work. It is impossible that benevolence should be inactive.

11. If all virtue consists in the ultimate intention, then it must be that we can be conscious of our spiritual state. We certainly can tell what we are aiming at. If consciousness does not reveal this it cannot reveal any thing about our character. If character consists in ultimate intention, and if we cannot be conscious what this intention is, it follows necessarily that we can know nothing whatever about our own character.

12. We can see what we are to inquire after in our hours of self-examination. Our inquiry should not be how we feel, but for what end we live--what is the aim of our life.

13. How vain is religion without love. Those who have such a religion are continually lashed up by conscience to the performance of duty. Conscience stands like a task-master, scourge in hand, points to the duty, and says it must not

be omitted. The heart shrinks back from its performance, but still it must be done or worse evil endured. The hesitating soul drags itself up by resolution, to fulfill the letter of the requirement, while there is no acquiescence in its spirit, and thus a miserable slavery is substituted for the cheerful obedience of the heart.

14. I must close by saying that benevolence naturally fills the mind with peace and joy. Mind was made to be benevolent, and whenever it is so it is in harmony with itself, with God and the Universe. It wills just as God wills, and therefore it naturally and cheerfully acts out His will. This is its choice. It is like some heavenly instrument whose chords are touched by some angelic hand which makes music for the ear of God. But on the contrary, a selfish man is necessarily, from the very nature of mind, a wretched man. His reason and conscience continually affirm his obligations to God and his universe, to the world and the Church. But he never wills in accordance with it, and thus a continual warfare is kept up within. His mind is like an instrument untuned and harsh. Instead of harmony, it renders only discord, and makes music only fit to mingle with the wailings of the damned.

[Back to Top](#)

HOLINESS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE PRESENT LIFE --No. 3

Selfishness

Lecture III

February 1, 1843

by Charles Grandison Finney

President of Oberlin College

Texts.--Hos. 10:1: "Israel is an empty vine; he bringeth forth fruit unto himself."

In this passage the Lord complains of the selfishness of Israel; and it is my present design to show,

I. What selfishness is not.

II. What it is.

III. That it cannot co-exist with holiness in the same mind.

IV. Mention some evidences of selfishness.

V. That one form of it is as inconsistent with salvation as another.

I. What selfishness is not.

1. It is not a desire of happiness, and dread of misery. This is perfectly constitutional in all moral beings. It is involuntary as we know by consciousness, and is, therefore, destitute of all moral character.
2. It is not the desire of approbation. This desire, to whatever degree it may exist, so far forth as it is mere desire, is constitutional, involuntary, and without moral character.
3. It does not consist in the desire of any personal good, nor in the dread of any personal evil. These are perfectly natural, and have no character.
4. Nor does it consist in any constitutional appetite, passion, or impulse, or in what are generally called propensities. Some persons speak of selfish propensities, as though our propensities had moral character, and we were blamable for them. But this is absurd. There is no such thing as a selfish propensity. All the appetites, passions, and impulses are natural, and are naturally excited whenever we come into correlation with the objects adapted to excite them. They are wholly the products of the Sensibility, and have neither voluntariness, nor moral character about them so far as they themselves are concerned.
5. Nor does selfishness consist in any kind, or degree of mere desire as distinguished from choice or willing. As I have often said, every one knows the difference between desire and willing, by his own consciousness. For example; I may desire to go to Europe, and strongly desire it, and yet on the whole, never will to go, for desire does not, but will does govern the conduct.

II. What selfishness is.

1. Man, as I have before said, possesses three cardinal faculties, called Intelligence, Sensibility, and Will. This we know by consciousness.

2. The Will is influenced by motives addressed to it, either through the Sensibility, that is, by constitutional desires and impulses, or through the Intelligence, that is, by truth, and obligation to comply with it, as perceived by the Intellect. There is no other way in which will can be influenced, and it must of necessity choose between the gratification of the impulses of the Sensibility, and the dictates of the Intelligence.

3. The law of God is revealed and imposed by the Reason. Man is, in a certain sense, his own law-giver; or, as Paul expressed it, he "is a law to himself." If the grand principal of the law of God did not lie revealed in our reason, we could never be influenced by any outward precepts, and could never perceive obligation, simply because we should have no standard of either truth or morality. We could not know whether the Bible is the word of God or a lying fable, because we should have no possible way of testing it-- In short, if our reason did not reveal and impose the great principle of the law of God, all religion and morality would be to us naturally impossible. All precept and instruction therefore are valid to moral beings, only because, when addressed to them, their reason recognizes their truth, and imposes obligation to conform to them; and whatever the Reason will not thus recognize as true, cannot be obligatory. All the commands, and truth of God are addressed to moral beings through their reason. I should perhaps say here, that by reason, I mean that power of the mind which affirms all necessary and absolute truth: or, in other words, the intuitive faculty. All moral influences then come to the Will through the Reason, and all virtue consists in the conformity of the will to its requirements.

4. The sensibility always invites the Will to seek gratification from the objects which awaken its susceptibilities. For example; The appetite for food is awakened by the perception of its appropriate object; and whenever awakened, and to whatever degree, is impulsive to the will. The impulse will be strong or weak in proportion to the degree in which the susceptibility is excited, and in proportion to its strength, will impel the will to consent to the gratification. So it is with all the appetites, desires, and passions. That this is true we know by our own consciousness.

5. There are then two, and only two directions and occasions of human action, between which the will must make its election.

(1.) The law of the reason requires the exercise of benevolence, that is, of supreme love to God, and equal love to our neighbor. It requires that this should be the ultimate intention, or supreme choice of the Will.

(2.) The Sensibility invites to gratification irrespective of the law of the reason. The Sensibility is naturally blind. It impels towards every object, which awakens its susceptibilities, for its own sake, that is because it will afford gratification, and for no other reason. Now every man knows by his own consciousness that such are the relations of his reason, and his sensibility to his will and that he is under the necessity of choosing between them.

The way is now prepared to state directly what selfishness is.

6. It consists in willing the gratification of the Sensibility--in the minds consecrating itself to its demands in opposition to the law of the reason. It is a disposition to gratify self instead of seeking a higher and holier end. It is a state of the will, as distinguished from the Sensibility.

7. It must then always consist in what I called in the last lecture, an ultimate intention. The ultimate end chosen by the mind is self-gratification. This, in some form or other, is preferred to everything else. It is not selfishness to have a capacity of gratification, nor is the gratification itself selfishness. Brutes have a sensibility like men, and when the demands of their awakened susceptibilities are met they are gratified, but there is no selfishness in them, nor are they capable of selfishness, because they have no reason to impose on them a higher law than the mere impulses of their sensibility. These impulses, are, however, regulated in them by instinct. But moral beings have a higher faculty which reveals to them a higher end of life, and imposes on them obligation to choose it. It requires them to regard all personal gratification as a means, and not an end, and therefore to be held in perfect subordination to the law imposed by the reason. The Bible only repeats the demands of every man's own reason, when it says--"Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." That is, hold all your appetites, desires, and passions, with a steady rein, and under perfect control. Now selfishness, consists in preferring self-gratification to the demands of this higher faculty, that is, making personal gratification an end--the ultimate end of life.

8. This is just what the Bible calls the "carnal mind," "walking after the flesh." That is, the carnal mind consists in the mind's choosing the gratification of the Sensibility as the end of pursuit. I have said already, that every object of desire, is desired for its own sake, that is, because it is capable of affording gratification. Selfishness therefore consists in choosing desired objects because they are desired; or to gratify self, and not as a means to the glory of God.

III. Selfishness and holiness cannot co-exist in the same mind.

1. In the preceding lecture, I showed that holiness, or true virtue consists wholly in disinterested benevolence, that is, in willing every interest according to its perceived relative value. Benevolence must be a supreme choice, or ultimate intention; for if it wills every interest according to its perceived value, there is nothing else in the universe which it can will. If every good is willed for its own sake according to its perceived value, it is naturally impossible to will any thing beyond that, or aside from it. To say that you can is a contradiction. It is the same as to say that you can will every interest according to its perceived value, and not will it at the same time.

2. Now what is selfishness? As we have already seen, under the previous head, it is also an ultimate intention. In other words it is the preference of self-gratification to the law of the reason, that is, to benevolence. Instead of willing every good according to its perceived value, it is willing one good more than all other goods. Whenever an individual prefers his own gratification to the demands of his own reason, he does it in the face of the law of God, and in defiance of his authority.

3. But these are, self-evidently, opposite choices and therefore cannot co-exist in the same mind. Is it possible that there can be two supreme, ultimate conflicting choices in exercise by the same mind, at the same time? This cannot be.

I may add that benevolence and selfishness regard and treat every perceived interest in the universe, in an order exactly the opposite of each other. Benevolence regards God's interests first, and aims at his glory as the supreme good; next the well being of the universe; then of this world; afterwards of its own nation; then of its own community; next of its own

family; and lastly of itself. Now selfishness exactly reverses all this. The selfish man places self first, and regards his own interest as supreme; then he regards the interest of his family and special friends, but only so far as supreme devotion to himself on the whole prompts; next he regards his own community or city in opposition to all other communities and cities, whenever their interests clash; then he regards his own nation, and is what men call very patriotic, and would sacrifice the interests of all other nations, just as far as they interfere with his own; and so he progresses till finally, God and his interests find the last place in his regards. That this is so, is a simple matter of fact as every body knows, and how then is it possible that these two opposite choices should co-exist in the same mind? Believe it, who can.

IV. Several evidences of selfishness.

1. A want of zeal for God's interests. Men are always zealous for that which they supremely choose, and if they are not zealous for God's honor, it proves that it is not the object of their supreme regard. To deny this is absurd.
2. The absence of pain and indignation when his interests are disregarded. If they were willed as the supreme good, it would be impossible to witness his commands and authority set at nought without the keenest sense of pain and indignation.
3. More zeal and labor in promoting self interest, than the interest of God, is an evidence of selfishness. It proves to a demonstration that your own interests are preferred to his. Men universally manifest the most zeal in behalf of that in which they are most interested.
4. If, therefore, persons think they have piety, while they are more zealous in promoting self interest than the interest of God, they are deceived, and are probably mistaking mere desire for religion. Let me here remind you that the will necessarily governs the conduct, while desire does not. I may strongly desire to go to Ohio, and never go, but if I really will to go there, I go of necessity unless my volition is overcome by superior force. So if a man is really benevolent, he prefers the interest of God and his universe to his own, and manifests a zeal accordingly.

5. Where persons pay more attention to their own personal interests than to the eternal interests of others, it is evidence that they are selfish. They certainly are not regarding things according to their relative value.

6. The absence of a spirit of prayer is an evidence of selfishness. In a world like this prayer is the very breath of benevolence. How can a benevolent man walk through the streets, and mingle in society, without his spirit being stirred within him, and venting itself in earnest prayer? It cannot be.--What! thousands around us, jostling us at every step, in all their sins, already suffering many evils the consequences of transgression, exposed to eternal death! Who that believes there is any help in God for them, can avoid prayer? Certainly none but those who are supremely selfish.

7. Another evidence of selfishness is spiritual epicureanism. There is a certain class of persons who are always wanting something to make them happy, and whatever measures or preaching will not secure this result, they of course reject. Now what state of will does this indicate? Why, a selfish state to be sure. They do not want to have their minds enlightened, and their duty pointed out because this renders them unhappy; but they delight to sit and have their emotions fanned till their sensibility is all in a glow, and the preaching which does that, is to them the only gospel. Now this is nothing but a refined selfishness.

8. Where persons are more zealous to defend their own reputation and character than the cause and honor of God, it is an evidence of selfishness. There are multitudes even of professors of religion, who, if men should say anything against their character, or if in any way, their reputation was about to suffer, would be thrown into an agony, lie awake all night, and wet their pillow with tears; but if they should hear a ribald infidel rail against God, and cover his character all over with foul reproaches, it would scarcely catch a passing notice. Now why is this? Plainly because they prize their own character more than the honor of God, and are supremely selfish.

9. Unwillingness to make personal sacrifices to promote a higher good is another evidence of selfishness. This needs no illustration.

10. Another evidence of selfishness is the dominion of any appetite or passion over the will. There are some who pretend to be religious, who habitually gratify certain appetites and passions which they admit to be

wrong. Ask them if they do not believe it to be wrong; they say, yes, but they cannot overcome it. And mark me, that is a selfish man; that is the very definition of selfishness. It is preferring self gratification to the known will of God. It is what the Apostle means by "minding the flesh."

11. A want of interest in the prosperity of others, is another evidence. Selfish men do not know what they lose, by neglecting to interest themselves in the good of others. The benevolent man enjoys the happiness of others, and thus all the well-being of the universe, of which he is the spectator, contributes to his own enjoyment. Myriads of rills of happiness pour into his own bosom. Why? Because the prosperity of others is the very thing on which his heart is set, and it is a contradiction to say that he will not be gratified in witnessing the realization of that which he supremely chooses.- Whenever, therefore, an individual manifests a want of interest in the happiness of others, it proves that he does not really will it, and is therefore supremely selfish.

12. Another evidence is a disposition to envy and murmur, if others possess what you do not.- What state of mind is that? It cannot bear to see anybody live in a better house, have better accommodations, superior endowments, or richer equipage. Instead of rejoicing in their good, it repines that they are not on a level with itself. It says, let no one have more than I. Now this must be supreme selfishness. How would benevolence feel and talk? Plainly it would rejoice in their good, and its language would be, "I thank God that others possess these good things if I do not."

13. A spirit of speculation is another evidence of selfishness. By this, I mean a disposition to make bargains out of others. Now would benevolence represent the article above its real value--would it attempt to get rich by taking the advantage of others? I have been amazed whenever I have thought of the perfect mania, which swept like an epidemic over all the length and breadth of the land some years since. It was the great object to make money by speculation. Christians, and even ministers rushed headlong into the general scramble after money. When asked why they did so, they replied, they wished to make money for God, that is, in plain English, they wished to promote the glory of God, by trampling upon his law. Why, the principle is as absurd as to become a pirate to get money to give to the Bible Society. Suppose a man should turn pirate, and go out

upon the high seas to run down, and destroy every vessel that came in his way under pretense of getting money to give to the Bible Society! And when remonstrated with, suppose he should urge the importance of sending abroad the Bible, and that he could make more money by piracy in order to accomplish this object, than in any other way! Who would give him credit for any benevolence in this? So to attempt to justify speculation on the ground of acquiring means by it, to spread the Gospel, is to put on an impudent face and baptize rebellion against God, with the name of holiness. Rob your neighbor to give to God!!

14. Squandering time and money to gratify artificial appetites is another evidence of selfishness.- There are certain appetites which must be gratified that is, the things desired are necessary to our existence and usefulness, and where gratification under appropriate circumstances is proper. To expend money for the gratification of these, is to make a proper use of it, so long as it is done in accordance with the dictates of reason. Such are all the constitutional appetites which are really such.- But when they are not natural, but artificial, their gratification can be nothing else but selfishness.- To illustrate, take the appetite for ardent spirits, tobacco, or any other unnatural stimulant.

15. An unwillingness to bear your part in making public improvements, is another evidence of selfishness. Suppose roads are to be made, or churches to be built, or anything else to be done which is essential to the public good, what else can it be but selfishness to stand back from bearing your part in the labor and expense necessary to accomplish it? I have sometimes seen cases of this kind: A church has become deeply involved in debt, and certain individuals seem to want to leave it. They manifest peculiar anxiety to change their relations, when it is as manifest as can be, that their only reason is they wish to avoid doing their part towards paying the debt.

16. When self interest must be appealed to in order to excite to action, it is evidence of selfishness. When a man is benevolent, all that is necessary to move the deep foundations of his moral being, is to lay before him some real good to be achieved. It is enough for him to have his intelligence enlightened. But in vain do you attempt to move the selfish man by appeals to his benevolence. If you wish to move him, you must exhibit an entirely different class of motives, such as take deep hold on his sensibility. If he be

a professor of religion, perhaps it will be impossible to move him until you can shake his hope. Duty must be brought, with such persons, into such relation as to appear the least of two evils, one or the other of which they must endure, and then their very selfishness leads them to perform it. Or it must be so placed before them as that its performance will advance their own special interests. For example: Suppose a church is to be built. Now if you are obliged to go to a man and tell him how it will increase the value of his own property, or in some other way promote his own peculiar interests, you may depend upon it, that man is supremely selfish. It is the same with this class of persons as it respects their eternal interests. Nothing will move them so effectually to any kind of religious effort, as a representation of the personal good which will accrue to them in the future world. In short, the only way in which you can influence such men, is by appealing either to their hopes or fears.

17. Increasing expenditures as your income increases, instead of doing more good. During the great speculation, it was my lot to talk with men very frequently upon the principles by which they were actuated in driving after wealth. They all said, they were seeking to do good with it. But I observed that with scarcely an exception, they increased their expenditures, and equipage, their coaches, and fine horses, and rich furniture, just in proportion as their means increased, so that they were no more able to do good than before. It would be the same if their wealth were increased by thousands, and this uniform result proves that the principle which they adopted was radically wrong. The truth is, you may as well talk of stealing for God as of speculating for Him. The one is just as consistent as the other.

18. A disposition to suspect others of selfishness. This is an almost universal characteristic of selfish minds, and never of a benevolent one. It is for this reason that selfish men so generally, deny that there is any such thing as disinterested benevolence. Mankind are disposed to regard others in the light of their own character. This might be illustrated by the case of Satan and Job. Job was an upright man and served God disinterestedly.- But Satan, being supremely selfish, did not believe it. Said he, "Doth Job serve God for naught?" intimating that the only reason for Job's apparent obedience, was the personal advantages which would accrue to him from it, and even when he had stripped him, by the permission of God, of almost all that he held dear, and Job remained unmoved, he still intimates that his only

reason for doing so was a selfish one. "Skin for skin, yea all that a man hath, will he give for his life. But put forth thy hand now and touch his bone and his flesh and he will curse thee to thy face." The truth is, a benevolent man is naturally unsuspicious- "thinketh no evil." But show me a suspicious man, one who is always attributing the worst motives to others, and I will show you a man who is himself supremely selfish.

19. An indisposition to do as you would be done unto, is another evidence of selfishness. I gave very high offense to certain persons in one of our cities, not long since, by pressing this thought. Suppose yourself and family to be enjoying all the blessings of liberty, suppose you have a wife whom you dearly love, and children, upon whom have centered the affections of your heart, but in a wo[e]ful day, they are wrested away from your embrace, and plunged into slavery. How would you feel? How would you talk? Would you say we have nothing to do with slavery? Nothing to do with it! Would you say it is nothing to me? Nothing to me! You may depend on it, in that case you would bring up no plea of the delicacy of the subject, as an excuse for refusing to interest yourself in their behalf and to condemn the outrageous system by which they were oppressed. In this way every one may learn his duty towards those who are enslaved in this nation. Put yourself and your family in their place and inquire how you would wish others to regard your condition and to act in reference to it. Now mark, the very thing which you would judge to be their duty in the circumstances supposed, is your own in your present circumstances. Suppose it were now, as it was some years ago, that the Algerines were enslaving our fellow citizens--how would it be regarded by this nation? It would be the signal for instant war. Thousands would press forward to enlist in the work of vengeance upon the oppressors, and if they could not otherwise accomplish the rescue of those in bondage, they would wade through an ocean of blood, and desolate with fire and slaughter their whole territory. But alas! the winds of heaven may come over from the south, laden with the groans of thousands of our fellow men, daily suffering the wrongs of slavery, in its worst forms, and with thousands scarcely a feeling is enlisted in their favor. Is that loving their neighbor as they love themselves? Is this the religion of Jesus Christ? My soul come not thou into the secret of such religion as that! And stranger still, multitudes even attempt to make the Bible sanction and authorize this accursed system. They say the Bible has really authorized it

as an institution. But who can believe it? What! the same God who uttered the fiery law, requiring man to love his neighbor as himself, and denouncing death on all who will not comply with the requisition, authorize and sanction a system, which tramples on this law at every step, by which, one man seizes his brother,

"Chains him and tasks him,
And exacts his sweat with stripes,
That mercy, with a bleeding heart,
Weeps when she sees inflicted on a beast."

Who does not regard such a supposition, when fairly stated, as downright blasphemy, and who would not reject the Bible as a gross imposition, if it really did thus contradict itself and belie its pretended author.

20. Another proof of selfishness, is covetousness. Some cannot bear to see others have what they have not without coveting it, and often to such a degree, that they can scarcely keep their hands from it.--Now wherever this spirit exists it is supreme selfishness.

21. A disposition to get the best seat in church or the prominent place in assemblies. For example, in churches where they sell their seats, you will see them striving to get the best seat and the best cushion, and the most convenient location, and if they fail of this they are more distressed than if a soul were lost. So, often, when churches are formed instead of trying to secure a house best adapted to the service of God, and instead of trying to promote the conversion of sinners, they lay themselves out to get the best house, and the best organ and the best choir, and the best minister, and then sit down to be preached to heaven. But how shall a minister preach to them? He will utterly fail to do them any good, and to save them from death, if he does not put his finger into their very eyes, and rebuke their horrible selfishness.

V. One form of selfishness is as inconsistent with salvation as another.

Remember that selfishness consists in obeying the propensities, appetites, passions, and desires.--This devotion to self gratification develops itself in a

great variety of ways without changing its character. With one, one propensity predominates, with another, another. One for example is an epicure. His desire for pleasant dishes predominates over everything else, and he does not value money only as it contributes to his gratification. Another is a miser, and is entirely too much devoted to the desire of wealth to be an epicure. Indeed, he thinks his ruling passion contemptible. One is fond of dress, and values money only as it contributes to the gratification of this desire. This is his form of selfishness. He thinks of it all the year round, and labors with his eye on self gratification in this form. Right over against this, another is fond of power or influence to such an extent as to wonder that any can be fond of such a trifling gratification as dress affords. But he is as much enslaved by his desire of power as the other by his devotion to dress, and is equally selfish. Again, some are so fond of reputation, as to do anything that public sentiment requires, rather than to fail of popularity. This is their form of selfishness.--Their reputation is preferred to the well-being of the universe. But others have such a large development of some appetite or passion as to sacrifice reputation for it. For example: the drunkard.--He regards his appetite for intoxicating drinks above everything else, and his character weighs not a straw when brought into competition with this. Now each of these different forms of selfishness is a violation of the law of God. One just as much so as the other. They all lord it over the will.--And yet those devoted to one form take great credit to themselves because they are not devoted to all the others. The truth is in all cases the sin lies in the indulgence of any appetite, desire or propensity whatever, in opposition to the law of love.

REMARKS.

1. It matters not which of the propensities prevail over the will in order to constitute selfishness. None of them has moral character in itself. To prefer the indulgence of anyone of them to higher interests is what constitutes sin. It is minding the flesh. It is enmity against God.

2. If we are asked why we have these propensities if they are not to be gratified? I answer, (1.) Those which are natural are given to serve and not to rule us. For example, the appetite for food. Without an appetite for food we should never take it, but it is essential to our existence, and therefore the appetite serves to secure life. So the desire for knowledge. Were there not a constitutional desire for knowledge, who would ever seek it. But knowledge is essential to our

highest good. The desire for it therefore, serves to secure this essential to our well being. (2.) Farther, these propensities are not only given to serve us, but to afford us gratification. The benevolence of God gave us these constitutional propensities, so that we might find pleasure in that which is for our well being. Were we destitute of appetites, desires, passions, and susceptibilities we should be as incapable of pleasure or pain, gratification or happiness as a marble statue. Had the human race remained innocent the gratification of these susceptibilities would doubtless have afforded them exquisite pleasure. That we possess them, therefore, must be regarded as a proof of the divine benevolence towards us, notwithstanding the fact that they render us liable to various and strong temptations. (3.) Many of the propensities that are most despotic, God never gave. They are wholly artificial, and are produced by a voluntary perversion of those which are natural.--For example, the use of intoxicating drinks, or tobacco, and various narcotics.

3. Indulgence in any form of selfishness is utterly inconsistent with salvation. It is sin, and the Bible declares that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

4. A man who is selfish in his business can no more go to heaven than a pirate can. How should he? They are both living for the same end, self-gratification, under different forms, and are both therefore directly opposed to the will of God.

5. A vain man or a vain woman, can no more be saved, than a licentious man or a licentious woman. They prefer the gratification of their vanity, to the end of life which the law of God requires, while a licentious man or woman prefers the self gratification afforded them, in this grosser form, to the same end.

6. There is so little discrimination, as to the nature of sin, that endless delusions prevail. For example: while it is known that drunkenness, licentiousness, theft, robbery, murder &c. are utterly inconsistent with salvation, various other forms of sin are regarded as consistent with a profession of religion. But the truth is, as I have said before, a man who is selfish in his business, or who practices selfishness in any other form, however slight it may seem, can no more be saved than a drunkard can. Why cannot a drunkard be saved? or the licentious man, or the thief? Because he is selfish. So it must be with any other man who is selfish, whatever may be the type which his selfishness has put on. If a man were drunk but once a week he would be excommunicated as hopelessly lost, but he may be habitually avaricious, vain, or an epicure, and yet be regarded as a good Christian in the estimation of the church. If any church should continue the

drunkard in its communion, it would bring upon itself the frown of Christians universally, and yet persons indulging various forms of selfishness are to be found in almost every church, and regarded as true Christians. Scarcely any one suspects that they will not be saved. Now this must be delusion. But why is this mistake? It is because there is so little discrimination respecting the nature of sin. The truth is, if any appetite, desire, or propensity whatever, rules over the will, it matters not what it is, the man is in the way to death.

7. To suppose religion to consist in obeying any feeling whatever, merely as feeling, is a most ruinous error. And yet multitudes know no other religion than this. They suppose happy feelings to be religion, and generally do just as they feel, irrespective of the demands of their reason. Now these persons have never yet apprehended the true idea of religion, namely that it consists in the entire consecration of the will to the law of God, as it is regarded and imposed by their reason. Feeling is not that to which the will should bow, for it is blind; but reason, as it perceives the law of God with its intuitive eye, should be heeded in its faintest whisper respecting the application of that law.

8. Selfishness was the first sin of man; that is, his first sin consisted in preferring his own gratification to the will of God. Now see whether I have given the right definition of sin. The first pair were placed in the garden in which were many trees bearing an abundance to supply their wants, but in the midst was one upon which God laid a prohibition. It is an important question why God laid this restraint[?] It is a question which is often asked, and it is important that it should receive a right answer. The design undoubtedly was to teach them that they must control their sensibility--that they must keep their appetites, desires, and passions in subjection to the law of reason. This lesson it was of vast importance they should learn, and learn too as soon as possible, before their sensibility had such a development, that is, before their appetites, desires, and passions, should acquire such strength, during their ignorance of the tendency of gratifying them, as to render it certain that they never would deny themselves of their gratification when they came to see its tendency. For this reason God prohibits their eating the fruit of one particular tree. Now here Satan steps in, and being well aware of the relation of the Sensibility to the Will, and of both to the Reason, he suggested to our mother Eve, that God was selfish in laying restraint upon the constitutional propensities, and then presents such considerations before her mind as awakens two of the strongest of them, the appetite for food, and the desire of knowledge. This placed the demands of her reason which echoed the prohibition of God, and

the demand of her constitutional desires in opposition. Between these her will was compelled to choose. And in that evil hour she preferred the gratification of these appetites to the will of God, and thus

"Brought death into the world, and all our woe."

This was the first sin. Observe now, these constitutional appetites were perfectly innocent in themselves, but the sin consisted in her consenting to their gratification in opposition to the requirement of God.

9. Selfishness is the first sin of every human being. Children come into the world in perfect ignorance both of the law of God and of the tendency of their sensibility. Now what is the process by which they sin. See the little child. At first it can scarcely turn its head or open its eyes. It is hardly conscious of any thing. Soon its sensibility begins to be developed, and foremost its appetite for food. As soon as you give it any thing, no matter what, it puts it right into the mouth. Gradually other appetites are awakened, equally constitutional, and therefore without moral character. At what age their reason begins to be developed we cannot know. But it is doubtless very early. But as soon as it is developed and affirms obligation then its very next is a moral act. Hence the appetites, desires, and propensities of its sensibility which have previously been developed, and its perception of obligation are both placed before its will, and it prefers the former to the latter. This is its first sin, and this is the first sin of every human being. But why does it always choose wrong? Because previously to the development of its reason, its will has constantly been under the control of its appetites, and it has acquired a habit of consenting to them. On the contrary the first affirmations of its reason are necessarily feeble. He therefore chooses self-gratification in opposition to it.

10. Selfishness constitutes sin in every instance. It is easy to show that this must be so.

11. We can see what regeneration is. It is turning from selfishness to benevolence. It is the act of the will preferring the well being of the universe to self-gratification to which it has always previously consented.

12. It is easy to see the necessity of regeneration. Who does not know that unregenerate men are universally selfish? And who does not know that selfish men thrown together could never be happy? I have often wondered what those

persons mean who deny the necessity of regeneration. The truth in it is self-evident.

13. We can see why men are commanded to regenerate themselves. If regeneration is an act of the will, nothing can be more rational than this requirement. It is of necessity their own act.

14. See why the Spirit of God is needed in regeneration. Men have been so habituated to gratify themselves, and their attention is so absorbed with this that the Spirit of God is needed to develop their reason, and to throw the light of heaven upon its eye, that it may see at once the nature and beauty of religion in contrast with the nature and deformity of sin. This is conviction. Then the sinner needs to be charmed away from his selfishness by correct apprehensions of the character of God, and the love of Christ. This it is the Spirit's office to effect.

15. Finally we can see what is meant by the Apostle, when he speaks so often of being led by the flesh and by the Spirit. An individual is led by the flesh when his will is in subjection to the Sensibility. This is the carnal mind. On the contrary, an individual is led by the Spirit, when his will is in subjection to the law of his reason, which is developed and applied by the Spirit of God. And now, beloved, where are you? Are you led by the flesh, or by the Spirit? Are you selfish, or are you benevolent? What would you say if you were called to appear before God to-night? Could you say, I know that I am led by the Spirit of God and therefore am a child of God? O! beloved, search yourselves, lest you be deceived!

[Back to Top](#)

HOLINESS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE PRESENT LIFE --No. 4

Christian Character

HABITUAL HOLINESS THE TEST

Lecture IV

February 15, 1843

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 John 3:9: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

In this discourse I shall,

I. Inquire what sin is not.

II. What it is.

III. What to be born of God is not.

IV. What it is.

V. What the seed spoken of in the text is not.

VI. What it is.

VII. What is not intended by the assertion that whosoever is born of God does not and cannot commit sin.

VIII. What is intended by it.

IX. How a Christian may be distinguished from a sinner.

I. What sin is not.

1. Sin is not a part of the soul or body.
2. It is nothing infused into either soul or body. Some talk as if they supposed the whole being, soul and body to be saturated with sin, than which, nothing can be more absurd.
3. It is no taint of corruption in, nor a lapsed state of the constitution. The Bible does not make it so, and reason certainly affirms it to be something entirely different from this.
4. It is nothing which is or can be transmitted from parents to children by natural generation.--This would contradict the Bible definition of sin, and the supposition is in itself a ridiculous absurdity.
5. Nor does it consist in any weakness, debility, or inability, either natural or moral, to obey God. The Bible no where makes it consist in this, and

certainly common sense does not.

6. Nor does it consist in any appetite, passion, or mere feeling. These we have already seen, in a former lecture, are constitutional, involuntary, and in themselves wholly destitute of all moral character.

7. Nor does it consist in any degree of excitement of these in appropriate circumstances; for in the appropriate circumstances, they are excited of necessity.

8. Nor does it consist in any state or act of the intelligence; for this also acts of necessity, and we can only be responsible for its operations just so far as we can regulate it by willing.

9. Nor does it consist in any outward actions; for these are necessitated by the supreme end chosen, and in themselves are wholly destitute of all moral character.

II. What sin is.

1. As was said in a former lecture, the primary faculties of the mind are Intelligence, Sensibility, and Free Will. This we know from consciousness. The Intelligence is that power which thinks, affirms, reasons, and reflects. The Sensibility, is the power of feeling. To this power are referred all appetites, desires, passions, or emotions whatever. The Free Will, is the power which wills.

2. The will is always influenced by motives originating either in the intelligence or the sensibility. The will always chooses some object, or acts in reference to some motive; and we know by consciousness that these motives are either duties perceived by the intelligence, or the awakened susceptibilities of the sensibility, which always invite the mind to seek the gratification of its appetites and passions for their own sake. I do not mean that the action of the intelligence and the sensibility are so isolated from each other, that either of them acts in perfect independence of the other; for we know that every thought and affirmation of the intelligence is accompanied by some feeling of the sensibility, and on the contrary that every feeling awakens in the intelligence, affirmations, thoughts, and reasonings to a greater or less extent. But what I mean is, that some motives originate in, and are addressed to the will by the intelligence, and some on

the contrary, originate in the sensibility, and as such, influence the will. The distinction of which I am speaking is just what every one means, when speaking of the difference between being led by propensity or passion, and reason.--The intelligence and sensibility mutually influence each other, but one or the other takes the lead. In other words, the mind, which is a unity, in thinking feels, and in feeling, thinks. When the intelligence reveals and imposes obligation, it is always echoed by the sensibility; and on the contrary, when some appetite or desire is excited in the sensibility, the intelligence is awakened into thought respecting it. In the one case the sensibility follows in the wake of the intelligence, and in the other, the intelligence in the wake of the sensibility, but in all cases the action both of the sense and intelligence is indirectly under the control of the will, which by its sovereign power always determines which shall be the ascendant.

3. The mind affirms itself to be under obligation to obey the law of the reason just as I suppose the mind of God imposes obligation on Him. The holiness of God consists in his obeying the law revealed and imposed on Him by his own infinite and eternal reason, and so the holiness of all moral beings must consist in their voluntary conformity to whatever their own reason affirms to be obligatory. Holiness then is that state of the will or heart which consists in the voluntary consecration of the whole being to God.

4. Sin is the exact opposite of this, and consists in the consecration, by the will or heart, of the whole being to the gratification of self. This is selfishness, which we have already endeavored to show is the substance of all the sin in the universe.--Whatever, in the action of the will or heart, is not conformed to the law of love, as perceived by the reason, is sin, whether it be omission of duty or the commission of that which is positively prohibited. Entire conformity of heart and life, therefore, to all known truth is holiness, and nothing short of this is, or can be. If persons deny this, it is because they do not know what they say, and have not the idea of holiness before their mind at all. The law of God is one--a unity, and to talk of being partly conformed to it, and partly not, is to overlook the very nature both of the law and of conformity to it. The law of God requires perfect conformity of life and heart to all the truth perceived, and this is moral perfection in any being, and is the only sense in which any being can be morally perfect in any world. Suppose there is a moral pigmy whose standard of truth is No.

1. Now if he fully conforms to that, he does his whole duty. So you may increase the scale to 2, 5, 10, 20, and moral perfection will still consist in conformity to the light possessed. Suppose you ascend the scale to ten thousand or a million, it is still the same until you arrive at God Himself, and this is just what constitutes the moral perfection of God. All the truths in the universe are known to Him with absolute certainty, and He conforms to all He knows. Since his knowledge admits of no increase, his holiness admits of none, while that of all finite beings does and will to all eternity. Angels doubtless sustain innumerable relations of which they are totally ignorant, and to which they are not morally conformed, but their state of will is such, that as fast as they learn them they conform to them, and hence their holiness is constantly increasing; and so it must be from the lowest to the highest degree of moral capacity. Every thing, then, short of living up to the light we have, is sin, and every moral act is either right or wrong.

III. What to be born of God is not.

1. Regeneration does not consist in the creation of any new faculties. We have faculties enough, more than we use well, and do not need any more.
2. Nor does it consist in a constitutional change. A constitutional, would be far enough from a moral change, and it would be hard to tell what good it would do.
3. Nor does it consist in implanting, or infusing any piece, parcel, or physical principle of holiness into the soul. What can be meant by a principle of holiness, when such language is used to designate something aside from holiness itself?
4. Nor does it consist in a change of the constitutional appetites and propensities. These have no moral character in themselves and need no change. They only need to be rightly regulated.
5. Nor does it consist in the introduction or implantation of a new taste. There could be no virtue in regeneration if it consisted in any of these things, and they all are mistakes overlooking the nature of virtue. But,

IV. What is it to be born of God?

1. To be born of God is to have a new heart.
2. We have seen that the old or wicked heart is the same as the carnal mind, and that the carnal mind or wicked heart consists in the devotion of the will to self gratification. Self gratification is the ultimate end chosen.
3. Now to be born again, or of God, is to make a radical change in the ultimate intention, or choice of an end. It is called being born again because it is a change of the whole moral character and course of life. Christ says, "except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall, in no case, enter into the kingdom of heaven." The phraseology is figurative and emphatic, because when a moral being has changed his ultimate intention, he must of necessity live an entirely new life, perfectly the reverse of what it was before.
4. It is called, a being born of God, or from above; because sinners are influenced to make this voluntary change by the word and Spirit of God. I say voluntary change, because every one is perfectly conscious that he was voluntary in it, and because it must of necessity be voluntary, if it has any moral character in it; and I might add, that unless it is voluntary, backsliding from it would be naturally impossible, and obedience necessary, which are as false in fact, as they are absurd in theory.

V. What the seed which remaineth in Christians is not.

1. It is not a physical germ, root, sprout or taste, inserted into the soul. If so, then falling from grace is naturally impossible, and perseverance naturally necessary. This theory robs religion of all virtue whatever.
2. It is not love nor any other holy exercise. In other words, it is not religion at all. Religion is voluntary conformity to the law of God, and to say that this remains in the Christian could have no meaning. The truth is, the Apostle, in the text, is asserting why this voluntary conformity is continued. It then cannot be the seed.
3. It does not consist in any new principle implanted in the soul.

VI. What this seed is.

1. It is the word or truth which re-generated him--that is, in view of which

he changed his ultimate intention or heart. Truth is frequently called seed in the bible,--"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." "Of his own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures."

2. This word or truth is called the seed of God, because it is introduced and made known to the mind by the Holy Ghost. Hence we are said to be "begotten of God." It is his truth that quickens the mind into right voluntary action. Now every one knows, by his own consciousness, that this is the way in which he was born again. Hear a young convert tell his experience. He begins to tell of some truth which arrested his attention, and convicted him; how he thought of one thing after another, that he perceived this, and that and the other thing to be true as he never did before, and that finally he made up his mind, in view of what he thus saw was true, to repent. Now what is he doing? Why, he is giving the history of his regeneration, and giving it in the detail. But does he know the history of his regeneration? As well as he knows any thing else under Heaven. To be sure he did not see the Spirit, no[r] did he perceive that it was the Spirit, because the Spirit directs to Christ, but he is conscious that he did see the truth as he never saw it before. And he is conscious that he was perfectly voluntary under its influence.

3. This seed, which has once broken the power of selfishness, remains in him, that is, in his memory, so that he can sin only by letting it slip. "Let that therefore abide in you which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." This truth, as I said before, is not a piece of something which God puts into you, nor is it religion, nor love, but it is that which once subdued your will and will not cease to influence you, only as you let it slip.

VII. What is not intended by the assertion that whosoever is born of God does not and cannot commit sin.

1. It cannot mean that a holy being has not power to commit sin. Adam was a holy being and he sinned, as did also the "Angels that kept not their first estate." If there were a lack of natural power to sin, there would be no virtue in obedience. This position would contradict facts innumerable. Perhaps

very few have ever been born of God who have not afterwards been guilty of sin. This is a matter of consciousness. Most of the histories recorded in the Bible of good men, show that they did fall into sin, and the Bible everywhere assumes that there is danger of this. It would destroy free agency and the possibility of being sinful or holy.

2. It would make John contradict himself, for he was writing to regenerate persons, but he all along assumes that they could sin, and were in danger of sinning. Nor can it mean that one who is born of God never does in any instance sin under the force of temptation. This would contradict all the rest of the Bible.

VIII. What is intended by it.

1. It is intended that since the truth has once broken the power of passion, and appetite, and gained the consent of his will, and since it remains in him, that is, in his memory, he will not, as a matter of fact, consent to indulge himself in any form of sin.

2. Cannot is here used in its popular sense, as it generally is in the Bible. Such language must not be strained nor cut to the quick. It is used just as it is now used in popular conversation. Suppose I say I cannot take twenty-five dollars for my watch. What do I mean? Not that I have not power to take it, but that I am unwilling to take it. If I say I cannot throw this table across the room, the nature of the case shows that I use cannot, to indicate a natural impossibility, but in the former case I use it merely in the sense of a strong unwillingness. It is in this sense that it is used in the text, just as it is used everyday in every store on Broadway.

3. It is intended then that with all Christians, holiness is the rule and sin the exception--if there be sin at all, that sin is only occasional as opposed to habitual, that it is so unfrequent, that, in the strong language of John, it may be truly said, that they do not sin. If sin is not so rare as to be merely occasional instead of habitual, the text is absolutely false. For example; suppose I should say that such a man is not a drunkard. I should not be understood to say that he had never been drunk in his life, but I should certainly be understood to say that at most his fits of intoxication were extremely rare. John, as a writer, expresses himself very strongly, and I might read many passages from his writings, showing that he does not

intend such terms in an absolute sense, but to state, that, in Christians, their aversion to sin, and their purpose of obedience are so strong and fixed, that it may be said in strong language they cannot sin. "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: For sin is the transgression of the law. And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him neither known Him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: And he cannot commit sin, because he is born of God."

4. It must be intended that Christians only sin by being diverted from the consideration of the truth by the force of temptation. This is the least that this and similar passages can mean. It is not intended to assert what ought to be true of Christians, but what is so as a matter of fact. He is drawing the very portrait of a Christian and hanging it up for all the Church in all ages to look at.

IX. How a Christian may be distinguished from a sinner.

1. They cannot be distinguished by profession. For doubtless many sinners make profession and some Christians do not.
2. Nor can they be distinguished by their observance of the forms of religion, nor by their creeds or opinions, nor by their church standing, nor by the emotions or feelings which they manifest. Emotions are as natural to the impenitent as to Christians, and are no distinguishing test. But,
3. The Christian is benevolent, while the sinner is selfish. These are their ultimate states of mind, and will manifest themselves in both by a natural necessity.
4. The Christian is influenced by reason, and the sinner by mere feeling. If you wish to influence a sinner, you must appeal to his feelings, for nothing else will move him. He has not learned to yield his will to the dominion of

truth. But the Christian has devoted himself to truth, and is always influenced by it. He knows that the feelings effervesce, boil or freeze, just as circumstances vary; while truth is forever the same. Said a brother to me not long since, "I am distressed about my wife. She is very full of feeling, and can be affected by appeals which are calculated to awaken it; but I cannot influence her by truth." I replied, that this was truly a dark sign; and I now say, that I should have no hope for my wife nor anyone else, who cannot be influenced to duty, by the simple truth, unaided by appeals to the Sensibility.

5. The Christian obeys all known truth, on all subjects, while sinners conform to truth only on those subjects that are enforced by public opinion. Truth is the Christian's law, and he conforms to it as fully in opposition to, as in conformity to public opinion. But mark! a sinner will conform to some truths outwardly, but not to all, nor really to any in his heart. Public sentiment is a god which most people obey and worship.

6. Christians adhere to principle in the face of all opposition, while sinners quail before it. Let opposition rise ever so high, you will see the true Christian stand like a rock, and breast the dashing wave--he will not shrink or quail. Not so with the sinner. He will go along well enough, while all is smooth, but when the tide begins to rise, you see him yield to its force and drive along with it withersoever it goes. "By and by he is offended."

7. It can never be said of a true Christian, that, "sin has dominion over him." But some form of sin has dominion over sinners universally. Sometimes it assumes one type and sometimes another, but sin is their master.

8. Christians obey the spirit and letter of the moral law, but sinners obey only the letter, even if they do that.

9. Cause a Christian to see the truth on any subject and he will obey it; but a sinner will see and acknowledge it, and continue on in his sins. His appetites, and not his conscience, are his master.

REMARKS.

1. Every real Christian lives habitually without sin. Nothing is more common than to find large classes of professors of religion who acknowledge that they are living in sin. You ask them--Do you not know that this is wrong? Yes, they say,

but no person is expected to live without sin in this world. We must sin some. Now, as the Bible is true, such persons are deceived, and in the way to hell. If that is religion, what is Christianity? But, you will say--"I know what you say of this text cannot be the meaning, for it is not my experience." Poor soul! this excuse will do you no good, for God's word is true, whatever your experience is, and in the day of eternity, where will you be if you rely on this? Now do you cry out and say, "why this is awful; for if it be true what will become of the great mass of Christians?" Let me tell you all true Christians will be saved, but hypocrites God will judge. Said a woman to a minister not long since, "Do you confess your sins?" confess your sins! What did she mean by that? Why, she meant to inquire whether every time he prayed he confessed, not that he had been a sinner in times past, but, that he was now actually sinning against God? She, with many other professors, actually seemed to think that Christians should sin a little all the while in order to keep them humble, and to have something to confess. Indeed!

2. It is a dangerous error to inculcate that Christians sin daily and hourly. It sets the door wide open for false hopes, and the effect on the Church is that it is thronged with the victims of delusion.

3. Equally dangerous is it, to say that their most holy duties are sinful--that "sin is mixed with all we do." What! Then John should have said--"Whosoever is born of God commits sin daily and hourly, notwithstanding the seed of God remaineth in him, for sin is mixed with all he does!" It is a palpable matter of fact that whatever is holy is not sinful. Holiness is conformity to all perceived obligation--it is an act of the will, and must be a unity. If then holiness be a unity, a compliance with all perceived obligation, there is not and cannot be sin mixed in it. Says Christ, "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." And James says--"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." A person therefore, knowing obligation to rest on him, and not discharging it, is living in sin and is not a Christian. It is in vain to appeal to experience against the Bible.

4. All who live in the omission of duty or commission of what is contrary to known truth, are living in habitual sin and are not Christians.

5. How infinitely different is the doctrine of this discourse, from the common view, and what is generally inculcated. Said a celebrated minister in giving the definition of a Christian--"He has a little grace and a great deal of devil." Now

where did such a sentiment as that come from? From the Bible? No. But from a ruinous accommodation of the Bible to a false standard. And yet so current is such a sentiment, that if you deny it, they look astonished, and say--"Why, I guess you are a perfectionist." Now read the language of the Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church, right along side of what John says. Says the Confession of Faith--"No mere man since the fall, is able, either of himself, or by any grace received in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God, but doth daily break them in thought, word, and in deed."--And to this almost all the standards of the Church agree. It is the common sentiment of the Church. Now I would ask how this accords with what John says, in the text and in many other places in this epistle? Let me say he is not here speaking of some Christians who have made rare attainments, but of the common attainment. Now, which is right? By which will you be tried at the Judgment? By the Bible or the common standards? You know very well which.

6. When any, therefore, live in the omission of known duty, or commission of what they know to be contrary to truth, we are bound to say they are not Christians. This is not a want of charity but a love of the truth. Suppose an infidel should meet you with the Bible in his hand and should point out what it describes a Christian to be, and should ask you, "do you believe the Bible speaks the truth?" And should then point to those Christians who live daily and hourly in the omission of known duty, in a violation of perceived obligation, and ask you if you believe they are Christians, what would you say? What would you feel bound to say to maintain the honor of the Bible? The answer is plain. The truth is, the common views on this subject are a flat denial of the Bible, and are a ruinous accommodation to the experience of carnal professors.

7. Now, beloved, if this is so it becomes us, to ask ourselves, whether our experience accords with the Bible or the popular standard. Not whether we think we were converted some time ago, not what feelings we may have had: but are we at present conformed to all the truth we know. Does the seed remain in us? The test is a habitual perfection of moral character. He who has it is a Christian. He who has it not is not a Christian. Now where are you? Where would you be to night if summoned to the Judgment? Could you lay your hand on your heart and say, "Lord Thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love Thee?" Thou knowest that my life is a life of conformity to all thy known will?

[Back to Top](#)

HOLINESS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE PRESENT LIFE --No. 5

Christian Warfare

Lecture V

March 1, 1843

by Charles Grandison Finney

President of Oberlin College

Text.--Gal. 5:16, 17: "This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things ye would."

This passage has been greatly misunderstood, or else the Apostle has contradicted himself. Leaving out of view the 16th verse, and that the design of the 17th is to assign the grounds of the assertion in the 16th, many of the expounders of the Scriptures have understood the 17th to declare, that in consequence of the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, persons who really wish to be holy cannot. So it has all along been generally understood. Now I repeat, that if this interpretation be true, the Apostle contradicts himself. The 16th positively asserts that those who walk in the Spirit shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. This interpretation of the 17th verse, makes him say, that in consequence of the opposition between the flesh and the Spirit, those who walk in the Spirit, after all, cannot but fulfill the lusts of the flesh. But this interpretation entirely overlooks the fact, that the 17th verse is designed to establish the assertion made in the 16th. In the 16th, the Apostle says, "walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh." Why? "Because," says he, "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other," that is, they are opposites. What then? Why the obvious inference, "that ye (that is, who walk in the Spirit,) cannot do the things that ye would," in case you were not walking in the Spirit. In other words, you who are walking in the Spirit cannot fulfill the lusts of the flesh. The simple principle is, that you cannot walk after the Spirit, and fulfill the lusts of the flesh at the same time, because it is impossible to perform two opposites at once.

In further remarking on this text, I design to show,

I. What the Christian warfare does not consist in.

II. What it does consist in.

III. The difference between careless and convicted sinners.

IV. The difference between saints and convicted, but unconverted professors.

V. That a warfare would have existed if man had never sinned.

VI. To point out the causes of the aggravation of this warfare since the fall.

VII. How it may be modified and abated.

VIII. That it will, under a more or less modified form, continue while we are in the body.

I. What the Christian warfare does not consist in.

1. It does not consist in a conflict between the will or heart, and the conscience: for the Christian has a new heart, and the new heart and the conscience are at one. The new birth consists in the will's rejection of self-gratification as the supreme end, and adoption of the law of reason. Therefore regeneration harmonizes the will and the conscience, for the conscience is nothing else but the reason in a given function.

2. It does not consist in a war with inward sin, but with temptation. Some persons talk about fighting with inbred sin. But what do they mean by such language? I have no objection to such persons using such language, if they will only tell what they mean, but the truth is, to talk of a Christian's fighting with inbred sin, is to talk stark nonsense. What is sin? Sin is an act of the will. It is choosing self-gratification in preference to the will of God. This, and nothing else is sin. To talk therefore of fighting inbred sin, is to talk of the will fighting itself. It is a choice warring upon itself, than which nothing can be more absurd. We may fight with temptation, but not with sin in ourselves.

II. In what the Christian warfare does consist.

1. It consists in a conflict between the will and the sensibility. By the sensibility, as I have repeatedly said, is intended that primary faculty of the mind to which all feelings, desires, and passions belong. The desires and passions of the sensibility are generally called propensities. The Christian warfare, is a warfare kept up between the will and these. For example: the appetite for food seeks its own gratification, and so do all the other propensities of the mind. Inasmuch as gratification is the only end at which the sensibility aims, it of course is blind to every thing else. It knows nothing of measure or degree. To give the will up to the gratification of these, therefore, is to subject it to a lawless power, and wholly to set aside the law of God as revealed in the reason. This is sin, it is giving the will up, to seek gratification for its own sake. This is the whole business of sinners. But in regeneration, the will rejects the gratification of these for its own sake, as an end, and gives itself up to the end demanded by the reason: that is, to universal well-being. It takes ground right over against these. But they still exist, and must be resisted. That the sensibility and its susceptibilities still need a curb, after regeneration, is a matter of universal experience with Christians, and is directly asserted in the Bible. In the text the Apostle says, addressing Christians, "Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not obey the lusts of the flesh." The term flesh in the Apostle's time, represented what we now mean by the sensibility. The reason why I use the term sensibility rather than the term flesh, is I think it expresses the idea intended more definitely at the present time. When a term which once definitely expressed an idea, has, in the wear of time, become less exact, it is our duty to adopt modern language representing the same idea. To express the idea of the text, I would say, "Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the propensities of the sensibility."

2. The Christian warfare is a war between the will and Satan. It is his great object to keep the will in subjection to the propensities of the sensibility. Hence he directs all his efforts to arouse these propensities, and through them to enslave the will.

3. This warfare is a warfare between the heart and the world. The world presents ten thousand allurements on every hand, adapted to arouse the propensities and to lead the will to gratify them. Against these allurements, therefore, a war must be kept up.

4. It is a warfare against constitutional temperament. How many temptations originate in peculiar temperaments; for example, in persons of peculiarly sanguine and impetuous temperament, or of a nervous temperament. Few have failed to observe the influence of temptation arising from this source.

5. It is a warfare with habit. When habits have been formed, every one knows the difficulty of overcoming them. Why is this? Because habit naturally originates temptation and this temptation is great in proportion to the strength of the habit.

6. It is a warfare with a polluted imagination. Many persons have kept their imagination upon such objects, and brooded over them so long, that it almost spontaneously creates the most polluting pictures and presents to the will the most seductive conceptions. Who does not know this? A warfare must be steadily maintained against all these creations of a polluted imagination.

7. It is a warfare with temptations arising from the law of association. By the law of association, I mean that capacity of the mind by which one thought suggests another, and that again another, until a whole series have passed before the mind. Now where the associations are corrupt, they present powerful temptations to the will, and with these a warfare must be maintained.

8. It is a warfare for the control of the attention and thoughts. How many things there are in a world like this, within and without, to catch the attention and carry off the thoughts and through them to arouse clamorous temptations. Every one is aware, to a greater or less extent, of the effort which it costs, in certain circumstances and relations, to restrain and keep under control the thoughts and attention. All these temptations, in the last analysis, arise in the sensibility, and Satan, the world, constitutional temperament, polluted imagination, the law of association, and vagrant thoughts are but different forms in which the susceptibilities of the sensibility are peculiarly aroused and inflamed.

III. The difference between careless and convicted sinners.

1. The careless sinner has no warfare between his will and his sensibility at

all. He is not convicted of the evils of self gratification, and sees not where his propensities are leading him. Hence he is led along without even attempting resistance. The convicted sinner, on the contrary, sees the evil of sin--that the reign of his propensities is a ruinous despotism from which he must have deliverance. Hence he attempts to resist their demands, but is continually overcome. All his efforts are unsuccessful and his resolutions are blown away as chaff before the wind.

2. The careless sinner does not know what temptation is. While floating upon the current he is unconscious of its strength, and because he moves with it, even fancies that he does not move at all. But the convicted sinner has learned its nature. He has become aware that he is floating on the stream of death, and of the necessity of escaping from its current. He therefore attempts to stem it, but finds it all in vain. He finds that when he would do good, evil is present with him.

3. Careless sinners make no effort to amend, and consequently do not know what resistance they would meet with if they should. They are like a man who has been bound in his sleep, who even when he awakes remains ignorant of what has been done and consequently makes no attempt to break his bonds. But the convicted sinner does make strenuous efforts. He sees himself standing on a slippery place from which he must immediately escape or perish. He is on an inclined plane, moving rapidly towards the verge, from which he must plunge to the depths of hell. He therefore makes mighty resolutions of amendment; but without success. He slides downward with an accelerated ratio, finding that the commandment which was ordained to life, is unto death, for sin taking occasion by it, deceives and slays him.

4. Both are slaves, but the careless sinner is not aware of his bondage. He knows not to what an imperious tyrant he is subject; but a convicted sinner does. He sees that he is a captive sold under sin. He is alarmed, and exerts himself to escape from his bondage. He arises to flee, but is overtaken by his master, and dragged back to his service.

Such are the prominent differences between careless and convicted sinner. The 7th of Romans is an illustration of the warfare of a convicted sinner.

IV. The difference between saints, and convicted but unconverted professors

and backsliders.

1. Both have constitutional appetites, passions, and propensities, which are liable to be excited in the presence of those objects to which they are correlated. Hence both are liable to temptation from these sources. These appetites and propensities have in themselves, no moral character in either case. Since they are wholly involuntary, how should they be sinful. A man would be called deranged, who should talk of the appetite for food being sinful. But it is as much so as any other appetite, desire, or propensity whatever. Sin, therefore, neither in the true nor deceived professor, consists in these, but in consenting to indulgence under forbidden circumstances.

2. Both see the necessity of resisting their excited appetites and propensities, and both make resistance of some sort. But the Christian's resistance is effectual. He holds them in subjection. This is the uniform representation of the Bible. The text says, "walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh." So in Romans 6:14, it is said, "sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace." On the contrary, the unconverted professor or backslider's efforts are ineffectual, and his temptations continually overcome him. In the 7th of Romans, the Apostle is speaking of exactly this state. He is there putting a case to show the ineffectual struggles of the mind attempting to overcome sin by resolutions, but without love, and therefore uniformly overcome. Nothing can be more certain than that the Apostle here designed to show that the law could not sanctify the mind. He is manifestly speaking, all along in the chapter, of the relations of the law to the selfish mind. When he says I, he merely supposes it to be his own case as an illustration, just as any other speaker or writer often does. We say I, not intending to describe our present actual state, but to set the case before the mind of those we address. The representation undeniably is, that he is continually overcome of temptation, which in the 8th chapter, and in numberless other places in the Bible, is denied to be true of a real Christian. The truth is, this chapter is an exact history of the experience of every mind laboring under conviction, and I may add, it is the exact opposite of the gospel experience.

3. The unconverted professor or backslider's heart is with the temptation. This is the real difficulty with him, and his conscience only distresses and leads him to wish and resolve, in opposition to the real choice of his heart.

Now while his heart remains devoted to self-gratification, of course all the resolutions and efforts which he makes in opposition to it, must be without love, and therefore legal. They are wrung out of him by the action of his conscience arousing his fears, and since his heart remains unchanged, and since the heart or ultimate intention always governs the conduct, his resolutions always fail of course. It is impossible that any resolution or effort should stand and be effectual against the supreme preference of the will. But the Christian's heart, on the contrary, is with his conscience, and therefore his resistance is effectual. Since he really chooses what his reason demands, temptation is in direct opposition to his supreme choice, and if he yield to it, it must be by a radical change of his ultimate intention. He is therefore able to put down temptation, and to keep it under his feet.

4. The convicted professor resolves and tries in the absence of love, and of course fails and is overcome, but the Christian does not make resolutions. He has tried them effectually and found that they avail nothing. Perhaps there never was a sinner converted, nor a backslider restored, until he had tried his resolutions and legal efforts so thoroughly as to be compelled to give them up, absolutely despairing of ever escaping by them. But when he has used up all his own stock, and finds himself totally bankrupt, then he will come to Christ for capital--he goes directly to Him as the only deliverer. This leads him away from himself, renders him benevolent, and makes him free. While, therefore, the legalist depends on watchfulness, prayer, and resolutions, to keep him from falling under temptation, the Christian knows better and depends wholly on the strength of Christ.

5. The unconverted professor or backslider calls upon Christ, and thinks he depends upon Him, but in fact, he really knows not what dependence is, while the true Christian actually depends on Christ. It is remarkable that those who have no faith call themselves in their prayers, poor creatures, make their promises, tell Christ they will trust Him, and yet after all do not overcome. But the true Christian knows he once made this mistake, and now makes it no more. He now knows what it is to depend on Christ by faith, and by love to serve Him. He is sustained by the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit.

V. A warfare would have existed had man never sinned.

1. Because the constitutional appetites and susceptibilities would have

existed. They did exist before the fall, otherwise our first parents could not have fallen. In our mother Eve, for example, these appetites could be excited into a temptation by their appropriate objects; otherwise, objects of temptation might as well be presented to this table. These excited susceptibilities had no moral character in themselves, they were excited in her, in her pure state, and if she had resisted them she would not have sinned. So they would have existed in all the race if we never had fallen, and in presence of their appropriate objects would have invited the will to seek their gratification. They are an inherent part of the constitution, and all moral beings, doubtless, find it necessary to curb them in conformity to the demands of their higher nature. Satan and all his angels actually fell under the temptation which they presented to them; and, as I showed in my last lecture, every child, in beginning to act morally, does the same.

2. Temptation, under some form, may, and doubtless will exist forever. As long as moral beings have constitutions, this must be so always, and in all worlds. As we have already said, Satan and all his angels, and our first parents were actually tempted in their holy state, and we know that Jesus Christ was, and had a mighty warfare--to such a degree as to have no appetite for food, and to seek the wilderness in his distress, just as you and I have often, under similar circumstances, gone into the woods or some other seclusion to be alone. What Christians has not often felt so? They are beset so tremendously, and such a struggle created, that they can have no peace day nor night, and often seek a place where they can give vent to their prayers or groans alone. Thus was Christ tempted, and thus, in his warfare, did He fly from the face of man and seek the solitude of the wilderness, where He might contest the point even unto death. He seems to have been assaulted in all the weakest points of human nature, and when, in his agony, He had fasted till He was well nigh famished, then He was besieged through his appetite for food, and in every other way the devil could invent, until he saw it was all in vain and left Him. The apostle says, "He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin." It is in vain then, to think that temptation is peculiar to a fallen state, and if men had understood this, they never would have fallen into the ridiculous blunder, of calling their constitutional susceptibilities indwelling sin. They would have taught men to control and regulate, rather than call the nature God has given them, sinful.

VI. Several causes that have aggravated this warfare.

1. The sensibility originally responded with equal integrity to all the perceptions of the mind, whether of sense or reason. It was alike susceptible to all its objects. We all know that when we look at certain objects, corresponding feelings begin to glow in the sensibility. For example, if we look at a beautiful object, the corresponding feelings will naturally be awakened. Now all the susceptibility of the constitution, were naturally equally linked to their objects, and excited with equal ease, by the perception of these objects. The sensibility responded with equal readiness, to an affirmation of duty, as to an object of sensual desire. It was not clamorous, and uproarious, in any thing, but duly and sweetly balanced.

2. But it is capable of sudden and monstrous developments in any given direction. To explain myself; Suppose a mother loses her child. There is a sudden crash, and in a moment her little blooming babe, lies before her face pale in death. Now what will be the effects of this? Why, always afterwards, the sight of a dead child will produce a greater effect on her sensibility, than it ever did before. She indeed used to be affected--even to tears; but now such a sight seems to absorb her whole sensibility--she stands convulsed whenever she looks upon it, and sobs, and pours forth her scalding tears like rain. Now why is this? Because there is such a development of her sensibility in that direction as to overbalance every thing else. She sits, thinking and weeping, and goes sighing about the house, and every object her eye rests on connected with her darling, opens up anew the subject of her grief. Just so it is in other things. The susceptibility to fear may be instanced. A man is thrown from a horse, or run away with his wagon, in circumstances of great danger, and he is peculiarly fearful in similar circumstances all his life after. Perhaps his house is enveloped in flames when he awakes in the night, and it is with great difficulty he makes his escape. Now this event may bring his sensibility into such a relation to fires, that all his life after, whenever the fire bells ring, he is thrown into a tempest of agitation, and finds it as much as he can do to control himself. It is said of a young man, one of those who escaped from the Erie, which was burnt on Lake Erie several months since, that he cannot even hear it named, without going well nigh distracted. I am now speaking of facts which every one knows respecting monstrous developments of the sensibility, and these facts incontestably prove that the balance of the sensibility may be

destroyed. Now whenever such a development exists, it seems to put out the eyes of the sensibility on the other subjects, so that such persons don't feel as much respecting them as formerly. The mother, in the case supposed, will never feel towards multitudes of other things as she formerly did, and so it is in every case, in exact proportion to the strength of this absorbing peculiarity of feeling.

3. In most cases, the sensibility is greatly developed in respect to objects of sense, and very slightly in respect to truths revealed by the reason. In presence of objects of sense, every one knows how readily the feelings respond to such objects. I need not stop to illustrate this. On the other hand, it is equally known that the Reason itself is but slightly developed, and the sensibility which was originally designed to wake up and respond, with instant readiness, to reason's voice, is scarcely disturbed into uneasiness by its loudest utterance. Now why is this? Because the monstrous development of the sensibility, respecting objects of sense, has turned its eyes away from the reason and its demands. It has given all its love to sensual objects; and this has greatly aggravated the power of temptation arising from such objects.

4. In some, one appetite or passion is more largely developed, and in others, some other; hence, one has, as we say, a passion for one thing, and another, for another. One, for example, has a passion for money, or for company, or for novel reading, or for gaming; but cares very little for traveling, or intemperance, or licentiousness; but almost every one has some ruling object of gratification to which his sensibility peculiarly responds, and the stronger this passion, or monstrous [its] development becomes, the more certain it is mightily to influence the will, and of course to be an aggravated temptation.

5. The imagination of some is greatly polluted. They allowed themselves to read such books, to converse on such subjects, and to muse on, or perhaps mingle in, such scenes, as have filled their associations with the most fiery combustibles, and the least incident kindles the sensibility, through these, into a flame, and temptation is thus greatly aggravated.

6. A diseased nervous system is often the source of great temptations. Perhaps there is scarcely any one whose nervous system is not, in some degree, diseased, but in some it is peculiarly so. Now, since the mind

developes itself through the nervous system, and an intimate connection exists between them, it often happens, that the nerves become the source of the fiercest temptations. Cases have come under my observation most strikingly illustrating this point.

7. Another source of aggravated temptation is, that the will has not subjected the thoughts, appetites, desires, and passions to its control. Instead of controlling, it has consented to them in almost all their demands, except where they conflicted one with the other, so that the mind was compelled to choose between them. Now it is of vast importance that the will should early acquire the ascendancy and control of all the susceptibilities, and this it may be taught to do as readily as any thing else that will accomlishes. Many do not seem to see this. Now how is it that the will of a human being gets possession of any of his own powers and susceptibilities? The process is easily seen. See the child--at first it hardly knows how to move any of its muscles, and it is not till after sundry efforts that it can control its little hands. Next it undertakes to walk, but it dont[sic.] know how, and must learn how to control its voluntary muscles. But by many efforts it at last succeeds in getting them under its voluntary control. So with the use of its tongue. All the various uses and movements to which the tongue is appropriated are actually learned, and to control it by the will, is as much an art, as the movement of an organist's fingers is an art. Thus a continual effort is going on in the child, to get itself under its own control, and its succeeds respecting its physical powers, but does not get the control of its mental susceptibilities. Now why is this? Because there is a defect in its training, and not because there is naturally an insuperable difficulty in the one case more than the other. That he can, to some extent, acquire control of his mental powers, is well known. What is the object of sending the child to school? To discipline his mind. One of the great difficulties with undisciplined minds is that they have not mastered themselves, but in process of time they will acquire such self-control as to concentrate attention for hours on the driest mathematical problems. But having never attempted, nor acquired the art of controlling the various propensities of the sensibility, the full grown man finds himself at as great a puzzle to regulate them, as the infant is to control his muscles. He has not learned the art, and hence in their turbulent outbreaks, they are continual temptations.

8. As I have already intimated, the fact that the reason is so very slightly developed, gives the sensibility with all its monstrous developments full swing. By the reason I mean that power of the mind by which it reveals and imposes the law of benevolence upon itself, and also the application of this law as fast as new relations are discovered. Now where moral relations are not sought after, nor the attention given to the affirmations of the reason, of course, it must remain in very slight development. I wish here to notice a subject which every body sees, but which is peculiarly delicate. It is said that females generally are influenced by feelings, but not by reason. A certain gentleman said of his wife, if I wish to carry her will, I can never do it by reasoning with her, but must always appeal to her feelings. The question is, why is this? Not because they have not reason, not because it cannot be developed in them to operate as powerfully as in the other sex, but because for ages, their whole training has been directly calculated to develop their sensibility, until, as it is said, they are a bundle of nerves, and their reason left to remain uncultivated and undeveloped. Now the same is true of men. Were their reason but developed as it should be, you might throw off a string of self-evident propositions, as fast as an auctioneer would knock off articles under the hammer, and they would without difficulty, at once perceive their truth. But as things are, they dont[sic.] perceive them. Why? Because, while there is a monstrous development of their sensibility, their rational development is almost wholly neglected, and now instead of influencing them by simply appealing to their reason, you find such labor all in vain, unless you can also powerfully arouse their sensibility in favor of the object you are enforcing.

9. Another thing which has aggravated this warfare, is the manner in which parents train their children. In most cases, their training is exactly adapted to monstrously develop certain appetites and passions. Instead of parents, and others who have the care of children watching over them and keeping them from circumstances, and conduct calculated to arouse their sensibility unduly, they give them up to just about as much excitement as possible, until the sensibility becomes so outrageous in its demands as to carry the will in favor of whatever it demands.

10. These and other things which I might mention, show how fearfully that warfare is aggravated, which the Christian, in becoming such, enters upon with temptation. I may add to the above specifications the fact that parents

have entailed diseases on their children, which continually operate to tempt their will to sin.

VII. How this warfare may be modified and abated.

1. By restoring health. If health be restored, of course all the temptations arising from disease will disappear.
2. By the development of the Reason. As the Reason wakes up, the sensibility begins also to be developed in the same direction. This is the very way in which persons become awakened and convicted, and after conversion, in proportion as the Reason lays cross breaks in the way of the sensual propensities, is their strength and tendency broken and subdued.
3. This warfare may be especially abated and modified by a great development of the sensibility, produced by a revelation of the love of Christ. It is often the case when the character of God in Christ comes to be apprehended in its true light it leaves no room for any thing else. The Reason stands on tip-toe, gazing steadfastly with its intuitive eye, and the sensibility turns its whole surface right out to receive the full impress of such a glorious vision. I recollect the case of a very ungodly man, who seemed to take delight in manifesting the highest contempt for religion. His wife was a professor of religion, but he opposed and forbade her attending meeting at a time of a revival in the church. He went so far, and things came to such a pass, that he could no longer find material and opportunity to keep himself in sport, and finally one day thought he would go to meeting that evening, and see if he could find something there to make sport about, especially as he heard a great many things about the meeting that seemed to him to promise such a result. Just before meeting time his wife went to her closet and poured out all her heart to God, and prayed Him to open the way for her to go to meeting. As she came out she met her husband, and he asked her if she wanted to go to meeting that night. Astonished, and rejoiced, she was soon ready, and they were off. While the minister was preaching, the man's attention was arrested, and about the middle of the sermon, he groaned out and fell down in his seat. He was in such agony, it seemed as if he would die, and the sermon was arrested. He exclaimed, over and over, "Oh Jesus, how I have abused Thee!"--until at last, his agitation passed off, leaving him in a state of most perfect submission. Now here was a case, where by the manifestation of his character, God as it were, almost

immediately revolutionized a man. He said it was a view of the character of God in Christ which produced the effect. By degrees his convictions rapidly arose, until he could endure it no longer, and when he bowed his will, it seemed as though God said to all the propensities which formerly ruled him--"peace, be still"--and he has been a flaming light ever since. His tongue seems to be tuned with the praises of God. I have known him long and he seems always the same. Doubtless his warfare was greatly abated by that apprehension of the character of God in Christ. I know the effect of this by my own experience. When I was converted, for some time I did not know that I had any appetite left, all my susceptibilities seemed so perfectly absorbed in the things of the gospel. And in all this there is nothing strange. It is perfectly natural and just what might be expected.

4. There is one truth particularly which when the Spirit has revealed it to the mind, seems forever after to exert a powerful influence on the sensibility, and that is the relation of the death of Christ to our sins. People often talk about the Atonement, without seeming to understand its real meaning, and especially its relation to their own sins. But let them once see that their own sins actually caused his death, and where's the mind that can contemplate the fact unmoved? I have known that single thought to excite all the nerves into a quiver, and as it were, set the sensibility all on fire, so as to throw a strong man almost in a fit of apoplexy.

VIII. This warfare will, under a more or less modified form, continue while we are in the body.

Some have supposed that when persons are entirely sanctified, all the passions, desires and appetites of the sensibility will impel the will in the same direction that the reason does, invariably; but such persons do not know what they say, for all their propensities seek their objects for their own sake, and are blind to every thing else. They always and necessarily urge the will to seek their respective objects for the sake of the gratification. This is temptation, and creates a warfare. The appetite for food, for example, seeks food for its own sake, and so does the desire of knowledge. It is nonsense, then, to say that they will not solicit the will to gratify them under improper circumstances. But when the mind is entirely sanctified, instead of the various propensities creating such a fiery and turbulent warfare when excited, the will will have them under such control as to easily keep their places, so that all the actions will be bland and tranquilized. The most

that will or can be done is to harmonize them, and it is by no means desirable that they should be annihilated. Suppose, for example, the desire for knowledge were annihilated. What a calamity would that be? Or the desire for food. The truth is, all the constitutional desires should remain. They were all given for useful purposes, and all call for their appropriate objects, for food, for knowledge, &c., and are thus constantly feeling after those things which are essential to our existence, and that of our race. Besides to regulate them is a good exercise for the will, and it is difficult to see how a mind could be virtuous at all, were all the susceptibilities of its sensibility destroyed; and were any of them removed, it would doubtless be a great evil, otherwise God was not benevolent in our creation, and did not make us in the best way.

REMARKS.

1. The common notion of warring with inward sin is nonsensical and impossible. Those who use such language confound temptation with sin. They call their natural appetites and propensities sinful, and when resisting these, they say they are indwelling sin, and multitudes, doubtless, mistake the actions of the conscience, its warnings and reproofs, for the resistance of the heart to temptation. The truth is, the Christian warfare consists in a struggle between the will and temptations from without and within, and in nothing else.
2. The deceived professor's warfare is between his heart and his reason or conscience. His heart is devoted to self-gratification, and the reason constantly disapproves of and denounces the service as wrong, and thus a continual struggle is kept up within, between his heart and reason, and this he calls the Christian warfare. If so, every sinner has the Christian warfare, and doubtless the devil also.
3. The Christian overcomes in his warfare. This is an habitual fact. Rom. 6:14. "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law but under grace." Also 8:1-4. See also the text and context, besides numberless other passages directly asserting the same thing.
4. What a ruinous mistake it is to suppose the 7th of Romans to be Christian experience. I hesitate not to say that it has been the occasion of the destruction of more souls than almost any other mistake in the world. It is fundamentally to mistake the very nature of true religion.

5. The warfare of the true Christian greatly strengthens his virtue. When he is greatly tried and obligated to gather up all his energy to maintain his integrity, when he wrestles, until he is all in a perspiration, with some fiery trial, as it is sometimes necessary for him to do, it must be that when he comes out from such a scene as this, his virtue is greatly strengthened and improved.

6. We can see, from this subject, why sinners often doubt the reality of temptation, and when they hear Christians talk of their temptations, they think that Christians must be worse than they, for they do not experience such. But the reason why they are not conscious of temptations is because they have not attempted to regulate their propensities by the law of God. A man floating on a current is not conscious of its strength until he turns round and attempts to stem it. The same principle applies to those professors of religion who entertain the same doubts. Talk about temptation! Why, they say, I am not so tempted. Indeed! Perhaps you have never done any thing else but to yield to it.

7. See why the Apostle said so much about the opposition of the flesh and Spirit. He represents them as at hostility, throughout his epistles, especially in the 6th, 7th, and 8th chapters of Romans.

8. Many struggle for a while in their own strength, and, through continued failures, become discouraged, and give it up. The temptations of their appetites and propensities are too strong for them, while they have not learned by faith to derive strength from Christ.

9. Many despair of ever becoming sanctified, because they suppose their constitutional propensities are, in themselves, sinful. They say it is in vain to talk of entire sanctification in this life, and well they may say so, if their constitutional appetites and propensities are sinful, for we know of no promise that our nature shall be revolutionized in this life or the next.

10. Others are brought into distress and despair because they cannot control their thoughts when their will is weary. The will is that power of the mind which originates all that control which it is possible for the mind to exert over itself. But it becomes weary, or perhaps it would be more correct to say, that the brain, through which it acts, grows weary and wants rest. In sleep, the will is suspended, and hence in dreams the thoughts run lawless and without direction. It is a matter of experience with students who study hard, and for a long time, that they find it extremely difficult, after long and severe application to keep

their attention and thoughts on their studies. Why? Because their will is wearied out, and needs rest. So it is with Christians who undertake to pray when they are jaded out with weariness. Their thoughts fly every where. They try to restrain their wanderings; they struggle, and, for a moment seem to get the control, and then they lose it again. They try it over and over again, but with no better success, until they are well nigh in despair. Now, what is the matter? They need rest, and ought to take it rather than attempt to force their jaded will into action. Let your will rest. God will have mercy and not sacrifice. What's the use, when a man has walked sixty miles in a day, and his will can scarcely force his exhausted muscles into further action, of his attempting to use them further, and blaming himself because he cannot? Suppose a man should never go to sleep for fear he should dream and his thoughts ramble heedless of his will! Why call such things sin? Don't mistify forever and mix up sin and holiness, light and darkness, heaven and hell, so that people cannot tell which is which.

11. Some bring forward, the fact that this warfare is presented as continuing, as an argument against the doctrine of sanctification. Just as if a soul in order to be sanctified must get beyond a warfare! What! Then Adam was not sanctified before he sinned, nor Satan; nor was Jesus Christ while on earth, for it is a simple matter of fact that He had temptation. What would you think of the argument, if it should be said that Jesus Christ had a warfare and therefore he was not wholly sanctified? And yet it would be just as good as this.

12. However sharp the conflict, if the soul prevails there is no sin. What trials had Jesus Christ? But He prevailed. "He was tempted in all points like we are, yet without sin." So if temptation should rush like a tornado upon any of you, if you will only hold on, and fight it out, you have not sinned. Nay the sharper the conflict, the greater the virtue of resistance.

13. The saints are no doubt preparing in this world for some high stations of usefulness, and where they may be exposed to strong temptations. I infer this from the fact that they are placed here in such circumstances as are exactly calculated to ripen and fit them for such a destiny. God never acts without design, and He surely has some design in this.

14. The sanctified are sometimes in heaviness through manifold temptations if need be. Now don't infer, if you see them so, that they are not holy. Christ had His sorrows, and knew what it was to resist even unto blood, striving against temptation to sin; and the servant need not expect to fare better than his Lord.

The truth is, these trials are useful--they are but for a moment, but they prepare for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Sorrows endure for the night but joy cometh in the morning. Under the pressure of the temptations the soul is in an agony, and cries out "Help, Oh Lord, help," and He comes forth and scatters the insulting foe, and the soul bounds up like a rocket, giving glory to God.

15. Many have supposed for a time their enemies were dead, but were mistaken. The fact is they are never dead in such a sense, that we do not need to watch lest we enter into temptation. But let us never overlook the distinction between temptation and sin, and ever keep in mind that the Christian warfare is not with sin, but temptation. Nor forget that Christ alone can give us the victory. O for the Spirit of Christ to baptize the Ministers and the Churches.

[Back to Top](#)

HOLINESS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE PRESENT LIFE --No. 6

Putting on Christ

Lecture VI

March 15, 1843

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 13:14: "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof."

It is my purpose to show,

I. What is intended by this command.

II. What is implied in obeying it.

III. Some of the essential conditions of obedience to it.

IV. Obligation to obey this command is universal.

V. Obedience to the requirements of this text is naturally indispensable to

salvation.

VI. Some of the consequences of obeying this requirement.

VII. Consequences of disobeying it.

I. What is intended by this command.

I observe that the idea is taken from the drama; "To put on a person," is to assume his character, and peculiarities, as an actor does on the stage. This commandment, therefore, enjoins the imitation of Christ, as actors imitate those whom they represent.

II. What is implied in obeying this command.

1. It implies the putting away of selfishness. Christ was not selfish. Selfishness is the preference of self-gratification, to the will of God, and the good of the universe, and Christ never did this. The Apostle adds, "and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." Here, he contrasts "putting on Christ," and "making provision for the flesh," which is the same as selfishness. Paul was more philosophical than any of the sacred writers, and employs the language--"works of the flesh," "following after the flesh," "carnal mind," & c. to designate the nature of sin. But the whole Bible condemns self-seeking as wrong, and inconsistent with the true service of God, or imitation of Christ.
2. It implies living for the same end for which Christ lived. What was his end? Not the gratification of self, but the well-being of the universe, and whoever puts Him on must adopt the same end.
3. It implies the same singleness of eye. Christ's eye was not double, but exclusively directed to one end, the glory of God.
4. It implies such a sympathy with Him, as to beget an imitation of Him. A profound sympathy is necessary to, and naturally begets imitation.

III. Some of the essential conditions of obedience to this command.

1. The first thing essential, is a deep and intense study of his character, until the great principle of his action is clearly perceived--the real idea of the end

for which he lived clearly developed. Persons attempting to imitate others, must give the closest attention. This is essential to the success of a dramatic actor, or any other artist. Who, when looking at a picture by West, and observing all its delicate shadings, has not been struck with the deep attention which the artist must have given to his subject? One shade is stronger, and another weaker, exactly exhibiting the position, and form of each limb, and the various expressions of countenance and attitude, appropriate to the circumstances of the person represented. Now in order to express these things, by colorings on the canvass, the artist must have studied most intensely. So it is with a good actor. He does not merely commit and rehearse his piece as a school-boy does on the stage. He does not stand and spout it off in recitation style, but seeks to represent his character in dress, habit, spirit, style, manner, and every thing, and in this consists the perfection of the dramatic art. Now the Apostle commands us thus to put on Christ--to imitate Him--to give intense thought to get at the true idea of his character, and to commit the mind fully to the same end, to which He was devoted. To enjoy a piece of poetry, you must put yourself into the same state of mind in which the author was when he wrote it. Then as you read it, your tone and manner will naturally represent him. This is the difficulty with so many in reading hymns. They read as though they did not at all apprehend the sentiment, and without emotion. The reason is, either they have not the spirit of devotion, or they have not at all given attention to the sentiment of the hymn. But to represent Christ we must catch his spirit, and make his grand end and aim ours. Then we shall act as He would under like circumstances.

2. Another essential is, you must fully believe that through grace you can put Him on. While you don't believe you can, of course you cannot. No one can intend to do what he believes he cannot do. It is absurd to suppose the contrary. No one intends to fly. Why? Because every one knows he cannot. We may wish to fly, while we do not believe we can, but to intend it is impossible. So unless you believe you can put on Christ, it is utterly impossible that you should intend to do it, and this is the great reason why so many never actually put Him on.

3. You must, therefore, not only fully believe that you can, but you must actually intend to put on Christ--to make Him your whole example. Unless it is intended, it will never be done by accident.

4. You must be fully prepared to make any sacrifice--you must count the cost, and make up your mind to meet the expense necessary to the accomplishment of this end. You must make any sacrifice of friends, property, or credit, which stand in the way. The Lord Jesus Christ teaches this, and warns persons not to make themselves ridiculous by beginning to build, without being able to finish. The truth is, unless persons have made up their minds to the absolute sacrifice of whatever hinders their fully putting on Christ, they have not got hold of the very first principle of religion.

5. You must realize the importance of doing this. Suppose a dramatic author should write an admirable drama, adapted powerfully to awaken the attention, and arouse the passions of the spectators of its exhibition, but the actors should so poorly prepare themselves, and so poorly act it, as perfectly to misrepresent him. It is easy to see how they would injure the credit, both of the author and drama. So persons who do not fully put on the Lord Jesus Christ, while they profess to be his followers, are doing Him, and his cause, the greatest injury of which they are capable. They should then realize the infinite importance of fully representing Him.

6. Another condition of putting on Christ is, that you should keep up a constant intercourse with Him. You must commune with Him in prayer without ceasing. Who does not know that an actor needs to drink into, and commune with the spirit of the author profoundly, if he would truly represent him. He must get the state of mind of the man who wrote it; in short he must "put on" the writer. If he does not he will misrepresent him. So there must be constant communion with the Spirit of Christ, in order to put Him on and act just as He would.

7. You must not rest while there is any unrepented, unconfessed sin between your soul and Him. You must keep a clear medium. I will explain what I mean. You have seen two friends who have been for a long time agreed, and have taken sweet counsel together, but by and by a little difference creeps in between them--a little mist begins to obscure the medium, and now, when they meet, you will begin to see it in the eye and countenance; there is a little flutter in their manner; and unless it be immediately removed, it will increase, until, finally, they will turn their backs upon each other. So with a husband and wife; how careful should they be to keep a clear medium of

mental intercourse. Suppose a husband has grieved his wife. Now, if he is a man of sensibility, he cannot be at ease; he goes to pray, he remembers the wound which he has inflicted, he can pray no further; he rises from his knees, and goes and confesses to his wife the injury he has done her. The cloud is now removed from the medium, and he is happy. So with the Christian. If he has grieved Christ, and injured his tender feelings, he can have no farther communion with Him, until he has repented, and confessed his faults, and the tender breathings of mutual love are again restored.

8. You must cease from all self-dependence. So long as you depend on yourself, you will see no need of putting on Christ.

9. You must avail yourself of his exceeding great and precious promises. You must realize what the promises were given for; and that they were given for you personally. The Apostle Peter says--"Whereby are given unto us, exceeding great and precious promises, that, by these we might be partakers of the divine nature; having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." The design of the promises, then, is, to beget in us a universal likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, a promise is good for nothing unless it be fulfilled. Ten thousand promises, of such a character, would be of no more use, than a book of checks given to a poor man, by Mr. Astor, which he carries about closed up, and never uses.

IV. Obligation to obey this command is universal.

1. By this, it is not intended, that all are to do exactly the same things which Christ did, for no one, is, in all respects, in the same circumstances. As circumstances vary, outward duties differ. Christ practiced celibacy; and, in the circumstances in which He was placed, this was his duty. But it never could be the duty of mankind, generally, to imitate Him in this particular, and in many other things.

2. But it is intended that all are bound to do as He did, so far, as their circumstances are the same, that they are to do what they suppose He would do, if He were in their circumstances: For example; if He were a father, a merchant, a mechanic, a lawyer, or a citizen. In early life He was a carpenter, and labored with his father at his trade. Let a carpenter ask these questions,--"What sort of a carpenter was Jesus Christ? How honest was He? How did He do his work? How did He associate, and converse with his

fellow workmen?" Now just that, which you suppose Him to be, you are to be. Suppose the Lord Jesus Christ were a merchant, upon what principles would He conduct his business? Or, if He were a physician, how would He practice? Would He avoid visiting the poor, and seek to engross a practice among the rich?

3. You are to consider, how He would act in your circumstances, and do, as you think He would. How important for a minister of the gospel, to inquire what kind of a pastor Christ would be if He were in his circumstances; and so with every other man, for the same reason. If Christ were a physician, what would He do? Would He try to reject the custom of the poor, and obtain that of the rich? Would He say, when a poor man came soliciting his aid, I shall not get much money for this; therefore, I do not care whether I attend to it or not. Now, beloved brethren, in this congregation, who are physicians, are you such as you think Christ would be, taking into the account the difference of circumstances? So, you may take any other occupation, even the lowest; for none that is honest, is too low to forbid the supposition, of his being in similar circumstances. It was with a design to illustrate this, that He washed his disciples' feet. In the East they wear sandals, which expose their feet to the hot sands, and it was customary for the lowest servant of the house to wait at the door with water, to wash the feet of visitors. Now the Savior did this, to inculcate the lesson of lowliness of heart, and to show the spirit with which all should perform the duties of life. Whatever may be your condition, whatever you suppose Christ would be in your place, just that, you ought to be. And it is an important question, for each one to ask, "Would Christ pursue my calling, if placed in my circumstances, and would He pursue it as I do?"

4. That it is a universal duty to put on Christ, is evident from the following facts--that it is just right--that all can do it by his grace--that universal reason demands it--that it is essential to the good of the universe, and that sinners are as really commanded to do it, as saints are.

V. Obedience to the requirement of this text, is naturally indispensable to salvation.

1. By this, it is not intended, that no one can be saved who has not always done this.

2. But, so far as their knowledge extends, they are to put Him on, and live devoted to the same end.

(1.) Because every thing short of this is sin.

(2.) Nothing short of intending to be, or do, what He would be, or do, with our light, and in our circumstances, can be acceptable to God.-- "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." What does this mean? Not that ye cannot serve God at one time, and mammon at another; but that you must be entirely devoted either to one, or the other, and cannot serve both at the same time.

(3.) Benevolence, is a unit, and will always manifest itself alike in all, so far as their circumstances are similar.

(4.) Christ was no more than virtuous, and you must be no less, or you cannot be saved. I have often been astonished, that people talk as if Christ did something more than his duty, and performed works of supererogation, as if such a thing were possible. Duty, is what benevolence requires. Now, if Christ should do more than benevolence requires, it could not be benevolence, nor duty, and consequently, not virtue. I would ask, was God in making the Atonement, any more benevolent than He ought to be? If so, He was not virtuous in it. The truth is, people are in the dark on this subject. No being in the universe can perform works of supererogation; for every one, is required to do his whole duty. Christ was perfectly benevolent, and this was his duty; and so must you be if you put Him on.

(5.) You must be like Him, or you never can be with Him.

VI. Some of the consequences of obeying this requirement.

And here, I wish to be exceedingly candid, and keep nothing back. I have often marked how much the Lord Jesus Christ differed from many who set themselves up as reformers. He would often press his hearers, till almost all of them would forsake Him. Once, all left Him but his twelve disciples, and He turned to them and said, "Will ye also go away?" Implying that he would rather lose them than to keep back the truth. And we must not preach a false Christ, or you will have the livery of heaven, and the temper of the world.

1. The first consequence I mention, is, you will have much opposition. You can expect no better usage than Christ received. "It is enough for the servant that he be as his master."

2. You may expect great trials. This is the inheritance of all who will live godly in Christ Jesus. Look at Paul. While he was a Pharisee, he went on smoothly. The gales of popular favor swelled his sails. But when he became the preacher of the cross, ah! then he knew what it was to go against wind and tide.

3. Men will accuse you of having a bad spirit. They have always brought this charge against the true followers of Christ, and especially against Christ Himself. He said so much about their teachers, creeds, and traditions, and rebuked them so plainly, that they finally tried, and executed him as a blasphemer.

4. You will need great meekness, and at the same time great decision of character. Without both of these qualities, you cannot endure the shock of a world arrayed against you.

5. You will subject yourself to much misapprehension. Men will not understand you. Many wonder, why Christians are so misunderstood. But it is not at all wonderful. Who was ever more misunderstood than Jesus Christ? The simple fact is, a selfish mind does not understand the principle upon which a true Christian acts.

6. If you are misunderstood, you will of course, be misrepresented. This you must expect.

7. It will subject you to the loss of many friends. They will think you are ultra, extravagant, and carrying matters too far. And every new step you take, you will see an additional falling off. They will walk no more with you. But all the consequences are not evil. For,

8. You will inherit his peace of mind; and this is worth more than all the world can give. You will sleep just as sweetly, eat with just as much relish, and enjoy the tranquil hours just as really, as if you had all the world's favor. Persons often wonder, whether such are not unhappy. I answer, nay. They are the only persons who know what true happiness is.

9. His joy will be fulfilled in you. This is his promise; and his true followers sympathize with Him in all the joys He had.

10. You will share his glory in being the representative of the true God. "And the glory which Thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that Thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as Thou hast loved me." Christ was sent to reveal the true character of God. He took the law which lay on tables of stone, and acted it out; thus showing mankind just what God was. Without such a manifestation, as was thus made of his true character, men must have always remained in ignorance. What is God? A glorious, infinite, and invisible Spirit, lying back in the bosom of eternity, where no eye can reach. What finite mind could comprehend Him? He must reveal Himself; and to this end, He concentrated his glory in Christ, and sent Him forth among mankind. Every one, then, who puts on the Lord Jesus Christ, will share this glory with Him, of making known to the world the true character of God.

11. You will be able to say, with Paul, "For me to live, is Christ." The Apostle seems to have had this idea in his mind, that Christ lived his life over again in him. So it will be with you. Christ renews his life in his true followers.

12. You will be able to say from your own consciousness, as John says,-- "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

13. You will be happy in the highest degree of which you are capable in this life. And you will be no less useful, than you are happy.

VII. Consequences of disobeying this requirement.

1. If you are a professor of religion, you will be a hypocrite, and people will know it. There are, perhaps, some, who are successful in keeping on the mask. But most, betray themselves sooner or later, and are known in their true character.

2. You will render peace of mind impossible.

3. You will render yourself justly despicable. All love to see men live up to

their profession, and naturally cry out against hypocrisy.

4. You will ruin your own soul, and do the most you can to ruin others.

5. You will bring upon yourself the endless execration of all beings in the Universe, both good and bad.

REMARKS.

1. Inconsistent professors sometimes gain the hollow applause of the unthinking, and ungodly.

2. But they never gain the solid respect, of any class, for any considerable time. Instead of this, they really lose it. For as soon as their true character appears, mankind cannot but condemn and abhor it. Their inward want of confidence in such professors, is often exhibited in a trying hour. A fact related in my hearing by a Methodist minister, made a deep impression on my mind. A wealthy man in the South, who had sat under the preaching of a worldly minister, was taken sick, and about to die. His friends asked him, if they should send for his minister. He said, no, I do not want him now; we have been together at the horse-race. They urged him to send for somebody, and mentioned several. But he rejected them all; and at last told them to call in Tom, one of his colored men; for, said he, I have often heard him pray alone. Tom came, laid his little hat at the door, and inquired what his master wanted. Said the dying man, "Tom, do you pray?" "Yes, master,--in my weak way." "Can you pray for your dying master?" "I'll try," he repeated. "Come here, then, and pray for me." And Tom drew near, and poured out his soul to God for the dying man. Ah! the master knew, in his inmost soul, that his minister could not pray. Poor Tom, was the man to pray.

3. The lives of many professors, are a most terrible burlesque on Christianity. Satan, it would seem, has pushed these into the Church to disgrace it. Persons who have a strong sense of the ridiculous, are often tempted to laugh at the absurd notions of religion which some manifest. They never seem to think of asking how Christ would do. I have sometimes seen servants, in families where they were called to family worship, come in cowering, and get behind the door, altogether away from the family circle. I wonder if they think it will be so in heaven. In some families I know, it is not their wish, but the choice of the servant, and of course they are not to blame. Since I have been here I have seen persons take up their hats and leave the house, when they see the colored people

sitting among the whites. I wonder if such people would do so in heaven. Do let me ask, is not this the direct opposite of the spirit of Christ? How would Christ treat the poor slaves, and the colored people, if He were in this country?

4. See the importance of always bearing in mind the person whom you have undertaken to represent, and the part you are expected to act. For example; all can see that a minister in the pulpit, and every where, should bear this in mind, and so he should; but no more, really, than any other Christian should in his vocation.

5. It becomes us to inquire, whether we have so represented Christ as to give those around us the true idea of religion. Suppose a minister should never ask himself, what idea of religion his people get from him. It is easy to see that he would not be able to convey a very definite idea of it to his people. So every professor should do. And now beloved, do you live so as to make the impression, that religion is disinterested benevolence? Who would get that idea from you? Said a man not long since, if religion is benevolence, I know of but one man in our church who seems to be religious. How many do you know in this City? Nothing else is religion--Do you live so? Do I? If not what will become of our souls?

6. Those who do not put on Christ, are the worst kind of heretics. There is no heresy so bad as a false profession.

7. Inconsistent professors are the greatest curse to the world, that there is in it.

8. Professors who have not put on Christ should confess to those around them and instantly reform. Confess to your wife, your children, your church, your neighbors. Will you do it?

9. Sinners are altogether without excuse, and are as much bound to put on Christ as professors.

10. Unless every one of us, in his calling, fully intends to put on Christ, and keep Him on, we are in the way to hell. If you are not what you think Christ would be in your calling, you are not a Christian. How different is this from the common religion. All that we see is pride, and starch, and fashion, and death. Oh! brethren, let us put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and "make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof."

[Back to Top](#)

HOLINESS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE PRESENT LIFE --No. 7

Way to Be Holy

Lecture VII

March 29, 1843

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 10:4: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

In this lecture I am to show,

- I. What is not intended by the assertion that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness.*
- II. What is intended by this assertion.*
- III. How Christ becomes the end of the law for righteousness.*

I. What is not intended by the assertion that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness.

1. Not that He abolishes the law in respect to believers. I am aware that some antinomians in the Church, affirm this, but it cannot be true for the following reasons.

(1.) The moral law is not founded in the arbitrary will of God, for if it were He would have no rule of conduct, nothing with which to compare his own actions. But every moral agent must have some rule by which to act. Again, He must have no character at all, for character implies moral obligation, and moral obligation implies moral law. Again, unless the law is obligatory on Him, benevolence in Him is not virtue, for virtue must be compliance with obligation. Nor should we have any standard with which to compare his actions, and by which to

judge of them, so that we could know whether He is holy or unholy. Moreover, if He is capable of Benevolence, it is impossible that He should not be under a moral obligation to be so, and if so, the law cannot, of course be founded in His arbitrary will. Furthermore, He could, if the law were founded in his arbitrary will, by willing it, make benevolence vice, and malevolence virtue, right wrong, and wrong right. But this is absurd and impossible.

(2.) The moral law is founded in God's self-existent nature. He never made his own nature, and consequently never made the law, and it must therefore be obligatory upon Him, by virtue of his own nature which imposes it. It is as really obligatory on Him as on us.

(3.) He requires benevolence of us because it is naturally obligatory on us. He made us in his own image, that is, with a nature like His own, and therefore He could not discharge us from obligation to keep the law if He would, for our own reason would still reveal and impose it on us. We should perceive its obligation.

(4.) If He could and should abolish the moral law, then we could have no moral character. We could neither be sinful nor holy any more than brutes can. Observe then, Christ cannot be the end of the law in the sense that He abolishes it.

2. It is not intended that He abolishes the penalty as it respects believers, so that they can sin without actual condemnation. Some have this view of justification, that at the first act of faith, God so sets aside the penalty that it never afterwards attaches to the individual. But this cannot be, for:

(1.) If the penalty is set aside, the law is repealed, for law consists of precept and penalty.

(2.) If it were so set aside, then Christians, when they sinned would not need pardon, and could not, without folly, and even wickedness pray for forgiveness. It would be nothing else but sheer unbelief. But every Christian knows that when he sins he is condemned, and must be pardoned or damned. Christ, therefore, is not the end of the law in this sense.

3. Nor is He the end of the law for justification merely, for,

(1.) He does not obtain for them a legal justification. Legal justification is the act of pronouncing one just in the estimation of law. This Christ cannot do in respect to any transgressor. Gospel justification is pardon and acceptance. But it never was the end or object of the law to pardon sinners. In this sense, then, it is impossible that Christ should be the end of the law, for the law never aimed at pardoning transgressors. The word righteousness sometimes means justification, but cannot mean that here, as Christ never aimed at legal justification, nor the law at pardon. He cannot, of course, then, be the end of the law in this sense.

4. Nor is He the end of the law in the sense of procuring a pardon for those that believe, for this was never the end proposed by the law. The law knows nothing of pardon.

5. Nor is it intended that He imputes his own righteousness or obedience to them. Some suppose that Christ was under no obligation to obey the law Himself, and that He can, therefore impute his obedience to believers. But,

(1.) The law never aimed at imputation. This was no part of its object. Did the law require Christ's righteousness or personal holiness to be imputed?

(2.) The doctrine of imputed righteousness is founded on the absurd assumption that Christ owed no obedience to the law. But how can this be? Was He under no obligation to be benevolent? If not, then his benevolence was not virtue. He certainly was just as much bound to love God with all his heart, and soul, and strength, and mind, and his neighbor as Himself, as you are. How holy should God be? As holy as He can be. That is, He should be perfectly benevolent, as the Bible says He is.

(3.) This doctrine assumes that Christ's works were works of supererogation. Is this what the Apostle means when he says--"For such a High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners?"

(4.) This doctrine is a mere dogma of Popery, born, bred, and supported amid its darkness and superstitions. The sufferings and death of Christ were for us, and constitute the Atonement. His obedience was necessary to his making an atonement, as a condition, since none but a holy being could make it. Holiness is benevolence, and Christ must of necessity have been benevolent, in order to make the Atonement which is a work of benevolence.

(5.) The doctrine of imputed righteousness represents God as requiring,

(a) That Christ should render a perfect obedience for us.

(b) Then that He should die just as if no such obedience had been rendered.

(c) That, notwithstanding the debt is thus paid twice over by our substitute, we must repent as though it were unpaid.

(d) Then that we must be forgiven.

(e) And after all this, that we must ourselves obey, or be personally holy.

(f) And finally, that we must count it all grace.

What a jumble of nonsense is this! Is this the gospel of the blessed God? Impossible!

(6.) The doctrine of imputation utterly sets aside the true idea of the gospel. The true idea of pardon does not enter into it. It is rather a fivefold satisfaction of justice. We are not restored to the favor of God, according to this doctrine, by a free pardon, but by imputed righteousness. It is not at all wonderful that thinking men, when they hear such slang as this, say, "O, nonsense!--If that be the gospel, we can have nothing to do with it."

(7.) Imputation is not, and never was, the end or object of the law. The end which it seeks is righteousness or true obedience.

II. What is intended by the assertion that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness.

The text affirms that he is the end of the law for righteousness. Righteousness is obedience to the law. He is, then, the end of the law for obedience. He secures the very end aimed at by the law; that is, He makes Christians holy; as it is said-- "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." What have we here? Why, an express assertion of the Apostle, that Christ, by his Atonement, and indwelling Spirit, had secured in Christians, the very obedience which the law required.

III. How Christ becomes the end of the law for righteousness or obedience.

1. Confidence or faith is essential to all hearty obedience to any law. An outward conformity to its requirements may be secured by fear, but not love.
2. Christ, then, must secure love or true righteousness by inspiring confidence in the character and government of God. God had been slandered by Satan, and the world believed the slander. Satan represented to our first parents that God was insincere in forbidding them to eat of the tree of knowledge, and that the result of their eating of it would be just the reverse of what God had threatened. Said he, "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil!" This was a most taking temptation! "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat." Now the thing to be done, is to remove this prejudice which has existed in all ages. How shall it be effected?
3. Christ came to reveal the true God and the true character of his government for this express purpose. He came not only to teach, but, by his example, to give an illustration of what the law meant; and to possess the human mind of the idea that God is love. He knew very well that

confidence was the thing needed; and that to reveal the character of God, so as to beget confidence, He must hold it out in strong relief, in a life of love before them. There was a greater necessity for this, because many of the dispensations of God, towards mankind appeared severe. He had poured out the waters of the flood upon the old world, and destroyed it; He had frowned upon the cities of the plain, and sent them down to hell; and in many other instances, He had been obliged to resort to such measures as were calculated, in the circumstances, to beget a dread, and slavish fear, rather than to inspire confidence and love. It was, therefore, necessary to adopt measures of a different nature, adapted to beget faith.

4. The nature of faith, renders obedience certain, so far as it is implicit. A wife, for example, is always perfectly under the influence of her husband, just so far as she has confidence in him. Suppose he is a business man; if she has confidence in his business talents, she does not concern herself at all in his business transactions. So, if they are going a journey, suppose she knows him to be careful, and attentive to his affairs, she will not be in a fret; she will never ask whether he has taken care of their baggage, and whether he has procured tickets, and accommodations. She expects all this, as a matter of course, and is happy in her reliance on him. But suppose we turn this over, and she has no confidence in his character. If he is a man of business, and she lacks confidence in his judgment, she will be all the time in distress for fear he will take some step which will ruin their affairs. If they are going on a journey, she will, perhaps, fear that he will start off without his pocket-book, or forget some of his baggage, or that he will lose them on the way. It is easy to see, that so far as this lack of confidence extends, its tendency is to diminish her affection, and if it extend to his whole character, she cannot love him. I might illustrate this in a thousand ways. If you call in a physician, and you have confidence in him, you will take any medicine which he may prescribe. I recollect a case, which, perhaps some of you are familiar with. A certain king was sick, and sent for his physician. The physician examined his symptoms and found his disease a dangerous one, and requiring a peculiar treatment. He told the king he would go home and prepare a certain medicine, which would make him very sick, while in its operation, but would remove the disease. While he was gone, the king received a letter, warning him against the physician, as though he designed to poison him. When the physician returned and

presented him the medicine, he immediately swallowed it, and then handed his physician the letter he had received. That was faith; and it placed him entirely under the control of his physician. It is easy, therefore, to see, that if Christ could only restore faith among men, He would, of course, secure obedience.

5. Faith in God's character, is the foundation of faith in his promises. Many people seem to go the wrong way to work. They try to exercise faith in the promises, with faith in his general character. But Christ takes the opposite course, revealing the character of God as a foundation of faith in his promises.

6. He baptizes them by his Spirit, and actually works in them to will and to do. How wonderfully Christ seems to work, to get the control of believers. Unless He can get into their confidence, He cannot do this, but so soon as He can inspire faith, He has them under his control. We see the same law among men. See a human pair, by securing mutual confidence, wind imperishable cords around each other's hearts. Then, for one to know the will of the other, is to do it. They do not need to be bound down nor driven by the force of penalties. This is the way of the seducer, who can "smile and smile and be a villain still." He lays his foundation deep in the confidence of his victim, until he may laugh at all her parents may say and do against him. He gains such an ascendancy, as to control the will more absolutely than if he could wield it by his hand. Such is the natural result of getting into the confidence of another. They will, and do, at our bidding. Thus Christ gains the heart, and works in us to will and to do, of his good pleasure.

7. The way to be holy, then, is to believe. "Then said they unto Him, what shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus said unto them, this is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." "That they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." "This only would I learn of you; received ye the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain? He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Even as

Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse; for it is written, cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God it is evident; for the just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith; but the man that doeth them shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree; That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." "What shall we say, then? That the Gentiles which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith; But Israel which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the law; for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone; As it is written, behold I lay in Sion a stumbling-stone; and rock of offense, and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed." In Christ, then the believer is complete; that is, He is all we need. His offices and relations meet all our necessities, and by faith we receive their redeeming influence.

REMARKS.

1. From this subject, we may see why the gospel lays so much stress on faith. It is the only way of salvation.
2. This method of saving men is perfectly philosophical. And as we have seen, Christ thus works Himself into the very heart of believers.
3. It is the only possible way, in the very nature of the case, to secure love. God might command, and back up the command with threatenings. But this would only fill the selfish mind with terror, leaving its selfishness unbroken, and even grasping at its objects amid the roar of its thunders. In the very nature of mind, then, to secure obedience, He must secure confidence. Why, look at Eve. The moment she doubted, she fell. And so would all heaven fall if they should lose

confidence in God. Yes, they would fall! They would no more retain their obedience, than the planets would retain their places, if the power of gravitation were broken. Every one knows that if the power of attraction were destroyed, suns, and stars, and planets would run lawless through the universe, and desolation would drive her ploughshare through creation. So, break the power of confidence in heaven, and every angel there would fall like Lucifer, and universal anarchy prevail.

4. What I have said, does not represent virtue or holiness as consisting in mere emotions of complacency; or in loving God merely for his favors; but the exhibition of his character in Christ begets in us real benevolence. It shows us what benevolence is, and stimulates us to exercise it. Nearly all preachers and writers, of the present day, confound religion, with mere complacency in God for his favors. Both gratitude and complacency may, and often do, exist in the impenitent mind. It must, therefore, be a fundamental mistake, to confound these with true religion.

5. Christ, by exhibiting his benevolence, begets his own image in them that believe; that is, they are naturally led to yield themselves up to the transforming tendency of this view of his character. This, the law could never secure in a selfish mind.

6. I said the doctrine of imputed righteousness, is another gospel, or no gospel at all. And here I would ask, is not this quite another way of salvation? According to this way, instead of imputing righteousness to them, God makes them righteous.

7. The gospel is not an evasion of the law. It comes in as an auxiliary to accomplish what the law aims at, but cannot effect, because it is "weak through the flesh."

8. We see who are true believers. Those who love God supremely and their neighbor as themselves; and unless your faith begets obedience, it is not the faith of the gospel.

9. We can see the sustaining power of faith. This is not well considered by many. If the head of a family secures its confidence, he controls it easily; but if not, there is a perpetual tendency to resist him. The same principle operates in state governments. They are firm, just so far and no farther, than they are based upon

the confidence of their subjects. So it is in the business world. Every thing is prosperous, so long as confidence is secured. This gone, and the tide immediately sets forth the other way. Why are so many houses in this country, which were once supposed to be perfectly stable, tumbling down around the heads of the merchants? Because confidence is destroyed. Restore that, and immediately things will assume a different aspect. Every merchant in New York will feel the impulse; and ships from abroad will come freighted down with merchandize. This principle is equally efficient and necessary in the divine government. This, the devil well understood. Hence his first effort was directed to its overthrow. But ministers too often put it in the back ground, and hence the reason of so much failure in the work of reforming the world. Christ, on the other hand, always put it foremost, and his declaration, "He that believeth shall be saved," is the unalterable law of his government.

10. Unbelievers cannot be saved, for their want of confidence, necessarily keeps the soul from hearty obedience.

11. Do you ask, "How can I believe?" I turn on you, and ask, "How can you help believing?" Christ has died for you to win your confidence. He stands at your door, offering blessings, and assuring you of his good will. And can't you believe! What! And the Son of God at the door! But perhaps you stand away back, and say, Christians can believe, but how can I? a poor, guilty wretch. And why not you? Come, let your anchor down upon the character of God, and then if the winds blow, let them blow; if the ocean tosses itself, and yawns till it lays bare its very bottom, you are secure, for God rules the wind and the waves. But I hear some one say, I am such a backslider. Yes, and you are like to be. Unless you believe, you will continue to go right away from God. Come, instantly, and believe. Come all you professors; come, all you sinners; come now, and He will write his law in your hearts; and it will no longer be to you a law on tables of stone. Can't you believe it? Yes, O yes. Then let us come around the throne of grace, and receive Christ, as the end of the law for righteousness.

[Back to Top](#)

HOLINESS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE PRESENT LIFE --No. 8
What Attainments Christians May Reasonably Expect to Make in This Life

Lecture VIII
April 12, 1843

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 Thess. 5:23-24: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it."

In this lecture I shall consider,

I. What sanctification is.

II. What is not implied in it.

III. What is implied in it.

IV. What is intended by the sanctification of body, soul, and spirit.

V. What is not implied in the sanctification of body, soul, and spirit.

VI. What is implied in it.

VII. What attainments Christians cannot expect in this life.

VIII. What attainments they may reasonably expect to make in this life.

I. What Sanctification is.

1. To sanctify, is to make holy, to set apart, to consecrate. Both the Old and the New Testaments use the word in this sense. For God to sanctify us, is for Him to secure in us the consecration of ourselves to Him. To sanctify ourselves, is to consecrate ourselves wholly to Him.

2. Sanctification, then, is holiness, purity, or benevolence. Benevolence, as we have seen in former lectures, is good willing, and is the ultimate intention of the mind; in other words, it is obedience to the requirements of the law of God; it is what the Bible means by love, which it declares to be the fulfilling of the law.

II. What is not implied in it.

1. It does not imply any change in the constitution.
2. Nor any such change in the temper, disposition, or state of the mind, that we cannot sin. To suppose this is absurd. The angels which kept not their first estate, were certainly sanctified, but they sinned, and so did Adam.
3. Nor is it implied in sanctification that we are not liable to sin.
4. Nor that it is certain that we shall not sin, immediately, and surely, unless supported by the Spirit of God. There is no evidence that even the saints in heaven, would continue their obedience, if the Holy Spirit were withdrawn.
5. Nor is it implied that a sanctified soul has no farther warfare with temptation. I showed, in my lecture on the Christian warfare, that this would have existed if man had never fallen, and will exist, in some form, forever.
6. Nor, that there is no farther growth in grace. The Lord Jesus Christ, all admit, was sanctified, but He grew in grace. And so shall we, as fast as the future world.
7. Nor does it imply freedom from errors in judgment, or opinion. I don't know how it could be shown either from the Bible, or the nature of the case, that this is implied in sanctification, even of the saints in heaven.
8. Nor does it imply a uniform state of the emotions. Christ's emotions were not always the same. He had his sorrows and his joys, and, from the very nature of the sensibility, the feelings must vary as the circumstances do.
9. Nor does it imply a constant, and great excitement. The idea that a great excitement of the emotions is essential to sanctification, has arisen out of a radical mistake respecting the nature of religion. It has been supposed that the love required by the law of God, consists in the highest possible state of the emotions. Now, if this is so, or if emotion constitutes any part of religion, then Christ was often in sin, for He did not exhibit any more excitement than other men. Those who maintain this sentiment, then, overlook the fact that religion consists in benevolence, and that emotion is no part of it.

10. It does not imply the same degree or strength of love which we might have exercised had we never sinned. There is not a saint in heaven who does this, and the law requires no such thing. It only requires us to exercise all the strength we have.

11. It does not require a constant tension or strain of the mind.

12. Nor does it imply a state of mind of which we cannot be certain by consciousness. It would be strange legislation indeed which should require such a mysterious, intangible state of mind as that. The truth is, it is naturally impossible that such a state should be required by an intelligible law. Indeed, how could one repent, or know it if he did, under such a requirement, or perform any other duty?

III. What is implied in it.

1. It does imply present obedience to the law of God, that is, benevolence. Benevolence, consists in regarding and treating every known interest according to its relative value, and as I have shown in a former lecture, it is a unit--a simple choice--a choosing good for its own sake.

2. We have also seen that bodily actions are connected with, and controlled by the will, so that willing necessitates corresponding outward actions. Sanctification, therefore, implies outward obedience--a correct life. We have also seen that emotions, desires, and thoughts, are connected with and controlled by the will indirectly. Sanctification, therefore, implies thoughts, desires, and feelings, corresponding to the state of the will, so far as they can be regulated by it. Some have less control over their attention, and consequently over their thoughts and emotions, than others, but whatever is possible to any one, he can do by willing, and nothing beyond this is obligatory.

3. It implies an honest intention to promote the glory of God, and the highest good of being, to the full extent of our ability. Such an intention necessarily embraces the following elements.

(1) It is disinterested. It chooses universal well-being for its own sake.

(2) It is impartial respecting all interests, whether of friends or foes,

rich or poor, bond or free, alike; that is, in exact accordance with their perceived value.

(3) It embraces all future time with the present.

(4) It is supreme to God, because his happiness is the supreme good.

(5) It is equal to men.

Now if you drop either of these elements, it is no longer virtue.

4. We have seen that intention, or the choice of an end, necessitates the adoption of corresponding means, therefore, sanctification implies the choice of appropriate means to the universal good of being.

5. It implies charitable judgments--these are the natural results of benevolence. When you see a person making severe and harsh judgments, you at least have reason to fear he is not sanctified.

6. It implies peace of mind. "My peace I leave with you," says Christ.

7. Joy in God.

8. Absence of condemnation-- "There is, therefore, now, no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

9. Implicit faith. The sanctified soul really believes, so far as he understands the truth of God.

10. Delight in all the ordinances and duties of religion so far as they are understood.

11. A compassionate temper, and whenever it is seen that persons have not this spirit, you may know that they are not sanctified.

12. The absence of all selfishness. Selfishness, in any degree, is inconsistent with sanctification.

13. Implicit and universal reliance on Christ for support and aid. You cannot remain obedient any longer than you remember where your strength is.

14. The holding all we are and have entirely at the divine disposal. Sanctification must include all these, fully up to the light possessed by each

individual.

IV. What is intended by the sanctification of body, soul, and spirit.

1. By the language, "body, soul, and spirit," we are to understand, the whole being, and the thing intended is, the perfect subjection of all the appetites and propensities, to the entire control of the will of God. Some of these appetites and propensities originate in the body, and some in the mind; but all must be controlled in reference to the highest good of being.

2. The harmonious development of the sensibility so that it shall respond to all perceived truths and relations, is intended in this language. In my sermon, on the Christian warfare, I spoke of the monstrous development of the sensibility, and of the influence it has upon the will, in the direction in which it is developed. I there remarked that a perfect balancing of all its susceptibilities, would greatly abate the force of temptation. Every one knows how forcibly the appetites and passions wake up and clamor for indulgence. Now, although neither holiness, nor sin, belong to these, in themselves, yet it would be vastly favorable to virtue, if they were all brought into harmonious subjection to the law of the reason. Here let me say that no physical influence is exerted on the mind or body by the Spirit, to change the sensibility. The mother, whose sensibility is so developed by the loss of her child, is not brought into such a state, by any physical influence; nor is such an influence needed to secure such effects. Let sinners see the love of Christ in its real relation to themselves, and it is directly adapted to enkindle their emotions. It is the Spirit's office to take the things of Christ, and show to them; and thus secure this result. This He actually effects in Christians. To be sanctified, then is to have not only the will consecrated to God, but the sensibility brought into harmonious action under the control of the will.

V. What is not implied in the sanctification of body, soul, and spirit.

1. It is not implied that the constitutional appetites, passions, and propensities, are extinct. They certainly were not in the Lord Jesus Christ, and whoever supposes this necessary in order to sanctification, has not well considered the matter. Without their continued existence, we should be incapable of any moral action whatever.

2. Nor that their nature is so changed, that they all exclusively impel the will to obey the law of the reason. It belongs to their very nature, each to seek its appropriate object. for its own sake: For example, the appetite for food, seeks food, not for the glory of God, but for its own sake. So it is with every other appetite and desire of the soul. Each is blind to every thing else than its own object, and seeks that, for its own sake. To say then, that they must be so changed, as to impel the mind only in the right direction, is to say that their very nature must be changed. Each of them, naturally, impels the will to seek its object, for its own sake, and it is the province of reason to give direction to their blindness, and of the will to gratify them in strict subjection to the law which reason prescribes.

3. Nor that they are so far suppressed or annihilated, as to be in no degree a temptation. They were not so in Eve, for she fell under the temptation presented by her appetite for food; and we need not expect ever to get into any such state.

VI. What is implied in it.

1. That these propensities are all harmoniously developed according to the light enjoyed; and,
2. That they become easily controlled by the will, as in the person of Christ.

VII. What attainments Christians cannot expect in this life.

1. They cannot expect to get above what Christ was. It is enough for the servant to be as his Master.
2. Of course they cannot reasonably expect to get beyond a state of warfare. Christ had a warfare, not with sin, not with conscience, for it would be nonsense to call this Christian warfare, but with temptation, and no one will deny that he was entirely sanctified. And here I wish to notice a very singular fact. Those who deny this doctrine say that if Christians were perfect, they would have no further warfare, But where do they get that idea? Not from the Bible, for there is not a single passage in it, that I know of, which teaches any such thing.
3. They cannot expect to get beyond the necessity and capacity of growth in grace; I mean growth in degree, not in kind. We shall doubtless grow in

grace to all eternity. The Bible says that Christ grew in favor with God, that is, grace, and so will every Christian.

4. They cannot expect to get beyond the possibility or liability of sinning. This would be to get beyond the possibility of obedience, and to cease from being a moral agent.

5. Nor, may they expect to get so far as not to need the means of grace. They must, of necessity, need the assistance of the Spirit, of the ordinances, of prayer, and of the Sabbath. To deny this is downright nonsense. While human nature remains what it is, it must need the means of grace, as much as it needs food, or light, or any thing else which is indispensable to well-being. God never makes minds holy by physical force, but by means, and therefore, means will always be necessary. Did not Christ Himself use them?

VIII. What attainments they may reasonably expect to make in this life.

1. God does not, and cannot, reasonably, require impossibilities of moral agents.

2. It is reasonable, then, to think that we can do whatever He requires of us, and to expect to do it. Our ability to comply with his requirements, is implied as strongly as possible in the command itself. If not, it can be of no binding force upon us.

3. God cannot lie. It is, therefore, reasonable to expect to receive any measure of grace, which He has expressly promised. Not to expect such grace, is to distrust God.

4. God has commanded us to obey his law; and we must intend to obey it or we are not Christians. But we cannot intend to obey it unless we consider it possible; this is naturally impossible. I appeal to every hearer. Can you really intend to render a hearty obedience to what you regard as impossible? We cannot intend to obey, unless we believe it possible to obey the spirit of the law. We may, therefore, reasonably expect to keep the law.

5. The first verse in this text is the prayer of an inspired Apostle, for the sanctification, in this life, of the whole body, soul, and spirit of Christians, and that they may be preserved in this state, blameless, until the coming of

the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, if this is an inspired prayer, it reveals the will of God on this subject. It is admitted that it includes all that I have said; that is, sanctification in the higher sense. Now observe, it is added, "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." It is reasonable, then, to expect its fulfillment.

6. But to this it is objected, that, although it is true that this, and kindred promises, do really pledge sufficient grace to secure this result, yet, as they are conditioned upon faith, it is unreasonable for us to expect to avail ourselves of them, unless others have done so before us. And in confirmation, you are pointed to the great and good men, who have lived in different periods of the Church, and told that they did not attain it. I waive, for the present, the answer to this objection, and pass to make several

REMARKS.

1. This must be an important question, I have been astonished beyond all measure, that this doctrine has been called a hobby. What! Is the fundamental doctrine of the degree of holiness attainable in this life, to be called a hobby? If so, then it is the hobby of the universe, and God, and every angel is intensely interested in securing its success.

2. We must hold up some standard. If you tell a sinner to repent, you hold up before him the standard to which he ought to conform, and even if he should deny that any had actually repented, you would still insist upon it, that it is his duty, whether others had or not, and also, that if he did not repent, he could not be saved.

3. Christians must aim at some standard, but they cannot aim at any state which they deem impossible; as well might they aim to fly. How essential then, that we should ascertain what the true standard is, and hold it up before them.

We have seen that sin consists in choosing self-gratification as the supreme end, and that holiness, on the contrary, consists in supremely choosing the glory of God and the good of his universe. We have also seen that they cannot co-exist in the same mind--that while the will or heart is right, that nothing can, for the time being, be morally wrong: and on the other hand, while the heart is wrong, all is wrong; that is, it is totally depraved. The only question then, is, can we reasonably expect to remain in that state. I said this expectation was supposed to

be unreasonable, unless others could be pointed out as examples. But if no one has ever availed himself of these promises, it by no means follows that no one ever will; on the contrary, the progressive state of the world, and the progressive nature of religion, warrant and demand the belief that future generations will make indefinitely higher attainments than the past. The golden age has not gone by; those who think so, have not well considered the matter. If any one will compare the time of the Apostles with the present time, and take in all the characteristics of both, he will see, that on the whole, the human family have made great progress. There is a radical error in the custom of looking back, instead of forward, for the golden age; and the common notion that the world is in its dotage, is exactly the reverse of truth. Every successive era is marked by a decided advance in science, art, philosophy and civilization; and this is in exact accordance with the whole tenor of prophecy, which warrants and demands the expectation of vastly higher attainments, in future, than have ever yet been made. The Temperance Reformation, shows that it is now common for drunkards to make attainments, which were once regarded as almost impossible. Who has not witnessed the Washingtonian, almost working miracles, in pulling the drunkard out of the gutter. And shall we extinguish hope respecting the Church, and make it an exception to the progress of the world?

4. One of the greatest obstacles in the way of both physical and moral improvement, is the existence of false opinions and expectations in regard to the degree of elevation, to which God desires to bring mankind in this world. I have examined Mr. Miller's theory, and am persuaded, that what he expects to come after the judgment, will come before it. Read the 65th chapter of Isaiah. The Prophet there speaks of the advancement to be made, as the creation of a new heavens and a new earth. The reason men have so little idea of the thing intended in such predictions, is that they have such meager views of the grace of God. If the world is to be converted to the present standard, it is true that such predictions cannot represent its state. What are the Church dreaming about, if they cannot see the necessity of a higher standard? The man who cannot see that, is as poor a philosopher as he is a Christian. Why, brethren, what would it avail, if the whole world were converted to the standard of the current religion?

5. Suppose this promise had been read to those to whom it was given, how could they have believed it, on the theory that they were not to expect higher attainments in the future than they then witnessed. Why they would have said, the world never will be converted, because it never has been; and what would

you reply to that? Suppose the same objection were made now, and it were said, it was not done in the days of the Apostles, nor at any time since, and are we to expect to accomplish what never has been done? Suppose farther, ministers were engaged in pointing back, to prove that the world can never be converted. Why, they would say, the Church never has converted the world, and therefore, it never will. You must be getting proud, if you think we shall do more than good men before us have done. And then, suppose they should go back, and hunt up all the fanaticism, and enthusiasm, and extravagancies of the Crusades, and other attempts to propagate the Christian religion, and instead of pointing out these evils, to guard the Church against similar ones in time to come, as they ought to do, they were doing it to prevent any attempts to convert the world now. What would be thought of all this? It would justly be regarded as ridiculous; and yet this is exactly the course adopted respecting the doctrine of sanctification. The fact, that the promises have not been considered as meaning so much, sufficiently accounts for the fact, that they have not been more generally realized in the experience of Christians.

6. To deny the reasonableness of this expectation, is to lay a stumbling block before the Church. Suppose you should exhort sinners to repent, and then tell them they could not, neither in their own strength, nor by any grace received. What else would that be than a stumbling block, over which, if they believed you, they would stumble into hell. So to tell Christians, that they ought to be sanctified and that it is attainable, and yet, that no one can, in this life attain it, is the very way to prevent them from attaining it. If they believe such instruction, it will as certainly prevent their spiritual progress, as a general outcry against missions would prevent the conversion of the world.

7. But if this expectation is unreasonable, what is reasonable? What may we expect? How much higher can we rise? Who can tell? Who will point to some definite standard?

8. Doubts as to the truth of the view I have here maintained, arise,

(1) From a false philosophy of depravity and holiness. When men make holiness consist in emotions instead of benevolence, they overlook the very nature of virtue, and are deluded as a matter of course.

(2) From unbelief. Our opinions on such questions, must depend on our faith, and the state of our hearts.

(3) From radically defective Christian experience, or rather, having had none but a legal experience.

(4) From overlooking the fulness of the Gospel provision.

(5) From confounding it with Antinomian perfectionism.

(6) From false views with respect to what constitutes entire sanctification. Many say, the Bible represents the Christian warfare as continuing till death, and that this warfare consists in fighting with sin. Now where do they learn this, not in the Bible. The Bible does indeed represent the Christian warfare as continuing till death, but it never represents it as consisting in fighting with sin. What is sin? Why, sin is a heart, or will, or choice, contrary to the will of God. To fight with sin, then, would be to fight with our own present choice or voluntary state of mind--a choice warring on or against itself--this is absurd. The Christian warfare consists in warring with temptation, not with sin. They say that Christians are commanded to grow in grace, and if they once arrive at perfection, progress is at an end. They thus set up a man of straw, and then fight it.

9. This is a serious question to all Christians, and I cannot tell how I feel, when I hear professors of religion say they cannot give time for its examination. Said a professor of religion to me not long since, "I cannot take time to examine this subject," and yet he had the strangest misapprehensions respecting it. It is enough to make one weep tears of blood to see the darkness which prevails, and yet the apathy and unwillingness to inquire. Beloved, let us know the truth that it may make us free. Let us give ourselves up to the teachings of the Spirit, that we may be "sanctified wholly, and preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

[Back to Top](#)

HOLINESS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE PRESENT LIFE --No. 9

Necessity and Nature of Divine Teaching

Lecture IX

June 21, 1843

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Phil. 2:12, 13: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

Text.--Heb. 13:20, 21: "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Text.--John 16:13, 14: "Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth, for He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me; for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."

Text.--John 14:26: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

I. Necessity of a divine influence in regeneration and sanctification.

II. The kind of influence needed.

III. This kind of influence is actually employed.

IV. The consistency and co-operation of divine and human agency in the work.

I. Necessity of a divine influence in regeneration and sanctification.

1. A selfish mind will, as a matter of fact, never recover itself to holiness. This will appear evident from the nature of selfishness. Selfishness consists in the committal of the will to self-gratification, or the indulgence of the constitutional propensities.

2. Now observe that selfishness is the supreme choice of the mind. It is choosing self-gratification over and above all other and higher interests. It is making self-gratification the ultimate end--the thing to which every other thing is made, by the mind, to sustain the relation of means, and which is therefore chosen for its own sake.

3. I have shown, in a former lecture, that choice necessitates outward actions--the attention, and through it the thoughts, emotions, and desires. The choice of an end, necessitates the use of means for its accomplishment, and gives direction to the action of all the mental powers. As choice directs the intelligence, it, of course, in a great measure, decides the motives that shall be addressed to the mind through it. As desire and feeling are dependent, to a great extent, upon the intelligence, and as that is directed by choice, it follows that choice, to a very great extent, decides the motives that shall address the mind through the sensibility. Thus all the actions and states of mind are necessarily controlled by choice. Hence, while a given choice exists, it of course shuts the mind, to a great degree from the influence of all objects inconsistent with itself, and gives the attention to all those things which accord with it. A man, for instance, who gives himself up to making money, will naturally so direct his attention to things connected with that object, as to be but very little influenced by any thing else.

4. Choice is necessarily an act of the will, and is, therefore, free; but the freedom of the will consists in the power, not to choose without motives, but to choose one way or another, in view of any given motive--to choose or refuse any object presented to it. But no mind can choose an object which it does not perceive. Hence, whatever prevents from perceiving, of course, prevents from choosing--whatever prevents from apprehending a motive, or object of choice, renders it impossible for the mind to choose that object.

5. If it be an existing choice, which diverts the mind from one class of objects or motives, and directs it into another channel, although the mind is entirely free, yet failing to perceive objects from which it is thus diverted, it does not possess within itself the means that will ever secure its choosing in accordance with them. I do not mean to say that an existing choice, whether selfish or holy, absolutely prevents the mind from perceiving any motives to a choice contrary to itself; for, as I showed in my lecture on the Christian warfare, our sensibility will always lay us open to temptation, however holy we may become. But a holy choice naturally shuts out motives hostile to itself as far as possible, and keeps its attention upon the opposite class. So, on the contrary, a selfish choice cannot utterly hush the voice of reason, and shut out all motives to holiness, but it naturally does so as far as it can; and, as a matter of fact, we find selfish minds so much open to motives to selfishness, and so diverted from all others, that selfish motives have the entire influence over them. Unless, therefore, some agency external to itself is employed to engage the attention, and cause the mind to apprehend and consider another class of motives, than those to which it has committed itself, the case is hopeless. While it is thus taken up and engrossed, it will not perceive objects of a different character so as to come under their influence, but will be drifted along to the depths of hell. All its choices will be between different forms of selfishness. It has committed itself to the stream, and notwithstanding the spontaneous remonstrances of reason, it will float onward. Persons may even hear daily the best of instruction, and the most solemn warnings, and yet so divert their attention from it, as to feel its power but little if any. Thus Judas was always thinking of money, so that even the preaching of Christ did him no good. So, multitudes of persons have so employed themselves in selfish pursuits that although they hear, every Sabbath, the most pungent and solemn truths, they do not seem to be in the least degree affected by them, but even sit in the house of God plotting schemes of selfish enterprize, and thus, by the action of the laws of their own minds, rush on to certain destruction, unless arrested by some foreign influence.

6. Another point to be considered is, that spiritual truths are not addressed to us through the senses, and since sensual objects are constantly appealing to the propensities, and calling off the attention, a spiritual influence is constantly needed to keep up the attention to the great truths of religion. It

is therefore certain that even converted persons need a constant divine influence to keep them from relapsing--to hold up to their view constantly the motives to holiness.

II. Show the kind of influence needed.

1. It needs to be spiritual in opposition to material. It needs a spirit to gain access to the mind, and draw it off from the material objects around us.

2. The influence necessary, is moral as opposed to physical. It must be something which can influence to choice, the will is not like a steel spring which can be bent by force; it must be influenced by motives. Physical power cannot move will; it moves freely.

3. It must be an enlightening influence so as to supplant and put away the darkness of the mind. Not only does the sinner move in an envelope of darkness which must be driven away, but there needs to be a constant blaze of light poured upon the Christian, to detect his deficiencies and lead him forward. When a Christian has backslidden, and become selfish, what but the light of heaven, can remove his darkness and delusion?

4. It needs to be sufficiently wise and powerful to arrest and keep the attention. It is manifest that an influence is needed, not merely to argue and gain the assent of the mind, but so to convince, as to gain and keep the attention. Nothing is more common than for persons to assent to arguments without really perceiving their true force, and an influence is therefore needed, that can actually show the truth to the mind, quicken the conscience, and develop the sensibility in its favor. Where any truth is presented to the mind, it gives increased power to the truth if a corresponding feeling can be aroused. An agency is therefore needed that knows perfectly the laws and whole history of our minds, and just how to approach them in order to make them feel--and to possess them of the true knowledge of God. Who has not been struck with the difficulty of making sinners understand the true nature of religion? Even professors of religion stumble at the true character of God. I was astonished at this, on hearing of certain objections made to my sermon about putting on Christ. You recollect I said in my sermon, that we ought, in all circumstances, and in every calling, to inquire how Christ would do were He in our place--even were He a physician, a mechanic, or even a street-sweeper. "What!" say

certain ones, "compare Jesus Christ to a street-sweeper, or a washer-woman! It is blasphemous! I can't go to hear him again." Now, do let me ask, what such persons know about religion? Why if they had seen Him washing his disciple's feet, they would at once have declared He could not be the Christ! What! suppose any necessary and honest labor below Christ! I wonder if they do not think it was below Him to be a carpenter. Some Infidels maintain that it is altogether below God to take any notice of this world. That is their notion about God. They think it would lower his dignity to concern Himself about it. Shame! So professors of religion do not know the nature of true religion. If they did, they would never indulge their foolish prejudices against people of color, and on a thousand other points on which they should be as honest and solemn as the Judgment. They need an agency to teach them the truth about God and his service.

5. This agent must be able to reveal to the mind such truths as are calculated to inspire confidence and love. Otherwise all his testimony will only confirm their selfishness, and leave them still "carnal, sold under sin." He must also possess immeasurable patience. Men often get out of patience, and even parents with their own children. What patience then is necessary in order to influence men to obey the will of God. Moreover, He must also be Omnipresent, and characterized by vast benevolence. Just think what benevolence is required. The Atonement is made, but sinners heed it not, and here something additional must be done to remove the blindness, and overcome the sottishness of man--to lead him to accept its offers and obey its precepts.

III. This kind of influence is actually employed.

1. The Holy Spirit strives with every generation, and with every individual altogether gratuitously. He receives no pay for it. Oh how great must be his benevolence! His influence has all the characteristics above specified. It is spiritual, John 16:7-8. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."

It is moral, as opposed to physical. He works in us to will and to do, by motives, by truth. See the texts. Also, James 1:18. "Of his own will begat He us, with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his

creatures." 1 Pet. 1:23. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." Jn. 17:17. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." All these passages, not only assert that the Spirit exerts an influence, but plainly teach that it is moral in kind. The Atonement of Christ, furnishes the motives by which to effect the work, both of converting sinners, and sanctifying saints. If it should occur to you, that there were persons converted before the Atonement was made, I answer, that it was through that class of truths which the Atonement presents, and they were shadowed forth in the Jewish ritual, and revealed in prophecy. It certainly was not by merely legal influences. Law only drives a sinner to despair. What! a selfish sinner brought to love by the threatenings of the law? Impossible! Conscious of his selfishness and guilt, he looks up, and sees God clothed in terrors and frowns, with the red thunderbolt in his hand to dash him to hell. Has this a tendency to induce in him a disinterested submission to, and love for God? No, but directly the contrary. It condenses his selfishness into fiercer opposition. But how different the manifestation of love in the Atonement. It is, as Paul says--Romans 12:20. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." If you meet your enemy, you may scold and threaten to shoot him; and while you upbraid him, he may blush; while you threaten, he may tremble; but he will not love. We know the influence of such a course, by our own consciousness. But if we manifest benevolence towards him, we heap coals of fire on his head. We change him into a friend. So, when the sinner sees God all love instead of frowns, with what a magic power it wilts him all down! While he sees only the signs of wrath, he stands as unbending as a marble pillar, and if he weeps, his tears are the tears of a rock; but as the Spirit takes and shows him the things of Christ, he is instantly all unbraced--his stubborn knees bow, his heart breaks, and he lies all along, subdued at the foot of the cross. Such is the work of the Spirit.

IV. The consistency and co-operation of divine and human agency in the work.

1. We are conscious of being active in every step of the work. The Spirit does not first convert men and they then become active. We are conscious that we are perfectly active all along, every step of the way; just as much so as in business, or any thing else in the world.

2. The Spirit is not employed to suspend, or set aside our own voluntary agency, but to secure the right direction and use of it. He could not make us holy, and save us without our own agency, for holiness consists in right voluntary action. To talk of being made holy passively, is to talk stark nonsense. The thing is impossible.

3. Without his agency, though perfectly free and responsible, yet being selfish, and voluntarily shutting ourselves up to the consideration and influence of motives to selfishness, we should do nothing to recover ourselves out of the snare of the devil. He works in us to will, and to do of course, since willing necessitates doing. He addresses Himself to the work of influencing the will, because that is just the place to begin. All the actions we perform which are good, are truly ours, but the agent who persuades us to them, is the Holy Spirit. He wisely charms our wills into conformity to the will of God.

REMARKS.

1. In all this work, we are conscious only of the influence of truth, as the Spirit presents not Himself to our view, but the truth. We are conscious of perceiving, and acting, and feeling, in view of the truth, but of nothing else.

2. See the error of those who are expecting and waiting for a physical change, and a physical sanctification. A great multitude of impenitent persons are waiting to be passively converted, and professors of religion encourage them in it. They are also waiting to be sanctified in a similar way. Now, prevalent as this notion is, and extensive as has been its sway in the Church, I do not hesitate to say that there is nothing more absurd, and unsupported by the Bible. It is a superstitious notion. As though the divine influence were like an electric shock, or some such influence. It is to overlook the very nature of religion, and of the Spirit's influences, and has ruined thousands, and, I may say, millions of souls.

3. Whenever we find our attention drawn to the consideration of spiritual things, we may know that the Spirit is at work with us, and conduct ourselves accordingly. If a sinner would know whether the Spirit strives with him, the way is easy. Does truth seem to have a stronger influence than formerly? Do solemn influences come in upon the mind from abroad? It must be the work of the Spirit. Walk softly lest you grieve Him away.

4. The truths of the Bible never influence us inwardly, only as they are revealed to us individually, and set home upon us by the Spirit. I have feared a great many overlook this. They read the Bible as they would a catechism or lesson, and often wholly overlook its real import. They must have the Spirit to make it plain to them. They never seem to have a passage brought home to them by the Spirit. But to read the Bible so, does them no good, but infinite hurt--the mind hardens under it, and this is the reason so many read it without finding its spirit. The truth is, it is not enough that it has been revealed to Isaiah, and Paul--it was never meant to be a rule of life as a mere outward thing; you might as well have it on tables of stone; it is a mere savor of death unto death, unless it is so revealed to you as to be spirit and life. You must be taught what its meaning is by the Spirit of God. What Christian does not know this to be true in his own consciousness? You have sometimes read a hundred passages and they seemed to do you no good. Nay, it seemed as though you could find nothing to suit you in a whole volume of promises. But, by and by, God makes one come home to you like electric fire. It sets you all in a glow and becomes food for many days. It serves also as a key to many other of the deep things of God. We observe the same thing in the biographies of distinguished Christians. How often we hear them talk about the Spirit giving them the meaning of a passage. They had read it before a hundred times, and it seemed to possess no special meaning--they had only an outside view of it. But suddenly they saw in it a profoundness of meaning that they had never conceived of; it is as light from heaven.

5. We have power to resist the Spirit. The will has the command of the attention, and if, when the Spirit presents truth the will averts the attention, and continues to do so, the Spirit might present it forever, and it would do no good. Hence we are commanded not "to resist"--not "to grieve" the Holy Spirit, and to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling for it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

6. Objects of sense, habits, the world, the flesh and Satan, render divine influence constantly indispensable.

7. See the vast patience, pains-taking, compassion, perseverance and love of the Holy Spirit. I shall never forget the impression made on me by the thought that came into my mind once when reflecting on the work of the Spirit. I asked myself how long it had been since I was converted and what the Spirit had done for me during all that time; and I could testify that, during all that time, through

all my provocations, He had continued to strive, to lead and guide me, faithful till that moment, in his work of love. Oh, how could I ever grieve him again!

8. How greatly our ingratitude must grieve Him. I have been afraid Christians did not think enough of their indebtedness to the Spirit. They often seem to regard the Savior with great complacency, the Father with less, and the Spirit with none at all, or but little; whereas all the persons of the Trinity, are equally interested and engaged for our salvation, and have equal claims to our gratitude. The Father gave the Son, the Son made the Atonement, and the Spirit secures our acceptance of it.

9. See what Rom. 5:6, means. "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." But for the Atonement, the Holy Spirit could not sanctify us for want of motives adapted to slay our selfishness. But the Atonement gives Him that power over us.

10. God is often employed in influencing the decisions of our will, when we are not at all aware of it. How often men find themselves having arrived at thoughts and made up decisions, for which they cannot account to save their lives. This is often the case with even impenitent sinners. Perhaps some of you can remember instances of decisions which even saved your life. I can remember such instances in my own history. It would be extremely interesting to gather up facts on this point. We should, doubtless find many wonderful things coming to light, respecting the intervention of the Spirit.

11. The Spirit is always in his people, but often his inward, gentle teachings and whisperings, are drowned in the din of outward objects. He loves to lead the mind in his own strait way, by breathing, gently, his influences upon the soul, but often times the mind is in such great excitement and bustle that it cannot hear Him speaking in his own inward sanctuary.

12. The mind is often diverted from his teachings by the teachings of those who are not under his influence. I have often heard people say that they had a sweet time in their closet on the Sabbath morn, but they have gone to meeting and by the time it was through, have found it all dissipated. The teachings they heard there conflicted with those of the Spirit of God, and they grieved Him by giving it their attention.

13. Excitement, measures, and talk often quench his influences. When persons

give themselves up to much talk, there is little inward communion; and when there is so much that is outward in means to promote religion, the mind grows poor and lean, and takes up with the flummery and show of outside religion.

14. See the importance of having the inward ear open, and of understanding that the senses are not to be confounded with the outward organs of sense. The ear is not a sense but the organ of the sense of hearing. It is no more to be confounded with the sense, than is the trumpet you hold to the ear. So the eye, the bodily organ of sense, is no more the sense itself, than are your spectacles. The glasses do not see, nor does the eye, but the sense of sight sees through them. Hence, you can keep your senses awake and active while you dispense with the outward organs. Why do you shut your eyes when you pray? To prevent your attention from being caught away from God. In like manner you can close your outward ear, so that you may hear God speak. Did it never seem to you as if you actually heard Him speak?--sometimes a Bible passage? I recollect a time, a number of years ago, when the Lord showed me his glory. So sensible was his presence that I never suspected, at the time, that I did not see his glory with bodily eyes. Soon after I was converted, I used to go about before, or at the break of day, to get brethren up to pray, (and I may say that was the first morning prayer meeting I had ever heard of.) One morning I could not get them up; I felt distressed, and in my agony was going away to pray, when all at once the glory of God blazed all around me, and it seemed as if all nature praised the Lord, and none but men looked down and were mute. I wondered they could not see. It seemed to have been some such view that Paul had, when he could not tell whether he was in the body or out of it. When persons experience this, it seems more than a figure of speech to talk of seeing God, but if you want to see Him, you must let the inward senses be awake to the influence of the Spirit.

15. See how the soul is sanctified by the Spirit, and belief of the truth. When the Spirit presents the truth you must believe it. Sanctification is, and must be by faith.

16. See the importance of understanding the ground of the necessity of the divine influence. The reason is that the mind has so shut itself up to selfish influences that the Spirit alone, can break the spell that binds it. Its greatness is manifest by the same reason.

17. The necessity for the Spirit's influence, is our sin, and hence never ought to be brought up as an excuse.

18. All the holiness on earth is induced by the Spirit.

19. If you grieve away the Spirit, you are lost. Nothing else in the universe can save you.

20. See what it is to be led by the Spirit. It is to yield to his influences.

21. How amazingly careless many persons are, in disregarding the influences of the Spirit. Until you are more careful how you talk and act, you will never know what it is to be taught of the Spirit. There is a man who would not grieve his wife for any consideration, but will daily grieve the blessed Spirit. The Spirit stands away back from such a man, knowing it will do no good to interpose. Poor man! If he continue to grieve Him, he will soon do it once too often, and never be forgiven.

[Back to Top](#)

HOLINESS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE PRESENT LIFE --No. 10

Fulness There is in Christ

Lecture X

July 5, 1843

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Col. 2:9, 10: "For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power."

The connection in which this text stands, shows that the Apostle is laboring to establish the distinction between an outside legal religion, and religion by faith in Christ. For this purpose, he warns them in verse eight to "beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." And in the twentieth verse, by an earnest and solemn appeal, he strives to tear them away from "subjection to ordinances after the commandments and doctrines of men." Indeed the main design of the whole epistle was to shut up the Colossians to the religion of faith,

and cut them off from that of legality.

In the present discussion it is my design to show--

I. What is not intended by the declaration that Christians are complete in Christ.

II. What is intended.

III. To point out some things which are demanded by our nature, circumstances, and character, in order to complete well-being.

IV. The conditions on which this completeness may be realized in our own experience.

I. What is not intended by the declaration that Christians are complete in Christ.

1. When it is said we are complete in Him it is not intended that we are complete in the sense of an imputed righteousness. The other evening, you will recollect, I labored to show that the doctrine of imputation is at once an absurd and pernicious dogma. It is not necessary here to dwell on that point again. It is enough to say that God could no more perform works of supererogation than any other moral being, and that therefore there could be no righteousness to impute. Moreover, a transfer of moral character is naturally impossible.

2. It is not intended that all Christians have, as a matter of fact, so received Christ, as to realize this completeness in their own character and experience; nor is it asserted in the text that any body ever did or ever will.

II. What is intended.

It is intended that in Him all the demands of our being are met--that a full provision is made, and set forth by God to meet all our wants, and make us all that God desires we should be.

III. Some things which are demanded by our nature, circumstances, and character, in order to complete well being.

The question is, what do men really need--what must belong to a Savior in order

to his being a Savior to us such as we need?

1. Our nature and circumstances expose us to innumerable trials and temptations. I have dwelt, in these lectures, to a great extent on the trials arising from our peculiar nature in the circumstances in which we are placed. None are exempt from them. Even in the garden of Eden, man's nature and circumstances occasioned trial. Nor is this, on the whole, to be regretted. Such trials are to our advantage if we use the help afforded us in meeting them. They "work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." But as a matter of fact, the circumstances are such, and men have so abused their nature, that the trials which they endure are extremely great, and the help which they need must be both adapted and adequate to meet all their wants in this respect.

2. Our frailties and infirmities are great, in consequence of our long abuse of ourselves. All the appetites and passions are greatly aggravated in their demands; the nervous system rasped up to the highest pitch; the habits inveterate; each successive generation placed under some additional besetments: until like the reed, man is liable to be swayed by every breeze, or carried adrift on the ocean of life, like a vessel torn from its moorings, and driven by a tempest. Hence, we need strength for our frailty, and grace sufficient for our infirmity.

3. Our ignorance is very great, and since men are influenced by motives, they can be influenced towards God and holiness, only in proportion as they are enlightened. The motives to sin are bold and obtrusive and seen by the ignorant, but the reverse is true of motives to holiness. Hence men must have a Savior able to enlighten and charm them away from the influence of things seen and temporal, and bring them under the influence of things unseen and eternal. The longer I live, the more I am astonished at the ignorance of men in reference of religious truths. Even Christians scarcely know their A, B, C. Very few of them are able to give any good reason for the doctrines of their faith. Hence, the great mass of them readily receive dogmas published by the press, and promulgated from the pulpit, which, to thinking minds, are palpably at war with human reason. Take, for example, the doctrine of imputed righteousness. Is it not astonishing that it was not at once seen that there can be no work of supererogation and of course no righteousness to be imputed? What more could God do than benevolence

demanding of Him? The Atonement and all his other works are virtuous, only because they are carrying out the law of benevolence. Jesus Christ was bound to be benevolent as much as any other being, and of course his righteousness could no more be imputed, than that of any other holy moral agent--no more than Gabriel's. Now, how does it happen, how can it be that men should believe such an absurd dogma as this, unless from sheer ignorance? Why the whole gospel is another gospel if this doctrine be true. It was Christ's object to save men from their sins, and not to throw over their filthy, ulcerated backs, a robe of imputed righteousness. I call it ignorance to hold such a dogma, because an intelligent being understanding it, and the objections to it, can't believe it. And this is but a specimen of many other things equally gross which are sanctified in the creeds and common faith of the mass of the Church. It is full of superstition, errors, and ignorance on a thousand subjects. The reformation cast off many, but many were left, some of which time has outgrown, and others yet remain. Now, we only get right, by getting an insight into the gospel. It is truth coming in that thrusts error out, and we therefore need somebody to deliver us, to teach us the very A, B, C, of religion. We want some patient instructor [sic.] who will be willing to teach us over and over even the same things. "What's that?" "A." "What's that?" "B." Now go back to A again, and ask, "What's that?" "I don't know," says the pupil. "Well," says the kind hearted teacher, "That's A," and thus, again and again, till he remembers it. Thus Christians need to be instructed by some kind agent who will not tear their souls, and sternly frown them away, but who will sooth them all down into love, and then gently remove their errors, and ingraft the word of truth.

4. We have a subtle adversary of great power and malignity. It has become unpopular to say much about the devil, people have become so incredulous respecting his existence. This state of things is doubtless the result of his infernal agency, since, if men doubt his existence, they will the more readily become his prey. But the Bible holds other language. It requires men to pass the time of their sojourning here with fear--"to be sober and vigilant; because our adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." It represents him as possessing great subtlety, and being ready to take ten thousand advantages, even turning himself into an angel of light, to delude and destroy souls. And what man is able to resist him?--to detect all the villanies and sophistries of a mind as old and

malevolent as his? I have often felt that the devil would just as certainly have my soul, in spite of all my endeavors against him, if Christ did not save me, as I existed. As well expect to escape a devouring lion, whose strong power had already encompassed you about. Who has not found that sometimes the devil has made a lie appear so much like truth, that we would be ready to take an oath it was truth. No doubt ten thousand times, persons have thought the Lord was leading them, when in fact, it was the devil who had involved them in a web of lies and sophistries, and was hurrying them on to the precipice of ruin. Now, a man who does not know these things, will never make much effort to get away from him. From him? From thousands of them, all leagued to destroy. Who can protect us? Our Christian journey lies all the way through an enemy's country, and throngs of devils are prowling about on all sides, and if the Lord does not deliver us the devil will have the whole of us.

5. Our education, habits, and prejudices all give him a decided advantage over us. He has been weaving his web of villanies and lies for thousands of years, and with all his profound experience, great mental capacity, and legions of compeers, he is able to weave his devilish plots into everything. You cannot have a benevolent society, but he must have a hand in it--even if you are getting up a Bible Society, his counsel and agency must have a place. He has a corner at every Missionary meeting and carefully watches its workings. Any one who will look narrowly into those which are professedly the most benevolent projects of the day can scarcely fail to see that the devil has a hand in them, and is exercising his infernal craft to pervert them to evil.

If I had time to take up the habits, opinions, &c., of society generally, I could show snares and pitfalls, and ambushes arranged with wonderful subtlety and adaptation, and awfully effective for the ruin of mankind. These are not less manifest in family and even individual relations, and at all peculiar crises of life, taking advantage of habits and education and susceptibilities to work out the endless overthrow of men.

Again, I ask how can we escape him? Who can deliver us? We need a wiser and a mightier than he to defeat him and to effect our escape.

6. We need a propitiation for our sins who will render it consistent for God to pardon us. What is the reason that the governor of this state felt a

difficulty in pardoning Colt? Because it feared the influence it would have to loosen the bands of society. It was not an unwillingness to gratify him, nor a desire to gratify any malevolent feelings, but lest it should thereby strengthen the bands of wickedness. So in the government of God. Pardon must not be extended to sinners unless on such grounds as will not impair, but uphold the influence of the government. Something must be done to propitiate as the gospel calls it--there must be an atonement, or sin could not be forgiven without the greatest danger to the public interests, and God could not be just in exercising pardon. There must then be a Savior who could make an atonement and thus meet this necessity.

7. We need an influence that can break our hearts and bring us to repentance--not only to atone for, but to reclaim us. That is a very slim gospel, which merely pardons men, and then leaves them to achieve their own victories over the world, the flesh, and the devil. It would never save any man. We need a gospel which will come to us where we are, break up the deep foundations of our selfishness, and transform us to love.

8. Not only do we need thus to be initiated into the spirit of the gospel, but kept all along the way to glory. We need a Savior who will watch over us till He gets us within the sacred enclosure. Should He forsake us, even at Heaven's golden gate, we should turn away and go back to hell. We must be placed safely within to be secure.

9. But, in order thus to keep us, He must possess such surpassing loveliness, and radiate such charms, as to draw away the soul from all other fascinations and lovers. He must be able, as it were, to make us sick of love, so that we would follow Him through any trials, and all seductive influences, unattracted by any of them, from our steadfast devotion to his love. We need somebody to draw us. If God should flash his livid lightnings, and hurl his blazing thunderbolts upon us; if He should roll up into our faces the lurid fires of perdition, it might amaze and horrify us, but it would do no good--it would not draw us to Him--it would not call out our love. When Elijah passed by Elisha, he cast his mantle upon him, and forth with, Elisha left the oxen and all, and went after Elijah. I have often thought it seemed to charm him. So Christ, as He passes by a soul, seems, shall I say, so to bewitch it, that it would seem as if He could lead it even through hell. I do not know but He could. If circumstances demand the sacrifice, it

would kiss his cross, and say, drive your nails and crucify me. I willingly endure it for Christ's sake, "who loved me and gave Himself for me." Oh, we do not want a legal Savior, but one "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," in whom we are complete, whose beauties can ravish and enchain our hearts. What is a Unitarian Savior good for? Pooh! Not such do we need, but one who can so captivate us, that if a thousand racks and gibbets stood in the way, they would not deter us from following Him whithersoever He goeth.

10. In short, we need a Savior able and willing to save us, and not only in eternity, but here in this world. We need Him daily, and unless we have such a one, we must constantly wallow in the gutters of iniquity, and its consequent misery. We need our every want met, and our souls made complete in all the will of God--to be filled with his fulness.

IV. The conditions on which this completeness may be received and realized by us, in our own experience.

1. One condition is a realization of our necessities. The Lord Jesus Christ said to one of the churches of Asia--"Because thou sayest--I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." Now observe, one grand defect in the way of people, is that they are so full in themselves, and so increased in goods in their own estimation, as to fail wholly to discover that they are in need of Christ in all things--that their necessities are as vast as the wants of their whole being. This they must realize.

2. Another condition is, that we must realize, that in Him we have all we need. Now people often admit this in words, but not in fact. They often think there is something so peculiar in their case, in their habits, education, relations, or trials, that Christ cannot save them. They seem to think Christ can save everybody else but them. But they must understand that they are complete in Him whatever are their relations, trials, habits and circumstances. This they must realize.

3. Another condition, is the renunciation of self-dependence in all respects. A man must not depend on his learning, his own philosophical insight, or anything else, or He will never depend on Christ. He must become a fool that he may be wise. Just as far as he thinks he can get along without Christ, he will get along without Him, but it will be away from God. When an individual has so much of self-dependence, he really has no faith in the existence of God, nor in his attributes. Self-dependence is allied to infidelity. "Every good, and every perfect gift, cometh down from the Father of light." Should God withhold from us that which we are dependent on Him for, nothing but certain destruction would ensue. This dependence runs through all moral as well as natural life, and it must be felt and acknowledged.

4. You must despair of finding help anywhere else. While a man runs to any and everybody, and puts more confidence in men than in God, he may go to the best man on earth, to an apostle, or an angel, and it will avail him nothing. He might as well go to a child, as far as any efficient help is concerned. I have told sinners sometimes, I won't pray for you, nor have anything to do with you, if you are going to depend on me, and put me in the place of the Savior. Away with you to Christ if you want help. Some of the last years that I labored as an evangelist, the church depended on me so much, that it cost me more effort to get them to look to God, than to perform the requisite labor to convert sinners, and it is so now. I was afraid to come here on this account, and feel now, brethren, that you have depended on me, more than you have any right to. It is a species of trusting in an arm of flesh which God abhors. Many will flee to books, to anything, and sometimes even to the Bible, and put it in the place of God, and cleave to such vain help, until God compels them to look to Himself alone.

5. You must cease to rest in means of any kind. I do not mean that we must cease to use means as means, but they are not to be put in the place of God, or substituted for a Savior. I wish I could impress it on you, how much professors of religion and all men, trust to means more than God, and put them in the place of Christ. You must cease from this entirely, if you wish for completeness in Him.

6. You must give up your cowardly unbelief, and dare to trust Christ wholly. Do you know that unbelief is a form of cowardice? I try sometimes to make

people see that they dare not trust Him, and to show them that they must have more courage, or they never can be complete in Christ. Venture on Him, if you would be filled with his love.

7. You must give up your love of reputation with men. When you really come to Christ indeed, you will see what Christ meant, when He said--"If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household." "They will cast out your names as evil." You must bear all this--be content to hear them misrepresent you--impute evil motives--look contemptuously--slight your company--stare at you, to see if the dilation of the pupil of your eye does not indicate insanity--just as certainly as you give yourselves up to be led by Him in all things. Care not for them. They need your pity more than your frown. They, poor souls, know not what they do.

8. You must forsake all that you have. You must spare no lust, have no sinister end, but give up all, be crucified unto the world. I know this is a great step to take, but you must do it or die. You must thus reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, in order to reckon yourself alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

9. You must confide in Him for all you want--believe that you are complete in Him, not partly so. No matter what new want you discover, or what new circumstances you come into, believe that in Christ, there is grace sufficient for every emergency, however great, otherwise He is not a full Savior to you.

REMARKS.

1. See why Christians are so imperfect. It is because they don't realize their wants, and do not take Him as a complete Savior.

2. They are always like to be, while they know so little of Jesus. I was conversing with one of the principal men in the state, on sanctification. He agreed with me in theory as to its attainability, and then said, that as a matter of fact, no body would realize it in this world. I replied, if you knew what you ought to know about Jesus Christ, you would as soon cut off your right hand as say that. It is a want of a knowledge of Jesus, which leaves men in sin, and makes them weak against it. I have often thought of the sons of Sceva the Jew,

who attempted to cast out devils in the name of Jesus, "whom Paul preached," and when they had bidden an evil spirit come out, he replied, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was, leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded." They did not know Christ, and consequently experienced only defeat. Suppose they had told their experience afterwards, to prove that no body ever did or could cast out devils! Ah! It is one thing to hear and read about Christ, and quite another to trust Him, know Him, and become complete in Him.

3. While they place so much reliance on human, and so little on divine teaching, they are like to remain imperfect. Let them stand in that relation in which God has placed them, and both profit the soul; but when men hear the minister or one another and depend on what he says more than on what God says by his word and Spirit, it is fatal to a growth in divine things. As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

4. While men rest in the letter and overlook the spirit of the gospel, they will of course remain imperfect.

5. The same will be true as long as they put their works in the place of Christ, or their watchings, their resolutions, and legal efforts.

6. Also, while their guides and leaders are blind, and while the shepherds frighten away the sheep from their pastures.

7. Many professors don't know Christ, because, as it were, they have only been converted and baptized unto Moses. Others have received John's baptism unto repentance; and others still know Christ as an atoning Savior. They began in the Spirit, and are now trying to become perfect by the flesh.

8. Wherever there is an imperfection in Christian character, there must be ignorance or unbelief, for the text is a promise that covers the whole field of our necessities. It is remarkable how the Bible abounds with promises both general and specific. Some cover our whole necessity--others point to specific wants. The specific promises seem to be given in accommodation to our ignorance and infirmities, lest our general confidence should not suffice in hours of trial; and yet to some minds, a general declaration implying a promise like that in the text affords greater strength than any specific promise.

9. How few realize that if they are not complete in Him it is because of unbelief. The truth is, it is because they have never known the exercise and power of faith.

10. Doubts respecting the doctrine of entire sanctification, are unbelief, for it is impossible that any one should doubt this who has implicit faith in what Christ says. If grace sufficient is promised, the doubts are unbelief.

11. Many deceive themselves by saying--"I believe the promise but I don't believe I shall fulfill the condition." The truth is, believing the promise is fulfilling the condition. How many nullify the promises in this way. They say they believe that the promise would be fulfilled if they complied with the condition, but this they know they do not do, and have no confidence that they shall. And instead of blaming themselves for it, they really turn it into a virtue, by calling it self-distrust. Its real name is unbelief.

12. If Christ is the depositary of all we need, we see why we are commanded to "come boldly to a throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." But true faith is almost universally regarded as presumption, and such boldness as Jacob, Moses, and others exercised exclaimed against as profane. How shocking this is, when, as a matter of fact, it is presumption not to come boldly. It is disobedience to a divine requisition.

13. There is no real difficulty in the fact that the promises are conditioned on faith. For faith in promise depends upon confidence in the general character of the promisor, and not to give full credit to the promise is to impeach the character of him who made it. Suppose a man of great wealth and veracity should make a promise with this condition, as indeed every promise necessarily implies it. Would there be any difficulty in the condition? Not the least. So long as we had confidence in his character, we should regard it as absurd to make a difficulty of the condition of faith. But if the man was known, or supposed to be unable or unwilling, or that his general character was bad, then truly the condition would be a stumbling block. Nay, to believe implicitly would be absurd and impossible.

14. It is impossible that unbelief should fail to make the soul wretched, or that faith should not bring it deep repose.

15. What a foundation have we for universal repose in Christ. He is a Savior who exactly and perfectly meets our case and necessities as they are. In Him

dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Oh, how important that we should know Him--that our acquaintance with Him should be full. We need a more thorough acquaintance with Christ than with any body else. There is such a thing as knowing more of Jesus, as having a more intimate acquaintance with Him than that which exists between a husband and his wife, or the dearest friends. Whoever is ignorant of that, is ignorant of the very marrow and fatness of the gospel. A personal acquaintance with Christ strengthens our confidence more and more in Him. Yes, and such an acquaintance removes our filth and makes us clean. James Brainard Taylor exclaimed--"I am clean." Brethren are you clean? Are you complete in Christ? Let us go to Him and receive of his fulness, until we are "filled with all the fulness of God."

[Back to Top](#)

HOLINESS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE PRESENT LIFE --No. 11

Justification

Lecture XI

July 19, 1843

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 8:1:"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit."

In this discourse, I shall notice,

I. What it is to be in Christ Jesus.

II. What is intended by no condemnation.

III. Why there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.

IV. What is intended by not walking after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

V. None, except those who walk after the Spirit, are in a justified state.

I. What it is to be in Christ Jesus.

Four answers have been given to this question, which I will briefly consider, and then give what I suppose to be the true one.

1. The first I notice, is the doctrine of eternal justification by imputed righteousness. The doctrine is, that a certain number were unconditionally chosen from all eternity, to whom, Christ sustained the relation of Covenant Head, in such a sense that they are eternally justified. This gross and absurd notion is now exploded and generally rejected. As I have given my views of imputation in a former lecture, I will not dwell on it here.
2. The second answer I notice, is that of perpetual justification by one act of faith. The doctrine is, that the first act of faith, brings the soul into such a relation to God, as never afterwards to be condemned or exposed to the penalty of the law, whatever sins it may commit. The simple idea is, that as it respects Christians, the penalty of the law is wholly set aside.

(1.) Now respecting this, the first remark I make is, that justification is of two kinds, legal and gospel. Legal justification, consists in pronouncing a moral agent innocent of all violation of the claims of the law, so that it has no charge against him. Gospel justification, consists in pardoning a sinner for whatever transgressions he may have committed, that is, in arresting or setting aside the execution of the penalty which he has incurred.

(2.) Legal justification is out of the question, as all the world has become guilty before God. And to maintain that a soul is perpetually justified by once believing, is antinomianism, and one of the worst forms of error. It is to maintain, that as it respects Christians, the law of God is abrogated. The law is made up of precept and penalty, and if either is detached, it ceases to be law. It matters not whether it be maintained that the precept be set aside, or the penalty, it is to maintain an abrogation of the law, and is a ruinous error. It is the nature of a pardon, to set aside the execution of the penalty due to past violations of the law, and to restore the person to governmental favor, during good behavior. More than this, it cannot do, without giving an indulgence to sin. If no future sins can incur the penalty, it follows that

the Christian could not be in danger of hell, however many or gross sins he might commit, or even should he die in a state of the foulest apostasy. What an abomination is such a doctrine!

(3.) This doctrine cannot be true, for no being can prevent condemnation where there is sin. I said in a former lecture, that the law is not founded in the arbitrary will of God, but in the nature and relations of moral beings. Whatever penalty is due to any act of sin, is due therefore, from the nature of the case, so that every act of sin subjects the sinner to the penalty. Pardon cannot then be prospective--sin cannot be forgiven in advance, and to maintain that it is, is to make Christ the minister of sin.

(4.) Again, if Christians are not condemned when they sin, they cannot be forgiven, for forgiveness is nothing else than setting aside the penalty. And therefore, if they are not condemned, they cannot properly pray for forgiveness. In fact, it is unbelief in them to do so. What else can it be, when the sin, whatever it may be in enormity, has not exposed its perpetrator at all to the penalty of God's law?

(5.) This notion cannot be true, because the Bible uniformly makes perseverance in holiness, that is, in obedience, just as much a condition of final acceptance with God, as repentance, or one act of faith. For my part, I must say, I don't know where the Bible makes salvation depend on one act of faith. Those who hold this dogma, ought to tell us where it is taught.

(6.) The Bible, on the contrary, expressly declares that "when a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquities, and dieth in them, for his iniquity that he hath done, shall he die." What can be more distinct or explicit than this declaration? I know not how it has been overlooked, or can be evaded.

(7.) If this doctrine be true, it follows that if Christians are not condemned for one sin, they would not be for ten thousand, and that the greatest apostates could be saved without repentance. But what kind of a gospel is that? It would overthrow the entire government of God. A pretty gospel! Strange kind of good news!

(8.) Moreover, as I have before said, if the penalty is abolished as it respects believers, the law must be. To them, its precept ceases to be anything else than simple advice, which they may do as they please about adopting.

(9.) Finally, every Christian's experience condemns this doctrine. Who of them does not feel condemned when he sins? Now, he either is condemned when his conscience affirms that he is, or it is at opposition to the government of God--affirming what is not true. And when, under its rebukes, persons go and ask pardon, in yielding to it, they are guilty of unbelief, and thus add one sin to another. The truth is, every Christian's conscience condemns the doctrine, and it obviously is evil, and only evil, and that continually, in its whole tendency.

3. The third answer I notice, is, that there will be no final condemnation. Without saying any thing of the truth or falsity of that doctrine, here, I remark that the text says no such thing. It says, "there is now no condemnation." With this agrees Romans 5:1, "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Indeed, this is the general representation of the Bible.

4. The fourth answer which has been given, is this. To be in Christ, is to have a personal, living faith in Him--it is to abide in Him by a living faith. John 15:4-7: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me, ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch that is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." 1 John 3:5-6: "And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins: and in Him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in Him, sinneth not: whosoever sinneth, hath not seen Him, neither known Him." 2 Cor. 5:17: "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." I might quote many other passages, all setting forth that there is no condemnation to those whose faith

secures in them, an actual conformity to the divine will. To all others, there is.

5. To be in Christ, is to be so under his influence, as not to walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit; that is, to receive constant divine influence from Him, as the branches derive nourishment from the vine. This intimate connection with Christ, and spiritual subjection to his control, are fully taught in many passages in the Bible. Gal. 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." And 5:16-25: "This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary, the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of the which, I tell you before as I have also told you in times past, that they which do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit, is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."

II. What is intended by no condemnation.

1. To be condemned, is to be under sentence of law. Those who are condemned, are not only not pardoned for the past, but also their present state of mind is blameworthy and condemned. They are not justified on the ground of either law or gospel, but the whole penalty due to all their iniquity is out against them.

2. When it is said there is no condemnation, it is not intended that they never were condemned, but that their past sin is all pardoned. They are wholly delivered from exposure to the penalty, due to their sins. In addition to this, it is intended, that in their present state of mind, they obey the law, so that the law does not condemn their present state. It does not mean that they will not be again condemned if they sin, but that while they are in

Christ Jesus, they are free from all present condemnation.

III. Why there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.

1. Not because they are of the elect and eternally justified.
2. Not because Christ's righteousness is so imputed, that we can sin without incurring exposure to the penalty of the law.
3. Not because we are perpetually justified by one act of faith. This, as we have attempted to show, is an antinomian and pernicious error.
4. Not because God accepts an imperfect obedience. There is a general opinion abroad, that somehow or other, God accepts an imperfect obedience as genuine. Now it seems to me, that this is a very erroneous view of the subject. The truth is, God has no option about this matter, any more than any other being, for the law exists and makes its demands, wholly independent of his will, and whatever it demands, that is, whatever the nature and relations of moral beings demand, that, as moral Governor, He is bound to enforce, and nothing else. Now what is there in reason or the Bible, to sanction the idea, that God will, or can accept an imperfect obedience? The Bible insists on our serving Him with the whole heart--on our being perfectly benevolent, and proposes no lower standard. Nor could we believe it, if it did. What kind of obedience is half, or imperfect obedience? No one can tell, and consequently, no one can intentionally render it. The very idea of it, is absurd.
5. But to him that is in Christ Jesus, there is now no condemnation, because he is in Christ Jesus in the sense above explained. Not that Christ shields him from the penalty while he continues to violate the precept, but that He saves him from sin, and thus, from desert of the penalty. Says the text, "to those who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Now mark the result; let us read right along. In the seventh chapter, he spoke of a law in his members, which brought him into captivity to sin and death; that is, under condemnation. Now he says, (8:2-4) "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk

not after the flesh but after the Spirit." Here he asserts that the reason why God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, and condemned sin in the flesh, was, "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Now, public justice having been satisfied by the Atonement, when the heart is thus brought into conformity to the law, that is a good reason why they should be pardoned. The same thing is meant, by "writing the law in the heart."

6. Again, there is no condemnation to him who is in Christ Jesus, because he "walks not after the flesh, but after the spirit." This same thought is contained in Gal. 5:16-24: "This I say then, walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led by the Spirit ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of the which, I tell you before as I have also told you in times past, that they which do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit, is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." Here the fruit of the Spirit is just what the law requires, and therefore there can be no condemnation.

7. This assertion must either mean that when we are in Christ we do not sin, or that in Him we can sin without condemnation. Now, what does it mean? It cannot mean the last, for that would make Christ the minister of sin. No individual can sin without breaking the law, for sin is the transgression of the law. The first, then, must be the meaning, and this agrees with what the Scriptures teach-- "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." The reason then why there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus is,

(1.) That in Christ their former sins are pardoned on the ground of his Atonement, and,

(2.) That while in Him they do not sin. He saves them from their sins,

and therefore from condemnation.

IV. What is intended by not walking after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

1. By the flesh is meant the appetites, desires, and propensities of the Sensibility. To walk after the flesh is to indulge these--to give up the will to self-gratification. It is to be in bondage to the propensities so that they are our masters and govern us. It is to be selfish.
2. But to walk after the Spirit, is to obey the Spirit of Christ--it is to obey the law of God.

V. None except those who walk after the Spirit are in a justified state.

1. By this I do not intend to say that they never were justified. For it is true that individuals who once obeyed, and were of course justified, have fallen. This is the case with the angels who kept not their first estate, and Adam and Eve. These were justified in the legal sense before they sinned. But many have also fallen into grievous iniquity, who have once been justified in the gospel sense.
2. I do not mean that they are in no sense Christians. In the common acceptation of the term, it is not limited to those who are in a state of actual conformity to the will of God, but applies to all who give credible evidence of having been converted. Moreover, it is true of Christians, that they sustain a peculiar relation to God, and the term does not indicate that they never sin or fall into condemnation, but that they sustain a certain relation to God which others do not.
3. But I do mean that no one can commit sin without condemnation. When a Christian sins, he is as really condemned as any one else, and he is no longer justified than he is obedient.
4. I mean that no one is justified or pardoned, until he obeys the law or repents, which is the same thing. By the by, it is important that all should understand that repentance is not sorrow for sin, but a real turning away from all sin to God. Now when any individual sins, he must be condemned till he repents, or forsake his sin. A great many people talk about always repenting--that the best acts we ever perform need to be repented of, &c. Now, this is all nonsense, and nothing but nonsense. I say again religion is

no such thing as this, and to represent it so is to talk loosely. "The soul that sinneth it shall die." Repentance is a hearty and entire forsaking of sin, and entrance upon obedience to God.

5. I mean that when one has truly repented, he is justified, and remains so just as long as he remains obedient, and no longer; and that when he falls into sin, he is as much condemned as any other sinner, because he is a sinner.

6. I also mean that justification follows and does not precede sanctification as some have vainly imagined. I here use the term sanctification, not in the high sense of permanent sanctification, but of entire consecration to God. It is not true that persons are justified, before they forsake sin. They certainly could not be thus legally justified, and the gospel proffers no pardon until after repentance, or hearty submission of the will to God. I add, that Christians are justified no longer than they are sanctified, or obedient, and that complete permanent justification depends upon complete and permanent sanctification.

REMARKS.

1. I have often thought, and could not help drawing the conclusion that the great mass of professors of religion are mere antinomians, living in the habitual commission of known sin, and yet expecting to be saved. And when they are pressed up to holiness of heart, they say, "I am not expected to be perfect in this life. I expect Christ to make up for my deficiencies." Now such religion is no better than universalism or infidelity. See that professor of religion. What is he doing? Why indulging his appetites and propensities in various ways which he knows to be contrary to the divine will. Ask him about it and he will confess it-- he will confess that this is his daily practice; and yet he thinks he is justified. But if the Bible be true, he is not. "Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" But he can tell an experience. Perhaps he wrote it all down lest he should forget it, and tells it over to the hundredth time, how he felt when God pardoned his sins, while he is now living in sin every day. Perhaps he never tells an experience at all, but yet rests back upon something which he felt when he imagined he was converted. Now this is nothing but antinomianism, and how astonishing it is that so many should cry out so vehemently about antinomianism who are nothing but antinomians themselves.

What a terrible delusion is this!

2. Men are justified by faith in Christ, because they are sanctified by faith in Him. They do not have righteousness imputed to them, and thus stand justified by an arbitrary fiction, while they are personally unholy, but they are made righteous by faith, and that is the reason why they are justified.

3. To talk about depending on Christ to be justified by Him, while indulging in any form of known sin, is to insult Him. It is to charge him with being the minister of sin. A lady, not long since, was talking with her minister about certain females who were given up to dress in the utmost style of extravagant fashion. He said he thought the most dressy people in his church were the best Christians. They were the most humble, and dependent on Christ. That's his idea about religion. What did he mean? Why that such persons did not pretend to be holy, and professed to depend wholly on Christ. They acknowledged themselves sinners. And well they might! But what kind of religion is that? And how did he get such a notion? How else but by supposing that persons are not expected to be holy in this life, and that they can be justified while living in sin! Now I would as soon expect a pirate, whose hands are red with blood to be saved, as professors of religion who indulge in any form of sin, lust, pride, worldliness, or any other iniquity. "Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid: Yea, we establish the law." But what a state of things must it be, when a minister can utter such a sentiment as that?

4. Such an idea of justification is open to the infidel objection that the gospel is a system of impunity in sin. The Unitarians have stereotyped this objection against faith. Ask them why they say so. They answer, because the doctrine of justification by faith is injurious to good morals. A circuit Judge, some years since said, "I cannot admit the Bible to be true. It teaches that men are saved by faith, and I therefore regard the gospel as injurious to good morals, and as involving a principle that would ruin any government on earth." Now, did he get this idea from the Bible? No, but from the false representations made of the teachings of the Bible. It teaches no such thing, but plainly asserts that a faith that does not sanctify is a dead faith.

5. There are many hoping that they are Christians, who yet live so that their conscience condemns them. "For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." Now to teach that persons may be justified while their conscience condemns them, contradicts this passage. If our own

conscience condemns us, God does. Shall He be less just than our own nature?

6. A great multitude of professors are merely careless sinners. Now do let me ask, if from the way many persons live in the Church, compared with the way many careless sinners live, is it not perfectly manifest that they are in no wise different. And is it censorious to say that they are mere hardened sinners? What will become of them?

7. Many who are accounted the most pious, are only convicted sinners. It is a most remarkable thing, and one which I have taken great pains to observe, that many, thought to be converted in the late revivals, are only convicted sinners, that is, mere legalists. The preaching makes them so. The claims of the law are held up, and obligation enforced to comply with it. They are told to trust Christ for pardon, and they attempt it. Many really do, while others stop short with mere resolutions. All this class will go back, or stay in the Church almost constantly distressed by the lashings of conscience. If you hold up the law they are distressed, and if you hold up Christ they are distressed by the consciousness that they do not exercise faith in Him. Hold up either, and they have no rest. They are really convicted sinners, and yet they think this is religion. In time of coldness they always sink back, but in times of revival they are aroused and driven to the performance of a heartless service which continually fails to appease the demands of conscience. They know of no other experience than this. They refer you to the 7th of Romans, to prove that this is Christian experience, and thus bolster up their hope. I recollect some time since when I had preached against this as Christian experience, a minister said to me, "Well, Bro. Finney, I can't believe that." Why? "Because that's my experience, and I believe I am a Christian." A strange reason that! I suppose it was his experience! Great multitudes have this, and suppose it genuine. I fear, in some instance, whole Churches are made up of such, and their ministers teach them that this is genuine religion. What would the minister just referred to say? That is Paul's experience, and mine too. And the people often derive much comfort from what the minister says in his experience. Oh, what teaching is this? It is high time there was an overturning in the Church on this subject. Whoever has no experience but that of the 7th of Romans is not justified at all, and were it not that great multitudes are deluded, it could not be that so many could sit down contented under this view of the subject.

8. One who walks after the Spirit, has this inward testimony that he pleases God.

An individual may think he does, when he does not, just as persons in a dream may think themselves awake, find it all a dream. So individuals may think they please God when they do not, but it is nevertheless true that those who please God know it. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.

9. This view of the subject does not touch that of the final perseverance of the saints. What I am attempting to show is,

(1.) That true believers are justified or pardoned, and treated as righteous, on account of the Atonement of Christ.

(2.) That those who truly believe, are justified because they are actually righteous. The question is not whether a Christian who has fallen into sin will die in that state, but whether if he does he will be damned. Whether, while in sin, he is justified.

10. Those who sin do not abide in Christ. "And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him neither known Him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous even as He is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin because he is born of God." While they abide in Christ, they are not condemned, but if they overlook what abiding in Christ is, they are sure to fall into sin, and then, they are condemned as a matter of course. The secret of holy living, and freedom from contamination, is to abide in Christ. Says Paul, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." We must have such confidence in Him as to let Him have the entire control in all things.

11. Sinners can see how to be saved. They must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all their heart. They must become holy and walk after the Spirit.

12. Convicted professors can also see what to do. Have you felt misgivings and a load on your conscience. Are you never able to say, I am justified--I am accepted in the Beloved. You must come to Christ now, if you now experience condemnation.

13. There is neither peace nor safety except in Christ, but in Him is all fulness, and all we need. In Him you may come to God, as children, with the utmost confidence.

14. If you are in Christ, you have peace of mind. How sweetly the experience of a Christian answers to this. Many of you perhaps can testify to this. You had been borne down with a burden too heavy, crying out, "O, wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from the body of this death." But your faith took hold on Christ, and suddenly all your burden was gone. You could no longer feel condemned. The stains of sin are all wiped out by the hand of grace. You can now look calmly at your sins, and not feel them grind like an iron yoke. Are you in this state? Can you testify from your own experience that there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus? If so, you can reflect upon your past sins without being ground down into the dust under the guilty burden which rolls upon you. The instant you experience a freedom from condemnation, your whole soul yearns with benevolence for others. You know what their state is. Ah, yes, you know what it is to drink the wormwood and the gall--to have the arrows of the Almighty drink up your spirit, and when you find deliverance you must of course, want to teach others what is the great salvation--to strengthen those that are weak. And an individual who can sit down at ease, and not find his benevolence like fire shut up in his bones--who does not even feel agonized, not for himself, but for others, cannot have yet found that there is now no condemnation. He may dream that he has, but if he ever awakes, he will find it but a dream. Oh, how many need to be aroused from this sleep of death!

[Back to Top](#)

HOLINESS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE PRESENT LIFE --No. 12

Unbelief

Lecture XII

August 2, 1843

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Heb. 3:19:"So we see that they could not enter in, because of unbelief."

In this discourse I shall notice,

I. What unbelief is not.

II. What it is.

III. Instances and evidence of unbelief.

IV. The tendency of unbelief.

V. The guilt of unbelief.

I. What unbelief is not.

1. It is not a negative state of mind. It is represented in the Bible as sin; it cannot, therefore, be a mere negation.
2. Nor is it ignorance. Ignorance may be caused by unbelief, turning away the attention from the objects of faith. But ignorance itself is not unbelief. Nor is it absence of conviction. This is often an effect of unbelief.

II. What it is.

1. It is represented in the Bible as sin. It must then, be a voluntary state of mind. It cannot belong either to the intelligence or the sensibility. For the action of both these powers is necessary.
2. It is the opposite of faith. Faith is represented as voluntary. It cannot, therefore, be conviction, since this belongs to the intelligence. It is trust or confidence in God; it is a committing of the soul to Him; as Peter says, "Commit the keeping of your soul to Him."
3. Generically, faith as distinguished from everything else, is confidence in God; but specifically, it is confidence in Christ, or in any fact, doctrine, promise, or threatening of the Bible. And I might add, in any truth whatever, historical, philosophical, or mathematical; or even in error. If it respects the promises of God, it is a confident assurance that they will be fulfilled. If it respects facts, it is confidence in the truthfulness of the fact. Unbelief is the opposite of this. It is a withholding of confidence from what

God says; it is distrust; it is a refusal to commit or give up the mind to the influence of a truth or promise; it is a rejection of evidence. For example; take any of the facts recorded in the Bible. Unbelief, is a refusal to credit their truthfulness, or to allow them that influence which they deserve. For instance, look at the manner in which the Jews treated the miracles of Christ. Christ claimed to be the Messiah, and in attestation of his claim, performed many wonderful works. Here was evidence that He really was what He professed to be. If He had not furnished such evidence, it would not have been unbelief to reject his claim. He might have lived and died among them, without their incurring any guilt by rejecting Him. But the works which He performed, were such as ought to have secured the confidence of every beholder, and established his claim in every mind. But instead of yielding to the evidence thus presented, they stedfastly resisted Him, and ascribed his miracles to infernal agency; and it would seem, that their disposition to reject Him was so strong, that no amount of evidence which He could place before them, could overcome it. Now this was unbelief. We may apply the same principle to other things. Take, for example, the doctrine of Phrenology. If an individual really lacks evidence of its truth, it is not unbelief to reject it. On the contrary, to receive it without such evidence, would be mere credulity. But just as far as he has evidence of its truth, it is unbelief to refuse to treat it accordingly. So with the doctrines of the Second Advent. If an individual has not such evidence of their truth, as to answer the demands of his intelligence, it is not unbelief to reject them. But if he has such evidence, then to reject them is unbelief. We might apply the same principle to the doctrine of Sanctification, or any other doctrine whatever, whether true or false.

4. But especially is it unbelief, where individuals confess themselves convinced and do not act accordingly. If an individual confesses himself convinced of the truth of the doctrine of the Second Advent, if he does not commit his mind to the full influence of that doctrine, it is unbelief; or if he admits the truth of the doctrine of Entire Sanctification, and does not commit himself to it, and expect to realize it in his own case, he is guilty of unbelief. And it is unbelief, whether he admits it or not, if he has reasonable evidence of its truth, and yet does not yield his whole being up to its influence.

III. Instances and evidences of unbelief.

1. A heathen who never heard the gospel, is not an unbeliever as respects Christ, in any proper sense of the word; He knows nothing about it, and consequently, withholds no confidence from it; but a man who lives under the gospel, and is not controlled by it, is an unbeliever.

2. A want of assurance of salvation through Christ is unbelief. This must be so, if the Atonement is general, and if faith consists in believing what is said respecting it. The Apostle says, "that this is the record which God hath given to us, eternal life, and this life is in his Son." Now if it be true that God hath given eternal life to all, then not to possess an assurance of your own salvation through Christ is unbelief.

3. Not being duly influenced by any perceived truth, is unbelief; no matter what that truth is. Faith is a disposition to be influenced by it, or the committing of the mind to its influence, in exact accordance with its perceived importance.

4. The absence of a firm confidence and expectation, that we shall realize the truth of every promise given to us, is unbelief. For example, God has promised to parents, to bless their children; then, not to have the most confident assurance that He will do so, is unbelief. And the same is true respecting every promise, either of justification or sanctification.

5. God has promised the salvation of all that believe; now, to doubt whether we shall be saved, is both an evidence and an instance of unbelief. Remember too, that the salvation promised, is salvation from both sin and hell. To this, it is objected, that the promise of salvation is conditional; and, says the objector, I have no right to believe that I shall be saved, until I have believed in Christ; for faith, is the condition of the promise, and to require me to believe that I shall be saved, before I believe in Christ, is to require me to believe a fact before it is true. To this, I answer,

(1.) By inquiring of the objector what I am to believe about Christ? Plainly, I am to believe in Him, as the Savior. That is, that He tasted death for every man, and that He hath given us eternal life. Two things, then, I must believe; first, that He died for all, and of course, for me; and secondly, that He will save me. Suppose an angel should believe that Christ died for all the world, would that be faith in Christ?

Certainly not, in the sense in which the Bible requires us to believe in Him; and I do not believe, in any proper sense, unless I believe He died for me. I must believe, not only, that He died for all, but for me; not only that justification is offered to all, but to me; and true faith, is accepting of eternal salvation at his hand. Now observe what the objection is; that the realization of the promise, is conditioned on faith, and that the condition must be fulfilled, before I can believe that the promise will be realized, and I shall be saved. This is a mere trick. It is to suppose a promise given, but on a condition that nullifies it. Suppose a rich father should give his son a promise in writing, and under oath, that he would supply all his wants, and should send him abroad, but the condition demanded of the son, was that he should exercise full faith in the promise. He must believe, that it will secure for him a supply of money in any of the banks of Europe, according to the tenor of the writing. Now, I want to know, if this is a condition that would nullify the promise. Plainly not, since the condition is not arbitrary, but naturally essential to its fulfillment. If he does not confide in the promise and expect its fulfillment, it is naturally impossible that it should be fulfilled. On the contrary, how plain it is, that faith in the promise naturally secures its fulfillment. God has given the promise of eternal salvation to all that believe. The condition is not arbitrary, but natural, so that the fulfillment of the promise to each individual necessarily depends on his faith in it. Now is it faith to stand away back, and say, Christ died for everybody else, and will save everybody else, if they will believe, and not believe yourself? What a strange objection! The truth is, if this objection be good, it nullifies every promise in the Bible. God has promised to convert the world, but the fulfillment of this promise, is conditioned on the faith of Christians. For them to believe it, is to deliver themselves up to it, and preach the gospel to them. Now does this condition hinder faith? Is it a sly and artful means of evasion, put in by the promiser to prevent the necessity of his ever fulfilling the promise? Nay, but the condition is natural, and involves the expectation of the thing promised. So God has promised to bless the children of believers, if they will believe; that is, if they will give themselves up to this truth. Now to believe, is to fulfill the condition, and for persons to take the ground of the objector, is to stumble themselves. The objection, then, cannot be

good.

(2.) In every case, faith expects the fulfillment of the promise, and this expectation is not founded upon the promise itself, but on the general character of the promiser. When God gives any promise, if an individual does not believe in it, because he believes in the general character of God, he cannot believe in it at all. Without confidence in the benevolence and veracity of God, it is impossible to rely upon his promises; but confidence in these, naturally secures such reliance.

(3.) God has promised to justify and sanctify every believer, or every one who will believe and expect this of Him. The condition is natural, and it is nonsense to say, that we cannot expect to be justified and sanctified until after we have believed; for to believe, is to expect. Not to expect, is unbelief; for to expect in this case, is implied in faith. Much has been said about appropriating faith, and I have been struck with the fact, that believers in a limited Atonement, have much to say about appropriating faith. But a limited Atonement and appropriating faith can't go together. If the former is true, the latter is impossible without a new revelation. For if Christ died for only a part of mankind, and has not revealed who they are, I would ask, how any one can appropriate Him to himself, without a direct revelation that he is one of the elect. But right over against this class, those who believe in a general Atonement, are consistent enough in holding the doctrine of appropriating faith; for to appropriate, is simply to accept of Christ, as presented in the gospel. If Christ died for all, then each may appropriate Him, and this is faith. Whoever does not appropriate Him, just as He is presented, rejects; he is an unbeliever.

(4.) Finally, if this objection is true, salvation is impossible; for if I can never expect to be saved by Christ until after I have believed, I can never expect it at all; for I have said, true faith, and the expectation of salvation by Him, are identical.

IV. The tendency of unbelief.

1. It defeats all God's efforts to save those who exercise it. As I have said already, faith is the natural condition of salvation, and is a voluntary exercise. It cannot, therefore, be forced; and therefore, if an individual will

not believe, he must be damned.

2. It defeats all his efforts to sanctify us. Sanctification is nothing else than delivering up the mind to the truth and promises of God. To think, then, that we can be saved while we reject the promises, is to overlook the very nature of sanctification.

3. It renders heart obedience impossible, for "without faith, it is impossible to please God."

4. It prevents the possibility of true peace. The unbeliever does not know what true peace is. His condition, is in some respects, like that of a person in sleep, who has terrible dreams, who supposes himself surrounded with dangers from flood, or fire, or dreadful circumstances; perhaps suffering shipwreck, and just on the point of being swallowed up in the waves. Perhaps he is struggling to escape from devouring flames, or he walks a miserable outcast from society, troubled on every side, and finding nothing on which he can repose, his agony is indescribable, but in a moment he awakes, and behold, he is in a warm bed in his own secure dwelling. He thanks God it is a dream. How great the contrast between his present state and that in which his dreams placed him. So the convicted unbeliever is tossed with agitation, he looks this way and that, but finds no rest. "He is like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." Now mark; as soon as he believes, what a change comes over him. It is like the sun breaking out in an ocean of storms. He sees promises on every side, like the mountains round about Jerusalem. He sees provisions for all his wants, and why should he be troubled any more. "Bless the Lord, O my soul," he cries. What is this? Why here, instead of bondage, misery and death, is endless life and peace; and the broad river of love, as pure as that which flows from under the throne of God, begins to pour its current through my soul.

5. Unbelief renders it impossible for Christ to keep us from sin. The Bible, however full of promises, may rot before him, and he go down to hell notwithstanding. Unbelief nullifies them all, and leaves nothing to help him.

6. It delivers the soul over into the hands of the world, the flesh, and the devil. There is no power in the universe can protect him against their

influence, without his own consent, for the very reason that he is a free being. Withholding faith from God, and delivering himself up to their influence, he becomes the sport and play of every temptation that besets him.

V. The guilt of unbelief.

1. It is the wilful rejection of the highest evidence God can give. Suppose you had an enemy who always suspected you of an intention to injure him, and although you had often tried to remove his suspicions, he should still hold this opinion. Suppose he should fall into great difficulties, and you should take much pains to help him out, you should relieve the wants of his family, and provide for his children, but still he should suspect you had some sinister end in all this, which would eventually come out; would you not think him vastly unreasonable and guilty in maintaining such prejudices? But suppose, finally, his house should take fire, and he and his family were in an upper story, while it was raging in every apartment below. No one can afford help; there are no ladders and no means of escape. The floor beneath him begins to give way, and the roof is about falling in; they stand at the windows and shriek for help. Suddenly one rushes through the flames, from one flight of stairs to another, with his hair and clothes on fire, till he reaches the miserable family. He instantly seizes him with one strong arm, and his children with the other, and carries them safely below. While he is doing this, the man swoons with terror. As soon as he opens his eyes, he finds himself in the arms of his deliverer, who, with the utmost solicitude and tenderness, is fanning him, and is using means to restore him; and whose first exclamation is, "your children are all safe." He soon discovers that his benefactor is no other than the object of his former suspicions. Now suppose he should still not be convinced, what an abomination would this be. How every one would execrate such a wilful and unreasonable rejection of the highest evidence you could give of your benevolence towards him. But suppose farther, he were condemned to death, and you should voluntarily step forward and die for him. What an amazing prejudice and obstinacy would be manifest, if he should entertain suspicions of the sincerity of your love. Now let me ask, what further evidence God could give of his love to mankind than He has given? Besides crowning their life with as many blessings as their circumstances render it possible to bestow, He adds the gift of his own Son to die for them; and has thus given the

highest possible evidence He could, of his good will towards them. What damning guilt, then, must their unbelief be. Suppose the sovereign of an extensive empire, is seeking to promote the highest possible good of his subjects, through the administration of the most excellent laws. But one province of his empire goes into rebellion. He has power to crush it at once. But suppose, that instead of marching an army, bristling with bayonets, among them, and desolating them with fire and sword, he should lay aside the robes of royalty, and in a most unassuming manner, go among them, and attempt to teach them the nature of his own character and laws, and the importance of conformity to his will, in order to their own highest good. But suppose again, they would not believe him, but suspect him of some sinister motive, how astonishing this would be; and if, to convince them of his love, he should even die for them, who would not expect this to subdue the rebellion? Now see the blessed God administering the law of benevolence impartially, throughout his universe. Our world rebels. He comes in the person of his Son, in the humble guise of humanity; He goes about among mankind, revealing to them the character and will of God, and endeavoring to secure their confidence. And when they reject his instructions and will not believe, rather than fail to accomplish his end, He dies for them on the cross. What higher evidence could God give of his love to man than this? And how outrageous is the unbelief, which wilfully rejects it all? What more could He do? Can you think of anything more? How damning then, must be the guilt of unbelief!

2. It is treating God in the worst possible manner. We never do our friends a worse injury, than when we distrust them without a cause. Should a husband become jealous and distrustful of his wife, without a cause, what greater injury could he do her? It would pierce like a dagger to her heart. Or, should a wife manifest unreasonable suspicions respecting her husband, what more could she do to render him wretched? He would say, have you any reasons for your suspicions? Let me ask that husband who is conscious of his integrity, and has tender sensibilities--let me ask that wife, who is virtuous, and values the confidence of her husband, as she should--how would you feel? How would you expostulate in the circumstances supposed?--and what would be more directly calculated to bring the blight of death upon the peace of a family, than such unreasonable distrust, on the part of a husband or wife? Now look at God's great family. What family

ever had such cause of confidence, as God's has?--and what father, ever had such cause of complaint? What husband was ever so distrusted, by a wife, as the blessed God, by the Church which He has bought with his own blood? See that husband; he is pouring his complaints all abroad, and loading down the air with his sighs. Now, I ask again, if this want of confidence is not the worst possible kind of treatment? Men naturally feel insulted, whenever their veracity and integrity are called in question. And has God no sensibility? Is it no grief to Him to be treated as a liar, the world over?

3. It is dishonoring God in the highest degree before others. Suppose a father should send his son to a University, and should give him a book of checks, assuring him, that they were good to supply all his wants. But suppose the son should show that he had no confidence in it, and should be seen managing around to meet his expenses, and to obtain his books. Would not this be to publish the worst things, in the most effectual way about his father? What then does unbelief publish about God? See that professor of religion, with the Bible in his hands, full of promises, going all about, complaining and mourning over his spiritual poverty, when God has said, that He is "more willing to give his Holy Spirit to them that ask it, than earthly parents are to give good gifts to their children." And that "his grace shall be sufficient for us." What is he doing? Why he is representing God in the worst possible light, as guilty, not only of lying, but of lying under oath; for "God willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the only hope set before us."

REMARKS.

1. We see what to think of those, who say they cannot realize that the promises will be fulfilled. Can't realize! Hark! Suppose your child should say, Pa, you promised to give me a New Year's present, but I can't realize that you will. You would say, my child, do you think I lie? Have I not given you my word, that I would give you a present? What higher evidence can men have than the solemn word and oath of God? What shall make it more sure? Who shall underwrite for Him? If what He has said does not satisfy you, He can give no security. Can't

realize! Horrible!

2. We see what to think of those who say they believe, but are not duly influenced by their faith. They profess to believe in the necessity of salvation, and in the eternity of hell torments; but then neither act respecting themselves or others, as the magnitude of these truths demand. The fact is, they don't believe at all.

3. We see, that no doctrine is believed any farther than it influences the conduct. What is faith? It is, as we have shown, the delivering of the mind up to the influence of known truth. It follows, then, that there is no faith where the conduct remains uninfluenced.

4. Heretical conduct proves heretical faith. The truth is, all heresy belongs to the heart; and however holy a man's creed may be, if his conduct is wrong, he is heretical in heart.

5. We see the wickedness of admitting that the gospel proffers entire sanctification in this life, and yet not expecting it. There are those, as you know who admit that the gospel proffers entire sanctification, on condition of faith--they admit that its provisions are ample, and yet do not expect to possess it in this life. What is that, but unbelief?

6. We see also the wickedness of saying, that the expectation of it is unreasonable and erroneous. They say, that to believe we shall actually attain it in this life is a great, and dangerous error. What is that but unbelief in its worst form?

7. Also the guilt of those, who teach men, that it is an error to expect sanctification in this life, and raise the cry of heresy against those who do teach them to expect it. If it is promised, it must be sheer unbelief and dreadful guilt to doubt it.

8. The good men who formerly rejected this doctrine, did not see, and admit, the fulness of the provisions. President Edwards, for example, did not admit this, and it is manifest, from the account which he gives of his wife's experience, as well as from his writings generally, that he had no such idea before his mind.

9. But what shall we say of those who make this admission, and yet do not expect the blessing? They do not seem to understand that this is unbelief. They

say, they do not distrust God, but they distrust themselves. This is a great mistake. If faith is implicit confidence in God's promises, and if these promises cover full provisions for sanctification, then there is no room left for self-distrust; and in that case, self-distrust is distrust in God. Take, for example, this promise. "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." Here is a promise, covering the wants of our whole nature. Now, I want to know what state of mind that is, which does not expect its realization? Whether it is self-distrust, or distrust in God? It is downright unbelief. It is virtually saying, Lord, Thou hast promised to "sanctify me wholly in soul, body, and spirit," but I don't believe it. I don't believe thou canst, I have such distrust in myself.

10. There is no consistency in making the admission of full provisions, and then rejecting the expectation of being sanctified by them.

11. How can the expectation of being sanctified in this life, be rejected without unbelief, in view of I Thess. 5:23, 24. Suppose I get up, and read over this promise--"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it," and then turn round and say, now brethren, I warn you against believing that He will sanctify you. But the promise comes thundering back--"Faithful is He that calleth you who also will do it." I rally again, and say, Edwards, and Payson, and Brainerd, were not sanctified, and why should you expect to be? What would that differ from the course adopted by most of the ministers at the present time? But here comes up the old cavil, that although provisions are made, yet they are conditioned on faith, and I have no right to expect sanctification till I believe. I answer, faith and expectation are identical; and if you do not expect sanctification, you do not believe God, and are making Him a liar.

12. To tell men not to expect to be wholly sanctified in this life, and preserved blameless, is to warn them not to believe God.

13. You can see why you do not enter into rest. It is because you have no faith. You have not cast your anchor within the vail. You are like a vessel, drifting along the majestic Niagara, towards the falls, and already approaching destruction; but will not let down its anchor, although it knows the rocks are within reach, upon which it might fasten and be safe. Or, like a man in a

dungeon, to whom a golden chain is let down, and who is exhorted to lay hold and be drawn up, but will not.

14. It is wicked to expect to sin all our days. God has said, "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law, but under grace." Therefore, to expect to live, carrying about a load of sin, till you die, is abominable wickedness.

15. The Church is never like[ly] to be holy, while it is exhorted to unbelief, instead of faith. It is a horrible thing, that much of the teaching of the present day, is nothing else than teaching men not to believe God. And lest they should expect sanctification, they are pointed back to those, who profess to come short of it--to antinomian perfectionism--and to every thing which may bring the doctrine into disrepute, and are warned against it, as if it were the pestilence. O, my soul, what is this! Is this the way the Church is to be sanctified? My brethren if you mean to be kept from sin, and antinomianism of every kind, and from every other delusion, take hold of these promises, and believe. Expect them to be fulfilled, and they will be. But if you doubt you shall walk in blindness. For says the Prophet, "If ye will not believe, ye shall not be established."

[Back to Top](#)

HOLINESS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE PRESENT LIFE --No. 13

Gospel Liberty

Lecture XIII

August 16, 1843

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Gal. 5:1:"Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

In this lecture I shall show,

I. What is intended by the yoke of bondage.

II. What it is to be entangled with it.

III. What is the liberty here spoken of.

IV. How Christ makes us free.

V. The danger of becoming entangled again.

VI. When Christians are in bondage.

VII. What is their remedy.

I. What is intended by the yoke of bondage.

The Apostle had immediately under his eye, the ceremonial law of the Jews. This is evident from the whole context. Judaizing teachers had come in, and were trying to ingraft the cumbersome observances of the Jewish ritual upon the gospel. This the Apostle was so grieved at, and felt to be such a departure from Christ, that he declared they were fallen from grace in complying with such instruction. But it was not simply because he rejected the ceremonial law, and regarded it as useless, that the Apostle thus resisted the observance of it, but because he had his eye on a principle of the last importance to the Church. Why was the ceremonial law a yoke of bondage? Because it had no tendency to reform the heart, and thus render its own observance a matter of choice. Any precept given us, contrary to the state of mind in which we are, is a yoke of bondage. And this is true, whether it be a precept of the Old or New Testament. The principle is universal. You may see it in the conduct of children. Impose some requirement upon them, contrary to the state of their hearts and you will never fail to see that their obedience is not cheerful, but constrained--a mere servitude. Every requirement, then, the spirit of which we have not, is to us a yoke of bondage.

II. What it is to be entangled with it.

1. To see a rule of duty, and feel our obligation to comply with it, and yet have no heart to enter into the spirit of it, is certainly to be entangled with a yoke of bondage. The obligation presses on the one hand, and the heart rejects it on the other, and the condition is one of restless distraction. The law given at Mount Sinai, was a galling yoke for this reason. The Apostle says--"it gendereth to bondage." Previous to a distinct perception of its

claims, men may not be aware of its influence. Paul says--"For I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died." Seeing the thing it required, to be duty, and yet having no heart to perform it, it was a snare unto him. You can easily see how it was. Let anybody be practising any injurious indulgence ignorantly, and there is no sin in it; but let light be thrown into his mind on the subject, and the true nature of the indulgence made known to him, and that moment the struggle commences. Before, he could practice it without compunction, but now his conscience is awake; his appetite still demands it, and the more clearly he sees the law, so much the more is he entangled, until his heart goes fully with the requirement.

2. To take pains to conform to the letter of a law, while destitute of its spirit, is to be entangled. A great many persons set themselves with great punctiliousness, to keep every point of the law, and yet, after all, never feel themselves any better off. Why is this? Because it is mere letter service; there is no heart in it; and the more of such service is rendered, the more exacting is conscience, and the farther is the mind from peace.

3. To strive to satisfy the demands either of the law, the gospel, or the conscience, without faith and love, is to be entangled. The case supposed in the 7th of Romans, represents an individual as setting himself to obey the moral law without its spirit, and the result was a perfect failure. The same is true of persons setting themselves to obey the gospel, without its spirit. They are like a man in a horrible pit of miry clay. Every effort towards obedience, only seems to render them less disposed to obey, and to create greater enmity to the service. The same is true of all attempts to satisfy the demands of conscience, while the heart reluctates from the service.

4. To undertake and assume responsibilities to which we are not equal, that is, to undertake to do any thing in our own strength, is to be entangled. Let an individual go about any duty, or assume any responsibility without the spirit of it, and in his own strength, that is, by dint of his own resolutions, without faith, and he will find himself the more entangled, the farther he goes, just as long as this is his condition.

5. Covenants, vows, promises, &c., where Christ is not consulted and depended upon, only serve to entangle the soul. Sometimes, persons write down covenants of the most solemn and binding character, with the design

to hedge themselves in, so that they will not dare to sin, but it does no good, and only brings the soul under a more dire condemnation.

6. Undertaking to do or to be any thing to which the spirit of Christ does not lead you. No matter whether this is obligatory on you or not, if you undertake it without love, it will only be a snare. Thus the law "gendereth to bondage."

III. What is the liberty here spoken of.

1. The word liberty is used in two senses.

(1.) As opposed to necessity. In this sense, it consists in the power to choose or refuse any object of choice.

(2.) As opposed to slavery. Slavery is not, as some have supposed, a state of involuntary servitude, for strictly speaking, there is no such thing. Every act the slave performs, is really as voluntary as the act of any other man. His muscles would not move without will. Slavery is a state, in which a man feels constrained to choose between what he regards as two evils. He selects between two alternatives, both of which he abhors. He knows he must labor or be whipped, and he prefers labor to suffering, as the least of two evils. Slavery then, is where a person feels himself shut up to take a course, which on the whole, he does not love, but which he takes rather than to do worse. For example, a person in the marriage state without love, may discharge the outward duties of that relation during life, rather than to separate and sustain all the evils attendant on such a course. So a person may live under a government which he abhors, and yet, rather than subject himself to its frown, may meet all its requisitions. This is acting on the principle of slavery. A person might be compelled to act on the principle of slavery here in New York, as absolutely as in the South, and may as much abhor the service. The difference between one here and one there, is, that there he fears the lash or some other physical infliction, while here, he fears some other evil, which is equally efficient, as he views it, to drive him to the abhorred tasks. Legal professors are slaves in this sense. Their duties are not something which they love, but which must be attended to, or a greater evil endured. Their service is not performed from a love to the end for

which it is required, but as the only way to escape the rebukes of conscience, or the wrath of God.

2. This liberty is that of faith and love. When persons come to love, then they delight in acts of love as a matter of course. So much are they free that in obeying God, they do only, what they on the whole, prefer to do, and what they would do whether there was any command or not, could they only see its relation to the good of the universe.

3. In short, this liberty is benevolence. It consists, not in the annihilation of obligation, but in possessing the Spirit of the requirement. Turn to the 13th chapter of the first Corinthians, and mark the characteristics of love which the Apostle there lays down. "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth; but whether there be prophecies they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." This description of charity or benevolence, shows that the free man naturally acts according to the requirement. It is spontaneous with him. He acts from a principle within himself rather than from a law without. He does not act from restraint, but obedience is with him, what it was with Christ. Christ did not need the sanctions of the law to induce obedience, but what the precept required, was just what, above all other things, he loved to do. So it is with those who are in this liberty. They do not act under the rod.

4. They are not governed by authority, but act spontaneously, from choice. They only need to know what will please God, and they do it willingly and of a ready mind. They do not neglect to do what is required of them, but they do it from love, and that is the perfection of liberty. When a man is able to choose in any direction in all circumstances, and does just what he has a mind to, that is the highest liberty in the universe. That is freedom in its highest sense.

IV. How Christ makes us free.

1. Not by abolishing the moral law.

2. Not by discharging us from any obligation to fulfill any or every duty.

3. Nor by relaxing the claims of any moral precept, in either the Old or New Testament.

4. But as it respects the ceremonial law, He fulfilled and abolished it, so that nobody is under farther obligation to obey it.

5. And as it respects the moral law, He makes us free by writing its principle, and all its spirit in our hearts. And what a sweet way this is! Suppose we should thus govern our children. What delightful families we should have. All our commands the very thing they chose, so that for us to intimate our will, would be to see it sweetly done. When Christ begets the spirit of the law in us, and then shows us the outward precept, the precept is just what we are pre-disposed to do, and of course it will be done by us cheerfully.

6. He makes us free by making the course of conduct prescribed in the whole Bible, as natural and spontaneous as it is with Himself; and therefore, we are free in the same sense that He is free, and that all in heaven are free. God, no doubt, feels bound to be benevolent, but his will is just what his infinite reason requires, and He is, therefore, infinitely free, and so is the Lord Jesus Christ. This is just the freedom He seeks to bestow on us.

7. He accomplishes this by his indwelling Spirit. He comes to reside in us, that He may beget in us the same state of mind there is in Christ, whom it is his office to exhibit to us.

8. He does it by so revealing Christ to us, as to gain the implicit confidence and affection of the soul. It is not accomplished by any physical force. How do we, if we want to get the confidence of persons, exhibit to them such views of our character as to win their confidence and love. So Christ, by revealing Himself in those traits of his character, which He knows are adapted to win the confidence of men, brings them into the same state of mind with Himself. He shows them that He is love, well knowing that this is the readiest way to make them love. There is no other way to make men benevolent. Weep yourself, if you want others to weep. Suppose a father is benevolent, and he wants to make his children so too. How can he do it? By using the rod? Or drilling them in the catechism? No. But by acting it out

before them. One great reason why the children of professedly religious parents are so seldom converted is because the parents so constantly command them, without sufficient manifestations of benevolence. They are commanded to read the Bible, to go to Sabbath School, to get their tasks in such a way, that it becomes irksome to them, instead of attractive and interesting. Let parents only temper all their commands sufficiently with benevolence, and it would not be so. It is thus that Christ wins the hearts of sinners, and makes them free. When He came, the idea of true religion was almost lost in the world, but He acted it out in his whole life. His disciples looked on and wondered, till finally they caught the flame. And what then? Why they shook the world with it. And it is the exhibition of this spirit alone, which can consummate the victory, and liberate our race. It is thus He makes us free from the yoke of bondage--from obligation to keep the ceremonial law--from the penalty of the moral law--from the spirit of bondage, by writing his law in our hearts--from the dominion of sin and from the power of the world, the flesh, and the devil. This is the glorious liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free.

V. The danger of becoming entangled again.

1. The least unbelief brings bondage. Let a wife lose confidence in her husband in any respect, and in that respect, her obedience will be constrained and stiff. So it is in religion. If there is any want of confidence, instead of your service being free and out-gushing, it will be forced and heartless.
2. Grieving the Holy Spirit will beget bondage. Whenever He withdraws his presence from the mind, then it falls right into bondage.
3. Admitting the least selfishness, naturally leads into bondage. Observe, religion is benevolence. The least selfishness, then, is bondage of course.
4. Any abstraction of the mind from Christ, of course begets bondage. No person, as a matter of fact, lives a spiritual life without Christ. We must feed on Him. We need Him as much as we do our natural food. We maintain our liberty only by thinking on Him, and communing with Him continually.
5. Any attempts to coerce the mind by oaths, vows, covenants, and resolutions, beget bondage. If a man has the Spirit of Christ, he does not

need these, and if he has not, he can never get it in this way. I have known persons to pray all night, and screw themselves up to the most solemn vows and covenants which they could frame, and yet it availed nothing. There was no religion in it; not an atom. And when persons attempt to coerce themselves in this way, they universally fail of success.

6. Taking upon your conscience, an obligation to conform to any particular forms and ceremonies not prescribed by Christ. It is truly astonishing to see what an excess the Jews loaded themselves down, in adhering to what they supposed were the requirements of the ceremonial law. They multiplied days, and traditions, and tithes, and purifications, almost without end. So it has been in the Church of Rome. She multiplied her vows, and pilgrimages, and fasts, to such an extent as could result in nothing else but a mere outside show, and work the destruction of souls. Even undertaking to conform with those that are required, in your own strength, is enough to bring any soul into terrible bondage.

7. But the multiplying of holy days, and religious observances and ceremonies, cannot result in any thing else. Even among Protestants, how many regard it as a duty, to observe Christmas. I have been afraid our Methodist brethren were becoming entangled. They seem to consider it a duty to watch out the old year, and in the new, and no matter whether sleepy or not, they must be there to satisfy both custom and conscience. Even monthly concerts come to be a yoke. The truth is, we are bound to resist such things, whenever they come to be regarded as binding on the conscience. These holy days in the Romish Church, became so numerous as to take up a great part of the time, and now, in many of the Catholic countries, if you employ a man to work, you get but very little out of him.

8. Binding yourselves by church covenants, especially if there is any thing in them contrary to the law of reason and of love. We hear of no such thing in the Apostles' days. The truth is, I am jealous of them. One embraces one thing, and another, another; and the first thing you know, you are reined up. "Why you are a violator of your covenant." Am I? "Yes." I have known several cases of this kind. Let no one be bound but by the law of love, which is the perfect law of liberty.

VI. When Christians are in bondage.

1. When the duties of religion are a burden. While we are in liberty, they are no burden. As an old writer says--"I sought all nature through, to find something like the burden of Christ, and could find nothing till I came to the pinions of the dove, which instead of weighing down, bear up the soul on high."
2. When the form is observed, without the spirit and power of godliness. Many have, and keep up the form very scrupulously, when the life and spirit have gone. But their piety is like a mere lifeless corpse, or hollow shell.
3. When driven by conscience, instead of being drawn by love. Oh, how many are attempting to live by mere resolutions forced up by conscience, without one particle of love to Christ!
4. When they don't find their heart spontaneously doing what is required. When the waters of life do not flow spontaneously out from them--when it is not nature's promptings to pray, to give to the poor, or perform any other duty. When persons have the spirit of religion, instead of needing a command, they feel an inward going of the soul in the right direction, and the performance of duty gives them sweet enjoyment.
5. When the soul has no peace, and no enjoyment in religion, it is under the yoke of bondage. True liberty, is essential peace and blessedness.

VII. What is their remedy.

1. Persons will never get into liberty by any legal, heartless efforts. That is beginning exactly at the wrong end; it is beginning on the outside to work inward, instead of beginning at the inside to work outward. People often become prodigiously excited, and go to doing, doing, doing, under the pressure of obligation; but where is the relief? This is particularly the case in many protracted meetings and special efforts, but when the meetings stop, where is their religion in a vast number of cases? I am not saying any thing against such meetings, but against the manner in which the truth is too often preached, and the meeting conducted. The process is just such as to set the sensibility all on fire with powerful excitement, and leave the heart unsubdued to love. This is all wrong, and only adapted to foster mere heartless legality.

2. But the only remedy is faith in Christ, and application to his blood. "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." Cast the whole soul upon Him, to receive the spirit of obedience. I have often seen persons striving and pushing for months, but all to no purpose. They were not one whit better, and it was not till they saw that it would not make them better if they should continue thus a thousand years, and until they cast themselves wholly on Christ, to receive the spirit of obedience from Him, that they entered into gospel liberty. "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

REMARKS.

1. You may see from this subject, the difference between a legal and a gospel religion. A legal religion is works without love, a gospel religion, works by love. A brother said the other day, he did not understand this distinction. Why it is obvious as the distinction between day and night. Both the true Christian and the legalist works, but the one works with, the other without love. They both do the same things outwardly, but the one is free and the other a slave in the performance.

2. See why the moral law is called the perfect law of liberty. It was ordained to life, and when obeyed in its spirit, gives life. But why do persons find it unto death? Because when the spirit is lost, the letter kills. It is when it is legally, that is, heartlessly obeyed, that it works our overthrow instead of our deliverance.

3. See what is intended by such passages as Gal. 5:18, "But if ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law;" and Rom. 6:14, "For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace." It is not intended that the law is abolished, but that its spirit has become their law. They are not under it in such a sense as to need its sanctions to press them up to duty.

4. Many feel that their religion is mere slavery--a hard, up-hill business. The language of their heart is, "it is hard to obey, and harder still to love." But they are ignorant of the true nature of religion. It is the easiest thing in the world to him that has it. Legalists complain about this world, that it is such a bad one, so hard to live in, and keep right. But it is not such a hard world as they think. Religion certainly does not make it any harder, but altogether easier. The

difficulty with those who find it such a hard world, is, that their hearts are bad, and if they find it a severe task to obey God, it is because they have not the spirit of obedience. If they have any religion it is of the wrong kind, and they are entirely deceived if they think all others have the same kind that they have. Some persons, when they see others joyful, say they are deceived. They don't feel so themselves, and they wonder how any body can. And then they point to the seventh chapter of Romans, or to David Brainerd, who, although a good man, was so hypochondriacal that his experience would be gloomy as a matter of course. Such persons are always suspicious whenever they see any of the spirit of liberty manifested, and I don't wonder, for mankind are naturally suspicious of those beyond themselves. How strange it must appear to them, and how it must stumble them to see persons almost dance for joy when they emerge from bondage, and yet this is not wonderful. Why, see that slave, with his back all blistered in the sun, set free. Is it strange that he should leap and bound about with fulness of joy? It is thus that Christians feel, and the Bible commands them to rejoice; but legalists don't understand it, and think they are possessed of the devil. Why, I have sometimes heard persons say, "That's not solemn--its fanaticism." And then they turn to some gloomy slave with a dead body strapped on his back, and groaning under his burden, and say--"That's the humble one--he's none of your visionaries!"

5. Multitudes have no true idea of gospel liberty. They have made a credible profession of religion, and are toiling out its duties, but what liberty means they know not--and perhaps they are even ministers of the gospel! Of course, such persons don't expect liberty. I recently heard of a revival, in which the minister said to inquirers, "don't expect to be happy in this world; I never was, nor do I expect to be until I get to heaven. I don't know what it is to have enjoyment in religion." Now there is a fundamental error in such instruction. Not happy! Had I been present where such instruction was given, I would have told that minister that he was not a converted man if that was his experience. It is thus that a legal religion is inculcated on converts, by legal ministers and legal professors. But how many persons are just here--afraid to find any other way, for fear it will lead to delusion! O, that it might be seen that a religion which does not produce present peace and blessedness, is not, of course, a religion of love, and is therefore false.

6. Any course of instruction that presses duty without holding up Christ, is like requiring labor without food and brings into bondage. It is like requiring the

Israelites to make brick without straw, and those who give such instruction are obliged to whip, and scourge, and abuse the dear Church of God to get the little service they do out of them. Hold up duty without Christ and legality is inevitable. They are starved for want of Christ. But let them see Christ and they will work, of course, as duty is appropriately enforced.

7. It is the other extreme to hold up Christ without calling to duty, and begets antinomianism. To feed the Church with Christ and leave them inactive, is the way to produce a religious dyspepsia. But give us the right food and work enough to do, and then we will thrive. Only let us have the bread that cometh down from heaven, and we shall have spiritual health, and even physical health, if we only have work enough to keep us busy.

8. If we may believe the confessions of the great mass of professors, they are in bondage. This fact has weighed on my mind for a long time. I labored to convert sinners for many years, but saw them fall, under the legal instruction of ministers, into bondage. I labored and prayed for them night and day, and do now, and yet they seem to know little of liberty. They often, by their looks, seem to ask, "Is this Christianity?" "Is this the boasted religion of Christ?" "Wherein does it differ from the Jew's religion?" A man said to me once with great honesty, although in vulgar language, "The gospel is not what it is cracked up to be." His idea was that the gospel promised liberty, but did not confer it. Now how many would say just so, if they would tell their hearts. They would say "the gospel is not what the Apostle said it was." Yes, poor soul, it is, but you have not got it. Taste and see. Come to the gospel feast. You have compassed that mountain long enough. Don't expect Christ to make you free while you turn your back on Him.

9. When the power of religion is gone, the form but hardens the heart, and makes men more pharisaical and hypocritical every day. What, you say, would you have a man do? Cast off his profession, and stop prayer, and go back to the world? No, but love and serve in the spirit. But if you will not do this, then give up your profession, that is my advice. Do you doubt whether God would rather have you give up your profession, than live in mere form, and heartless obedience? "I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art luke-warm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." How loathsome to Him are the mockeries, and slavish obedience to his holy will! The text represents Christ as actually vomiting them up. Now I would not recommend apostacy but condemn

hypocrisy, and bring you to Christ.

10. None really understand this liberty but those who have experienced it, and those who have experienced it cannot find language to express it.

11. Many exclaim against antinomianism who are mere legalists, while both these characters are an abomination to God.

12. When the shepherds attempt to drive instead of lead the flock, they lay a snare before them. We cannot make people love by whipping, scolding, and driving them. God has given his law with its sanctions, but He opens his blessed heart to beget love. Dearly beloved, are any of you in bondage? Have you left your first love? Did somebody tell you that you must go down into the valley of humiliation, and did you go? Alas! what a mistake! When you should have gone up to the mountain by faith. What is true humility? Will you return to your first love? And will you "commit the keeping of your souls to Him in well doing as unto a faithful Creator?" Let us all go to Christ to receive our liberty.

[Back to Top](#)

Joy in God

Lecture XIV

September 27, 1843

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Hab. 3:17, 18: "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

I. What is implied in the state of mind which the prophet describes.

II. This state is indispensable to peace of mind and to salvation.

I. What is implied in this state of mind.

1. The true knowledge of God. The prophet would not have said what he did, except he had known God as He really is--a being in every way worthy of confidence and unfailing trust.

2. Perfect confidence in God, in his natural and moral attributes, his natural perfection and his moral character. Observe, he says, even though all temporal mercies are withheld and fail, he will yet rejoice in God. Though calamity of the severest kind should fall upon him and all around him, yet he will confide in God fully, and with the utmost assurance. God should be to him a source of joy, deep, constant, never-failing, notwithstanding he should in his just indignation do all those things.

3. Perfect sympathy with God. His language is consistent with no other state than one of complete and universal sympathy with God, in all his works and ways. Not merely does he have confidence in God as just and righteous, but the prophet joyfully, and with his whole soul, enters into the spirit which God cherishes towards all objects, views them with the same eye, acquiesces most entirely in the glorious manifestations of his indignation against sin, and rejoices with a full heart, even in the midst of the judgments of his hand. God is regarded as equally good in his judgments and his mercies; to be rejoiced in as much, when in holy indignation He chastises a rebellious nation, as when in mercy He pours blessings upon the penitent and obedient; to be adored with supreme and unspeakable love, in all the wonders of his work, in his fearful visitations of merited punishment, no less than when in his grace, He causes the fountains of plenty to be opened, and streams of prosperity to flow to every quarter of the land.

And this state implies more than mere submission, in the commonly received religious use of that term. The prophet did not barely tolerate God's dealings in his providence; his language means not simply, that he would not find fault, that he would not murmur or complain, that he would tolerate God so far as not to go into overt rebellion against Him. But what does he say? "I will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation." He goes the whole length of full and overflowing joy, and extatic rejoicing.

God, though He delights not in the death of a sinner, but desires rather his return to life and happiness, and salvation, yet renders the righteous retribution which the good of universal being demands; not in the spirit of

revenge and malice, but from a holy and unalterable regard to the dictates of impartial benevolence; and in all this display of his judgment, He is everlastingly and unchangeably at peace with Himself, and forever rejoices in the consummation of right, and the maintenance of eternal justice, in accordance with, and subservient to the great end of universal good. In this work of his, God does, and cannot but rejoice, for his name is Love. So the righteous prophet also, rejoiced in sympathy with God, and in complete conformity of heart to the same great end.

4. God is regarded as the all-sufficient portion of the soul. Though all else should fail, still his joy would be overflowing, perennial. No circumstances whatever, could have any power to damp the flame of love, no wind to parch the soil and dry the current of holy joy in the soul.

This state of mind is such, that the soul cannot be deprived of its portion, while God lives and reigns, while He holds the throne and sways the sceptre of infinite love. The mind cannot be despoiled of good, of happiness, and joy, of an all-satisfying portion, while God endures; and though all besides give way and disappear, God remains, and the soul is full.

5. Universal and joyful acquiescence in all God's will. An intelligent mind, in being able to adopt the language of the prophet, must be, like the blest above, in harmony with the divine will.

II. This state is indispensable to peace of mind and to salvation.

1. Without this state of mind, the providence of God will continually distress and disturb. Unless you can see calamity and judgments come upon men for their sins, and behold them with joy and peace, you cannot be happy, for these things are, and must be constantly taking place. Men must be able to rejoice in God, let Him do what He will. They must be able to confide in his wisdom and love, and feel assured that He can make no mistake, that He is doing all for the best. Unless they can thus confide, they cannot be happy in God and rejoice in Him; for God must often visit the world with severe judgments.

2. Indispensable to prevent being disturbed by Satan. God must of course, do many things mysterious to his creatures. He is working on a vast scale, consistent with his infinite nature. Much must be unexplained and

inexplicable to creatures finite in duration and knowledge. In many cases, doubtless, it would be impossible so to lay before a finite mind, the whole scheme of things, as to make him see the reason for the divine conduct. Now if men cannot feel that He is good at any rate, and however appearances may be, then they cannot rest in Him, and be at peace; and Satan will take advantage of all such mysteries, and thence draw things to disturb the mind's repose, to throw it off its balance, and send it headlong down the declivity of infidelity, or if not that, yet greatly to harass and vex the soul's peace and communion with God. Ah, Satan will say, how came God to make man as He did, liable to suffer the extremest misery without possibility of escape; nay more, when He knew certainly that such would be the result? How can God be good, and yet permit the world to be as it is, the abode of hate, and war, and suffering inexpressible--to go on as it has these thousands of years, in blood and carnage? Why is a good man cut off in the midst of his days, taken from a field of usefulness, upon his very entrance thereinto, while a vile and profane wretch, doing nought but evil continually, is left to live on in prosperity, a sheer curse to the world? Why is one portion of the human race sunk in deep wretchedness, in the profoundest night of ignorance and vice? Could not God have carried the blessed light of Heaven to their desolate shores if He had chosen so to do? And can He be good in this that He has not done so? Why, Satan whispers, should God send parching heat, when rather drenching rain is needed--and floods of rain, when there should be the warm and genial sun in its mild shining? Why is the holy saint tortured with disease and racked with pain? the faithful martyr bound to the stake? the witness to the truth made to pour out his blood in its defense? Surely the world is sadly out of joint--these are not the dispositions which an all-wise and all-good being would make! Now nothing but the most perfect confidence in God, can prevent us from accusing Him of ignorance or impotence, or downright malevolence. In the midst of so much that must be wholly unaccountable to finite minds, what is needed, but such a confidence as to say, "Let Him do what He will, I will rejoice in Him continually."

3. Nothing but this confidence can secure the soul against that kind of carefulness and anxiety, that restless fear of ill and wrong, which is so destructive of peace, and dishonorable to God. Persons are perplexed and anxious, because God deals so or so with them; they have no confidence in

Him, and they cannot be happy till they do have.

4. Nothing short of this can meet the demands of our intelligence. Reason affirms that we ought to have universal and perfect confidence in God, because He is infinitely wise, infinitely powerful, and infinitely good; and there must be a sense of guilt in the soul where this confidence is not exercised, and the peace of the soul must thereby be destroyed. Nothing else, moreover, is consistent with God's commands. A man obeys not God till he comes into that state--till he can say with the prophet, "Though the fig-tree shall not blossom, and there be no fruit in the vine; though the labor of the olive fail, and the fields yield no meat, the flocks be cut off from the folds, and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and will joy in the God of my salvation." He is an unbeliever and a wicked man, who does not thus rejoice, who does not adopt this language as his own with all his heart.

5. It is in this very thing that salvation consists. Nothing short of this is salvation. What is holiness here? What is holiness in Heaven? What is it but the state in which the mind looks over all God's works and exclaims, "holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory. Who shall not praise thee O God? Who shall not fear thy name, O king of saints?" No others are saved but those who are thus in sympathy with God. And they are saved no farther than they thus rejoice in Him, and cry "Whom have I in Heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." "Thou art my rock and my strength, the rock of my salvation and my God."

REMARKS.

1. This state of mind is indispensable to usefulness. A man cannot be truly useful in the world--cannot do what is needed to be done--cannot make the world holy and happy by his influence, till he is thus. He cannot truly represent God, promote genuine religion, or enforce the claims of piety on man, till he is thus. He may have much zeal, create conviction, produce excitement, but he does not and cannot lead the soul to God. He does not know what true religion is in his own experience, and he cannot tell others what it is, however clear his intellect may be, and sway their minds under the power of truth, for he is a stranger to that honest, hearty, deep-felt conviction of the truth, and that personal consecration, devotion, and experience of the joy flowing therefrom, without

which, commonly all efforts are in vain. His life, conversation, conduct, and preaching, will not exemplify true religion without this experience.

2. Any thing short of this in a professor of religion, is a gross stumbling block. What! profess religion, declare God to be the all-sufficient and never-failing portion of the soul--profess to rely implicitly on Him, and trust in Him always and forever, and yet practically show the same anxiety and carefulness, the same distress and perturbation, the same uneasy, restless disquietude, that other people have? Is not that a stumbling block? Would it have been honorable to God, had the prophet gone on to complain, and lament the loss of comforts--to cry out, What shall I do? I am undone! if he had refused to be in sympathy with God, to justify Him in all his doings, and love Him, and rejoice in Him through all? And does it not dishonor God, for professedly pious men now to distrust his goodness, and murmur at his justice? Is it not a stumbling block to those who look on and see their inconsistency?

3. Many seem to be reconciled to nothing else in God, but his mercy, and that without regard to the conditions of its exercise, as though that could be mercy, which should be put forth inconsistent with holiness, as if mere fondness, the obeying the impulses of blind sensibility, could be mercy at all. They are moved to joy and praise only by the compassion of God, and are comforted by nothing but a view of his mercy and compassion. They are pained by any other apprehension of God's character, by any other view of his dealings with his creatures. Instead of rejoicing in God, in the great, and glorious, and harmonious whole, which makes up the perfection of his character, they can see Him only in one light, that of compassion and grace. Had the prophet been so, could he have said what he did? Every sustenance of life cut off, the world starving around him, and desolation and desert wastes stretching over the land--how could he rejoice, if he had had complacency only in mercy and compassion?

This class of persons seem to have no other idea of religion, than a sort of good natured fondness, a sort of easy disposition, so as not to be angry at sin or sinners, but to exercise a mere blind indiscriminate compassion for sinners, and a disposition to treat all, impenitent and penitent, with the same lenity, and in just the same way. These men neither know, nor worship the true God; the Bible is a stumbling block to them, and Satan keeps them constantly in a worry and fret, by pressing on them, these points of God's character. Much of the Old Testament--the dealings of God with the heathen--the prayers of David in the Psalms for

vengeance--these seem to be the spirit of hate and malice; they will not comprehend that a God of love can inflict the penalty of a righteous law, and yet they cannot shut their eyes to the undeniable fact that He does visit the sinner with utter destruction.

4. Holy beings, from the very nature of holiness, rejoice none the less in God because He rules the earth in judgment, and because He visits the world with calamity--love Him none the less--confide in Him none the less--are no less happy in Him because He sends sinners to hell--they sympathize with Him in all He does, in the promotion of the highest good of the universe; they love Him none the less for his scourgings, for his desolations, for his destruction of men and of nations, than for the pouring out of his Spirit to bring the world to salvation. They know he has the same great end in view in both cases, and they love Him equally in both.

5. Many professors of religion are at heart, Universalists. They are not thoroughly and really with God, in his administration of government. Universalism has its seat in the heart. It is a state of heart, divesting God of his holiness, of his justice, of his prerogative to execute terrible judgments, to send the wicked to hell. These things Universalism cannot love. Their God must not do such things as these. No, surely! Is this true religion? to limit God, to say, do thus or thus; punish not me, my friends, or my race; no matter how rebellious we are, destroy us not; no matter how incorrigible we are; or we cannot love you? This is selfishness, and is regarded by Jehovah as such.

6. See why so many are disturbed by God's providential dealings. Because they have not the confidence in God which belongs to true religion. By judgments they are disturbed, thrown off their pivot, and down they go into rebellious murmurings, or impious infidelity. If any thing goes out of their little channel, contrary to their marked out path, across their finite judgments, all is wrong.

7. Many seem to have no enjoyment in religion any longer than the providence of God seems to favor their particular plans and favorite schemes. Forsooth, God does just as I want Him to do, all my notions are exactly realized, my ship goes before the breeze with all sails set, in beautiful trim, and therefore, God is good and I am happy! Their country is blest, their state is prosperous, their commonwealth is in peace, their family is in prosperity, their circumstances are comfortable, and therefore, God is good, and they are happy! They love God for all this, they rejoice in his love. But let Him thwart them, run across their track,

turn upside down their cherished plans, blow to the winds their favorite schemes, and what then? What then? They tolerate God perhaps, perhaps not even that; they by no means rejoice now in their God, they do not now joy in the God of their salvation. Oh, no! They cannot help what God has done, to be sure, He is too strong for them; but suppose they could, what would they do? Now what is the matter? They have no true religion. They thought they had religion. God was so good and kind to them, they thought they loved Him, but it was themselves they loved, and Him only because He was subservient to them. They were pleased to have God for an almighty servant, surely they were; but to have Him on the throne, that was another matter! Their own way they are supremely set on, not on God's way. Instead of rejoicing in God's will, whether or not it is like theirs, God must succumb to them, or they are displeased and grieved.

8. To know God as the all-sufficient portion of the soul, is the highest knowledge. No man knows any thing as he ought to know, till he knows this. Till he knows God thus, he has no knowledge of any avail for happiness. All other is worse than useless without this. How often have I thought upon the quiet and happiness of ignorance. Ignorance, by its very want of knowledge, avoids much restlessness and anxiety. An increase of knowledge in the same unreconciled state of heart, but increases misery and wretchedness. Learning is only a curse, without the knowledge of God as the portion of the soul.

9. The happiness of the true saints is secure, because it depends not on external and contingent circumstances, but on God Himself. They know God, and to know Him is eternal life. As long as God lives and reigns, they know their happiness cannot be disturbed.

President Edward's wife, at one period, thought she could not bear certain things--she thought certain losses would destroy her peace. She thought she could not bear the alienation of her husband's affection, the loss of her reputation among his people, &c. But when her soul came into communion with God, she was delivered from the fears which had distressed her, she was carried so high above all earthly things, they had no power to affect her happiness. Like the glorious sun, which from its height in the heavens looks down on the earth below, and rolls rejoicingly on, unmoved by all that passes among us mortals, so the soul whose trust is in God, rests in exquisite peace on the bosom of exhaustless love, far beyond all sublunary influences and cares. The martyr at the stake, though in the extremest agony of body, is yet, often full, inexpressibly full of glory and joy.

Why is this? How can it be? God is the natural and all-sufficient portion of the soul, and it rests in Him.

10. Sinners cannot be happy, from their very state of mind as sinners. If they do not know God, they can find no peace for the sole of their foot; like Noah's dove, forever on the wing and no place for them. And why? There is no place but in God, and when it rests not here, it must remain restless, forever seeking peace and finding none. It is thrown from its pivot--it is naturally impossible for that soul to be happy. It is gnawing upon itself, eating out its own vitals. The soul must return to God, must dwell in God, repose under the shadow of his pavilion, or happiness is out of the question. The home of the soul, is the bosom of God. "Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations," is the beautiful and true exclamation of the Psalmist. Till the mind finds its home, its home in God, where can it be quiet? The prophet's soul had reached its home. In this dwelling-place was he rejoicingly secure--without care, without anxiety, without fear; with all joy and glory, in unspeakable blessedness.

11. Those who do not know God thus, do not know God truly.

They have but the outside of religion, the form, the rite, but where is the spirit? Where the filial love, the child-like confidence, the simple unquestioning trust, the artless, heart-felt joy, the soul-absorbing delight in God? Most religion seems to be external--it comes to the temple, it views the building, the splendor, the sacrifices, the gorgeous apparel, the imposing ceremony, it joins blindly in the ritual. But the new and living way, into the holy of holies, opened by the great high priest--that way its foot never trod, that inner glory its eye never rested on. Most have no personal communion with their King, no fellowship with Jesus Christ, or scarcely any; but all is distant, cold, hearsay. They have heard of God by the hearing of the ear, but their eyes never saw Him. Now, the prophet had gone beyond the outward service, in beyond the veil into the holiest of all, even to the presence chamber of the King. In view of all that his eye, in the ken of prophetic vision, saw of judgment and calamity, his soul was calm, nay not calm, but intensely wrought up to the most exquisite joy, and bliss untold. The prophet knew God and knew Him to some purpose.

12. This is the only reasonable state. This, and this only, answers fully, the demands of the intelligence.

13. Sinners can see the necessity of a change of heart. They know this is not their

state of mind, every sinner knows perfectly well he does not feel thus towards God; every sinner knows he cannot be happy, except his own way is followed, his own will gratified. He cannot rejoice in God let him do what he will, and yet who does not know that this is universal in heaven? How could he be happy in heaven, were he to go there? He has no sympathy with God, no delight in his will, he would be alone in heaven; the holiness of that pure place, how could it receive him, or be congenial with his selfishness?

14. If this be true, professors can see why they are not saved, nor likely to be saved. They have not that spirit, which is the essential element of a state of salvation.

15. Many seem to rest in conviction. They see their sins. They are in agony. There they rest. The agony, be sure, subsides, but that uneasy state produced by a sense of present guilt remains, while they should pass through conviction into a state of conscious consecration, conscious forgiveness, and acceptance, and resting their souls joyfully in God. Many expect no such thing, look for, labor for no such thing as continual peace and happiness in God.

16. They who think outward circumstances essential to peace, think so, because they do not know God. If they only were thus and thus, if they only had this and that and that, then they could enjoy religion. If I had some Christian society, if my husband were pious, if I were not so poor, if I enjoyed good health, or were not so severely afflicted, if the Church were only awake and active, if these, and a thousand things were as I wish they were, I could enjoy religion, but as it is, in my circumstances, I cannot rejoice, I am in distress, in solitude, in persecution, in poverty; how can I be glad? How can you? How could the prophet rejoice? He could rejoice by having God for his all-sufficient portion, and his everlasting home. So could you rejoice. If you knew God thus, no suffering, not the most intense, could shake the fabric of your bliss, and throw your soul from its firm resting place, on the everlasting Rock.

17. Why, sinners seek happiness in vain. They seek it where it cannot be found--every where but in God. All sorts of knowledge they strive to attain, but the knowledge of God. In all directions, they push their researches, but towards God. Every thing else they do, but give themselves to God. They seek the world, its pleasures, honors, riches, its fame, its glory--can these be an everlasting portion? They pass away like a dream. Can the soul say--"If all these pass away, and disappear, yet is my treasure secure, my happiness unmoved? Indeed no, for

these were the sources of your joy, and how can you be happy? You will say--"Ye have taken away my gods, and what have I more?" So might the Christian's hope be destroyed, if God could be dethroned, and Satan have full rule--then might the Christian say--"All joy is fled from my soul." But while the throne of God stands unshaken, his soul remains safe who has put his trust therein. Can riches make a man happy? Is the richest man in country happy? Nay, he is one of the most miserable men, and he grows more wretched every day. How could he more effectually become the sport of winds and waves, of every vicissitude, than by placing his heart on riches? His houses burn down, his ships founder at sea, his tenants fail to pay their rent, he is at the mercy of every wind that blows. Can he say--"Let every penny of my wealth be burnt up, and still I am happy?" Young man, you are a student, you are talented, ambitious, aspiring--you climb, and climb, and climb, the ladder of promotion, to the summit of greatness. Are you happy? You are only multiplying incalculably the vulnerable points of your soul, and from the very peak of your fame, you will topple and fall, and plunge into the lowest deeps of perdition. O, how mad! Why not come back to God, know God, and be able to say, "He lives, and reigns, and I am happy."

18. The true knowledge of God completely ravishes the soul. Men think they can be satisfied in some object of their choice. This is a mistake with respect to all created things. But with respect to God it is sublimely true! In God is the soul swallowed up, absorbed, hidden, lost, in an ocean of bliss.

No man should stop short of this knowledge. Stop not till you reach this high goal. Professor, stop not till you arrive at this blissful consummation. Be not content till you can rest in God as Habakkuk did. He was no more than in a state of salvation. He was no more than happy. This was not the peculiar privilege of a prophet. And suppose it were then so. What did Christ mean, when he said, "The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he?" You may be able to say not only this, which the prophet did, but every thing in the same direction, in the strongest possible manner.

19. Wherever you lack this state, you may know you have unbelief. If there is any thing in which you cannot say, "I rejoice in God," you are in unbelief, and have no right to stay there a moment.

Most professors know little or nothing of this state of confidence and joy, and therefore represent religion falsely, represent it as a gloomy, sepulchral, death-bed affair, not to be thought of at the same time with joy and gladness.

God deliver us and bring us to this state of joy in Him.

[Back to Top](#)

The Benevolence of God

Lectures XV

December 6, 1843

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 John 4:16: "God is love."

It is not my intention, in commenting upon these words, to prove them to be true, for I should consider myself poorly employed in attempting to prove the truth of any passage of Scripture. It is not so much the business of the minister of the gospel to defend the truths of the Bible, as it is to expound and illustrate them, as he finds them revealed, and to show their bearing on the relations and responsibilities of men. It would be easy for me to advance many arguments, drawn from the whole range of the created universe, to show that "God is love;" but this I shall not do at this time. I shall merely.

I. Show what is the meaning of the text.

II. State some things which must be true if "God is love."

I. What is the meaning of the words of the text.

1. By the assertion that "God is love," I do not understand the Apostle to teach that the nature, that is, the essence or substance of God is love, for this would be an absurd proposition--nor that God is love in the sense of fondness for his creatures: that is, that his love is merely an emotion, belonging rather to the sensibility, than to the voluntary faculty of his mind.

2. I do understand the text as teaching that God is benevolent--supremely devoted to doing good--that all his powers are consecrated to the promotion of the highest good of sentient being. The Apostle, by the strong language

of the text, surely does not mean to affirm that the nature or substance of God is love, but that his character or voluntary state is benevolent, and that it is infinitely so, that benevolence constitutes the whole disposition or state of his will, and that his character is constantly and eternally benevolent--not benevolent at one time, and selfish at another, but forever, and without change benevolent. But not to dwell on this division of the subject, I shall,

II. State some things which must be true if "God is love."

1. If it is true that "God is love," it follows that He has been eternally so, else his character is mutable, which is impossible.

2. If "God is love," He has but one intention or subjective motive for his conduct; that is, He aims at but one thing--consequently, his character is simple. In other words, if his ultimate end in acting is a benevolent one, it necessarily follows, that He always acts in view of one great consideration, which is, the promotion of the objects of benevolence, or the good of universal being.

3. If "God is love," He never has done, and never will do any thing, but in execution of his benevolent intention. There is a difference between the benevolence, and the executive volitions of God. His benevolence is one thing, and the action which He puts forth in execution of his benevolence, is another. God was benevolent from eternity, but He has not acted in execution of his benevolent designs from eternity--He has not eternally put forth creative power, for if He had done so, there would be created things as old as Himself, which is impossible. As just remarked, the will of God has forever been in a benevolent state; the developing, or acting out of that benevolence, is his actions or doings. Now, I say, that He never has done, and never will do, any thing which will not tend to realize the objects of his benevolence, or to accomplish that on which his heart is set. In other words, all the actions of God have been, and will continue to be, in execution of his grand design, which is, the promotion of the highest good of being.

4. If "God is love," it follows, that while He remains benevolent, He can do nothing but in execution of a benevolent intention. He will only do what necessarily results from such a state of mind. Every man knows from his own consciousness that this must be true. Action is caused by design or intention; therefore, it can never be inconsistent with intention. If I design

to go directly home, I cannot go in an opposite direction, or loiter by the way. I can relinquish my intention, but so long as the design continues, I must act in obedience to that design. Now, while God remains benevolent, He can only act in obedience to a benevolent design--He must act in execution of a benevolent purpose. As He is a free agent, He can, of course, cease to be benevolent: but while He remains benevolent, He cannot cease to act benevolently.

5. If "God is love," it follows that He has omitted nothing, and can omit nothing, the performance of which, would, upon the whole, result in the highest good of being. God is infinitely wise. He can, therefore, make no mistakes. Good men being benevolent, cannot act inconsistently with a benevolent design; but having finite intellects, they may make mistakes and err in the path of duty. While intending the highest good of the universe, they may be mistaken as to the means for promoting this end, and so accomplish only mischief by their actions. But not so with God. His infinite wisdom permits Him to make no mistakes. While He remains benevolent, He will, and can do nothing inconsistent with his grand design. Hence it follows, that He never has, that He never will, and that while He remains benevolent, He never can, omit to do any thing which would conduce to the highest good of being--it is naturally impossible for Him to do so. He must cease to be benevolent, or else He can do nothing inconsistent with the highest good of being, or leave undone any thing which universal good requires.

6. If "God is love," He has suffered, and will suffer nothing to occur that would be injurious to the universe, that can be prevented by the attributes of Jehovah. This ought to be perfectly understood. I say, then, that if almighty power, under the control of infinite wisdom, and infinite love, can prevent the existence of any thing which will harm the universe, it will, of course, do so. If God is love, it follows as a self evident truth, that He has prevented, and will prevent, so far as He wisely can, the existence of every thing which would work ultimate injury to being.

7. God, being love, has created the universe in obedience to the law of benevolence; for his creative acts result from his benevolence--they are only effects of the benevolent state of his heart. Hence--

8. He created the universe as early as He wisely could. It would have been a

natural impossibility for Him to create from eternity, for then his creatures would have been as old as Himself. But He did put forth creative power as soon as He benevolently could, taking into the account his own character and designs, and the prospective character of those whom He was to create. And,

9. He created the universe as rapidly as He could, consistently with his benevolent design. Not only did He begin his work as early as He wisely could, but when commenced, He carried it on as rapidly as benevolence would permit.

10. If "God is love," He has created as many worlds as benevolence demanded. He has omitted to create none, and has made no more and no less than the law of benevolence required.

11. He has created just such orders of beings, and endowed them with just such capacities as his infinite wisdom saw to be consistent with the accomplishment of his benevolent designs.

12. If "God is love," He has done, and will do, as much to promote the happiness of his creatures as He possibly can. Had He done, or should He do, more or less for the happiness of his subjects, than He has done, and will do, He could not be a benevolent being--He would become a wicked one. But being love, no one can accuse Him of neglecting his duty to his creatures. Hence -

13. He has done, and will do, as much to prevent the misery of his subjects, as the good of being will allow. This follows of course, if He is a benevolent being, or a "God of love." Many persons seem jealous, if any limit is put to the power of God; while they manifest little concern, whether or not his moral attributes, his justice and benevolence are limited. They seem to think that God might, if He pleased, prevent all misery, regardless of its cause. Now this is a false notion, for if God is a benevolent being, it would have been a natural impossibility for Him not to have done all that He could consistently do to prevent the misery of his creatures. It was, and is, impossible for Him not to do this, and remain a God of benevolence, a God of love. If He had fallen short of it, He would not have been benevolent at all. How can a man be benevolent and not do all the good he can? What is benevolence, but willing to accomplish all the good that lies in

our power?

14. If "God is love," He has done, and will do, all that He can to prevent the sins of moral beings. He never has suffered a sin to be committed, which He could wisely or benevolently prevent--which He could prevent without sinning Himself. Do you think this a strange assertion? But is it not true? And is it not better that God should suffer some one else to sin, rather than sin Himself? Moreover, God has never suffered any thing inconsistent with the perfect holiness of his subjects, to exist, which He could wisely prevent. He has never allowed any temptation to draw his creatures from the path of duty, which He could prevent without an infraction of the law of benevolence. Now is not this self evident? If God is love, is it not certain that no sin or temptation ever existed which He could wisely prevent? Under existing circumstances, if God had done more than He has done to prevent sin, He would have sinned Himself. This is self evident; for if God is a benevolent being, He never could have omitted any exertion to prevent sin, which would be consistent with the good of the universe. Therefore, if He had done more than He has done to prevent it, He would no longer be a sinless being.

15. God is love; and therefore, He has made every sacrifice on his part, which He could benevolently make, for the promotion of the highest good of being. "Herein is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Yes, God did not even hesitate to give his Son, his only Son, to die for us. He had no daughters, no other children, but one only Son. You who are parents, know how strongly a father becomes attached to an only child; while, if he has several children, he does not concentrate his affections with so great intensity upon any one of them. But if he has an only child, he prizes it as his greatest earthly treasure; he will see his property swept away, his buildings torn down, and all his earthly goods destroyed, before he will consent to give up his darling child. Now observe. God did not hesitate to give up his only Son to be a ransom for many; and after He has gone so far, will He not be ready to make any reasonable sacrifice for the good of his creatures? I tell you, yea. If it would be wise, He would willingly send his Son to earth, to die for us every year. He would Himself die a thousand times, if it were possible, and benevolence demanded it. When He sees that a sacrifice on his part, however great, will be the less of two evils, He will not hesitate to make it.

16. If "God is love," He has created all things as well as He possibly could. The question is often agitated--how could God have made such and such a thing, and why did He make it just as He did? Now observe. If God is love, He has done the best He could in the creation of the universe. He has established the best relations and founded the best laws which He possibly could have made, for the government of his creatures. We have a beautiful illustration of this truth in our own persons. God made us in the very best way; and if we are ever disposed to find fault with our physical or mental construction--if we will only examine ourselves, we shall be compelled to grant that God has done his best in our creation, and has placed all our organs and faculties in just the right place. And if we look away from ourselves, we shall see, that in giving laws to the universe, in directing all its movements, in ordering the succession of seasons, of day and night, God has done as wisely and well as He possibly could. He does not half do his work, nor does He do it slothfully; whatever He sets Himself about, He does in the best possible manner.

17. God has governed the universe as well as He possibly could. Not only has He created moral beings well, but He has governed them well. Not a single hour, since He first put forth creative power, has He ceased to control the universe in the best possible manner.

18. It does not follow from the fact that God is love, that there will not be great, but incidental evil always existing in the universe. Where there is sin, there must of necessity be misery; and there are also many natural evils, which are consequent on the arrangement of the universe, but this misery, and these evils, do not invalidate, nor are they inconsistent with the character of God; they are only incidental evils, resulting from the accomplishment of his great plans of benevolence--the plans, in pursuance of which, He created the universe, and affixed to it laws for the regulation of its movements. I say that certain incidental evils have resulted from the creation of the universe, which God made in the best possible manner. But mark. They are only incidental to a benevolent plan. It does not follow, then, that because God is love, great and incidental evils may not exist in the universe, nor that they will not exist through eternity, nor that new forms of evil, unknown to us, but known to God, will not make their appearance. But,

19. It does follow from the fact that God is love, that as a whole, creation will result in greater good than evil. God was infinitely wise from the beginning. Now had He seen that creation would result in more evil than good, He could not have ordered it; therefore, we may be certain, that the evil will never equal the good which will result from creation, but that it will fall indefinitely short of it.

20. It is also certain, that a majority of his creatures will be happy--that the number of those who are happy, will greatly overbalance the number of those who are miserable.

21. It is not at all probable that the majority of the inhabitants of any world, except the place of torment, will be finally miserable. I say that it is unreasonable, to suppose that more evil than good will result to any world, where God has placed moral beings on trial. If it was not true, that in every world which God has created, the amount of good resulting, will equal or exceed the amount of evil, how, I ask, could God be a benevolent being, and what tokens of his benevolence could we have in such a creation.

22. If "God is love," it follows that He abhors whatever is inconsistent with the highest good of being. He of course abhors all sin, and all sinners, and is opposed to all the selfishness in the universe, and to whatever is forbidden by his law. If He is benevolent, He is manifestly sincere when He commands his subjects to be holy; and He commands this, with all his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. As a necessity of his character, He is better pleased with holiness than with sin.

23. It follows that He will exercise any degree of needed severity on rebels against his law. He will not hesitate to execute vengeance on the doers of iniquity. We have myriads of instances in this world, of the sternness with which God carries out the principles of His government. How often are men and families, yea, even nations, overwhelmed and crushed beneath the mighty wheels of this vast machine--with such firmness does God carry out his benevolent plans. His government of the universe will go on, and whoever stands in the way of it, will be ground to powder, no matter whether he be an angel from heaven, or a fiend from hell. So too, in the moral world. If an individual will throw himself in the way of the execution of God's plans, He is sure to let him fall, though he is a great and mighty king of Israel, though his fall will be the occasion of dire ruin to the church

and the world. Yes, God could and did let even David fall. It was better that He should suffer the King of Israel to fall and the tale of his crime be told from Dan to Beersheba, through heaven and through hell,--I say it was better that he should let the wheels roll over and crush his chosen king, rather than that the car of his moral government should be for a moment stopped. And what God did to David, He does in a thousand other instances in the administration of his moral government. Yes, He will let Peter even deny his master, and the whole church apostatize from the true faith, rather than alter the plans of his moral government--and the reason why He does this, is because He is infinitely benevolent--because He is firm in the execution of His wise plans, and because He is moving on the great concerns of his government on a vast scale. God will not shrink from sending the wicked to hell, any more than from taking the righteous to heaven, for both acts are parts of the same great plan. It is indispensable to his peace of mind that He should do this. I repeat, that God could never be satisfied with His own conduct, if he did not send the wicked to hell, as well as take the righteous to heaven. Both acts result from the same great principle of love to being--a principle, which seated in the breast of God, like an infinite volcano, bursts forth on every side--on the one hand scattering death and damnation among the inhabitants of hell, and on the other, casting the smiles of love over the dwellers in heaven. Yes, it is the same thing heaving up from the very depths of Infinite mind. It is the carrying out of the same benevolent design, which on the one hand consigns the wicked to hell, and on the other, takes the righteous to heaven.

24. If "God is love," He is equally good and equally deserving of praise, whatever He does. If there are any cases in which He is more virtuous than in others, they are those in which He is obliged to sacrifice his own feelings--the strong affections of his nature, in order to inflict merited punishment on the wicked. But being a benevolent being, He always has one intention, and that a benevolent one; and He is always guided by the same infinite wisdom, therefore his virtue is always one and the same; it is never diminished and can never be increased. Strictly speaking, virtue cannot be predicated of his executive volitions, but only of his one eternal consecration to the good of being. It is evident then, that God is equally worthy of praise at all times, and for every thing that He does. Hence He requires us to give thanks at all times. "In every thing give thanks," the

apostle says, "for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." They greatly mistake, who think that God must be praised when He performs certain acts, and only tolerated when He performs others. For instance, that he is more merciful under the gospel than He was under the legal dispensation, and therefore more worthy to be praised now than He was then.

This false notion arises from an ignorance of the fact that God exercises all the attributes of his character in every action, and therefore the different phases of his executive volitions, all have the same moral character, for his character belongs solely to his intention, and that results in all his acts, his mercy, justice, &c. His virtue lies back of his executive actions. It is only the flowing out of the vast fountain of benevolence within Himself.

25. If "God is love," it follows that He will do for every individual of his creatures, all that He can wisely do. He will not only do this for the universe at large, but He will also do it for each one of us. Yes, He will do just as much for every individual creature in his universe, as, under existing circumstances, He possibly can. He has done this, and He will continue to do it; and should He do any more or any less for our good, than He is doing and will do, He would commit sin. This follows as self-evident, if it is true that "God is love."

26. If God is benevolent, He will do all the good by us that He wisely can. He will not let a single hair of our head fall to the ground, for want of doing all the good by us that He possibly can, under existing circumstances. What do you think of that? I tell you that not a sinner will go to hell, if God can wisely and benevolently employ our instrumentality to save him.

27. What God can wisely do for us and by us, must depend mainly on the course we pursue. I did not mean by the preceding remarks, that God could not do more for us and by us, if the circumstances were different. I merely meant to affirm that He has done all that He could, considering the course we have taken, and do take. If we had acted differently, He would have acted differently. If we had done better than we have, God would have made us wiser and better than we are. So the amount of good which is to be done by us, must depend entirely on the course we pursue. God may have done far less for each one of us, than He would have done, had we acted differently towards Him.

28. God is always doing the best for us and all around us, that, under the circumstances He possibly can; but by the exercise of our agency, we may so vary the circumstances, that He will be compelled to change his conduct, or cease to be benevolent. This is evidently true. It is manifest that God must act differently towards us in the different circumstances in which we place ourselves. Now take the case of a sinner. He repents and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. Will not God at once change his conduct towards him? Suppose that he lays himself out to do good to others; will not God assist him and make him the instrument of doing infinitely more good, than he would have done if he had remained a rebel? The fact is, we may limit the goodness of God to others, in a thousand ways; for what He does for the individual subjects of his moral government, depends, in a great measure, on the voluntary agency of other free beings.

REMARKS.

1. We see why implicit faith and confidence in God is a duty. Faith would not, and could not be a duty, if God was not a God of love; a God of wisdom, in fine, just such a God as the scriptures say He is.
2. If "God is love," it follows that any thing inconsistent with perfect confidence in Him is infinitely wicked--hence,
3. Any thing like murmuring against his providences must be very sinful.
4. We see why universal and perfect obedience to God is a duty. If God were not love, obedience to Him would not be a duty. If his laws were not founded on benevolence, we should be under no obligation to obey them. But as God is love, and as his laws were framed with a benevolent intention, we are bound to obey Him, and a rejection of his laws is rebellion against the good of the universe.
5. Our subject gives us a clue to the correct interpretation of the Bible--we must make every thing contained in it, consistent with the perfect benevolence of God. The fact once announced that God is love, every thing in the scriptures must be explained by the light of that truth.
6. We have a key to explain the providences of God. We often hear people say, in a complaining way--"why did God do so and so? Why did He afflict me in such and such a manner?" Now the answer to such questions is obvious--it is because

the laws of benevolence demand it. So of all the movements of divine providence, and grace, whether they occasion suffering or happiness, they are all put forth for one and the same reason, and that, because benevolence requires them.

7. The benevolence of God lays no foundation for the inference of universal salvation. It is no more reasonable to infer from the benevolence of God, that misery will not exist in a future world, than it would be to infer from the same premise, that there will be no more misery in this world--it would be just as reasonable to say that pain does not exist at all, as it would be to say that it will not exist to all eternity. But it is correct to say that it will have no power over the holy and the good in a future state. We stand on firm ground when we affirm this, but we have no authority from reason or revelation, for saying that great and incalculable evil will not exist in some part of the universe to all eternity.

8. To my own mind, a weighty objection to the second advent doctrines as now promulgated, is found in the fact that God is love. I cannot see how it could be consistent with the benevolence of God to destroy the world at the present time. So far as we know, and the fact is not disputed by any believer in the doctrines of Christianity, a great majority of those who have inhabited the earth, have gone to hell. Now God saw this from the beginning, and could He have benevolently ordained the destruction of the world under such circumstances? It is no answer to this argument, to say that "men are free, and can escape hell or not as they please, and therefore God is clear of their blood"--for suppose that there was but one world in the universe, and that God had peopled it with beings who would certainly be eternally miserable, grant if you please that their own agency had made them so--grant that God had done his best to prevent their misery--I ask would God have any right to make such a world? By no means, unless He should see that it would occasion sufficient happiness to Himself, to overbalance the misery of the creatures placed in such circumstances. Now what could be thought of the benevolence of God, if at the present time, under existing circumstances, He should destroy the world? We are to judge of the character of God, by his dealings with us. We are told but little of his doings in heaven--we are not told whether the sun, or the moon, or the stars are inhabited, therefore we must judge of the character of God by his doings here. Let us remember this, and let us remember that when God created the world, He had full knowledge of all that would result from its creation, and if, foreseeing that nine tenths of its inhabitants would be eternally miserable, that a vast majority of those who have

peopled it would go to hell--if, I say, notwithstanding all this, He had determined to wipe the world out of existence now, when all or the most of the results have been evil, could we consider Him as a God of love? It is no answer to this question, to say that we do not know how much good God will accomplish in other parts of the universe, by the destruction of the earth at the present time. As I just said, we are to judge of the character of God by his dealings here, not by his actions in other parts of the universe. So far as we can judge, greater evil than good has thus far resulted from the creation of the world, and if it should now be swept out of the universe, could we suppose that it was created with a benevolent design? If God is love, how can it be that the great mass of men will be finally miserable?

9. The fact that God is a benevolent being, appears to me to be a most cogent argument in favor of the doctrine of a temporal millenium, the result of which will be the conversion of the majority of men. No other doctrine, so far as we can judge, is consistent with the benevolence of God. God tells us to reason with Him, and judge for ourselves of his character. Now let us do it. So much does the doctrine of a temporal millenium consist with the benevolence of God, that the mere announcement of the fact that He is love, seems to tell us with trumpet tongue, that He is yet moving on in this world with his great plans of benevolence--that He is going on from conquering to conquer, and that the time will yet come when all shall know the Lord, from the least unto the greatest. I love to dwell upon the character of God in this light. I love to think of Him, not merely as the creator of the universe, but as the great and good governor of all things, who can deign to put his mighty hand in to the base affairs of earth, and turn, and overturn, till his benevolent design in creating the earth is fully accomplished--till the majority of men come to be his obedient subjects, while those who are damned will be monuments to warn the universe of the dreadful effects of sin. What! shall God be defeated in his plans? Is it indeed true, as some assert, that the tendency of things on earth is to go backward? If it is how grievously was Christ mistaken, when He compared the kingdom of heaven "unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measure of meal till the whole was leavened." Some, forsooth, tell us that Christianity is dying out on earth, that the meal is killing the leaven, instead of the leaven leavening the lump. Now God forbid that the tendency of his government should be to retrocession. What! shall the God of the universe, the creator of all things, because the tide of earthly things is rolling back on Himself, and thwarting his

mighty plans, crush the world, bury it in everlasting destruction, and send its teeming millions off to hell! Nay, if this be so, we are left to the dim light of inferring that for some inscrutable reason, God created such a world as this. I do not say, that God could not have a good reason for destroying the world at the present moment, but I do say, that if such a reason does exist, He would in some way have made it known to us. But when we open the Bible, we find the truth that God is love, standing out on every page, like the sun breaking through an ocean of storms, and by its light we can go through all the dark sayings of scriptures, and through the mysterious workings of Providence. It is a key with which we may unlock the designs of God, and learn that this world was created to aid in accomplishing the good of universal being, and that it will not be destroyed till its work is fully done.

10. If God is love, there is no favor too great for Him to bestow. No one need say that he is too insignificant a creature for God to bless, for He is ever ready to bestow the greatest blessings upon us all, whatever may be our condition as soon as He possibly can. He comes close up to our side, and takes every opportunity to do us good--we cannot open our mouths before He is ready to fill them. We need not starve, and wait for God to come to our relief, for He is ever close at hand. If He withholds spiritual blessings from us, we may infer that the difficulty lies with ourselves, not with Him.

Let me say to you, who are impenitent sinners, that if at last you make your bed in hell, you , and not God, will be to blame--and to you who profess to love the Lord, if you have not as much grace as you feel you need, if your experience of heavenly things is cold and barren, be assured that you, and not God, are in fault. He is continually crying in your ears, "all things are now ready, come ye in and sup with me." He is ever pressing upon you with all the weight of infinite love, seeking for some nook or corner in your hearts, where He may come in and fill you with all the fulness of his Son.

[Back to Top](#)

Revelation of God's Glory

Lecture XVI

December 20, 1843

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Ex. 33: 12-23: "And Moses said unto the Lord, see, thou sayest unto me, bring up this people; and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me; yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight. Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, show me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight; and consider that this nation is thy people. And He said my presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said, if thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? Is it not in that thou goest with us? So shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken; for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name.

And he said, I beseech thee, show me thy glory. And He said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. And He said, thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me, and live. And the Lord said, behold there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock. And it shall come to pass while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by. And I will take away my hand and thou shalt see my back parts, but my face shall not be seen."

In this discourse I shall show,

I. What is intended by the glory of God.

II. What is implied in Moses' prayer.

III. What is implied in God's answer.

I. What is meant by the glory of God.

The original meaning of the term glory was, brightness, clearness, effulgence: from that it has come to signify honor, renown; and again, that which renders honorable, or demands honor, or renown, reverence, adoration, and worship--that

which is worthy of confidence and trust. The glory of God is essential and declarative. By essential glory is meant that in Him which is glorious--that in his character which demands honor, worship, and adoration. His declarative glory is the showing forth, the revealing, the manifesting, the glory of his character--his essential glory--to his creatures: the laying open his glory to the apprehension of intelligences. And this is what Moses meant--that God would reveal Himself to his mind so that he might know Him--might have a clear and powerful apprehension of those things which constitute his glory.

II. What is implied in Moses' prayer.

1. A desire to know more than he knew of God. He knew comparatively little of God. Something indeed he had known of Him, but he wished to know more--A desire to know that which makes God worthy of the homage and adoration of his creatures, and especially he desired to be so subdued by this knowledge--his heart so fixed in his confidence, as to be prepared for his great work, the work of conducting Israel to the promised land--so subdued that his confidence might be perfect in him, so that he might never fail in his trust and leaning upon the Lord. God had called him to a very arduous work, and he needed a very thorough acquaintance with Him.
2. A sense of the necessity of this knowledge of the glory of God--that he greatly needed it.
3. That he was disinterested in his desire--entirely for God's glory and the people's good--that he might succeed in the great work of emancipating God's people, and glorifying his name by their establishment in the land of Canaan.
4. A sense of his responsibility, of the necessities of the people, and of Himself.
5. The belief that from the call which he had received of God, to be the leader of Israel from Egypt, he had a right to expect this revelation to his soul. God had called him to a work--he saw that for him to accomplish it, he must have a clearer knowledge of God, to sustain him in his difficult position, and uphold him under discouragement; and he seems to have thought he had a right therefore, to expect that God would not deny him this requisite to success.

III. What is implied in God's answer to Moses.

"I will make all my goodness pass before thee," said he. God's glory consists in his moral attributes--in his goodness.

1. The answer implies Moses' disinterestedness in his request--that his motives were right. If it had been mere curiosity that induced Moses to ask, God would not have granted it. God saw the sincere and earnest consecration of Moses' soul to the one object of his aim, to wit: The fulfillment of the work which God had given him.
2. He recognized the real necessities of Moses and the people, and testified that He thought it necessary to give what Moses asked.
3. The reasonableness of Moses' expectation--that Moses had a right to expect grace equal to his circumstances.
4. A willingness on the part of God to make known himself to Moses, for the purpose for which Moses desired it.
5. A regard for the frailties of Moses and the people. "Thou canst not see my face and live." The glory of my ineffable presence is too much for mortal eye to behold; it would overwhelm you, and separate soul from body. But I will hide you in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand as I pass by. "And I will take away my hand and thou shalt see my back parts, but my face shall not be seen." You may see as much as you can bear, and no more. You shall have as clear a revelation of my character as you can sustain; as vivid an apprehension of my holiness as your powers can endure and bear up under.
6. It implies that God considers his goodness, his moral attributes, as making up his essential glory. His glory does not consist in his natural attributes--his power, his wisdom, his omnipresence, his eternity--these are awful, they are fearful for us to behold. But his glory lies in his goodness, his moral character, his justice, benevolence, holiness, mercy. All these are but so many forms of his benevolence. God respects Himself, and demands respect and honor of others for his holiness, because He is voluntarily subject to the law of love, of universal and impartial benevolence. And not in one merely, but in all, combined and balanced in due proportion, his glory consists. Mark what He says, "I will make all my goodness pass

before thee." And what a beautiful and awful revelation it was! "And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty, (the impenitent) visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." This was all of it, the goodness of God--forgiving the penitent, rewarding the obedient, bearing with the rebellious, fulfilling his promise for good to the faithful and confiding, and pouring the vials of fiercest wrath on the incorrigible--all this is the goodness of God, his benevolence under different phases, and all of this, is the essential glory of the living God.

7. His sovereignty in the disposal of his mercies. "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and have compassion on whom I will have compassion." By God's sovereign grace, I do not mean that He acts arbitrarily, or without a good reason; but that He acts independent of all save Himself--that He obeys the dictates of his own infinite benevolence, and asks no being but Himself for leave to do what He sees best to be done. "I will consult my own unsearchable wisdom, and that which to me seemeth best, I will do," is his declaration to the universe.

REMARKS.

1. The circumstances and the prayer of Moses, were the conditions of the revelation which God made to him. His circumstances--he needed to know more of God. His prayer--he made supplication to be taught. The circumstances alone were not enough, nor the prayer alone, but both united. He had subsequent and frequent manifestations of God's presence and power as circumstances required. Sometimes alone, sometimes in the full presence of all the people. On awful Sinai He moved in thunder and fire, and the congregation quaked at the terror of the Lord. According to the exigencies of Moses and of the people God dealt with them, and showed his glory to them.

2. A principle of the divine administration is here developed, namely--God will furnish such grace and manifestation of his goodness, as the circumstances demand, and their exigencies require. He is unchangeable. In the same circumstances his dealings are the same. He who gave to his ancient servant, an overwhelming view of his glory, such a view, as that in unspeakable awe, "he

bowed his head and worshiped," will, whenever necessary, grant the same or greater manifestations, if it be requisite to strengthen for his own work.

3. He will be inquired of, to do the things that need to be done for you for his glory. The Bible every where insists on this. Moses prayed, and prayed with great earnestness and importunity--"God show me thy glory." "Lord if Thou go not with us, take us not up hence." The universal example of Bible saints, is one continued stream of prayer, flowing onward in a broad and deep current, with a strong and resistless tide, to the great ocean of God's boundless mercy and compassion.

4. We are to persevere in this asking. Was Moses to be put off? No indeed. He cries-- "Show me thy way, that I may know Thee, that I may find grace in thy sight." God answers, "My presence shall go up with thee, and I will give thee rest." But a mere promise is not enough for Moses. "O Lord, surely Thou wilt go up with us, but O Lord show me thy Glory, let me know Thee, let thy perfections come home with such power to my soul, that they shall never depart therefrom. Lord show me thy glory." He reminded God that He had called him to bring up the people, and yet he was not prepared. "Thou hast said to me, bring up this people, and yet thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me." Moses persevered, and he gained his request. God did for him what he asked. It is exceedingly important that we continue to press upon God, so to speak, for any grace which we need. Let us learn our duty from the Bible, and the relations we sustain, and then, having settled the question that we are in the work to which God has called us, let us come to God with a full assurance of faith that He has promised to be with us always, and that what He has promised, He is able also to perform. Press upon Him your wants. Say to Him--O Lord Thou hast placed me here, Thou hast made me what I am, and I have not strength for the work, I have not knowledge for the labor. O Lord, arm me for the contest, harness me for the battle, fit me for the work. O Lord, thy name will be disgraced if I fail, for Thou hast set me here, thy honor is at stake. What will become of thy great name? "O God show me thy glory." Whatever we find ourselves in need of for the success of his work, to which He has called us, we have a right to go and ask for, with perfect confidence, and complete assurance, and we should not let go our suit, till the request is granted. We should come with importunity I said. See how Moses speaks to God at one time, with what confidence and holy familiarity, he addresses his heavenly Father! When God was angry with the rebellious Israelites, and said, "Let me alone, that my anger may wax hot against them, that

I may destroy them from the face of the earth," Moses besought the Lord. He came, and seizing hold of his hand as it were, "O Lord," he cries, "why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, for whom Thou hast done so much? Why should the Egyptians say, for mischief did He bring them out to slay them? O turn from thy wrath and repent Thee of the evil." Moses was so importunate, it seemed as though God could not deny him. And thus may we come to God, and cry--are not all thy promises yea and amen in Christ Jesus? Hast Thou not promised, and shall thy word fail? Brethren, is not this directly? point? May we not come to God and ask at all times? Is He not able to save to the uttermost? Shall not "our strength be equal to our day?" O how strongly my experience testifies to this truth. Many a time, I should have given up all for lost, and sat down in despair, had it not been for such a revelation of God's glory, as to strengthen me for the work I had to accomplish. Always, yes always, when I have gone to God, as Moses did, with the prayer, "Show me thy glory," He has never denied me, never, never.

5. It is reasonable to understand a call of God to any station, as a virtual pledge of every thing that we need, to stand in that place, and meet those responsibilities. If God calls us to do a thing, it can be done. What is needed to accomplish it may be had. God is not a Pharaoh, commanding to make brick, yet withholding straw. The requiring a thing, always vouchsafes every thing necessary for its fulfillment.

6. The people always need one thing. Every child of God is called to represent God, to be a teacher of God, to show forth to the world around him the character of God. Every saint is called of God to do this. Every Christian has a right to insist that God will give him grace to do that--to do it fully and successfully. He may say to God, "Lord, thou hast made me a Christian, put thy spirit within me, called me to represent thee, and show the world who thou art, and what thy character is; but how can I do this, except I be shown by thy grace, except all thy goodness pass before me and melt me into contrition and love." How long shall it be, ere Christians, feeling their weakness, will go to God and ask him thus for what they need, and must have, or perish.

7. Many persons seem to have exceedingly narrow, partial, obscure views of God. So shadow-like, and dim is their notion of Him, or so partial and one sided, and distorted, that it is like any thing almost more than like God. Perhaps Moses was somewhat in this condition. He had seen God in the burning bush, he had

heard his voice, saying, "O, lead my people Israel," he had been the rod of Jehovah's wrath on wicked Egypt, he had stood on Sinai and seen God in fire and smoke and lightnings, but he could not be satisfied--he must know more. And all along Moses had to ask for new revelations continually.

Many know God only as a lawgiver and judge. They apprehend his law, and they sink in terror and fear; that is all they know of God. Others know nothing of him but what they call his mercy and love; nothing of justice, and holiness, and righteous indignation against sin. They have neither of them any confidence in his word and promises. Now Moses ever after, trusted firmly and unwaveringly in God's truth. God had shown him his truth, and Moses forgot it not. The impress of that hand, he felt always pressing on him; that sight was ever present to his mind. He had confidence in his mercy after this. Only see how, when God said, "Let me destroy this rebellious and stiff-necked people, and I will make of thee a great nation." Moses had such trust in God's mercy. He cried, "O Lord, save thy people, or blot out my name from thy book." "O God, what will become of thy great name?" What a savor and relish the revelation had left on his mind--a sweet and controlling sense of God's mercy and goodness. God's Justice, too, rested with awful distinctness upon Moses' apprehension. He was the great and terrible God, visiting the iniquities of them which hate him, upon their own heads, and upon the heads of their children. It is vastly important that men should have just and symmetrical views of God's character; for where the revelation is partial, they do not possess a well proportioned piety; they show a want of balance in their character. If they have not seen the justice of God, his holiness, they have no apprehension of the guilt of sin, of its desert of punishment, of God's infinite hatred of it. They have no proper sense of the condition of sinners, have no compassion, no ardent zeal, no burning love for them. So if men have not a revelation of the mercy and love and compassion of God, they will be legal, have very little confidence to pray for sinners; instead of laying hold of God, as they should do, even in the most desperate cases, they slacken, and give up in despair. So of all his attributes; if men have not sought and obtained a just view of God's character, they will be like their views of God, ill-proportioned, and unbalanced in their own character.

8. It is of the last importance, that men should realize that all God's character is made up of his benevolence, his goodness. See how He says, "All my goodness;" not my mercy, my love, but all, my mercy, my justice, my holiness, my hatred of sin, and my settled purpose to punish it, my tender compassion and pity, and my

righteous vindictive justice. A minister, especially, should thus know all his goodness, and be duly affected by every attribute. If they do not have such a revelation, they will induce and foster an unnatural and ill proportioned piety in their congregation, and among the people of their intercourse--either an antinomian or a legal, just as the bent and cast of the minister's own mind is.

9. Nothing can make us stable Christians, but to behold his glory, a revelation of Him to us. No excitement, no intellectual acumen, no strength of logic, nothing can secure us but a revelation of God to our souls. We should therefore persevere and insist that this be done for us, that we see God's glory, and be fixed on Him. The church should pray for ministers and for candidates for the ministry, that God would reveal to them the deep secrets of his love and mercy; that He would open to them the ever flowing fountains of exquisite and perennial blessedness to let them drink therefrom and never thirst more. O do the churches think and feel how much they can do for their ministers, by praying the heavens open, and letting down on their hearts such rays of glory as shall forever enrapture and hold them in awful apprehension of God's presence and character, as that the spirit of the Highest shall come upon them, and the power of God overshadow them, and transform them from men of clay, to angels of mercy and power to a fallen world? Why do they not pray? Brethren, why do you not pray--pray that God would show you, would show the students here, the community, the whole church in the land, and in the world, his glory? Pray, and give God no rest, till He glorify his people before the nations?

10. It is easy to see what made Moses' face shine so, when he came down from the mount. The manifestation of God's glory has the same effect always and every where. There was such a clearness, a glory, a brightness, in his countenance, that the people could not look upon him. Christ in the mount, when the glory of God appeared to Him, was transfigured, his raiment was white as the light, and his face was like the sun.

11. Many cannot bear much of the revelation of divine glory to them. They are babes, and must be fed with milk and not with meat; for they cannot take meat. How it affected Isaiah, to behold the glory of the Lord. Isaiah, that man of God. Who could behold, if he could not? One would think his views of God were high and exalted. But see his vision. "I saw the Lord, sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim, and one cried to another, and covered his face with his wings, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy is

the Lord God of Hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory!" Think of it! It overcame Isaiah. He cried in despair, "Wo is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!" He saw the holiness of God as he never saw it before. He was completely overcome, he seemed unable to recover from it, till one of the seraphim came with a live coal from the altar, and laid it on his lips, saying, "Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." O, how much do we need such revelations--new revelations--great and mighty things which we have not known. And then we shall be humbled, subdued under his mighty hand. Mark how Isaiah was subdued to the will of God. When he heard the voice crying, "Who will go for us?" with meek boldness he answered, "Here am I, send me." And so shall we be humbled, and say, "Lord, glorify thy name in us."

But often God has to hold back. He must cover Moses in the rock--cleft, and hide his face from him. Often must Christians say, "Hold thy hand, O Lord, it is enough; draw the curtain, and veil the glory from my fainting, reeling sense."

12. Sometimes young converts get proud, and think that they know a great deal of God, and imagine that all which they never experienced, is fancy, and cannot be true. If just what they know of God is not presented, they think it is not the gospel, when, poor blind men, they know just one part, and a very small part. They must not think they know the whole of God that may be known of Him. Many cannot bear to hear of God's justice, of his sovereignty, of his holiness. Now, we should desire to have all the character, all the goodness of God pass before us; to have him let in upon the mind as bright and glorious a vision as it can bear.

Brethren, is it not true, that we need new manifestations of God? One revelation brings need of new and more glorious revelations. Do we not need it? My soul from its depths, my heart from its very bottom, cries out, "O God, I beseech thee, show me thy glory. Let me see and know more of God." Will you pray for me? Will you pray for yourselves? Do we not need it, I say again? Have we not high responsibilities? Who has higher? Now pray in view of your circumstances; besiege the throne; give God no rest; let him have no peace, till He come and revive his work, and make his name glorious.

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the

end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence

presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

End of the 1843 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1844
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College

Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Lecture I. [Hardness of Heart](#)
Lectures II. & III. [The Eyes Opened to the Law of God- No.'s 1 & 2](#)
Lecture IV. [Christian Witnesses for God](#)
Lecture V. [Fearing the Lord and Walking in Darkness](#)
Lecture VI. [Blessed are the Poor in Spirit](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Hardness of Heart

Lecture I

January 3, 1844

by Charles Grandison Finney

President of Oberlin College

Text.--Mark 6:52: "For they considered not the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened."

These words were spoken of the disciples. The occasion of their utterance was this--the evening of the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, Christ walked out upon the water and met His disciples, who were crossing the sea in a boat. They were much surprised and astonished to see Him walk on the water; they had already forgotten the wonderful miracle which was performed before their eyes, but a few hours before, and being "sore amazed in themselves, beyond measure," the evangelist properly says of them, that "they considered not the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened."

Again, Mark 8:17. "And when Jesus knew it, He saith unto them--Why reason ye because ye have no bread? Perceive ye not yet, neither understand? Have ye your heart yet hardened?"

These words were addressed to the disciples, who did not understand Christ when He warned them to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." They supposed that He alluded to the fact that they had come out without bread. He, perceiving their mistake, said unto them, "Why reason ye because ye have no bread? Perceive ye not yet, neither understand? Have ye your hearts hardened?" In other words, "the fact that you can so greatly mistake as to the meaning of my instruction, is sufficient proof that your hearts are very hard."

Again, Mark 16:14. "Afterward, He appeared to the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen."

Without stopping to expound this text, I shall endeavor to show,

I. What hardness of heart is.

II. The influence of hardness of heart on the states of the intelligence and sensibility, or in more common terms, upon the opinions or judgments and feelings of men.

I. What is hardness of heart?

The above, and many other texts which might be advanced, show that hardness of heart is a voluntary state of mind. If it is a voluntary state, it must be the will in a state of choice--a will committed, for the time being, to some form of selfishness. The term hardness is appropriately used, because when the heart is in this state, it is stubborn, and will not yield to the truth, and prevents the intelligence and sensibility from perceiving, and being duly impressed by the truth. But I must pass rapidly on and show,

II. The influence of hardness of heart upon the sensibility and intelligence, or upon the opinions and feelings of men.

1. We know by consciousness, that the heart controls the attention of the mind. In other words, the intelligence is so completely under the control of the will, that its action, or attention, is directed to whatever point the heart or will pleases.

2. We also know by our own consciousness, that the attention affects the sensibility. If the attention is directed to a particular object, the feelings are of necessity excited by that object. If the attention is from any cause diverted from that object, we at once cease to feel for that object. The kind, or nature, too, of our feelings, depends on the view which the intellect takes of its object of attention. If it views it in one aspect, we are moved to certain states of feeling; and if it views it in another, we are exercised by very different feelings. The feelings then, are dependent on the perceptions of the intellect, and the intellect in turn, is controlled by the will, according as the will is more or less given up to any object, so will the attention of the intelligence be more or less directed to that object, and consequently the feelings will be more or less excited by the same object.

3. When the heart is hard, we do not consider the truth as we otherwise would. This must of necessity be true; for if the will is given up to the indulgence of any form of selfishness, of course it cannot pay a calm and dispassionate attention to the truth. Such a thing would be an impossibility, and could never be. Suppose for instance, that the mind is committed to money-making for selfish purposes; of course, all the feelings will drift in that direction, and it would be absurd to say, that while such is the case--while the will is committed, the intelligence can give serious and candid

attention to the great truths of religion.

4. When the heart is hard, we do not understand truth--of course, if we do not pay attention to it, we do not understand it. Hence, in the parable of the sower, Christ represented impenitent men as "hearing the word of the kingdom, and understanding it not." The fact is, wicked men do not consider the truth, therefore they do not understand it, they do not perceive it with their intellects, therefore it does not move them, it does not take hold of their feelings, and go down to the depths of their emotions, and so rouse them to action.

I wish now to illustrate this proposition--that hardness of heart affects the opinions and feelings of men--by several familiar examples; for it seems to me that the proposition is one which needs illustration rather than proof. I say then, that the truth of the proposition is illustrated,

(1.) By the case alluded to in the first text. Now the disciples of Christ were surrounded by many peculiar trials. As yet, the Holy Spirit had not descended upon them, they were comparatively ignorant of all truth, they were sorely tried by temptation, and their faith was very weak. Hence they had fallen into a state of hardness of heart; therefore little impression was made upon their minds by the miracle of the loaves. You well know the history of that transaction; how that, when the disciples asked Christ to send the multitudes away, in order that they might procure provisions, He refused to do it, and wrought a miracle for the feeding of the great company. But as I before said, the hearts of the disciples were so hard, that the miracle seemed to get but little hold upon them. That same night, as they were rowing hard upon the boisterous sea, Christ came to them, walking upon the water. From the evangelist, it appears that they were much surprised and sore amazed. This fact showed that the truth of His divine nature had not been fixed in their minds by the miracle, as it ought to have been. They should have remembered, that Christ would, of course, have power to walk on the water, if He possessed sufficient creative power to feed five thousand miraculously. Instead of being surprised at the event, they should have looked upon it as a thing to be expected. The fact is, their hearts were so hard, that they did not infer from the miracle, what they ought to have inferred from it, they did not understand it as they

should have understood it. So too, in the 8th chapter, 17th verse, the same truth is brought to light. Christ had warned His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. By this, He designed to put them on their guard against their peculiar doctrines, which doctrines were, as He well knew, particularly liable to prejudice their minds against the truth of His teachings. He warned them to beware of that leaven, which would diffuse a pernicious influence over all their opinions and feelings. But the disciples, misunderstanding the import of Christ's warning, in the hardness of their hearts, "reasoned among themselves," saying, "It is because we have not bread." And when Jesus knew it, He saith unto them, why reason ye because ye have no bread? Have ye your hearts yet hardened?" In other words, "have ye so mistaken the meaning of the miracle which I wrought yesterday, that ye cannot yet understand truth? Is it possible that ye have so misinterpreted my instructions that ye cannot understand the plainest truth which I make known to you? Again, in the 16th chapter, 14th verse, we have another striking instance of the effect of hardness of heart upon the perception of truth. Here we are told that Christ appeared unto the eleven, as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen." Yes, the minds of the disciples were not so fixed and grounded on the truth, but that they could even doubt the testimony of those who had actually seen their risen Lord. What must have been the state of their hearts? Alas! this is another instance of the influence of hardness of heart upon the perception of truth.

(2.) The case of the Jews generally, affords another striking instance of the blinding effect of hardness of heart on the intelligence. Such was the state of their hearts, that no evidence which Christ could give them could convince them of His Messiahship.

(3.) The case of careless sinners illustrates the same truth. Their views and feelings are a living illustration of the influence of hardness of heart on the intellect and sensibility; for mark, if their hearts were not hard, and they had the same light which they now possess, they would be full of the bitterest agony instead of coldness and indifference in respect to religious truth.

(4.) Cases of difficulty among brethren in the church, illustrate forcibly, the influence of hardness of heart upon the opinions and feelings of men. How many times when brethren have fallen into difficulty with each other, and have come to lay their complaints before me, as their pastor, have I thought to myself--now the only difficulty with these brethren, is, their hearts are hard. Why is it that they do not understand truth alike? Why, plainly for no other reason, than because their hearts are hard; that is, they are, for the time being, so much under the influence of selfish motives, that each looks at the object of controversy in a different light; therefore, their opinions upon the subject do really differ, and each thinks the other to be in fault. How often have I heard contending brethren, when in this state of mind, say, each of the other, "Why he is so entirely wrong, that it cannot but be, that he knows he is an arrant hypocrite, and that he lies outrageously." Now such things often arise among brethren in the church, and they may almost invariable be traced to the hardness of heart of the contending parties. The same brethren will see the subject of controversy in the same light, if their hearts are only softened. How many cases of difficulty have I known, where nothing could convince either of the parties of his fault, and so great was the contumacious obstinacy of the disputers, that the church would be obliged to take up labor with them, and would send committee after committee to them, to endeavor to prevail on them to come to an amicable adjustment of the difficulty, but all to no purpose. Quarrel they would, in spite of all that could be done to prevent it. But when prayer, earnest, effectual prayer has been offered for these brethren, and the Spirit has descended and softened their hearts, then there has been no more difficulty between them; the one who has been to blame, confesses more than he has been charged with, and each sees the subject in dispute, in the same light as the other.

(5.) Cases often occur in the business transactions of life, which forcibly illustrate the effect of hardness of heart upon the intelligence and sensibility. How often do men adopt and employ principles in their business matters, which they would utterly condemn, if it was not for their hardness of heart. Yes, they will do things in their business, for days, months, and even years, which they would abhor if their hearts

were not hard.

(6.) The manner in which the providences of God are regarded by the mind, illustrates the same principle. When the heart is hard, God is not seen in His providences; however striking they may be, they are looked at with a cold eye, and regarded as mere common occurrences. But if the heart is not hard, they make a deep impression of it; they are regarded as blessings sent from God. If the heart is hard, they do not inspire praise; God is not looked to and thanked as the author of them. Oftentimes, affective providences occur--friends, perhaps relatives, are torn away, but we do not observe in the subjects of the affliction, any evidence that they feel their bereavement. They do not seem to realize their loss, or if they do, it is only to murmur at the dispensation of providence. Now why is this? It is because their hearts are hard; they do not see the hand of God in the providence, as they would if their hearts were not hard.

(7.) Of course the heart is not moved by the providence of God, to gratitude nor repentance, when the heart is hard.

(8.) Even miracles may not produce much impression on the mind, if the heart is hard. This was the case with the Jews. They stood out against all the evidence of miracles which Christ could produce. This was especially the case with the Scribes and Pharisees, who were hard-hearted, even above the most of their nation. Consequently, the miracles of Christ made but little impression upon them; they did not fasten conviction on their unbelieving minds; and with all their weight, they could not break down their stubborn wills.

(9.) Persons in a hard-hearted state, will justify the most palpable wrong doing, they will have some excuse for their misdeeds, their will be some reason, which in their estimation, requires them, as an act of duty, to perform the iniquitous deed. Yes, they will even imagine that they are doing God service, when in fact, they are committing the most flagrant acts of wickedness. This was the case with Saul of Tarsus. His heart was hard, and he "verily thought he was doing God service," when he hunted the disciples from place to place, and delivered them over to judgment and death. So too, of the persecutors of the Church in every age--they have thought that they were doing God service. Yes,

their hearts have been so hard, that they have really imagined that they were called and taught of God to do their work of death and blood, yea of hell. Nothing has been more common in the Church than this state of mind. How does it come that Papal Rome has been so zealous in the cause of hell, that she has been so busy in persecuting and destroying those whom she regards as heretics? It is because her heart has been hard, and she has been entirely mistaken as to the nature of her zeal, and misled as to the true means of promoting the glory of God.

(10.) Again, look at the slave-holder. See how sanctimonious he is. Perhaps he is a Church member, and it may even be that he is a doctor of divinity, and yet he has slaves. Oh! but he does it because he considers it his duty so to do; he does it in the fear of God, and with due regard to the highest well-being of the slave. Yes, he will dare to justify himself in his hellish business, and will even call it God-service. Now how can this be? I tell you it is because his heart is hard. How do you suppose he can think as he does? How can he go to the communion table, how pray in his family while he continues in this nefarious business? I say again, it is because of the hardness of his heart. The murderers of Christ did the very same thing. When Jesus was standing before the judgment bar of Pilate, they cried out with one accord, "His blood be on us and on our children." "What" you say, "could they be guilty of so great wickedness and blasphemy?" Yes, they were so certain that Christ was an impostor, that they were ready to take the responsibility of His murder on their own shoulders. They did not hesitate to cry out "His blood be on us, and on our children." What higher evidence could they give of their deep delusion, than this? Now what was the matter with them? Why were they so perfectly besotted, so lost to all sense of right and justice? Why plainly, because they were so hard-hearted, that all the evidence of His Messiahship which Christ could give them, fell to the ground, and they pursued their course of wickedness, buried in the deepest darkness of ignorance and self-delusion.

(11.) Persons whose hearts are hard, will often embrace the grossest errors, and be very zealous in defending them. Not a form of error has ever been preached, which has not found some zealous, and even self-denying advocates.

(12.) Persons in this state of mind, will often mistake the most bitter, and even ferocious zeal, for true religion. This was the case with the crusaders, and with the Catholic Church in the dark ages. Now how does it happen that people can make such an egregious mistake? We often see men in such circumstances, or in such a state of mind, giving the highest evidence of sincerity; they are willing to lay down life itself, in the accomplishment of the most nefarious plans. Yes, they are ready to become martyrs; they will rush headlong to the stake in the maintenance of error, or in carrying out unholy plans, which they call the work of God. Now, I ask, how can this be? I answer, it is because their hearts are so hard that they are really deceived, and mistake for true religion, what is nothing more than bitter, ferocious zeal. I have often been struck with the case of the "come outers," as they are called, who go about the country, railing at the law and the priesthood, and who imagine they have a perfect right to get up in churches, and disturb the congregations in their worship. Now these persons seem to be as certain that they are right, and that they are doing God service, as they would be if they should receive a distinct revelation from Heaven. How does this happen? Why manifestly, it is because of the hardness of their hearts. It is on this account, that they have fallen into so deep and strange a delusion.

(13.) Persons in a state of hardness of heart, often mistake the spirit of fanatical impudence for Christian faithfulness. How often do we see people going about, talking to their neighbors and others in the most outrageously impudent manner, and all under pretense of being governed by a spirit of Christian faithfulness.

(14.) Persons who are in this state of mind, often mistake the most shocking irreverence, for true faith and filial boldness. We often observe it in the prayers of such individuals, and in their conversations about God and holy things.

(15.) The entertaining of false hopes, is another manner in which the influence of hardness of heart is illustrated. People often "indulge a hope," as they call it, when the very fact that they can entertain a hope under the circumstances, shows conclusively that their hearts are very hard. Probably there is not one of you, who has not known many

individuals professing Christ, whose lives have been such, that you have been struck with wonder, that they could dare to call themselves Christians. But very likely their hearts have been so hard, that they have sincerely believed themselves to be accepted of God, notwithstanding their foul deeds. This was the case with the Scribes and Pharisees who persecuted Jesus. They doubtless thought themselves to be true saints. Paul, while he was breathing the very spirit of hell, deemed himself a real servant of God. The reason why people make this mistake is, because their hearts are so hard that they are mistaken as to what Christianity is--they are utterly in the dark as to what the true spirit of religion consists in, and as to who and what Christ is.

(16.) The influence of hardness of heart is illustrated by the great difficulty which exists in overcoming false hopes. How remarkable it is, that the same persons to whom I have just alluded, are the most difficult persons in the world to be convinced that they are not Christians. Christ in his parable of the wise and foolish virgins, alluded to these individuals, when he said, "afterward came the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us." Yes, those very persons who are influenced by the spirit of the devil, will often imagine that they are influenced by the Spirit of Christ; and they will not give up their delusion, but will soon in blindness, and at last cry, "Lord, Lord open unto us." Yes, they will not be put down by preaching, or by anything else; until at last Christ will say unto them, "depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Think how hard their hearts must be; they will not yield their false hopes, even if an angel from heaven should warn them so to do; they will cling to them, till Christ will banish them forever, to the lake of everlasting torment.

(17.) The wonderful delusion of many in respect to their spiritual state, illustrates the influence of hardness of heart. But I will not dwell upon this head, but will remark--

(18.) The same truth is illustrated by the change of views and feelings, which every Christian has experienced, when his heart has been thoroughly subdued. How remarkable this transformation often is! When the heart is softened by the love of Christ, how differently does

everything appear--how greatly are our views changed on every subject! This change extends to almost every duty, relation, and act of life. Why, let a man turn from the service of self to the service of God, from a course of sin to holiness, and he looks back on his past life with perfect horror. He sees that his past deeds have all been wrong, and he detests them as he would if they had come from the bottomless pit itself. So too, a professor of religion often passes through a course of hardness of heart, and when he comes out into the light and liberty of the gospel, how different are all his views of what he has said and done, and of the influence which he has exerted, and of the manner in which he has used the talents which God has given him.

(19.) The influence of hardness of heart, is seen in the different effects which the same truth produces on the mind at different times. How striking is this difference? Perhaps a truth which has been heard an hundred times without any conscious effect, comes, of a sudden, to absorb the whole soul; and why is this? It is because the heart is softened and then the intellect is placed in the attitude of attention, and the truth pours its focal blaze upon the sensibility, and warms it, and melts it, and makes it as liquid as water.

(20.) Another illustration of the same truth is found in the different views we take of the Bible at different times. If the heart is hard, we take but little interest in the Bible, unless we read it for the purpose of criticism, or to gather historical facts. Its truths do not strike us as being very affecting; they do not interest us sufficiently to make us wish to devour them. But let the heart be softened, and at once how changed does the Bible seem. Why, its truths strike us so powerfully, they contain so much light, and power, and love, that they seem to set us afloat, and carry us with omnipotent energy towards God, and heaven. If a man's heart becomes thoroughly softened, he becomes so enamored of his Bible, that he sits up nights to read it: he carries it with him wherever he goes, and whether he is walking or riding, or engaged in business, he is ever pondering on its sacred truths. Yes, when his heart is hard, his Bible gets no hold upon him; but when Christ comes and softens and subdues his proud spirit, then his Bible is a new book to him; at once it introduces him into a new state of being, and makes the way of holiness light and clear before him.

REMARKS.

1. Persons often attribute the blame of their wrong doing to other things and other persons besides themselves. For instance, you will hear them complaining that the Bible is a very mysterious book, written in a very mysterious manner, notwithstanding God has said of it, that it is so plainly written that "the wayfaring man though a fool need not err therein." It is strange, they will say, that I cannot understand it; why did not God make it so plain that it could be easily understood? And so they shove the fault of their sinning off their shoulders, and lay it on the Bible. Their hearts being hard, they cannot see how plainly the scriptures are revealed, especially in the doctrinal portions of them. The same is true of the manner in which the preached word is received. You will often hear people complaining of the preaching. The very preaching which at one time takes a strong hold upon them, and goes down to the very bottom of their souls, I say, this same preaching, you will hear them complaining of, at another time, "as being very dull, the same thing over and over, nothing new, out of place, &c." Now let the spirit of God come and soften their hearts, and the preaching sounds entirely new to them; it is, as it were, a divine unction to their souls every time they hear it. They will be hard to say of it, "Ah that is just what we needed--very instructive--just in the right place, and just in the right time."

2. A man may be very sincere in believing a lie, and he will be so much the more sincere as his heart is the more hard. If his heart is very hard, he will lay aside all candor and will settle down in the belief of a lie so firmly that no evidence of any truth, however palpable, will in the least, move him from his falsehood. It will not be impossible for him to believe any lie, however palpable; and he will not only believe it, but he will give himself entirely up to its control; and the harder his heart is, the more confidence will he have in it, and the fewer misgivings as to its truth.

3. When a person believes a lie, and gives himself up to its influence, however sincere may be his belief, yet he is without excuse; for he creates his delusion by his own voluntary wickedness--it is forced upon him by no one.

4. It is only when the judgments or opinions are formed in a right state of heart, that a person is justified in acting in conformity to them. Many people seem to suppose that a person is pursuing a virtuous course when he acts in conformity to his real opinions, whether they are right or wrong, provided he is only sincere. Now sincerity itself may often be an evidence of great wickedness. For a man

could not be sincere in pursuing a wicked course of life, or in holding on to a wrong sentiment, if his heart was right. Therefore, a man is without excuse, who does wrong, however sincere he may be in the wrong he is doing.

5. Men are the more apt to settle down and be confident in their wrong opinions and actions, in proportion to the hardness of their hearts. Perhaps when error is first broached in their minds, they have some misgivings about receiving it, but as their hearts become more hard, they are more firmly convinced of its truth, until at last, they lay aside all doubt, and come to believe the lie most sincerely. We have a striking illustration of this truth in the case of the persecutors of Christ. Doubtless when Christ first began to preach, the Scribes and Pharisees had many more misgivings as to the truth of His doctrine, than they had at the time they put Him to death. At first they listened to Him with attention, but soon their hearts grew harder, and they waxed more bold, until at last they, with the whole Jewish nation, assumed an outrageous tone, set at naught the holy Jesus, and denied all His claims to the Messiahship.

6. We often find the greatest confidence where there is the most delusion. Of all the persons that I ever met with, or heard of, I think the "come outers," are the most self-confident. They seem to think that they "are the people, and that wisdom will die with them." New perhaps in the whole world there are not seven men to be found, who are so entirely wrong in all their principles of action, as these very "come outers." I have often been struck too with the assurance of many of the antinomian perfectionists. Why, you might as well call in question the fact of their existence as to deny any of their positions. If you attempt to reason with them, and lay the axe of truth to the root of the tree of their faith, they will laugh in your face, and all your arguments will fall to the ground--so blind has their delusion made them.

7. Persons often wax more confident in the belief of a lie, in proportion as the evidence of their error thickens around them. This was the case with the Jews. In proportion as Christ heaped miracle upon miracle, and appealed to His works, to scripture, and to reason, for proofs of His Messiahship, just to that degree did the Jews wax confident in the belief that He was an impostor. Yes, such was the hardness of their heart, that in spite of all the light that Christ brought to bear upon them, they became steeled, and, as it were, case hardened against the truth, until at last, they were wrapped up in a delusion as fatal as can be conceived.

8. Millions, no doubt, die with a hard heart, and a firm hope of everlasting

salvation. I recollect being called in my early ministry to visit a woman who lay at the point of death. Though she had been a very abandoned woman, yet she had the idea that she was a Christian; she supposed that in her youthful days she had seen Christ in a dream, and that she gave herself to the Lord at that time. Her friends tried to convince her of her error, but all to no purpose. She insisted on declaring that she was accepted of God, and that she enjoyed religion very much. With a knowledge of this fact, I went to see her. I conversed with her sometime, endeavoring to tear her from her delusions, but all in vain; my efforts were entirely unsuccessful; at last I kneeled down and prayed, I will not say with the effectual prayer, but at any rate, the Spirit of the Lord descended, and tore the veil from the wretched woman's heart--and oh! what a wail of agony burst from her lips--so shrill and piercing was it, that it was heard even to the neighbors. And she continued shrieking and shrieking, and her last mortal breath was spent in shrieking a note of bitterest agony. But the most remarkable case of the kind that ever came under my observation, was one which occurred in the city of New York, while I was preaching there. A man by the name of S-----, came into the city, and married a lady who was one of my church members. She persuaded him to accompany her to Church. He appeared to be a serious man, and disposed to listen to the truth, and before long, he was hopefully converted, and from what little I saw of him in inquiry meetings, I thought he appeared very well. I soon lost sight of him, and would occasionally inquire of his wife how he was getting on in spiritual matters. "Well, I don't know," she would say, "he is a very mysterious man--he is so constantly engaged in writing, that I see but little of him, and therefore do not know what to think of his religion." Why, what is he writing? I asked. "Well, I hardly know," said she, "he keeps his papers so closely locked up, that I hardly ever see them, but he says that he is writing a church history." Things ran on in this way for two or three years. The man continued to profess religion, and for ought I knew, his outward walk was consistent with his profession. At last he was taken with consumption, but he did not appear to be at all alarmed, indeed he seemed to be happy at the near approach of death. Finally he inquired of his physician how long he thought he would live, and whether it was probable that he would hold out till a certain day. The physician observing his calm and happy state of mind, did not hesitate to tell him that it was not likely that he would live till the day which he named. The man seemed to be very joyful in view of the fact. He continued apparently to enjoy religion, and as the day of his death drew near, he seemed to grow more and more spiritual. His conversation soon came to savor so much of heaven, that many people visited

him on purpose to enjoy it. He seemed to delight in prayer, and in singing praise to God. By the way, all this time, he was frequently asking whether it was probable that he would live to the day which he had mentioned to his physician. At last the morning of the day arrived, and it was evident that he was just on the eve of death. He called his friends around him, requested them to sing a hymn, bade them good-bye, telling them that he hoped to meet them in heaven, and then died. Now mark, while he was lying there, yet a warm and quivering corpse, the sheriff entered the house with a warrant for his arrest on the charge of forgery. The officer brought with him the most clear and convincing proof that the charge was well founded, indeed it was soon discovered that this very man who had just left earth to go as he hoped to heaven, had been engaged for years in a system of the most daring forgeries, which extended through this country, and even through Europe. As soon as the dreadful fact was announced, the horror stricken wife went to the bed side of her dead husband, and turning down the cloth from his cold and pallid face, she cried out in unutterable anguish of spirit--"You wretch, how could you deceive me in this manner?" Think of that, you who are wives--think of looking on the marble face of your dead husband, and calling him a wretch. This was the most wonderful case of self-delusion that I ever met with, and it taught me this good lesson--to inquire frequently whether my opinions were being formed under the influence of a hard heart.

9. We see why confession always accompanies a true revival. When persons have become really converted, and their hearts have become softened, they are ready to say that they feel that they have done wrong in past time. So too, when professors of religion get their hearts softened, and receive new views of duty, they do not hesitate to make ample confession of past transgressions.

10. No one can be truly revived or converted, without feeling the spirit of confession. The heart is not really softened if the person is not willing to confess frankly all his past sins.

11. The manner of confessing often indicates the state of the heart. How often in my ministry have I wanted to say to people, whom I have heard attempting to vindicate themselves, even while they were pretending to confess, --"Your hearts are not yet softened, they must be hard else you would not attempt in this manner to vindicate yourselves."

12. People are often mistaken as to the real sources of difficulty in religious matters. They lay the blame of it to every one but themselves--they look for the

cause of it everywhere else besides just where they ought to look. If religion is at a stand, they are very apt to look through community and ask, "who is in the way of the work of the Lord?" They forget that this is the question which they should ask--"Is not my heart hard--am I not indulging in wicked practices and feelings, which the hardness of my heart does not permit me to regard as wrong?"

13. It becomes each one to inquire for himself--"Is not my heart hard?" This is the duty of the minister of the gospel. He may see that religion is in a decline in his church, but before he looks around for the cause of the coldness, let him ask himself, "is not my heart hard?" Let professors of religion do this, let each one ask himself, "is not my heart hard?" Now why is it that the precious truths of the gospel do not take a deep hold of you? Why is it that your souls are not all liquid and glowing with the love of Christ? Is it not because your hearts are hard?

Beloved, shall I not ask myself, "is not my heart hard?" and will each of you ask yourself, "is my heart hard?"

[Back to Top](#)

The Eyes Opened to the Law of God- No.'s 1 & 2

Lectures II & III

July 17, 1844

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Ps. 119: 18: "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law."

LECTURE II.

In this discourse I shall show--

I. In what sense the term law is used in the text.

II. The meaning of the request-- "open thou mine eyes."

III. What is implied in making the request.

IV. The consequences of receiving an answer to the request.

V. The condition of an answer to the request.

I. In what sense the term Law is used in the text.

The term "law" is used in various senses in the Bible. Sometimes it means that which was written on the two tables of stone; sometimes the ceremonial law given to Israel by God through Moses; sometimes the five books of Moses in distinction from the books of the prophets and the Psalms, &c.; and sometimes it means the whole revealed will of God. This last is its widest sense, and this I suppose to be the meaning in the text; to wit: the whole Old Testament Scriptures--that is, the whole revealed will of God. The prayer of the Psalmist is as if he had said--Open Thou mine eyes to behold wondrous things in the Bible.

II. The meaning of the request--"Open thou mine eyes."

1. It does not mean create new eyes for me. Nor,
2. Does the Psalmist pray for any physical operation as removing a cataract, or taking away a film from the surface of the eye; for it is not the natural eye with which we see spiritual things. But,
3. The Psalmist does intend to pray for spiritual light. A man may have good eyes, bodily and mental, and yet he will perceive nothing if light be wanting. I suppose the Psalmist to pray for spiritual light, the medium of spiritual vision, by which, supplied by the in-dwelling Spirit, he may apprehend the wondrous things really revealed in the Bible. Many will inquire--What is this spiritual light? I answer, that I cannot tell what it is, any more than I can tell what natural light is. Ask me what natural light is, and I cannot tell. I can tell what philosophers speculate about it, and that is all. I know this, that in its absence I cannot see, and that in its presence I can see. So there is spiritual light. What it is I know not, but that there is such a thing I do know, (and what Christian does not know it?) Every man enlightened by the Spirit of God knows the fact full well. He may be ignorant of its nature of the manner of its operations, as we doubtless are of both natural and spiritual light, but of the fact of the existence of both we may be perfectly sure; and of the existence of spiritual light, he upon whose eyes it has shone, is as certain as any man can be of the existence of the sun

in the heavens. He knows that in its presence he can discern spiritual objects, and that in its absence they are hid from his eyes. Now I say, that the Psalmist in the text, expresses his desire to have spiritual light--his desire for the Spirit to shed his light upon the Bible, without which, he could not see and apprehend the truth of the Bible, and by which, they might be made to stand forth as actual realities to his soul. I pass to show

III. What is implied in the request.

1. It is implied that we possess the faculties requisite for the perception of spiritual objects. The Psalmist prays for no change or new creation, and there needs no change in the nature or organization of our faculties.
2. That our spiritual eyes are useless without light--that they are of no avail till God opens them, or till He supplies the light by which alone we can see--that we shall not and cannot behold the wondrous things in God's law, only as the medium of vision is supplied.
3. That the Psalmist knew very well that there were wonderful things concealed from his spiritual eye in the absence of spiritual light. He knew some of the things contained in the Scriptures doubtless. His eyes had been opened perhaps, and more than once. Indeed, no spiritual man can read the 119 Psalm with any good degree of attention, and not feel that he who wrote it had drunk, and that deeply, into the spirit of God's holy law. Every verse almost, any every verse but two, expresses in some way his love for God's law, the importance of God's law, or the glory of God's law. And the knowledge he already had gained had ravished his heart and made him cry out more earnestly to have his eyes fully opened, that he might be able to see clearly the glories of the Scriptures. The Psalmist had without doubt been enabled to get in some degree, behind the veil of types and shadows of the Old Testament, he had taken a peep beneath the drapery, and had seen Christ revealed and the wonderful things of salvation; he had looked through and beyond the outward types and shadows and the sight had so enraptured his soul, that he prayed with agonizing earnestness and importunity--"Open mine eyes. O Lord open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." The wonders are in the Bible if we could only see them. We might be walking in the midst of the splendors of nature, and see nothing if there were not light. What are the glories of vision to a blind man? He may encircle the globe, go over its mountains and

through its valleys, cross its oceans and its continents, pass among all its beauties and its luxuriance, and yet see nothing. Without eyes they are nothing; or with eyes if there be no light, all is midnight darkness. It is so as to spiritual things. Read the Bible, pass through its paragraphs, go over its pages, and you may after all see nothing of its beauties--like a man traversing a country in a stage-coach at midnight, he can get nothing of its scenery, how picturesque so ever it may be. When men with eyes not opened in the sense of the text read the Bible, they do not see its beauties, do not behold the wondrous things which are nevertheless contained therein, and they should with all earnestness make the prayer of the Psalmist. He prayed because he felt there were things in the law of God which he had never seen.

4. It is implied that we need to know the wonderful things which are spoken of. It is not to be supposed that the Psalmist wished to gratify a vain curiosity. Did he utter this inspired prayer, I ask you, merely from idle curiosity? No. He needed to know, and he felt it; he perishingly needed knowledge, and he cried in view thereof, and not for his own benefit alone, but that he might teach others also, that he might declare the praises of God in the great congregation.

5. It is implied that none but God can open our eyes. The Psalmist knew that a mere knowledge of language, of grammar and philology could avail him nothing. He understood the language of the Scriptures well enough. He did not pray to be taught the language of the Bible, to have the ability to decipher all the philology thereof--he would not pour contempt upon these, but value them in their place. But after all, with all his knowledge of the language, he felt that not any man, not even the wisest, not an angel, could give him the light. No, none but God, none but God by the Spirit which indicted the sacred pages could open his eyes, and hence his prayer to God--"Open Thou mine eyes." It should never be forgotten that the Bible is a mere dead letter except to those to whom the Spirit makes it a personal revelation. Do you understand me? What did the Psalmist pray for? To read the Bible? He could read it. To understand the words? He could define them. To become acquainted with the literature of the Bible? No, he knew all these things well enough. What then? That God would make the Bible a special and personal revelation to him. Not through Moses and the prophets, not by having the Scriptures in his hands, but to him, for himself--

not by giving light to others, but directly to him--by opening his eyes. Lord "open Thou mine eyes." People are mistaken who think that the Bible is a revelation to them in any such sense as to save their souls, except their eyes are opened by the Holy Ghost. The Psalmist himself could not see without this, and he prayed God to supply to him that light, by the aid of which he might apprehend the truths of God's word. He sees the words--he reads the sentences--but what is the meaning? What are the things said? Open my eyes that I may see them. His prayer was to God for he felt that none but God could supply his need. But I hasten to notice,

IV. The consequences of having our eyes opened in the sense of the text.

1. Ourselves will be revealed. We shall see our own portrait drawn in a manner that will convince us instantly that the pencil of the Omniscient has done the work. It will be as if you had been sitting in the blaze of the Omniscient eye. The clearness and exactness will be startling. You will seem never to have seen yourself before, you will be astonished at the fearful fidelity with which every feature will be sketched. Sinner, let your eyes be opened, and you will have another view of yourself altogether. Though it never entered into your heart to sit for your portrait, yet there is drawn every lineament, there you are, your face blazing right out, staring upon you, every feature and lineament blazing from the page of inspiration. Look where you will, there you are--a vile sinner, and you will wish to flee and get away from the horrible picture of your own face.

2. God will be revealed. God and yourself--and this in proportion to the degree of light. If the light be obscure, you will see indistinctly--"men as trees walking"--like moon-light or star-light. In the star-light you can see the fences, the trees, and the houses; in moonlight you can distinguish more; but yet things are not clear. As the sun approaches, as it puts out the stars and makes the moon dim, as it rises more and more till it appears in perfect day, your view grown fuller and clearer till the whole landscape is bathed in a flood of light. God is revealed--Father, Son, and Holy Ghost--but especially the Son, Christ, is revealed. You will find Christ in places without number, in passages where before you never dreamed Christ was to be found. The more I read my Bible and pray the prayer of our text the more am I convinced of the spirituality of those who find Christ revealed every where in the Bible. Once I thought differently. I remember a few

years ago reading Edward's Notes on the Bible, and that I thought him visionary because he found Christ hinted at so often. He saw Christ every where. I saw no such thing. So some writers will find clear proofs of the divinity of Christ, where others can see no reference thereto at all. Now the difficulty with me was, I lacked spiritual light, so that I was unable to see what was really revealed in the Bible. The Jews, the great body of them, could not see Christ in the Jewish law, they did not see the drift and bent of the Scriptures. Why not? They were carnal, sensual, they had not the Spirit. Where persons' eyes are thus opened, they will have revelations of Christ such as to surprise them exceedingly; such a fullness and glory as will astonish them greatly. O what love! And in proportion to the clearness of the light of the Spirit, you will see that the design of the Bible every where, is to reveal Christ directly or indirectly. Christ is the subject, and the end--in history, in prophecy, in poetry, the Old Testament and the New--every where, Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the sum and the substance, the beginning and the end. Let your eyes be opened, and Christ is every where--our righteousness, our wisdom, our sanctification, and our redemption.

3. We shall differ very much in our views from all those whose eyes have not been opened. Impenitent young men, you sympathize with each other, you are alike self-wise and vain, you meet and scoff at religion and religious men, you agree in your notion that all piety is superstition and beneath your notice. But let the Spirit open the eyes of one of your number, and how changed his tone. How he will differ from those with whom he so perfectly agreed but just now in his views of himself and of them, of his works and their works, of his relations to God and of theirs. He can no longer sympathize with them, and join their wicked scoffings--he sees with a strong light, and is astonished at their darkness and his former darkness--he shuns them as the gate of hell. Why? His eyes are opened to behold eternity, and the judgment, and his sins. He sees himself, and them, standing upon the slippery steep, and fiery billows rolling beneath, and he cries out, and flees in terror. All this may be true while he is impenitent. But suppose he is converted; then he differs from them still more. He goes farther and farther and farther from them, and as he progresses in grace, and the light of the Spirit's illumination beams stronger and brighter upon his soul, he presses on to the perfect day, while they remain where they were or plunge into deeper darkness.

This difference in views is true moreover of the different stages of Christian experience. As a man's eyes are opened more and more, he differs more and more from those who are below him; he sees things which they cannot see, and has a clear view of what they see but dimly. His view differs from theirs, as a view in the bright noon-day differs from one at evening twilight. Their experience will differ from his, as the description of a village, or a mountain, or a landscape, seen in the evening, would differ from a description of them as seen under broad day-light. Just as far as we get our eyes open we view the Scriptures differently, as naturally as cause produces its effect. As our light increases, our views must enlarge and expand of course. We must see more and better surely, when we stand with the great sun pouring upon our heads his flood of light, than when in the dim star-light we cast our eyes abroad.

And here let me remark--it is unspeakable folly to stereotype religious opinions, as if men were of course to agree in all their views. A young convert just born into the kingdom, wishes to be admitted into the fold of the Good Shepherd. Well, the whole system of religious doctrine is read over. Do you subscribe to this? the whole of this? And then not a step farther may they go, at the peril of heresy. How strange it is that men should imagine that here can be such a thing as for Christians to be just alike in their views of religious truth. They may be alike as far as they go. They may each be correct, while one may be far in advance of his fellow. And as a new truth comes to view, it always sheds its light over all the rest, and modifies the form in which they appear. And while the Spirit continues to throw its light upon the sacred pages, we may expect to modify and enlarge, and in some degree change our view of truth. How absurd to nail down our system and say--There, never change more. I have heard persons reckon it a virtue that they had never changed their views of truth. But I ask, have such persons prayed the prayer of the Psalmist? Have their eyes been opened?

4. The Bible will become to us a new book. Converts say so, and with truth; but it is not true with them alone. Old men, men who have long known God, are made by their experience to say the same thing. A few years since I was laboring in a revival with an elderly minister, a man sixty years old. I shall never forget how that man would say to me time after time, with deep emotion--"I have a new Bible. How striking the promises are. It seems to me as though I had never read them before. So rich they are, so full, so

precious!" Ah, yes! Nor is this a singular nor an uncommon case. In many, very many instances have persons who have long been Christians, thus found their Bible a new book, and growing fresh and new as it were every day. It has become so precious, so glorious, so sweet, they could, so to speak, devour it, as the hungry soul devours its needful food. In my own case, let me say, beloved, within the last year the Lord has given to me such views of the Bible, that I have found it difficult to realize that I had ever known before any thing thereof at all. Many a time have I cried out, as the light poured upon the truth--"Lord, I never knew this before,"--and I could scarcely for the time believe that I had ever seen the thing at all. I do not mean I had not, for I know I had before seen great beauties in the Bible, but the light was so great that the spots that before seemed bright, were now hidden in the added splendor, as stars are lost in the light of dawn. Whole trains of passages would crowd through my mind with such glory and freshness--passages which I had preached from again and again, would come in review under a light so new and striking, and with a meaning so full, that it would seem as though I had never known anything of them before, and the thoughts would crowd, and roll, and swell like an infinite tide, till it would appear as if I could preach and preach, and never be done preaching from almost any one of them.

5. Persons will be astonished at their former ignorance of the Bible when God opens their eyes. They will see so much that is new where they thought they knew all before, that they will be forced to exclaim in amazement--how could I have passed these things and not see them. I have read the passages a hundred times, why have I not seen these things before? As if a person should pass through a village in the dark, not knowing it was night, but supposing it was day, and then should go through the same village in actual broad day, and see the houses, and streets, and gardens, and wonder (as he would) why he did not see the village before. Without spiritual light, persons fail to see almost every spiritual truth in the Bible. They are like persons in the dark, while yet they say "We see;" and when God does indeed open their eyes, and they really see, they are astonished above measure that they had never seen before.

6. Those whose eyes are opened will see a great multitude of things in the Bible which others do not see, and which they will not believe are there, even though you tell them of their existence therein. Read the Bible under

the illumination of the Spirit, and you will see myriads of things, which if you tell to others, they will smile at you for a crazy man; they will declare no such things are there, and suspect you to be a little beside yourself. Well let them alone. Let them have their say. They cannot see what you have seen, till they stand in the like strong and clear light. Let two persons pass through a place one in the night, and one in the day, and let the one who passed in the dark think that it was day, and that he saw all that was to be seen. Can he convince him? Wait till he goes through in the day-time, and then talk with him.

And here let me remark, as I said a little ago of the doctrine of Christ's divinity, so it is of the doctrine of Entire Sanctification. Once I could not see that doctrine in the Bible, and now I wonder much why I did not, for now I see it every where, almost. It is true with me as a good sister said of herself--when I first heard of the doctrine of Entire Sanctification, I thought it was nowhere in the Bible, but now I see that it is everywhere. I can adopt that language myself. It is not strange however, that persons whose eyes are not opened cannot see that doctrine in the Bible. The Bible, much of it, is so written, and perhaps from the necessity of the case, that the soul must be in a certain state, in order to see at all what was in the mind of the Spirit. "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost," says Paul. That is, no man can see Christ as He is--the Lord of our salvation--but by the light of the Holy Spirit spread upon the sacred page. It is curious to see how many notions and conceits men will have of the meaning of the Bible, or how dull of apprehension they will be, and then how clear it will seem when the Lord has opened their eyes. Before, nothing could convince them, now they need nothing to convince them. If a man should pass this meeting-house, supposing he could see when he could not, you could not convince him of its presence; but let his sight be restored or the light shine upon his eyes, and there needs no more--there it stands before his own eyes. The doctrines of Atonement, of Christ's Divinity, of Sanctification--when the light from heaven bursts upon the page, you need no voice to tell you; all silent, you gaze upon the revealed wonders, as when from the deepest midnight the sun breaks from the darkness and the whole landscape lies before you in an ocean of glories. Now Christian friends, I mean what I say; there is a spiritual illumination, a supplying the spiritual eyes with light, in which light the mind sees with a power of demonstration, like that which attends natural

vision, the spiritual truths revealed in the Bible. Before this light is supplied, the mind may doubt, and reason, and cavil, and deny; but O, when the sun rises and pours forth its glorious blaze, then everything is revealed, every cavil is hushed, every doubt forgotten, and the soul gazes in silent rapture on the wondrous scene.

7. Our views will become a wonder to others, and just in proportion as our eyes are opened. Our views will be reckoned peculiar. Yes indeed, peculiar light will produce peculiar views of course. As far as the Spirit gives us light and we see thereby, our views will be modified, and those who have not the same light, will think them strange, and will wonder at us. How is it, they say, that they find such and such things? We find nothing like that. The Jews think the Christian doctrine blasphemous; they cannot find our Jesus in their Old Testament Messiah. We shall surely be regarded as heretics by those who have not our light. If God gives us light, if the revelations of His word be made to our souls, and especially if we proclaim them to the world, who shall be thought heretics. Let any man push his prayer before God, "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law," and let an answer be granted, and his eyes be really unsealed, and the presbytery will begin to watch him, the whisper will begin to go around, "The brother has a good spirit, but his views are dangerous"--they must have an eye to him, a committee must be appointed, and they must confer with him to rid him of his strange and peculiar views. What is the matter? Nothing, only the Spirit sheds light upon his mind, and he has got a step or two beyond the stereotype form, that is all. He understands the Bible better than before, has a richer insight into the richness of its promises; the Spirit has anointed him for his work--that is all. And if he ventures to say meekly to his fellow-servants, "Brethren, the Lord hath shown me such things in His word," their counsel will be--our brother seems to have a sweet, heavenly spirit, but his views are peculiar and dangerous, and they must be pronounced heterodox, and he be silenced. This has always been so, and men who are led in advance of their fellow Christians, must be content to be suspected of heresy.

8. Those who are enlightened, will be counted mystical. The most spiritual have in all ages been reckoned mystical. There are real mystics to be sure; there are extremes and delusions, and men think they see when they do not; but that does not alter the fact that spiritual men are reckoned mystical by

those who are in the dark. Why? Because the former have spiritual eyes, they have spiritual light, and they see and understand things that are entirely invisible, and a complete mystery to others.

9. Those who are enlightened will be considered deranged by those whose eyes are not opened. Christ was thought to be mad. Festus said to Paul, "Thou art beside thyself, much learning hath made thee mad," you have studied so hard, have gone so deeply into philosophy and theology that you are deranged. Paul indeed answered him most solemnly, "I am not mad most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." But now wherein lay the difference? Paul had met Jesus by the way and had seen a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun, shining round about him. The light of God had fallen upon him, and now people thought him mad--Festus thought him mad. And why should it not be so? It will be so. It will surely be so. When do we judge a man deranged? Suppose a man's eyes should really be opened as Elisha's were, and those of the young man who was with him, and he should behold the angel of God encamped about him, which is in fact true, or like Stephen's, so that he could look into heaven and see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, could behold the realities of the invisible world--would he not be pronounced deranged? Yes indeed. "Put a strait jacket on him--do hear him" they will cry, "he says he sees angels, and chariots, and horses all round him--he sees heaven opened! Blasphemy--away with him--stone him to death!" Why? He tells what he really sees. Let a man but speak out what he sees, and surely he must be deranged. Now men do become deranged--surely they do; they do sometimes become visionary--most certainly; but men's eyes may really be opened too, as Stephen's and Elisha's were, and then others will imagine they are deranged. Those who think so may be honest in their opinion too.

10. Such will almost certainly be persecuted. Why was Paul persecuted? Because his eyes had been opened to see the fullness of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord, and because he was constrained by his love to preach the cross. He had been a persecutor and injurious; he had many friends; but Christ's love had ravished his soul, and he would joyfully pour out his whole being for his Master. And what did he say? Hear him. "As I came nigh to Damascus, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me, and I heard a voice saying unto me--Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" and he went on and finished the story of his conversion. They

bore impatiently with this, but soon he began again--"while I prayed in the temple I was in a trance, and saw [the Lord] saying unto me, make haste and get thee out of Jerusalem," and they could bear it no longer. They gave him audience till this word, and then lifted up their voices and said--"Away with such a fellow from the earth, it is not fit that he should live." And "they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air." And why? Surely Paul was beside himself, and a horrid blasphemer, and to kill him would be to do God service. They persecuted him. Why? He could see and they were blind. And those who are thus blind often will think that they ought to do many things contrary to those who are spiritual, and whom they regard as dangerous fanatics. I am very far from believing that all persecution arises from mere malicious wickedness. Many in high places and in low, oppose and persecute because they are in the dark, and think they see, and they persecute "in all good conscience." They may be, (as indeed they are) wicked for being in the dark, but in the dark, they think their spiritual brethren are mischievous, and must be put down and put out of the church; and think to do God service when they use the excising knife. But are they innocent? With all the light around them which God has proffered and now proffers, are they innocent while they remain in the dark? I think not.

11. The illumination of the Spirit will make us cease from man. We shall cease to expect any such instruction from human lips as shall suffice to qualify us to be useful. Not that God may not use creatures to instruct us in a degree. He does so. But we shall cease to rest in them, and we shall go to God feeling entirely sure that from Him alone cometh our help--that He alone can supply the light by which we are to see the things which lie hid in the Word of God.

12. In proportion to the light we enjoy, we shall find ourselves dwelling in the spiritual instead of the natural world. Let a man see as with open vision, the realities which we all believe to exist in the invisible world, let him apprehend them as we now do the objects of this visible scene, and with which world think you will he be most conversant? With God, heaven, Christ, and the eternal world, or this gross and earthly clod on which we tread? As the mind is opened, it dwells in and communes with the spiritual world, it loses sight of earthly objects--there is a state of mind in which persons can feel the light shining broad and deep upon the soul--God draws

near--the soul withdraws from all the outward senses, and retires into its inner sanctuary--God approaches and comes into the inner-most chamber of the mind, and there is silence, far, far from all the world of sense and sight, the soul communes with the eternal God, and if all the world were to throng around and clamor for a hearing, still the soul, withdrawn far within, would heed them not, but in bliss ecstatic drink draughts of ineffable joy from the presence of infinite love, and God be all in all.

I remember well how once I read with astonishment the account of such men as Xavier, where they would have such communion with God as utterly to drive from them all thoughts of earth, and every object of sense. Xavier, you know, on a certain day, was to have a visit from a prince--the viceroy. He went to his chamber, directing his servant to call him at such a time. When the servant entered his room to call him at the hour, there was his master kneeling on the floor, his eyes upturned, and his face shining like that of an angel, wholly insensible to outward things--the servant dared not disturb him. At the end of an hour he came again, still he was so--again, there he knelt. The servant spoke, no answer--he spoke again, no reply--he shook him and succeeded in awakening him from his trance--"Is the viceroy come?" inquired he, "tell him I have a visit from the King of Kings today, and I cannot leave it"--and he sank back into insensibility, and was shut up in the presence of the Living God. Time was when I could not understand how Paul could be in such a state of mind, that, speaking as an honest man, he could not tell, as he says, whether in the body or out of the body. But now I can see how he could say so. The mind is so absorbed with spiritual views, as to be insensible to natural objects entirely. The senses are all swallowed up, laid aside. The senses you know are but the organs which the mind uses; but she can do without them; she can retire from the touch, the hearing, the sight, and in the deep sanctuary of the soul sit alone with God. And this occurs when the light of the Spirit shines broadly and fully on the mind. Speak to him he does not hear you--touch him, it does not arouse him--he is gone--gone to the spiritual world; and when he returns and his soul comes back to earth, whether I was in the body I could not tell.

You remember a case among ourselves some years ago. A beloved sister--the Spirit came upon her, and she thought she was in heaven; her heart was there, and she thought she was there; she forgot she was in the body, the glories of heaven were around her, and she literally leaped for joy. I heard of a case, I

think it was in the state of New York. It was that of a deacon. He was sitting in the "deacon's seat," facing the congregation; as the minister was preaching, the Holy Ghost fell upon the deacon. He rose up unwittingly, stretched out his hands upward, his face pale and gazing as it were into heaven, and his countenance radiant as an angel's. The assembly were amazed, the Spirit of God ran like fire through the whole congregation, the arrows of conviction flew like lightening, and the whole body were convulsed with emotion, and many were broken down before the Lord.

13. He whose eyes are opened, will be solemn, but it will be a cheerful solemnity. It is related of Xavier, that his cheerfulness was so great, that those who were not familiar with him thought him gay. David, in his joy, danced with all his might before the ark, when he brought it up from the house of Obed-Edom. There will be nothing like levity, but a deep and solemn cheerfulness, such a cheerfulness as we may suppose God to possess--a broad, universal smile; the mind smiles in its deepest being; to the very bottom of the heart, there is one deep, broad smile--as God looks forth over His whole creation with a smiling face--the soul is cheerful, peaceful as an ocean of peace.

LECTURE III.

July 31, 1844

THE EYES OPENED TO THE LAW OF GOD--No. 2

Text.--Ps. 119: 18: "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law."

V. The conditions on which an answer to the request in the text may be expected.

1. We must believe that there are such wondrous things in the Bible, and that God is able and willing to reveal them to us. We must believe in the doctrine of this discourse, to wit, that without divine illumination shed on the Bible by the Spirit, we cannot understand the truths thereof, and that God can so enlighten us as really to make us behold wonderful things, new and before unknown, things hidden from those whom the Spirit does not enlighten, in short, we must believe that the Bible needs to be revealed, that

it is not sufficient that these words be written down, and that we read these sentences, but that there must be a personal application and revelation to us, by the Spirit, in order to get beyond the letter which killeth, unto the Spirit which giveth life.

2. A sense of our great ignorance, and spiritual blindness. No man will make this petition unless he feels that he is exceedingly blind; unless he realizes that he needs the divine illumination, and how great his darkness is, and his ignorance of the spiritual truths of the gospel, he never will have the enlightening of the Spirit.

3. We must strongly desire this divine light. It must be the leading, controlling desire of the mind, our soul must be pressed down with our ignorance, and drawn out in mighty supplications, with strong crying and tears, that God will give us light. The Prophet says, "And ye shall seek me, and find me when ye shall search for me with all your heart." There must be such a longing, the soul so set upon it, as that the soul cries out after God. We need to be much in the state of mind in which blind Bartimeus was, that most affecting case, so graphically described that you seem to see it acted before your eyes. Jesus was passing along with a great multitude around Him, it was all excitement, they came into a village, a blind man sits by the side of the way, where he has often sat before. Bartimeus sits there, as in the East is common to this day—to this day you may see poor creatures blind and lame lying by the way side, half-naked, famishing, dying, and frequently no more notice taken of them than if they were so many beasts—there he sits to beg—he has heard of Jesus of Nazareth, and of his wonderful kindness, and his wonderful cures, and he longs to see Him. Well, Bartimeus hears the noise—he asks, What is it? "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by." He is all on fire—"Jesus, JESUS, thou Son of David have mercy on me." "Hush, hush, be still, don't make such an outcry." He cried the louder, "Jesus, Jesus, O Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." He must be heard, there was a great throng and much noise and he must be heard—he was blind and he must have his sight restored. Jesus could do it and he must gain his ear—he would be heard—when they told him to be quiet he only cried the louder. But Christ heard him. Who is that? A blind man, Lord, nobody but a poor blind beggar. Bring him hither to me. And Bartimeus leaped forth, and they brought him to Jesus. What wilt thou that I

should do unto thee, Lord, that I may receive my sight? And now mark, see the sweet mercy of the Savior, He restored his sight immediately.

Now you must feel as Bartimeus did, you must have the confidence that he had—for see the confidence Bartimeus had, he believed Jesus could heal him, and he wished to afford Him the opportunity. O, if he could but find Him, and when Jesus came that way how he cried out. And so you must feel as to your spiritual sight—that it must be obtained.

4. A willingness to encounter all the consequences. Some of the consequences I have told you already. You must be willing to encounter all the consequences, or you cannot be the subjects of the divine illumination.

5. We must persevere in faith and asking—for we may not be enlightened at first, any more than the Syrophenician woman was answered at first. Many mistakenly suppose that the very first exercise of faith brings, in their fulness, the blessings promised to faith. But not so. The Syrophenician woman must ask again and again. Jacob wrestled all night with the angel even till break of day. God has his reasons for delay, and they are good ones no doubt, and we should not think the answer will surely come instantly, on the exercise of faith, nor because the answer does not come immediately should we think we do not pray in faith, but we must press our suit, and hold on, and cling to the promises.

6. Right motives in asking. Not mere curiosity, but a desire really and truly to glorify God thereby, a desire for the light that we may walk in it, that we may glorify God and hold up the true light in our conduct, by our spirit, our manner, our preaching, our everything. If we have unholy motives in asking it, we shall not obtain the light, we may be well assured.

7. We must search the Scriptures, if we would expect the light of the Spirit poured upon their pages.

8. We must give up those pursuits, that reading, those objects, which divert our attention, and prevent us from giving our whole souls to the Bible. While our minds are drawn off from the Bible by other things, while we are interested in those authors whose spirit is as directly opposite to that of the Bible as heaven is to hell, how can we hope to have the enlightenment of the Spirit? There is a class of writings, which, in their influence, make the

soul totally blind to the glories of the Scriptures&emdash;it cannot receive them in such a state of mind. If you give yourself to search for the spirit of Byron, that spirit will come upon you with little effort on your part. It is so congenial to the heart in its selfishness and passion, it will fall upon you without being prayed for. But the Spirit of God will never enlighten you, never. I believe it to be an unalterable condition of communion with the Spirit, that the mind must be broken off from communion with such corrupt and corrupting authors. You must break loose from them, or you will never enjoy the sweet light of God's Spirit.

9. You must avail yourselves of all the aids within your reach, which will lead you to a right understanding of the Scriptures. I do not mean that a man may not understand the Bible, and have the spiritual illumination in the absence of commentaries and of a knowledge of the original languages; he may get a spiritual acquaintance with the Bible without these, if he give himself thereto with a right spirit, that is, if these helps are out of reach. But if a man can avail himself of the opinions of learned and godly men, he should do so; if he can gain a knowledge of the original tongues, he should do so; if in any other way he can get help from his fellow men, let him do so, remembering meanwhile, that these are by no means indispensable to such a knowledge as is necessary to usefulness and salvation, but very useful in their place, when they can be obtained, and therefore should be used with thanksgiving. If God places you out of reach of all these, then He will enlighten you without their aid, but if they are within your reach, he will not teach you independently of them, those things which are appropriately to be learned from them.

10. It is necessary that we become child-like in our disposition. Now God does not teach, I suppose, by miraculous interposition, properly so called, but when the mind is in a child-like state, the way is open for the Spirit to present the glorious truth, and for the mind naturally to apprehend its deep and transcendent import. The eye then is open, and ready for the light to be shed upon the objects of spiritual vision. But if the mind be committed, if there be a determination to see things just so and no otherwise, we never shall be able to see the truth as it is in Jesus. I pass to make several

REMARKS.

1. I notice the danger there is in preaching some of the spiritual truths of the

Bible. Not that they tend in themselves to produce mischief, but, men being as they are, those truths will by very many, certainly be perverted. This has always been true, and it is true in respect to many doctrines. Justification by faith—salvation by grace—have they not been sadly perverted? Yet they are most precious doctrines. So the doctrine of spiritual illumination. Many will go straight into delusion under such a discourse as I have preached, or make it the occasion of confirming their minds in a previous delusion. Many will seize hold of some one or other of the consequences I have enumerated of spiritual illumination, and finding such a fact in their own case, they will conclude they are surely divinely enlightened. I said that those who are divinely illuminated will differ much in their views from others, that their views will be reckoned peculiar and wonderful, that they will be thought deranged, that they will be persecuted. Now we differ from those about us—we are counted strange and fanatical—they call us crazy or chatter-brained—we are persecuted for our opinions and conduct—therefore we are spiritually enlightened. The doctrines of spiritual religion will certainly be abused—but that is no reason why they should not be preached. They are the food of the saints—the bread of their souls—and shall it be withheld? If others will abuse them, who can help it? They must not be withheld from the true saints who are panting after them, because some will abuse them, and so be lost thereby. It is the less of two evils to preach them for the good of the true saints, though incidental evils result to some, than to withhold them and starve the souls of the faithful and thus curse the world. I have often seen persons confirming themselves in delusion in this way. I know not how many times in reference to this very subject, when I have met with persons laboring under curious delusions, and have expostulated with them, they have quoted my own sermons and writings in support of their fantasies. They will say, you used to preach that men might be taught of God. Yes, I preach the same doctrine now. But because a man may be taught of God, does it follow that you are taught of God in your strange vagaries? Because you may have your eyes opened so as to behold wondrous things out of God's law, is it certain that your wondrous things are contained in the Bible? A certain class of minds will almost surely be deluded, and this most likely to their ruin. To such God says by the prophet, "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks, walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks which ye have kindled. This shall ye have of my hand—ye shall lie down in sorrow."

2. Many persons will be led astray in another direction by this subject. Becoming greatly wrought upon, they get a wrong idea, and seek for immense excitement. You are to seek with all earnestness, but the thing which you are to seek is not feeling, but light, substantial light shed upon the pages of the Bible.

3. Where persons give themselves up to seek states of feeling, and to be carried away by a flood of emotion, it will always react, and create abundant mischief. Men need to be baptized with the Holy Ghost, and if they give themselves to anything else, it may cause much noise and vociferation, but it will never lead them to the state in which they are "light in the Lord."

4. I understand this divine illumination to be a special gift from God—not the gift of miracles—not conversion. The Apostles had it on the day of Pentecost. It is generally included in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is given in different degrees, and at different times. Men need it again and again, and more and more of it. Persons who have been enlightened need still greater illuminations as they go forward.

5. Those whose eyes are not opened are very liable to speak "evil of things which they understand not," and thus wound their own souls and grieve the Spirit of God. It grieves me much to see persons stumbled at things, merely because they are in advance of their experience. I will mention a case. A man, an elder in the Presbyterian church, who had been such for nearly half a century, and who thought all religious excitement fanaticism, was present at a meeting during a revival in a neighboring church. The Spirit of God came down with power. The elder was much disturbed. At the close, a person in the assembly sank down to the earth, overcome with the power of conviction. The elder cried out angrily, "Get thee behind me Satan." Where is that man now? He opposes everything that is good—all reformations, all progress of good, in a most obstinate and self-willed spirit, and is left apparently to his own destruction. Many do not, I know, go so far as this; but it is astonishing to see how men will speak evil of things which they understand not. It will be well for such to read the solemn words of the Apostle Peter. "These as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speaking evil of the things they understand not, and shall utterly perish in their own corruption, and shall receive the reward of their unrighteousness." It is one of the great dangers to which men are exposed, to oppose, and reject, and speak evil of things simply because the things are beyond their own experience. They seem to think they know all that can be known, and

anything else is fanaticism of course. Persons often treat as foolish, and visionary, and childish, and contemptible, the higher states of Christian experience, and only because they themselves have not advanced so far. You should be careful, brethren, lest you speak evil of and reject those very things which you must know if you are ever saved.

6. The spiritual members of the Church have always been persecuted by the body of the church. The Bible will tell you so, and all history declares the same thing. The most spiritual ministers and members have always been misunderstood and persecuted by those who are not spiritual.

7. This should not discourage you from seeking spirituality, nor from being spiritual. And, moreover, spiritual persons will neither be surprised nor offended thereby. They can understand very well why others speak evil and oppose. The spiritual man discerneth all things, but he himself is discerned by no man. The Bible teaches this, and he sees why it is so; he sees why they account him a heretic, and are afraid of him; he sees where they are, but they do not see where he is; he understands their darkness better than they understand his light.

8. The subject accounts for much of the difference of opinion as the meaning of the Bible. There always will be differences of opinion. It is absurd to think that there can be any system of opinions stereo-typed, and believed alike by the young convert and the adult Christian. What, must men have the full knowledge of the Bible when they are first converted? Are men to make no advances in knowledge of divine things? How are stewards to bring from their treasure things new and old? Then, must nothing new be brought forward? O no. You must learn nothing new—must find nothing which is not in the standards. It is to be taken for granted that a thing is wrong of course, if it is not in the standards. It is true, indeed that all will agree in certain doctrines. But it by no means follows that everyone will hold all that is taught in the Bible; neither is it true that men may not be real Christians, and yet be ignorant of many very precious truths taught in the Bible.

9. We all see why so many persons are not deeply interested in the Bible. They have not their eyes opened, have not the divine light shining upon it to make it interesting to them. They are like persons passing a most beautiful region in the dark. They see no beauty, they have no light. Without this light from God, the Bible is a sealed book, and for all spiritual matters of no benefit. And the reading of it for such a purpose, is as dull a work as one can well be engaged in. A man

will read his chapter, and five minutes afterwards he knows nothing of what he read. But with the Spirit, the Bible is a world of wonders; it is a mine of gold, exhaustless; you may dig, and dig, and the deeper you do, only the richer will it become.

10. You may see the reason why ministers, and young men preparing for the ministry are so little interested in making the Bible their study. They lack the divine light that makes it all glorious within, that leads them into the depths of its hidden meaning.

11. Where men possess this divine light, you will never hear them pleading the necessity of reading other books to give the mind proper recreation. If they read other literature at all, it will be not for amusement, but for information. Such a man will not feel bound to read Shakespeare and Scott. He will draw away from them as from an ocean of filth. I may say without extravagance, that to him whose eyes are opened, the Bible will prove a more fertile source of improvement, both moral and intellectual, a more powerful spring of mental action than all other books put together. It opens up a world of thoughts on almost every subject, it starts ten thousand trains; you tread as it were upon enchanted ground, whole masses of thought constantly rising from the bosom of the great ocean of truth; the Psalms, the Prophets, all point you to every part of the universe, the heaven, the earth, and the sea. But without the Spirit, the Bible is bereft of this power.

12. It is true, I believe, that the more of the divine illumination Christians enjoy, the less they read of any thing else than the Bible. Or if they read other things, it is because it will throw light upon, or because the spirit of the works is like the spirit of the blessed Bible. Ask the oldest saint, if he is not tired of his Bible. Tired of my Bible? My Bible? It is more and more my book every year I live. But have you not read it through and through? Yes, but it grows richer and richer every time I go through it. But do you not understand it all? Ah, I learn something continually. I learn more now at a reading than when I first began. Now I know no end to this progression in divine knowledge, for the spiritual mind. The Spirit keeps bringing up without end, new and more exquisite and glorious displays of the things of God's law. The soul drinks and drinks, and drinks again, and the ocean is never exhausted.

13. Spiritual guides whose eyes are not opened are blind leaders of the blind. I do not mean that a man must have all light in order to be a guide at all, a man

may guide as far as he knows the way himself, but without enlightenment he can lead but a little way. A vast many ministers are so blind that they can lead but a little way. Many cannot even bring sinners into the kingdom, they have not knowledge enough of the way to carry a sinner into the kingdom and set him down within the gate. Others can take them through the gate, but can guide them little further. Ministers will labor in their way for years and years, and their church will make little progress or none at all. The reason is, their own eyes are not open, and what they do not know they cannot tell to others.

14. You see the importance that ministers shall insist that God shall open their eyes, to enable them to behold wondrous things out of His law. A young man who is called to preach, may urge that call before the Lord as a valid reason for the illumination of the Spirit, and he is bound to urge his call. O God, hast thou set me a watchman upon Zion's wall, and wilt thou not open my eyes. O, how blind I am! How blind the flock are! How they need enlightenment, my Father open thou mine eyes. A minister ought to press this, and insist on it, and every candidate for the ministry should press it. The Church ought to pray with earnestness that God will open the eyes of their spiritual guides. And every Christian too, ought to pray for enlightenment, that he for himself, may understand the holy word.

15. Many pray to be enlightened who will not fulfill the conditions, who will not give up their own ends, and cast away their prejudices. Of course they remain in the dark.

16. Many mistake and suppose they are enlightened when they are not. They do thus—They desire a certain thing to be true. They take the Bible and endeavor to make it support their loved doctrine, till at length they seem to see its truth written every where. By long labor the doctrine has become coupled by association with a multitude of passages. Now they are enlightened. O yes, it's as clear as day. No, but they are not enlightened. They are much mistaken. Let me give an illustration, a curious case enough. I received a book, not long since, directed to me with all gravity, as if a revelation from heaven itself. The book is the work of some of the people called Shakers, and it claims to be a revelation from God, to the effect that Christ has come the second time, and that in the person of Ann Lee. In that book a great many passages are adduced to maintain the proposition that Christ's second advent must be in the person of a woman! And all this by the teaching of the divine Spirit! Men think they have the witness

of the Holy Ghost to a thing when they have no witness of the Holy Ghost to that thing. Bro. Charles Fitch professed to have the witness of the Spirit that the second advent of Christ with the end of the world would occur in 1843. But he was mistaken, as he also is in respects to the doctrine of the annihilation of the wicked. O brethren, do not mistake the persuasions of a heart set in falsehood, nor the vagaries of a fanatical brain for the teachings of the Holy Ghost.

17. Many persons do not care enough about understanding the Bible, to give themselves to pray for the light of the Spirit. They have no longing to know what is in the Bible. I know what that indifference is, and I know too what it is to cry out from the bottom of my soul, O God, open my eyes. Listen to the Psalmist. As the hart panteth after the water brooks so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God, when shall I come to appear before God! Is there any fanaticism there, my brethren? Look at that figure—the poor, tired hart, its tongue out, panting, leaping, and panting in the desert, and no water. Is there not earnestness there? So interested must you be, your heart panting after God, crying out after Him.

Brethren, there are glorious things in the Bible—wondrous things in God's law—we need the Spirit to open our eyes that we may behold them. To obtain that light we need to pray the prayer of our text—"Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Will you give yourselves to pray and seek the Lord, for the light of his Spirit to shine upon the word, to enlighten our eyes, and make us know God's holy truth?

[Back to Top](#)

Christian Witnesses for God

Lecture IV

August 28, 1844

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Isa. 42:10: "Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord."

In this discourse I shall show:

- I. What is implied in an appeal to witness.*
- II. What is essential to the competency of a witness.*
- III. State some things that affect his credibility.*
- IV. God's cause must depend upon the faithfulness of his witnesses.*
- V. The conditions which make testimony for God available.*

I. What is implied in an appeal to witness.

It is implied,

1. That there is some question at issue, which can be settled by an examination of facts.
2. That the parties, or one of them, will have an appeal to the facts in the case, to settle the question at issue.
3. It implies an appeal to certain persons to establish the facts, as the vouchers thereof. The parties agree to appeal to persons to determine the real facts in the case, which persons are witnesses. Now all this is true with regard to God, and His cause, in this world. He has taken issue with men. The great question is concerning His moral character and government, and He has appealed to witnesses to set forth and establish the facts. His people are those witnesses. He has called them as witnesses and cast His cause, as it were, upon their testimony. The issue is the moral character and government of God, and the appeal is to those who in this world know Him, who are best acquainted with Him, and who are therefore the most competent and credible witnesses.

II. What is essential to the competency of a witness.

But few things are required for competency.

Witnesses must be of suitable age, and have the necessary qualifications to understand the circumstances to which they testify; and they must have been so situated as to speak from personal knowledge of the things which they state, and

not from report or hearsay, or conjecture. These are the principle things which go to make a person a competent witness. So God's witnesses must be able to speak from personal knowledge, it will be of no great account to tell what others know, or what you have heard reported. You must speak if you testify at all, and do any good by your testimony, from actual knowledge; you must state facts which your own eyes have seen, ears have heard, and hands have handled.

III. Mention some things that affect the credibility of a witness.

By credibility is meant the degree of credit to which a witness is entitled. It is very manifest witnesses may differ very much in the degree of credit which should be given to them. Some are entitled to the utmost confidence, and others to little or none at all. And a multitude of things must affect their credibility, must conspire to give them credibility or otherwise.

1. Substantial agreement with each other in the things to which they testify. If witness contradict one another on fundamental questions, they cannot be believed. But observe here, that some witnesses may be able to testify to things of which others can say nothing, and in this sense, there may be much difference in the testimony of different witnesses in the same case. One may speak of things which the other does not know. But this will not invalidate the testimony of either, provided there be no contradiction in their statements. One may see what another did not see; one may be so situated as to learn what another has no opportunity to learn. The fact that one did not see a thing is no proof against the testimony of another who did see it. But there must be no contradictory statements. One witness must not contradict another. If one swears that a man was at New York on a certain day, and at a certain hour, and another swears the same man was at Buffalo on the same day and hour, both cannot be true, and neither can be taken. There must be a mistake because the testimony is contradictory. Moreover,

2. The statement of a witness must be consistent with itself throughout. He must not contradict himself. If his story is contradictory, if it is not consistent throughout, if the parts do not hang together, the witness' credibility is destroyed. There must be, moreover, an agreement with statements made at other times. If at one time, he contradicts what he says at another time, you cannot generally know which is true, and the testimony cannot be received. Or if a witness' testimony is inconsistent with his practice, this in God's cause is fatal to the credibility of the witness. If he

says one thing and does another, it is most fatal to his credibility, since the testimony respects his regard for God and his fellows, and since it is true that actions speak louder than words, it follows that though a man say he loves God, yet if he hate his brother, he is counted, and justly too, a liar. Again--

3. The spirit and bearing of a witness taken as a whole, has much to do with his credibility. Where a witness manifests great prejudice and committal to one side or the other, where a wrong spirit is cherished, where he manifests hate to one party, and interested attachment to the other, where he is uncandid, where he has not investigated the subject, has not been candid and thorough in getting at the facts, in such cases the witness is plainly entitled to little credit.

4. The degree of acquaintance with the matter at issue. If it is clear that he is familiar with the whole subject, that he knows the whole question, and knows it perfectly, where it is manifest that he is qualified from character and position to be a good judge, and that he is perfectly at home in the whole question, he must be reckoned a credible witness in a high degree. A witness must know what he professes to testify. Where it is plain that he does not know, that he is in doubt as to the principle points in dispute, he is entitled to, and will receive in court, very little credit.

IV. The success of every cause decided by testimony must depend on the character of the witnesses and the testimony which they give.

1. This is true of any cause. The case is brought--an appeal is made to facts--who are to establish those facts? The witnesses. If they do so, the cause is gained, if they fail, it is lost. And it is true also of God's cause. What is God's cause, now trying? God is endeavoring to sustain His government over men and bring them to obey Him. This can only be done by subduing their hearts. That can be affected only by the truth--that truth must be presented: and this must be done by witnesses. An appeal must be made to the intelligence, such an appeal as to carry conviction--a course must be taken such as to bring men back to God, and to induce men readily and heartily to submit themselves to God's authority. How is this to be done? In as much as the matter is a subject for investigation and knowledge, and as the facts in the case are the criteria on which it is to turn, and as God has made an appeal to the facts and to men as the witnesses to establish the

facts according to which the issue is to be decided,--as the cause rests thus--the success thereof--the question whether He shall get a verdict in His favor--whether all hearts shall be given to Him or at least, whether the universal judgment of conscience and reason shall turn for Him must depend on the ability and faithfulness of His witnesses. This is no mere speculation; it is a simple matter of fact--God's cause in the court of this world has depended and does depend on His people; the witnesses to whom He has made His appeal. Moreover, the witnesses are God's people and none others. He appeals to no others. He appeals to all His people, makes no exceptions among them, but calls every one to the stand, "ye are My witnesses," stand up before the whole world; arise in the court-room of the universe, give in your testimony on My behalf, testify what you know of Me, of My character, My government, tell what your eyes have seen, and your heart has known concerning Me and My cause. Take the stand and bear witness in this case between God and the world, and let us hear what you know of these great realities.

2. Inasmuch as God has thrown His cause upon an appeal to facts; He Himself perceives the issue depending upon the faithfulness of His witnesses. He has appealed Himself. He Himself has appointed His people to be His witnesses, and He sees His success in the eyes of men depending upon their testimony.

The success of God's moral government is conditional on faith. Faith depends on conviction that the things are true. But how is conviction produced? By evidence. Whence comes evidence? From witnesses. Who are the witnesses? God's real people, and the Holy Spirit giving weight to their testimony. His true children are the only competent witnesses, the only ones qualified to testify. They are of lawful age, and can speak from personal knowledge. They are the best of all witnesses, and the only competent ones. Their testimony will decide the question, and ought to decide it.

V. The conditions of the availability of the testimony of Christians for God.

1. They must have personal knowledge, must be personally acquainted with God, so that they can tell, not what somebody else has said, not what they have heard reported, not what they have been told, that Paul said, that Peter said, that John had heard, that such and such things were thought to be so. They must tell what they know. When they come to the stand, the judge will

ask, are you acquainted with the parties? Do you know any thing of the matter at issue? What do you know of this cause now in this court, pending between God of the one party, and wicked men of the other party? "I have heard"--you begin, "I have been assured by such a one,"--But what do you know? You have heard--Where is he that told you? You have only heard -- Stand aside then. Is there anybody here that knows aught of this question between these two parties? If there be, let him appear and truly give testimony concerning it.

2. Consistency. Consistency of statement among the several witnesses. If one swears to one thing, and another contradicts it, unless God's witnesses agree substantially with each other, all will go to confusion and end in defeat. Consistency too, is requisite in the story of each witness throughout, and consistency of his practice with his testimony. But observe as I said before, one may testify to what others know nothing of, and yet not destroy the validity of the testimony. And moreover it requires a deep, a rich experience of divine things, a high insight into the dealings of God; a deep apprehension of God and His truth and salvation, to testify to some truths of the first importance. Superficial believers are utterly incompetent to testify in regard to some of the higher, in which yet are some of the chief positions needing to be sustained on God's part. Again,

3. Truthfulness is a condition of availability. If the witness is known to misrepresent or pervert or falsify, of what worth is his testimony?

4. The indwelling of God's Spirit, and the revealing of God to the soul by the Spirit, so as to give them personal knowledge of God, is requisite to make persons available witnesses. They can testify to no purpose unless God dwells in them, and they in God, unless so to speak, they live and move and have their being in Him, in such a sense as that they have constant communion with God, are conversing with Him day by day; unless they are thus, they cannot bring such evidence as to bear down upon the unbelief of wicked men, and drive it away from them.

VI. The responsibility of the witnesses.

1. Great interests are at stake. Suppose you are a witness in a case of life and death, suppose that on your single word hangs the life of a fellow-being, you would feel your real responsibility to be great. Think that upon

your testimony is poised the life of a fellow-man, and how greatly would it affect you. How it would make your heart sicken and sink within you. How carefully would you weigh every word and should utter, and consider every sentence. How important that you bear just the true testimony. How great the injury you might inflict on the accused if really innocent on the one hand, or on the public weal, if the accused were really guilty on the other. But advance a step. Suppose the temporal well or ill-being of a whole town was suspended upon your word or conduct. Suppose the lives of a regiment of men were thus pending, and you were called into the presence of the generalissimo, and your testimony would determine their doom, you would approach awe-stricken, all pale and trembling, and would inwardly, and perhaps audibly, groan out, how can I stand under such a weight--bear so heavy a load. O what if by an error of my tongue, the lives of all these should be sacrificed! But farther still--let the life, not temporal, but eternal, of a soul depend upon you--nay farther still, let there be all around you those whose eternal destiny hangs upon your words and deeds, those whose unbelief or faith, whose repentance or prolonged rebellion, whose submission or obstinacy, whose holiness or sin, whose sanctification or permanent purification, or deeper and deeper plunge into filth and pollution, whose everlasting good or endless ill, hangs upon your look, upon your words, your conduct, my friends, let this be the weight laid upon you,--and O, what angel can estimate the immensity of your responsibility, can reckon up the importance of your testimony. An immortal soul is arrested by God's Spirit, and enjoined to swear allegiance to God's throne; he turns to you a professed subject of God's kingdom,--he asks, What sort of a king is God? You have no testimony to bear for your sovereign, your mouth is closed, not a word to say--but only feeble and unintelligible, mumbling, or contradictory statements, and a practice that gives the lie direct to your words. What then? The Advocate is sad, no plea to make, His own witnesses have betrayed Him, His dependence has failed Him, and He is silent and confused. The judge charges the jury, he asks them, Have you agreed upon your verdict? They answer without leaving the jury-box. "We have," Gentlemen, what say you? worthy, or not worthy? And they answer, "Not Worthy." The Infinite God as lost His cause, it has gone by your perfidy, and the opponent makes his way from the court glad by the strength of the verdict, and the failure of the witnesses to stifle the voices disagreeable as they are, in his own breast, that say while they speak at all,

false verdict! Treacherous witnesses! God is worthy! O, man be not deceived! But the case is decided against God, the soul is set, the course is taken, and it ends not till it descends down the sides of the bottomless pit. O, false witness, what hast thou done? Treacherous advocate see thy work! Faithless defender, cursed by thy memory! Soul, witness, beware, you are on the stand, a word, a look, falter, stammer, and it is gone!

2. Not only are great interests at stake--the world's salvation, the glory of the Infinite God among men, the honor and success of His moral government, but it is true, that you may be as fully furnished as you please, as thoroughly qualified to bear witness as you desire. Every facility is afforded, every opportunity is given for acquaintance. God has spread out all the glorious facts in the case for your full and thorough understanding. He has invited you, and He urges you, to search with the utmost diligence--He throws His kingdom open to your eye for the most familiar knowledge--He lets you study, if you will, and gives you ample time and leisure, and all needful aids to examine and learn all the great facts upon the establishment of which His cause is to command a favorable verdict--He urges you to so complete a knowledge, and so deep, so rich and exquisite an experience, in all the parts of truth, in the whole great scheme of practical godliness, that you may stand up in the presence of the court as erect as an angel, and declare as with the tongue of a silver trumpet, from your own knowledge and great experience the wonderful things on which the world's salvation is hung. If you have such advantages, such facilities, such interests at stake, if you have such facilities for securing the requisite knowledge in the case, if you must be reckoned as a witness at any rate, and so much depends on your testimony, I ask you, what should you do? Ah, an angel might tremble under such responsibility.

3. It is impossible for any soul to tell how much may depend upon his own testimony--his own individual witness. When the judgment sits, and all the events of the world, and their causes and effects are spread out and laid open to the eyes of men, what wonders will there be revealed, what stupendous changes will be seen to have hinged, have turned on the agency of each child of God. What wonders will there be revealed! Once more--

4. God Himself feels keenly alive to the result of the investigation. Never did a person commit a cause to witnesses, who was so tremblingly alive to

the issue, as God is in this very question. He is not selfish--does not seek His own ends--no self-gratification moves Him--His work is not to crush and discomfit His opponents, but He is moved by love, He wishes to save His foes, to draw them over, to subdue their wills, and draw them sweetly by the power of the truth to the "wells of salvation." His whole soul is set upon this. And God is tremblingly alive to the progress of the great suit (great to us, and great in its results) now pending between Himself and men, and in which we must testify before angels and men. He is infinitely regardful of His own reputation, because His reputation is necessary to the best good of the universe, and He is infinitely regardful of the interests at stake in the controversy. He engages in the proof with all His heart. How does a man feel when engaged in an important matter, having brought it to trial, and having called His witness to the stand--how alive to every word the witness shall say. And how grieved and indignant will he be, if a principal witness should prove careless, or ill-informed, should be inconsistent, or worse than that, wickedly perverse. Be placed yourself in such a position, the advocate of great interests, and let your witnesses fail you in the hour of trial, how would it affect you! God is really and deeply interested in the trial, He has thrown the cause on an appeal to facts, and sincerely calls on witnesses therefore, and expects of them a full knowledge, and a clear and explicit testimony, and in consequence an honorable verdict in His favor.

REMARKS.

1. The world is now, and always has been stumbled with the contradictory testimony that nominal Christians give, for they intrude their testimony, though God has not called them to testify, and does not wish their witness. He calls His own people, and none others to bear testimony; but multitudes pretend to be God's people, and perhaps sometimes think they are so, and set themselves up, and are reckoned by others as witnesses, who know nothing at all of God, and they bear false witness; for they think they know, and testify as if they do know; and by giving such testimony they overbear the true witnesses, and the minds of the jury and the by-standers are puzzled, and they are at a loss to know what to think, or else the verdict is given against God and religion.

2. The nominal Christians, mere professors, so greatly outnumber God's real people, that their witness in the minds of men generally, glad to get rid of an

unwelcome subject, entirely outweighs that of the true witnesses, and the world taking the mass together say, There is nothing in religion. And if they were right in taking the mass of professors as the witnesses, they would be right in their decision. If the testimony of the great body is to be taken as the true Christian witness, what else can the decision be, what other verdict can be rendered? What in such a case must they say? Just what they do say. But observe, the evil lies herein, not that God loses His cause for lack of evidence, but that those come forward and obtrude themselves upon the stand who never have been summoned, and who know nothing at all of the matter. But I remark,

3. God will reject their testimony in the great court of equity and errors at the day of judgment, and with it both the persons who gave it, and the persons who have been blinded by it and have stumbled over it, and both classes together will be sent off to the eternal prison-house. For God has made no appeal to any such incompetent witnesses. To His true children He has appealed, and no others, and those who attend the trial should observe who are admitted and who are rejected from the stand. It is true indeed, that since multitudes press forward to bear witness, and it is not always decided on the spot who are competent, and who are incompetent, but they are allowed each to tell his story whether to the point or not, whether consistent or otherwise, there is great danger of deception, great danger of being stumbled, but it behooves by-standers to be on their guard, to be most particular whose testimony they receive, for if they carelessly rely on the testimony of a witness whom God does not call, they, and they only are responsible and must bear the consequence of their carelessness. It becomes men to understand well--what indeed they may fully understand if they will--who are true, and who are only pretended, and self-called witnesses. For their salvation hangs on their careful discrimination.

4. As the nominal Christians are a vast majority, the true are suspected of heresy, of fanaticism, of insanity. Those who know God, are so few among the vast many, (for sure "so many can't be wrong,") that their witness is counted false. They are declared not to know, to be presuming, and over-zealous, who are in fact the only ones who do know anything as they ought to know it. It is sad to think how the truth is perverted, and pronounced false, for the hypocrisy and ignorance of professors, and carelessness of sinners.

5. How true this fact is of ministers, that even they are false witnesses of God. O, how many are crying out against the most precious truths of the Gospel, and thus

leading others to doubt their truth and power.

6. The true witnesses themselves have often fallen into gross inconsistencies, and thus destroyed the weight of their own testimony, and greatly weakened the force of the testimony of others. And this is the special aim of the adversary. It is Satan's chosen policy to prevail over the real people of God, and thus to strike away at a blow what they have before done. If he can nullify the true testimony--the witness of those who do know, he is safe enough, for that of others only turns on his own account.

How often have real Christians fallen under powerful temptations, and then the force of their testimony is gone--its value is lost, it will not be believed. They have fallen, and who will credit what they said before? When a person of high religious reputation falls into sin, it emboldens scoffers to excess, and leads multitudes to turn away, and dispirits numbers of real seekers after piety. That's the way it goes--exclaims the scoffing crew. There is nothing real there--say the careless. O my God, he has fallen! Can I hope to succeed? --cries the timid inquirer. What influence does such conduct exert! When there is a traitor among the disciples, what havoc does his defection produce!

7. Many who are, perhaps, or may be supposed to be true witnesses, have very little to say. They seem to have their abode among the first principles of the doctrine of Christ; they have tapered away and dwindled down in religion; they have grown almost none at all--or perhaps grown downwards; they know little more--perhaps no more than at first. The command, "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," has by no means engaged their attention. They do not seem to know what is meant by growing in the knowledge of Christ. Many seem to stop on the threshold--they appear to know next to nothing of Christ by personal experience--they have not grown up into Him, they do not go on and increase, learning first one and then another, and another of Christ's offices and relations. Instead of gaining new knowledge every day--of being able to say, "There, I did not know that; I have learned something about God; I never thought of that before"--instead of learning something here and something there, of growing day by day in experience of the grace of Christ, they do not grow at all, but remain your babes, mere tyros in divine knowledge. And when they are called to testify, they have to say they know very little of the matter. And when a witness know but little of the case, when he stammers and hesitates, the jury get weary of hearing his pother, and the judge will say--"That man know not what

he's talking of. It is not worth while to waste the time in hearing him." How remarkable it is that Christians can say so little from personal acquaintance with God. How exceedingly little they can say. Live with them for years, attend prayer and conference meeting with them for years--and what do you hear them say? Their experience is not more than an inch long--they will tell all they ever knew in ten minutes. Long ago they were converted, now and then they have a conviction, they feel compunction and sorrow for sin, a desire to do better, faint feelings of worship and adoration arise continually. But O, they have never gone within the veil, they have tarried without in the outer courts, and the glorious inner sanctuary, which was opened by the sacrifice of the great Atonement--the sacred Holy of Holies their eyes have never looked upon--those deep and flowing springs which rise beneath the very throne, they never drank of--they never have felt flowing through their enraptured souls, that deep, broad river of peace, which pours its streams through the channels of salvation--their eyes have never been opened to behold the great things of God, and with ever new revelations, brighter and yet brighter still, to sit entranced in joy so that they can tell and tell and never be tired of telling the things which God has done for them, and the beauties which He has showed them. No, alas! their story is soon told--the same oft repeated, mournful tale, alike dishonorable to God and disgraceful to themselves.

There is a great fault in these witnesses. With every facility afforded them to make them able to bear a most impressive testimony for God and His Christ, they neglect them all, and their mouths are shut. Impressive testimony? Hear a Christian, one indeed, one in a high degree, tell his story. See the tears start, see them trickle down the cheek all over the assembly. He will make more impression than 500 unfeeling sermons. His statements, how simple! His faith, how artless! His trust, how child-like! I knew a young man, a sailor, converted on board ship. He had been brought up at sea, and was an infidel; or rather knew nothing of religion. On a voyage to China, in a most remarkable manner, he became convinced of the truth of the Bible. He became very anxious to have a Bible, and at length got one of an old sailor who had one, but cared nothing about it. The Bible was old--he covered it carefully to preserve it choice, and then he read it. But with what emotion! how his bosom swelled! how his tears flowed! It was the word of God; every word of it was true; every promise was sure. How wonderful it appeared to him--he sat and wondered, and read, and wept, and wept, and read; so happy was he, he forgot every thing but God, and

Christ, and his Bible. On their voyage, the ship stopped at a port for supplies. The city was illuminated, it was a perfect blaze of light. As the ship lay at anchor, our sailor walked the deck and looked at the illuminated town, "I was so happy" said he, "with my bible and my God, I could not help exclaiming--I am happier than all of you." He said he did not once think whether he were a Christian, but his soul was all absorbed in love and joy.

After this relation, our sailor told his experience of the faithfulness of God. It appeared to him a small thing indeed that God should answer prayer--nothing remarkable or strange. God has said he would hear His people's cry, and why should He not? He said it seemed no way strange that God should change the wind and give them a favorable breeze in answer to his prayer. He would take his watch on deck, the wind would be contrary, he would pray for a fair wind, and there was never so much as a doubt but God would give him his request. He would kneel to pray, the wind would be blowing on his larboard cheek, and before he arose, often it would turn and come from the starboard. This he would do many a night. "I did not think it strange or wonderful," said he, "I supposed He answered every body's prayer just so. I never thought of doubting His faithfulness and His readiness to answer my prayer." Thus he went on through the voyage, constantly trusting, and praying, and rejoicing, and learning every day a new lesson in the unsearchable riches of the knowledge of Christ. His story, as he told it, ran through the congregation like a stream of electricity. He told a multitude of things, all tending to unfold the simple and child-like faith and joy in Christ which his soul possessed, and which, but for the hearty simplicity, and undeniable sincerity and truthfulness on the very fact of it, would not have been believed. He was full of it; he would come to my room after I became acquainted with him, with a whole budget full which the Lord had taught him of the Bible and his own soul. I wish you could hear his testimony--it was as simple-hearted as a little child's. He did not know what spiritual pride was. He took not the least credit to himself, as though he were anything, or as though God had favored him especially, for he did not know but that every body thought, and felt, and trusted just as he did, and was answered just as he was. Now if Christians could testify as he could, they would exert a power well nigh irresistible--it would be most over-whelming. When he told his story, many things were so remarkable, I went and inquired of a friend who I knew was acquainted with the sailor, (it was the seaman's minister,) concerning the young man. "Ah," said the minister, "he is a true bill, depend upon it." And indeed,

every body could see it was so, and yet it was remarkable, to hear a man relate so much about God from personal experience; for he had not learned it from man I assure you; no indeed, it was not what he had heard another say, but the Lord Himself had, at the opening of the door, come in, and they had sat down to a feast of fat things--to a banquet of love. O it was rich, delightful. I would rather hear him speak, than five hundred merely learned men, who should have no Christian experience. His very looks were preaching, and all he said was preaching of a most excellent kind, for it came direct from a heart overflowing with love, and full of the Spirit of the Lord.

8. There is there and here a most precious witness springing up in the church. God is never wholly without such witnesses. Blessed be His name! once in a while one will arise. And, glory to God! He is multiplying such through the land. Go through and visit the churches, and every now and then you will find a soul full; so heavenly, so Christ-like, so deeply in communion with God--listen to its experience, and you will seem to be fanned by the wings of angels. They are multiplying where the truth has been proclaimed in its fullness, and received in simplicity of heart. Such witnesses are bearing their testimony, and it is taking effect; and though there is much to overcome thereby, it will be overcome, as certainly as truth can affect human minds, and the Spirit can convert them.

9. Many Christians are afraid and ashamed to say much. They have feared to be reminded of their inconsistencies. And indeed it would be so. It is best that such as cannot show a consistent walk, should keep silent. The stiller they keep the better, till they come and walk with God and do His will.

10. The relations that Christians sustain to God and the world, should be with them a most powerful argument in prayer to God. I fear Christians do not enough consider this, that they may come to God and say reverently--O Lord, Thou hast required such and such a thing of me, to testify for Thee, Thou wilt call me as a witness for Thee--now Lord, make me able to testify, let me know Thee, bring me into Thy pavilion and let me be ravished with Thy love. O, teach me the hidden glories of Thy word, that I may be able to speak what I know, to testify what I have seen. Make up your mind, Christian, be single-hearted, and go to God and say--O Lord, I wish to bear emphatic testimony, so that men shall be constrained to believe--urge it on the Lord, and rely on His word, expecting to be heard. This is a most cogent argument at the throne of grace, one that will prevail with God for you.

11. God's witnesses should realize that they are watched on every hand--that they are watched for inconsistencies--that there is a continual endeavor to impeach them as witnesses, to destroy their credibility. And if any thing can be found in the least degree erroneous--that can throw any shadow of doubt over your testimony, it will surely be taken up. Bear this in mind, and take care to live so, and speak so that they shall be compelled to say, however their hearts may writhe under it, that you are in the right.

12. There is nothing so fatal to a party in court, as the failure of its own witnesses through ignorance, or inconsistent testimony, or perfidy. Where a party's own witnesses know nothing of his case, or tell contradictions, or will not tell what they know, how can he maintain his cause? Who shall stand up for him?

13. Since God throws Himself upon our integrity, and uprightness, and candor, we should consider where we are. Consider, God casts His cause on you, Christians, "Ye are My witnesses," "Ye are Hy witnesses." How deeply should you realize your position; how you should be weighed down with the burden of your responsibility--with the importance of knowing all you may know, of testifying all you may testify, of bearing so straight forward and unassailable a testimony as to carry conviction irresistibly to all around you.

14. Christians should remember that they are always under oath. The making a profession is, so to speak, taking an oath for God. They are bearing testimony all the time, are all the time on the stand in court, before the judge, and jury, and bystanders, constantly under the eye of those who are to decide the case. This should be borne in mind. There is no discharge in this suit while life lasts.

15. Professors will of course be considered as witnesses, whether God calls them or not. Your testimony, professor, will be taken, though you be only a false one. How fearful is your position if you have made a profession of religion--the eyes of the world, of God, of all are upon you; your deposition will be written, counted upon, read in court, have its weight in settling the question in the mind of those concerned in the issue. How incalculably important for you to remember who and what you are.

Brethren, do we live, act in such a manner that those around us, by taking knowledge of us, by taking pattern of us, shall get and exhibit a true picture of religion? How solemn a question this is! What a responsibility is assumed by

ministers and young men preparing for the ministry, and by all young people educating for the Christian field! What a cloud of witnesses are here! What testimony might here be given. Are you resolved, young men, young women, that nothing shall be wanting in your testimony, in your life, in your experience, that can be obtained by the utmost diligence on your part? Are you resolved? If you are, how shall we rejoice to lend you all the help possible in effecting your noble purpose, to fit you to go out and proclaim aloud your testimony. But if you are only serving yourself and the devil, if you are seeking your own, and not the things of Christ, how much will your labor and our labor be misapplied. How are we mis-employed in fitting you--for what? For what? To fight against God and good in the world, and then be food for the flames of hell! A church is a cloud of witnesses--this people is a host of witnesses. And if ever a people were looked upon as witnesses, this is the people. Your testimony, whatever it be, is going out through all the land; the church and the world are hearing it; when one of you falls, the tale is told with trumpet-tongue through America, through Europe, in the islands of the sea. The missionaries in the far off isles hear it and mourn, from the rising to the setting sun. O, brethren, how shall we give such a testimony as to be heard till holiness shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea?

[Back to Top](#)

Fearing the Lord and Walking in Darkness

Lecture V

September 11, 1844

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Isa 50:10: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

In discoursing from these words I shall show:

I. What the darkness spoken of in the text is.

II. What sort of fear is here meant, "who feareth the Lord, &c."

III. What is intended by the exhortation "let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

IV. Why persons under the circumstances in the text, should "trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

I. What darkness is here meant.

1. Not the darkness of nature, or of an unconverted state. This is evident from the fact that it is in the text itself spoken of as being consistent with obedience. "Who is he that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant?" Who does this, and yet "walketh in darkness?" It is not therefore a darkness produced by guilt and condemnation.

2. Nor is it the darkness of a state in which the soul is under condemnation and guilt, for the same reason as before. The prophet describes the state as that of obedience. But condemnation can come only from disobedience. It is not therefore a darkness produced by guilt and condemnation.

3. It is not the darkness spoken of by John, in his first epistle (Jn. 1:6.) "If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth." This is the darkness of unbelief, or of an unconverted state--the darkness of sin and disobedience; whereas the darkness which the prophet speaks of is entirely consistent with obedience, and existing at the same time with obedience and the fear of the Lord. But,

4. The darkness in the text does result from the absence of special divine manifestations to the soul. An illustration of the condition described by the prophet may be found in the circumstances of Job, (23:8 and onward). "Behold" says Job, "I go forward, but he is not there; and backward but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand that I cannot see him: but he knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." Observe, Job was in great darkness, he could not comprehend the dealings of God

with him, he was in agony, he was struggling with his calamities; he could not find God to know the reason of the sore trials heaped upon him. Yet his obedience was constant and he held fast his integrity, and his confidence in God. He could declare he had not gone back from his commandment, and that he did esteem the words of his mouth more than his necessary food. He was in a state of obedience and integrity; yet in a state of darkness. There was an absence of the divine manifestation. He was searching after God, feeling after him on every side, looking where he worked, but not divine manifestation was vouchsafed. God hid himself in thick darkness, and Job could not find out his way. Yet Job was holding fast to his integrity and to his confidence. "When he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold," are his words. He was in a state of obedience. Now this same thing often occurs to Christians. They are often in great trials and under powerful temptations. They have, sometimes great inward struggles against temptation, and these are accompanied with great outward difficulties. And providence itself seems to be all against them. All their prospects darken, their way is shut up before them, their sky is covered with clouds, their undertakings fail, and their expectations mock them, and at the same time comes the withdrawal of the light of God's face, which before had shined upon them. They are left in darkness. This apprehension by our minds of the withholding of the special divine manifestation, the absence of divine presence, while we still hold fast to our integrity, is the darkness of the text.

II. What the "fear" of the text is.

It is not a slavish fear, nor a legal fear, for it is accompanied by obedience. But it is a filial fear--a fear to offend and displease God, proceeding from love to him, the fear of love and veneration such as affectionate children have for their beloved parents. That state of mind which good children have toward parents whom they greatly love and venerate, is which they cleave affectionately to obedience, and cannot endure the thought of offending, and bring upon themselves merited displeasure. You know how keenly good children feel the frown of a kind parent. If a cloud gathers upon his countenance, they are agonized, they cannot bear the sight, and must inquire beseechingly, "Dear Father, are you displeased with us?" They have the greatest dread of the displeasure of their parents. So the child of God, fears to offend his heavenly Father--to know above all things to sin against him. This is the "fear" of the text.

III. What is implied in the exhortation--"let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

1. A confidence in the goodness of God, in the goodness of his character. This is not at all strange, is it? You can conceive how such a confidence can consist with the darkness already described. A child might be under the hidings of his father's face, in the absence of his smile, and yet be able to say "I know my father, I know there is some good reason for him to do as he does." And in it all, he might confide in his parent's goodness in general, and kindness towards him in particular.

It is well for the child to be able, when any thing mysterious in his parent's conduct takes place, thus to confide, and if the matter is for the time inexplicable, to be able to say, I have unwavering confidence,--I know he does all things well. Such a trustful spirit will sustain his soul in his obedience, and preserve that love without which obedience is no obedience. If you lose your confidence in the goodness and the holiness of God, your obedience is no longer the obedience of love.

2. An exhortation to confide in the wisdom of God--not only in his benevolence and truthfulness, but in his wisdom also. It is an exhortation to lay hold of the promises, to lay hold of all that is said in the Bible, of his moral character, in application to all cases wherein his conduct is to us unexplained or inexplicable, and to rest assured that in respect to what he does to us in particular, he is good and wise and that even the darkness in which we are left, is among the "all things" that work together for our own good. While we search in vain, and fail to find God--when he hides his way in a great deep, we are to trust his wisdom and love, and expect him to bring us forth at length into the light. "He knoweth the way that I take" says Job. "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

In all that God does, we are to believe that he does it for our good, as he says he does, to feel that what God does is well done, and in all places, even in the midst of the deepest darkness, to repose the soul in unwavering faith in the glorious perfection of his wisdom and power and love. But I come now to show,

IV. Why we should thus trust in the Lord. Why we should acquiesce in all God's dealings, and believe that all is for the best.

1. Because this darkness is designed, on God's part, to develop and strengthen our faith. Observe, the darkness is not that of unbelief and worldly-mindedness, but it is consistent with obedience to God. In all such cases, it is designed by God for our good, we may be sure that it is designed to develop and strengthen our faith and confidence in God. He thereby gives us occasion to try the reality and genuineness of our trust and the firmness of our faith, and occasion to strengthen it by exercise, and unless we believe God, and hold fast our integrity as Job did, and say with him, "Though he slay me yet will I trust in him" we defeat the great end for which these seasons are suffered to come upon us. Job's darkness was of ultimate benefit to him, and glorified God in many ways. After he had gone through the trials, and come out safe, after he had held fast to his assurance of God's love and mercy and goodness and had been confirmed in that assurance by the event, answering fully his expectation--did this not teach him to trust God in the future? Surely he could. Before, he knew God was holy and good, and now he has the additional witness of his own most solemn and protracted experience on the point, to wit, the goodness of the Most High.

2. We should trust thus in darkness, because such confidence is highly honorable to God, more honorable to God than faith in other circumstances. Job's confidence, how honorable to God it was. How confounding to Satan! Satan pretended that Job served God for gain, and insinuated with a malicious impudence that if God should bring adversity upon him, Job would forsake him forthwith. "Doth Job fear God for naught? But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." And after he had failed at first, his malice and hateful suspicion are not yet silenced, he said again, "Touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face." And the Lord let Satan try Job to the utmost of his malice. He let him prove Job to his hearts content. And Satan found out to his confusion, that Job was proof against all his attacks. God let Satan and the universe know most unequivocally that Job's religion did not consist in a selfish love for temporal prosperity, that the root of the matter lay deeper than this in Job, that his piety did not spring from riches, and could flourish not alone in the sun-shine. When Job maintained his integrity under the most dreadful attacks of Satan--the destruction of his worldly possessions, the ultimate death of his children, and last, the excruciating disease with

which his body was smitten; when he stood firm, though his friends turned against him, and denounced him as a wicked hypocrite, when they refused to sympathize with and comfort him; when he held fast, though his own wife urged him to give up his confidence, and, his piety, and gave to him the awful advice, "Curse God and die;" when to this infamous advice, he gave the stern and impassioned rebuke, "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What, shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" when Job thus clung to his trust in God, what a testimony did he give to the goodness and faithfulness of Jehovah! When did Job honor God more than here? When, if I may speak, was God so proud of him? Methinks I hear him say to Satan, "Satan, what do you think of Job now? You said that he was selfish, and that take away his wealth, he would curse me to my face. But now see! You have stripped him of his wealth in a day, have slain his children, smitten him with sore boils from head to foot, and made him a loathing to himself, his friends and even his wife turn against him--and what does he say? 'The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.' This is what he says instead of the curse you predicted." And what does he reply to his wife? Methinks if God ever smiled in complacency, it was then, to hear Job's earnest reply, "Thou talkest as one the foolish women talketh. Shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil?" When persons under outward discouragements or inward trials, plunged into the darkness of a mysteriously afflictive providence, still maintain their integrity, and maintain their confidence in God, how much in so doing, do they honor him! Many seem to suppose that they honor God most when their cup runs over with praise at the revelation of himself to them, when their face glows with the glory of the divine manifestation. This is lovely, indeed, and desirable, and we ought to rejoice when God thus vouchsafes his presence in glorious beauty to the soul. But we do not so highly honor God by such rejoicing as we do when we can say, "Though he slay me yet will I trust in him." When we can say, "I cannot give an account of God's dealings with me. I cannot tell why he afflicts me thus, but this I know, God is infinitely wise and supremely good, and all things, even these light afflictions, and this darkness will work together for my good, and for his glory." When we manifest this trust in God, we do honor to his faithfulness and goodness in a high degree.

3. Unbelief in such circumstances is highly dishonorable to God, and therefore persons when in darkness should trust in the Lord, and stay upon their God. What! Must you have all the time the favoring gales of prosperity fill your canvas, and the gay sun-shine continually dancing on the waves beside your bark? Must you be thus, or will you be taken aback and begin to doubt whether God loves you at all? How dishonorable! Will you persist in judging the Lord by feeble sense, and still refuse to trust him for his grace? How disgraceful is such conduct towards your Almighty Sovereign and friend! But again,

4. Faith in such circumstances is the condition of subsequent divine manifestation. If you will read the Bible through with your eye on this point, I think you will find that faith, in the absence of divine manifestation is every where made the condition of that manifestation. Christ says, "If a man love me he will keep my words, and my Father will love him." Manifestation is conditioned upon obedience and faith in the absence thereof. These manifestations are to be obtained by us through faith in the promises while we are under the hidings of God's face, with no divine manifestation. Once more,

5. That faith is the most valuable, which can trust God with the least divine manifestation. Abraham is called the "father of the faithful." Why? It will be well for us to consider what there was in Abraham's faith that give to him this honorable distinction.

Observe then, that God's manifestations to him were few and far between, only at distant intervals. There is no account of God's appearing to him but a few times in all his life. The fulfillment of the promises was long delayed. God said, "Get thee out from thy country and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee, and I will make of thee a great nation." Abraham departed forthwith and went to Canaan, trusting in the promises of God. He is promised a land, yet he never to the day of his death, inherited a foot of the soil, but was obliged to buy a portion for a burying place for his family. God told him he would make of him a great nation, yet twenty-four years after, he had no child except Ishmael. Where then was the promise? God did not come. But Abraham held fast, he hoped against hope, and believed the naked word of God. By and by, when Abraham was past age, his son was born. And then after that, God

commanded him to give up his son, the child of promise, to sacrifice him, to slay him with his own hand, to offer him a burnt offering upon the mountains. What was this? It is the child upon whose life hangs the truth of God's promise, from him the "great nation" is to arise, and now he is to be slain. God has contradicted his own promise, besides the requirement is surely and absolutely wrong. It was most prodigious, Isaac must die! A human sacrifice!! By the hand of his own father! To the God of mercy, can the thing be? But in the midst of all this darkness, for a strange thing indeed had come, in the midst of this darkness without and darkness within, he held fast, he set out to Mt. Moriah, said nothing to Sarah, this her only son was to be slain, told not his servant, but in the strength of his faith in God, he went on--the stern old man! He built the altar, and laid the wood, and then, he bound Isaac, and stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. No wonder the Lord said, "Now I know that thou fearest God." No wonder God declared to him, "Surely blessing I will bless thee and multiplying I will multiply thee for thou hast obeyed my voice." No wonder Abraham is placed at the head of the whole family of the faithful ones upon the earth. His faith was in the highest degree conspicuous. Consider the little light he had, the nature of the command, and see the touching and dreadful circumstances in which he stood and his faith and obedience are wonderful indeed. Well might Paul say of him, "he staggered not through unbelief." Great grace was upon Abraham.

Take the case of the Syrophenician woman. The circumstances were forbidding. She came and cried, "Have mercy on me O Lord thou Son of David, for my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." But to this Christ answered not a word. He did not deign to notice her it would seem. But she cried still. And then the disciples set in, and begged him to grant her request and send her away because her entreaties were annoying. But to them he says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she is not put off yet, she comes nearer, and still her cry goes up, "Lord help me!" And then he calls her a dog. "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs." But she was not to be shaken, she held on. Truth Lord, I do not ask the bread from the children, but "even the dogs eat the crumbs from their master's table". I ask not the bread but only a crumb. And she got her fill. How honorable to God was this, and how valuable was this her faith, it procured for her the great blessing which she asked. But,

6. Such faith will quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And this is a reason why we should possess it. Satan will try to overthrow our faith. When he finds God withdrawing himself, and wrapping his mantle of darkness about him and retiring into the thick darkness, he will try us with doubts and fears, and forebodings. When he finds our expectations blasted, and our plans crossed, and our comforts stricken down, he will fall into and overthrow our confidence in God's goodness and favor, if he can. But brethren, hold fast to your shield, the shield of faith, and you will quench all his fiery darts.

7. Such faith will procure all needed divine manifestation, all the light will be thrown upon God's dealings with us, that it is well, and best for us to have. There can be no mistake here. Just as much light and love will be manifested as it is best for us on the whole, to have revealed to us. Once more,

8. It is often better for our health both spiritual and bodily, to be left to exercise faith in darkness, than to have copious manifestations for a season, and then have them withdrawn, and thus be subject to an alternate excitement and depression, which would often prostrate the mental and bodily powers, and leave the soul unstrung.

Remarks.

1. The state of mind here described is entirely different from apathy or worldly-mindedness. If persons imagine themselves trusting in God, while they are worldly-minded, they are grossly deceived. This state of faith and trust is as far as possible from that, and where persons are lying in apathy let them not say, they are trusting in God, while walking in darkness, for this faith is always accompanied with obedience.

2. Sometimes a very great darkness, comes over the soul, and this immediately before a great divine manifestation.

One of Abraham's manifestations was preceded by "a horror of great darkness." This is more common than is generally supposed. Before God reveals his face in sun-shine, he is apt to withdraw it, to veil it in a thick cloud, so as to try our faith and bring it into strong exercise, and if in this withdrawment and darkness, our faith is strong and the mind holds on to its confidence we may expect the divine

manifestation to succeed, and to be copious and refreshing to the soul.

3. It is a common but great mistake to suppose that great faith is inconsistent with great present darkness. It is indeed, with the darkness of unbelief, but not with such as Abraham had, and as Job had, and as that in the text. Or to suppose that such darkness is inconsistent with entire sanctification. The darkness of our text does not imply present unbelief, nor departure from God, and they mistake who think that it does. But because of this mistake, inquirers after light and divine manifestation, are charged often with unbelief and disobedience. When a man is under a cloud, and feeling after God, and sets his heart upon finding him, God often for wise reasons, withholds his light from the soul, hides himself, does not manifest himself. The soul prays, and prays, and prays, and in faith too, but God withholds. He is preparing him in the best manner possible, to receive the light, before he gives it. The soul prays, and struggles, and searches, and tries to lay hands upon a promise, but the divine manifestation does not come. If in such a case the individual is told that it is certainly because of unbelief in his soul, that God reveals not his glory, that it must be so, that he is all unbelief and in sin, or God would have come long ago, it will almost surely bring discouragement. How easy thus to put out the light which is leading him, and cause him to give up, and lose the end to which the spirit within him was drawing him, the great and joyful enlargement and manifestation of the divine presence.

4. Many think the darkness spoken of by John, to be all the darkness there is, that all darkness is that of unbelief, and they understand John to say, if we say we are Christ's and walk in darkness, no matter of what kind, we lie. Whereas men may be in a very high exercise of faith, and be in darkness, as they actually are when they cleave to God, as Abraham and Job did in the midst of darkness. I remark once more,

5. They are mistaken who promise instant light upon the exercise of faith. It is common to say, if you will believe, that moment you will have a flood of light poured upon you from God's throne. Now the text implies the contrary. The Bible nowhere, so far as I know, promises constant light to faith. This is a world of trial, and there are innumerable reasons why there should not be constant light and divine manifestation. Again,

6. The text contains the direction that should be given to persons in such cases. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord and obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light, let him trust in the name of the Lord

and stay upon his God." When we cannot see the way that he takes, we are nevertheless to confide in his faithfulness, and rest in the immutability of his wise counsel, as upon a firm rock. Read the chapter and you will see that Isaiah had been led to this experience--into this state of mind, by God's dealings with him, and his people. It is remarkable how God qualifies his servants to speak a word in season, how he leads his children through darkness, and settles their souls upon himself, so that they may be able to "speak a word in season to them who are weary." And here we have the word, the heavenly counsel to administer to all those who thus mourn the hidings of God's face.

7. Many confound faith with divine manifestation and think there is no faith without it. They think they have great faith when the candle of the Lord shines around them, when they stand in the sunlight of the divine glory, so that their faces shine with the reflection of that glory. Now they may have faith, of course they do have faith; but their joy, their spirit of praise and thanksgiving is not to be mistaken for faith. Directly beside the man whose face shines with glory, and who is ready to shout aloud in the excess of joy, whose eye is open, and who can look like Stephen, into heaven, and see God upon his throne and the angels around him, there may be one kneeling, a cloud around him. Feeling after God with a confidence not to be shaken though the heavens thunder and the earth quake; and this second may be no less acceptable to God--nay, he may be more acceptable than the first. When did Job honor God more than when in darkness deep as midnight, in trials without and within, he planted his foot firmly upon God's goodness--"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Never. Once more,

8. Many refuse to walk unless they can walk by sight, in the divine manifestation, constantly. They will not take a single step. They will not trust God out of their sight, and think themselves doing well to insist that God shall not let them walk by faith a single foot, but that all the time the light of his manifestation must encircle them. They believe, when everything, without and within, is light and glory, then they do well; but once withdrawn, and they have no resource but faith, then they will not trust at all. They will exclaim as Jonah did when the gourd was blasted, "I do well to be angry," as if they were not to trust God unless all is light, and God's countenance, all covered with smiles, is visible to them. But such persons are greatly deceived if they imagine they have faith, when, as a matter of fact, they dare not trust God a moment out of their sight.

9. It is not pleasant, but often very useful to walk in such darkness. Was not Job greatly benefited by the scenes through which he passed? What Christian has not been struck with the manner in which God turns for the faithful soul, afflictions into benefits? These seasons of darkness are among the afflictions which are not for the present joyous, but grievous, but which afterwards yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby. Persons in this condition should not be treated harshly, and those who treat them so, who snuff at them and call them to repentance, though they may do it from a good motive, are nevertheless very much mistaken. They may have sinned in doubting his love, but it is by no means certain because they are in darkness, that they have sinned. Such persons are like the bruised reed which must not be broken, and the smoking flax, which must be fanned rather than rudely quenched; they need to be encouraged, to be told that God is doing the best he can for them and for all--that this their darkness is among the "all things" that shall work together for their good if they love God; and instead of telling them, you will have light if you believe, tell them to believe, light or dark. Point them to God's truthfulness, insist upon trust, whatever the appearance is, whatever darkness is without, and whatever trials are within--do so, and you will help them. But denounce them, take it for granted they have fallen into sin, and it may be they will really and sadly backslide, and go away from God for months and months. To do so, is worrying the sheep instead of feeding them. It is setting a cruel dog upon the already jaded creature, instead of urging her to rest safely under the care of the good shepherd, and telling her that he will protect the flock and keep the raging wolves off, that he will gently lead the flock, that he will "gather the lambs in his arm, and gently lead those that are with young," that the weak and the weary are his special care, and that no fear need be indulged in, either of his ability or disposition to keep all right and bring them safe home. His children should be assured that he hears them and will care for their good, though they cannot see him, and that the cloud that has passed over them is only to quicken their faith, and make them honor him, that he may honor them before the universe, for their strong faith in their fierce conflicts.

10. The life of faith in opposition to a life of excitement in manifestations is a calm and steady life, and greatly desirable.

11. God is trying to develop our faith, and confirm it so that nothing that can occur in his providence however inexplicable, can stumble us. He knows the end from the beginning, and he knows that many things happen which will seem

strange, and exceedingly trying. He sees many trials ahead awaiting his people, and he would prepare them for those trials that they may pass them safely. He wishes to make their ship staunch and firm, so that they may weather the storms, and escape the fury of the angry surge. He would give us strength and ballast, so that we may outride the waves, and come safely out from the war of winds and waters.

12. He is the best Christian who can trust the most perfectly in God, in the greatest outward discouragements, and inward withdrawings of God's face. He is the best Christian, and manifests the highest degree of religion in that very hour of trust, amid all possible discouragements and trials. When he can say "I know my God, I can trust him and I will, come what may," his faith is perfect. He is in the state of the highest virtue, that which is most acceptable to God.

13. Manifestations do much to develop the sensibility, and draw out the emotions, and soften and melt the soul, and they do much good if sought and used properly, but when sought as a luxury they do mischief. Faith must be drawn out and strengthened, as well as emotion quickened and deepened, and this can be done most effectually by throwing men where they can do nothing but hang on the naked promise and character of God.

14. Many persons seem unwilling to let God take any other course than to reveal his way continually; they envy those who do thus walk in the light, as though that were the only religious state, the only state in which they can do good, as comprehending the whole of religion in the heart. These ideas should be put away, for they are false and hurtful, and are a great stumbling-block to any church where they gain a foothold, they set a people drifting in one direction, after a thing which is false, they will work a monstrosity Christian character, and will tend strongly to fanaticism. Let a professor of religion run away with one idea, and push it to the last link, and he is verging to a fanatical state of mind. If he is trying to lash his feelings up to the required point, rasping them into strong excitement, creating a whirlwind of emotion, and seeking for a flood of feeling to pour forth continually, he endangers his piety, and jeopardizes the soundness of his faith. There are many stages through which we are to pass. I see a man in the light of God's face--the way of God all visible to him, and rejoicing in his Lord's presence, and I rejoice, for I love to see it. I love to hear him pour out his heart, to see the strong current of emotion flowing from the depths of feeling within, and to see his face shine like the face of an angel. But if I see the same man in

darkness, and hear him say, though God slay me, I will trust in him, I rejoice in that too. Instead of denouncing him as a hypocrite or an unbeliever, I would say, be of good cheer, God speed, you go on; darkness and light shall alternate with your soul--light to develop your sensibility, and darkness to exercise and confirm your faith. Keep your soul in all; they are all needful and beneficial, and in all your darkness, trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon your God. Let us not be deceived by supposing there are not many stages of experience, but rather say, I welcome them all--I love to pass through them all--I will trust under them all. I will not fear, though I pass through the valley of the shadow of death, for thy rod and thy staff, O God, shall support me. Let not Christians be afraid to pass then,--through the gate that unbars its doors, and bids us enter into joy unspeakable and full of glory. Once more,

15. Do not confound apathy and backsliding with that state of mind that trusts God in darkness. They are as much opposites as two states can be. One is a state of obedience, the other of disobedience--one of strong faith, the other of no faith at all--one of great and active love, the other of perfect stupidity and stagnation of soul like a putrid lake. In one, the soul rises above all the gusts and storms of doubt and fear into the calm blue sky of unfaltering trust; in the other, it sinks below both blue sky and howling wind, as into the death damps of the grave. Do not, I beseech you, mistake apathy for trust in God. Beloved, will you trust in God?

[Back to Top](#)

Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

Lecture VI

December 4, 1844

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Mat. 5:3: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

In several of the first verses of this chapter, Christ states the distinctive features

of the Christian character, and affirms the blessedness of those who possess them. The text gives one of them: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

In this discourse I shall show--

I. What it is to be poor in spirit.

II. Why such are blessed.

I. What it is to be poor in spirit.

1. To have a realizing sense of our spiritual state. In this it is implied that we understand our own guilt and helplessness, and realize as a practical fact our own utter emptiness by nature of every thing good, and of any tendency to that which is good. It is one thing to hold this in theory, and another thing to be heartily sensible of the humbling fact. Most professing Christians admit in words that they are in themselves wholly helpless and destitute, but to know and feel as an abiding practical conviction that this is their true spiritual condition how few are able!

2. Being poor in spirit implies that we see in its true light the tendency in us to every thing evil--that we understand that the habitudes of our minds, that our appetites and propensities, that nearly the whole power of the sensibility continually tends to selfishness.

3. A realizing conviction of being shut up to the grace of God for help. I know people hold in theory that salvation is all grace, and suppose themselves not to doubt it; and I know too that very many of those same people do not believe it after all: they do not conceive it so as to realize the fact. Ask them--do you expect to be saved by your own works? and they will say no, to be sure. Are you shut up to the grace of God? Yes. But to hold it as part of your creed, and to realize it as God's truth, are two vastly different things.

4. A conviction that we are shut up to faith in Christ as the only possible way of obtaining help. This too is held in theory, and many suppose themselves to understand it, who yet do not really apprehend it at all. And let me ask, who that has come to a realization of this fact has not been

astonished to see how superficially he once held the truth on this point? Who in such a case has not been shocked to see in how loose and heartless a manner all the truths respecting the importance of man were held by him--to see that his belief was mere theory, without ever so much as reaching the heart at all? To be poor in spirit implies a right sense of the fact that we are shut up to faith in Christ as the only possible way of obtaining help in our helpless condition.

5. A conviction of being shut up to God for faith-- to the sovereign working of God's Holy Spirit, and the sovereign grace of God as manifested through Christ, to produce this faith. Not that it is not our own exercise; it is indeed, and from its nature must be, but we must be sensible that without the Spirit of Christ we shall no more exercise this faith, than we shall get to heaven by our own works of obedience to law. It is one thing to hold this as the doctrine of an orthodox creed, and quite another to feel it in our inmost being.

My own experience speaks strongly here. I was led to contemplate unbelief as a distinct sin, and its infinite guilt and inexcusableness. The question came--do you believe God as you believe men? Do you take His word and trust in His promise as you take the word and trust the promise of men? The answer was unavoidable--no, I do not. I do not trust God's promises as I trust man's promises. Herein was revealed and laid open to me my infinite wickedness, that I would not trust in God's promises and rest in them, even as firmly as I would trust in the word of men. I saw it now clearly. I saw the God-dishonoring, damning (for so I viewed it) the God-dishonoring, damning fact, that while I knew, and confessed, and saw clearly that God would not and could not lie, after all I did not believe fully and with all my heart. I would not take the word of the Mighty God as I would the word of frail and fallible man. And then, being led to perceive my absolute unbelief, I felt notwithstanding, that unless God pleased so to reveal Himself to me, that I could throw my soul upon Him--so to enlighten my mind and draw it to Himself by laying open before my soul His goodness and truth as to induce me to cast myself on Him by faith, I should sink. I felt that unless He would give me faith in Him, I was as certain to be damned as that I existed. Now this is what I mean by being sensible that you are shut up to God for faith. But moreover, we must be willing thus to be shut up to God. We must not merely see the fact, but be willing to be thus. We must see that we are

condemned and that justly, for not being right; and hopeless, helpless in ourselves, shut up to the sovereign love of God to work that which is well pleasing in His sight, and thus shut up to the sovereign grace of God by our voluntary wickedness.

6. A deep and abiding sense of the absolute need we are in of a Savior from our utter wickedness, helpless and just condemnation. The mind must perceive and feel its guilt in such a sense as to be sure that its salvation is out of the question, except Christ shall substitute His death for ours, a ransom for our souls; such a sense of our own vileness as to lay hope out of the question altogether, except through the sacrifice of Christ. O it is easy to say we are helpless and that Christ is our only hope and dependence; it is easy to recite for our creed--"I believe that salvation is through Christ alone and wholly." But how hard is it to see our vileness and guilt--our abominable filthiness, our loathsomeness, and our hopeless condemnation except Christ be applied to our souls in His offices and relations as Redeemer, Savior, Sanctifier, Teacher and King. How hard to know this as we know what we see and hear without eyes and ears.

7. Not only a sense of this dependence upon Christ, and helplessness out of Him is implied, but a willingness to have it so-- a willingness to cleave to Christ in all His offices and relations, a setting aside self, a self-loathing, a self renunciation in all respects, a casting away all hope in ourselves, all dependence upon ourselves, all trust in our own wisdom or righteousness, or our efforts at sanctification, and every thing else which is our own. These things are implied in poverty of spirit in the text. In short it is a correct view of our utterly helpless state, a realizing sense of that fact, and a disposition of soul corresponding to such views.

I come now to show--

II. Why those who are thus poor in spirit are blessed.

1. Because the kingdom of God is within them. The text says, "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." They have already the first elements of the kingdom of God within them.

2. Because flesh and blood has never revealed this to them. Before, they might have had it as mere theory after the flesh, but if they have come to

feel and realize their state in its dreadful aggravations, flesh and blood have not revealed it unto them, but God has uncovered with His own hand the deep vileness of their souls and undertaken their cure.

3. They have already surmounted the greatest difficulty in the way of their salvation. After Christ has provided a feasible method of salvation, so that God can be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus, the greatest difficulty is to make mankind see their need of Christ. It is a great work to make men feel themselves hopeless, to humble them, to tear away their self-dependence and self-righteousness, and the notion of resources in themselves for any thing good. God is constantly engaged in bringing about this result. When a man has come to know himself and to renounce himself in all respects as to dependence and hope, then rely upon it the greatest difficulty is over come, and the chief discipline endured.

4. It is the most painful part too. To slay him, to tear away the last fiber of hope in his own righteousness or efforts after righteousness, and burn in upon his soul a sense of his real abominable wickedness and hopeless ruin in himself--O this costs more trouble and patience and loathing of soul, and anguish of spirit than anything else. How many times must he be infinitely ashamed of himself--so sunk in the lowest pit of shame, as to abhor himself with unutterable loathing! How often be compelled in agony to exclaim--Infinite wretch that I was. How full of pride and of hell I was, and how little I knew it! To be mortified so many times in order to empty him of himself; he must weep, and agonize, and grieve, and despair so often; must undergo a perpetual dying--for it is indeed a perpetual dying, while passing through this process of having himself shown to himself. He sees this sin and that sin, is ashamed here and ashamed there, is mortified at every turn; he dallies with temptation, breaks his resolutions, and falls into shameful sins, and is vexed and angry at himself, and ready as it were to spit in his own face; he stumbles, and plunges, and flounders and falls, till at last all hope vanishes, and the soul lies down, weary and worn out by vain struggles, and gives up in despair. All this is painful enough; but once gone through with, the man begins to understand himself thoroughly, becomes poor in spirit, glad to renounce all self, part with his own righteousness, his own wisdom, his self-dependence, because they are nothing. When he is thus thoroughly crucified the most painful work is done. If he falls from this, then he must do his first work over; but let him keep in this state of mind, continue thus

poor in spirit, and the rocks and breakers are well nigh past.

5. Because he has now come to be prepared for the application of the remedy for his disease. He is in an attitude in which Christ is best pleased to see him. The thing is effected for which Christ has been laboring. Heretofore Christ has been trying to crown Himself upon the mind, but self has been a constant hindrance and this Christ has been belaboring with a continual stroke. Christ would knock and knock, but to use a homely figure, the mind has been brushing up, and brushing up, and putting things to rights like an untidy housekeeper, unwilling to admit Him, and trying to put matters in a little better trim instead of letting Christ in forthwith, and saying--"Lord, thou seest what filth and rubbish are here." He is obliged to knock and keep knocking and to stand without till His head is wet with dew, and His locks are the drops of the night. The sinner is making preparations, and must become exceedingly righteous before he comes to be saved. But when Christ has convinced him of his own utter helplessness and that the more he tries to wash and cleanse his pollution, the more polluted he becomes, and that all he can do is only sinking him deeper into the horrible pit--then, then the soul is ready to receive Christ in all His offices and relations--to receive a whole Christ as presented in the gospel.

6. Because in a sense, such a person has already learned what the remedy is. He has learned to reject himself, and that his dependence must be utterly and forever on another than himself. He has learned how blessed it is to be nothing, to know and do nothing of himself, to be universally dependent upon Christ for every thing--for breath, for grace, for faith, for every thing; to have Christ his "all and in all."

7. Because they learn how blessed it is to trust Christ. They see such fullness in Christ, they do not wish any strength of their own. Their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption are in Christ, and they need and wish for none of their own. Christ is all they need, and they need nothing in themselves. They have them all in Christ, and they are willing and glad to have them in Him.

8. Because they have learned how to be composed in the midst of all kinds of trials. They neither have nor seek any resort in themselves. They know in whom their strength lies, and who is their strong tower. They can depend on Christ for all, and they know He cannot fail them. But let me say,

9. Because they have no self interest. They have seen themselves to be perfectly destitute and worthless. They have no reputation to build up, they have no appetite that must be gratified, no passion that must be catered for, none of these to contend for or hold on to. They are emptied out, and every particle of self value is gone entirely. They labor not for themselves, but for Christ.

10. Because to be poor in spirit is to be rich in faith. Then poor in the proper sense, emptied of dependence upon themselves, then they are rich in faith. But I hasten to conclude with several

REMARKS.

1. It is easy to see what Paul meant when he said "When I am weak, then am I strong." Paul you know had a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him. He was at first very uneasy at it, and he besought the Lord thrice that it might be removed, but Christ told him His grace should be sufficient for him. As if He had said, "I shall not remove that thorn. I gave it to keep you under such a pressure of infirmity that you could never forget your dependence upon me." Paul then gloried in his infirmity. He says he gloried in infirmities and tribulations and persecutions, because they emptied him of himself, and made Christ his strength. They made him know his weakness and his strength. When he was weak in himself, he was strong in Christ. His trials kept alive a sense of his entire dependence, and thus prepared him to do all things through Christ who strengthened him.

2. To be poor in spirit, is to be in a highly spiritual state. Persons are often in a spiritual state without being aware of it. In my intercourse with Christians, I have often been struck with the sad mistake made in respect to what is a spiritual frame. Certain high wrought pleasurable emotions are often regarded as the highest spiritual states; whereas other states, which can exist only under a high degree of the Spirit's influence, are nevertheless not so regarded at all. Is this state, in which a man sees himself all empty and naught, shut up to God's goodness, shut up to God to make him as He shall please, a vessel of wrath or a vessel of mercy--sees how infinitely reasonable it is for God to deal with him thus; that it is just for God to consult wholly His own wisdom, and to consult the creature not at all, and that he lies in the hands of God as clay in the hands of the potter, for God to mold from the filthy lump a vessel of honor or dishonor as

seems good in His sight; when he feels thus, and lies crucified and dead as to the least idea of self-dependence--is this a state of weak and low spirituality? Nay verily. Scarcely can there be a state of higher spiritual exercise than this. This poverty of spirit, total renunciation of self, is far enough from being a carnal state of mind.

3. This state of spiritual poverty is a very healthful state of mind. It is healthful to be laid in the dust, to be emptied, and stripped, and made naked and bare; to be laid in the dust and kept there. It is the only state of mind that is safe. Of a man who is kept in such a state, I have great hopes.

4. Certain forms or stages of this spiritual poverty are very disheartening. Individuals, when Christ reveals to them the depth, as it were bottomlessness, of their misery, and gives no such revelation of Himself, and of His intention to do all for them as to give them a firm hope, feel greatly disheartened. There is such a sinking away from all expectation in themselves, that unless Christ gives them an indication of His love, and opens a medium of communication between Himself and them, a state of great misgiving and anxious suspense will ensue. The mind comes into a state in which it does not rebel, it does not murmur or weary itself except in this; it does not see at the time, its acceptance with God. It feels that God would be just in casting it out, and it lies there with the eye fixed on Christ, and cries, "If God does not take me up, and by His self-moved goodness sanctify and save me, I am lost to all eternity." While there is nothing in the mind upon which it can seize as a present evidence that Christ is his, this self-renunciation and self-emptying will leave the mind in a state of despondency. I do not mean of despair. I hardly know how to express it; the mind is not joyful, nor is it in that agony which is the accompaniment of clear light and desperate resistance; but it is in despondency, in a kind of mourning--and perhaps that is what is meant by the "mourning" in the next verse--"Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted." The mind mourns when thus completely emptied of all self-trust, while yet it has no such hold on Christ as to feel assured of its interest in Him. It mourns for sin, for its own madness; it mourns at the thought of being separated from God, it mourns over its lost condition. It is a state of most perfect mourning. If you have experienced it, you know well the state to which I refer. If you have experienced what it is to be driven out of self, and torn away from self, and crucified to self, before you had faith to lay hold on Christ and feel yourself set upon the rock; if you have every been emptied of self, having no longer any expectation of helping yourself, no

more than of creating a universe, having no more thought or intention of trying to save yourself, or of doing any thing effectual for yourself, than of walking in mid air, or than of stepping upon the boiling waves, (for if you have been in the state, you no more thought of helping yourself than of going a journey to Europe across the Atlantic on foot,) having it well settled in your mind, that you will no more succeed in doing any thing in your salvation, than you would succeed in walking from the top of a house into mid air, if you have been thus, and at the same time the offices and relations of Christ were not so revealed to you as to enable you to avail yourself of them, then you know the mourning which I mean. It is any thing but a worldly sorrow, any thing but an ungodly sorrow. It is a sorrow after a godly sort which worketh life. And remember--a man needs to be thoroughly emptied of self in order to come into the state of mourning above described. Most have so much self reliance, so much complacency in self, and know so little of themselves, that they cannot have this state. It can be produced in no other way than by showing a man his character and nothingness as they really are. But I remark

5. Such seasons as these very commonly precede and are the prelude to great spiritual enlargement. Where you witness great spiritual enlargement, inquire and you will find that in proportion as it is deep and abiding, the season of spiritual poverty was thorough and complete. If the sense of poverty be slight, the enlargement will be so, and the opposite. If the enlargement be great, the man can tell you what none but spiritual minds can tell; such experience as "none but he that feels it knows;" and the things that he will tell you will be any thing but unreasonable. He sees what common eyes never saw. He has found out what all men ought to know, but what few have seen. If his enlargement is abiding, he will have a rich history to give. He may not be communicative, but fish him out, get at the bottom of his heart, and he will drop his eyes and tell you what he found in himself, how he found himself out, how he sank, and kept sinking from one depth to another still lower, till it was like sinking into the bottomless pit itself. He was driven from the last hold upon himself, the last link was broken, and he fell into the arms of Christ and was saved. And O, the salvation! Such a salvation is worth the having! But again,

6. Christ has no pleasure in causing this poverty of spirit only as it is the only way to get Himself before the mind. In no other way than by revealing to us by bitter experience our own weakness and sin, can He make us renounce ourselves and cast our all upon Him: and so He takes this way. And I tell you that no man

can have a more important revelation from God, than this same revelation of self by the Spirit. And no man sees God in Christ, or apprehends Christ as He is for the soul, till he has seen himself--till he sees the old man and the necessity of putting on the new man.

7. These seasons of spiritual poverty are indispensable to holding on to Christ. See a young convert--young converts know little of themselves or of Christ. They run well for a time, but they must be taught more of Christ, and this they can learn only by learning more of themselves. Well, Christ begins the work in a soul. The convert was all joy, but his countenance falls. Poor child! do not scold him. He is sad; he dares hardly indulge a hope. What is the matter? He desponds. You encourage him to trust in Christ and rejoice in Him. But no, that will not serve the turn, that does not remove the load. Christ has undertaken a work with him--has set about revealing him to himself, and the work will cost the poor soul many prayers, and tears, and groans, and searchings and loathings of heart. He prayed before for sanctification and he is astonished out of measure. He receives any thing in the world but sanctification. He prayed for the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, and he verily expected some beatific sight. He thought he should see the heavens opened as Stephen did. But instead of this, what a state! he seems given over to the tender mercies of sin. Every appetite and lust is clamorous as a fiend; his passions get the mastery; he frets, and grieves, and vexes himself, and repents and sins again; he is shocked, ashamed of himself, afraid to look up, is ashamed and confounded. Poor thing! he prayed to be sanctified, and he expected Christ would smile right through the darkness, and light up his soul with unutterable joy. But no! it is all confusion and darkness. He is stumbling, and sliding, and floundering, and plunging headlong into the mire, till his own clothes abhor him, and he is brought to cry--"Lord, O Lord, have mercy on me!" He expected--O what a fairy land! and he finds--what a desert--barren, dark, full of traps, and gins, and pitfalls; as it were the very earth conspiring with all things else, to ruin him. Child be not disheartened; Christ is answering your prayer. Cold professors may discourage you, but be not discouraged; you may weep and groan, but you are going through a necessary process. To know Christ, you must know yourself; to have Christ come in, you must be emptied of yourself. How will He so this for you? If you would but let go of self--if you would but believe all that God says of you, and renounce yourself at first and at once, you might be spared many a fall; but you will not, you will believe only upon experience, and hence that experience Christ makes sure that you shall have to the full. And now,

mark: whoever expects to be sanctified without a full and clear and heart-sickening revelation of his own loathsomeness, without being first shown how much he needs it, is very much mistaken. Till you have learned that, nothing you can do can avail aught; you are not prepared to receive Christ as He is offered in the gospel.

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the

sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE LXXVI).

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE LXXIV).

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE LVIII).

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE III).

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE XXXVIII).

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE III).

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic*

Theology (LECTURE XXXIV).

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII).*

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV).*

End of the 1844 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1845
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Lecture I. [The Sin of Fretfulness](#)
Lecture II. [Governing the Tongue](#)
Lecture III. [Dependence on Christ](#)
Lecture IV. [Weights and Besetting Sins](#)
Lecture V. [Rejoicing in Boastings](#)
Lectures VI. & VII. [The Church Bound to Convert the World- No.'s 1 & 2](#)
Lecture VIII. [Trusting in God's Mercy](#)
Lecture IX. [The Old Man and The New](#)
Lecture X. [Coming Up through Great Tribulation](#)
Lecture XI. [Delighting in the Lord](#)
Lecture XII. [Having a Good Conscience](#)

Lecture XIII. [Relations of Christ to the Believer](#)

Lecture XIV. [The Folly of Refusing to be Saved](#)

Lecture XV. [Seeking the Kingdom of God First](#)

Lecture XVI. [Faith in its Relations to the Love of God](#)

Lecture XVII. [Victory over the World through Faith](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

The Sin of Fretfulness

Lecture I

January 15, 1845

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Ps. 37:1: "Fret not thyself because of evil doers."

Fretfulness is a state of mind the opposite of that meekness and patient endurance which the gospel enjoins on all.

In discoursing from these words, I shall show--

I. Why we should not fret because of evil doers.

II. How to avoid it.

I. Why we should not fret.

1. Because, in fretting at the evil doing of others we do evil ourselves. Many persons seem to think that they do well to fret when others sin: for as much as they think it is meet to manifest holy indignation and zeal for the Lord of Hosts; and would say with Jonah, I do well to be angry. But such persons ought to remember, that in fretting at others for their sins, they are abusing God themselves. And surely this is a good reason why they should

abstain from fretting, if by so doing, they are but adding sin of their own to that of the individual on account of whose sins they fret.

2. Another reason why we should not fret because of evil doers is, that it will do no good. It certainly can do us no good to fret. It cannot benefit him at whom we fret. It does not tend to the glory of God, nor in any way to the advancement of His kingdom. Why then should we fret?

3. The third reason why we should not fret because of evil doers is, that it will only add mischief to mischief. It will do us great evil; it will destroy our own peace; it will break up our communion with God; it will quench the spirit of prayer in our own hearts; it will bring us into condemnation; it will destroy our confidence in God, and destroy our respect for ourselves; it will in every way tend to the injury of our own souls.

Again, it will do great evil to others. It tends greatly to the injury of the one at whom we fret, and but exasperates and tends to make him fret in return. It has no tendency to reform his heart, but rather to aggravate his wickedness.

Again, it tends to the injury of all who witness our fretting. It is a stumbling block to them. And perhaps our fretting is a greater stumbling block to them than the evil doing of those at whom we fret. Fretting at the evil doing of others tends only to mischief. It is dishonorable to God, and a manifest want of confidence in Him. It tends in every way to the injury of His kingdom.

4. If we manifest a sweet and patient spirit towards evil doers, it tends greatly to do them good. It also tends greatly to prevent the harm of their evil doing. If when they do evil we do well, and manifest a Christian spirit, our Christian temper, in some measure at least, is a set off against their evil doing. If they dishonor God by evil doing, and we highly honor Him by the manifestation of a heavenly temper, we do all we can to retrieve the injury done to the kingdom of God by the evil-doer. His evil doing tends to stumble those around him--our well doing in manifesting a heavenly temper tends to the removal of the stumbling block. Bystanders will say, to be sure here is one that has done a great evil, but another has manifested so excellent a spirit in view of it, as on the whole to strengthen my conviction of the necessity and excellence of the religion of Jesus.

5. Another reason why we should not fret is, that the evil doing is suffered

to occur under the providence of infinite wisdom and love. God has chosen not to prevent it, but on the contrary to suffer it rather than to change the administration of His government, in such a manner as to prevent its occurrence. God has looked upon it as the least of two evils; and we ought to consider that no evil is done which could have been wisely prevented. No evil exists under the government of God but what is suffered as the less of two evils. That which daily occurs is permitted in order to prevent greater evil; and on the whole, it was wise and benevolent to suffer that thing to occur rather than to have interfered for its prevention. Why then should we fret about it?

6. Another good reason why we should not fret at evil doing is, because provision is made to overrule it for the glory of God and the highest good of His kingdom. "The wrath of man shall praise Thee, and the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain." All the evil in the universe has been taken into account in the great plan of God for the promotion of the highest good of bring. He saw that in the wisest possible moral system all evil could not be prevented: consequently what He could not wisely prevent He overruled for His own glory. We can easily see in a great many instances, how God does overrule, as a matter of fact, the most flagrant transgressions for the promotion of His glory. Take the conduct of Judas in betraying Christ, and the wickedness of Satan in that affair. These were among the most flagrant transgressions the world ever saw, and yet they were instrumental in laying the cornerstone of man's salvation. God has taken occasion from these transgressions highly to honor Himself and to benefit the universe. Now although we cannot see the particular manner in which God does this in every instance, yet we may rest assured that every sin that ever does occur or ever can occur shall in some way be overruled for the promotion of the glory of God. No thanks to the sinner. He intended no such thing. He is perfectly free and responsible, and deserves to be punished just as much as though there were no overruling providence to bring good out of his intended evil. But the fact that it will be thus overruled, is a substantial reason why we should not fret about it.

7. Another reason is, it is Satan's object to make us fret. He understands very well the injury that we shall receive from it ourselves, and the great evil of fretting to the government of God. He is an enemy to human happiness, and loves to disturb our peace. He loves to stumble others and to

see God dishonored; and understands full well that few things are more hateful in the sight of God and destructive to all good than fretting. It is therefore a prime object with him to promote as much fretfulness as possible. But shall we gratify the devil?

8. Another reason why we should not fret is, that the very evil doing at which we fret, is often allowed in providence, as one of the means of perfecting in us the grace of patience. Mother, did you ever consider that the trying conduct of your children is often designed to perfect the grace of patience in your soul? The Apostle says--"Brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing that the trial of your faith worketh patience: let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." The things at which we are so prone to fret all occur under the government of God, and are all parts of those means which God is using to perfect holiness within us.

9. The evil doing of others affords a good opportunity to glorify God. If in view of the evil doing of others, we manifest a God-like temper, this is highly honorable to God. What can be more lively than for a man under severe trials, to manifest the temper of Christ? When did Christ Himself ever shine more gloriously than under His severest trials? The temper which He manifested, was more glorious to God, and reflected more of the divine beauty of His character, than was manifested perhaps under any other circumstances. So when we are greatly tried with the evil doing of others, God has given us an opportunity of manifesting most of the divine temper to the world around us.

10. It evinces unbelief to fret. If we but realize that the hand of God is concerned directly or indirectly in everything that occurs; if we but firmly believe this, we shall not fret at the occurrences around us. No man who practically believes in the universal providence of God, will fret at the occurrences around him any more than he would fret at God Himself. He will perceive that fretting at these occurrences, is but fretting at God, and that scolding because of this evil doing, is virtually scolding at God. It is certain that God is in some way concerned in everything that occurs. Not so concerned, as to diminish in the least, the blame worthiness of the evil doer; but yet so concerned in it, that in a sense, God has done it. "Is there evil in the city and the Lord hath not done it?" "I make peace, and create evil; I the

Lord do all these things." I know that people very little realize that they are fretting at God Himself, when they are fretting at His providence, yet such is the fact, and but for their unbelief, they would at once perceive it.

11. Fretfulness is an expression of self-will. No man frets at what occurs around him, if his will is swallowed up in the will of God. If a man has a will of his own, and is set on having his own way, he will fret at anything that crosses his path, and opposes his inclinations. But if his will is lost in the will of God, he will recognize the universal providence of God, and having no will of his own, he will sweetly submit to all the Providences around him. He will blame the sinner and justify God, in suffering the evil doing rather than preventing it. He will look on it as something which has been permitted for wise and benevolent reasons, and will consider it highly absurd for him to fret at anything which occurs under the providence of the infinitely wise and benevolent God.

12. It is un-Godlike to fret at evil doers. God never frets, and why should we fret? And yet it concerns Him rather than ourselves, to resent wickedness. If anybody is injured vengeance belongs to Him, and not to us. But if He has good reasons for not fretting at what occurs, surely we need not fret about it. For it concerns Him infinitely more than it does us. When any trial falls in our way, we should always ask ourselves, now what is God's state of mind in view of this thing? Does He get out of patience, and suffer Himself to fret? Who would not be shocked at the idea of God's fretting at anything that occurs? Why then, should we fret?

13. Fretting destroys our own peace. Who does not know that the indulgence of the least fretfulness instantly breaks up the peace of our minds, brings a cloud over our spirits, and throws our souls into darkness? What Christian does not know this by his own experience? It is remarkable how easily our peace is destroyed. The least rising of impatience if indulged but for a moment, brings the spirit into rough waters, stirs up the sediment, and makes it for the time, like the troubled sea.

14. Fretting is also destructive to the peace of others. A fretful man is a great nuisance to all around him. Fretting seems to be contagious. If parents fret at their children, the children are almost certain to fret in return. If husbands fret at their wives, or wives at their husbands, the other is almost certain to fret in return, and thus the peace of a whole household will be

continually destroyed by the wickedness of one fretful member.

15. Fretting grieves the Holy Spirit. He will not live where there is a fretful spirit. We are shocked and grieved if we go to a neighbor's house and find them in a fret. We feel embarrassed and uneasy, and if we find them out of humor, we retire in distress and disgust. And will not the Holy Spirit be grieved away and retire from us, if we suffer ourselves to fret in His presence?

16. It is destructive to our influence to fret. A fretful person can have very little Christian influence in any community. A fretful parent never governs his family well. A fretful minister, a fretful neighbor, in short, anyone that frets, destroys his Christian influence.

The common sense of mankind teaches them that fretting is the opposite of a Christian temper. And no man can have much confidence in the piety of another who is in the habit of indulging fretfulness. Many a professed Christian parent has lost all Christian influence over his own household, by indulging in this sin. Visit any family you please, where the parents, either or both of them are professors, and are in the habit of fretting, and as a general rule, you will find their children unconverted. The family have been stumbled by them, and they remain in their sins.

It destroys man's influence with God, to fret. A fretful professor of religion can never prevail with God in prayer. The whole influence of a man's prayers, and exertions, and labors to convert others, will be lost on them, if he is known by them to indulge in fretfulness.

17. Indulgence in this sin, compels others to abhor us. Scarce anything is more hateful than fretting. And our nature is such, that although we may pity fretful persons, yet we cannot but abhor them. God both pities and abhors them, as He pities and abhors the devil. A mother who frets at her children, is never beloved by them. A fretful father is never loved by his family, but always secretly hated. A fretful husband or wife is never loved by the other party. If a man has a wife who is in the habit of fretting, he will find in time, that he neither respects nor loves her. Although he may be benevolent towards her, yet he cannot regard her with complacent love, but secretly loathes her, on account of her fretful temper. It is just so with the wife. If she has a fretful husband, she may fear him, she may pity him, but

with complacency she cannot love him.

18. Fretting compels others to dread our presence. The presence of a fretful person is always to be dreaded. Scarcely anything is more annoying and loathsome than a fretful spirit. The children always dread the presence of a fretful father or mother, or of a fretful brother or sister; insomuch that if a fretful member of the family is away from home, his return is secretly dreaded.

19. Another reason why we should not fret is, God will take care of the evil doers. The verse immediately following the text, says: "For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb." They are in the hands of God. He will take care so to dispose of them, as to promote His own glory. We need not therefore fret ourselves because of their evil doings.

But again, their evil doing is of but short continuance. The verse just quoted, says: "they shall soon be cut down like the grass." The triumphing of the wicked is short, and his evil doing in this life is but for a moment. God will remove him just as soon as He sees it wise to do so. When He can no longer overrule his wickedness to promote the general good, He will cut him off and put him out of the way. We often wonder why evil doers live so long, and are suffered through so many years to provoke the majesty of God, and to scatter fire-brands, arrows, and death through the world. But we have no reason to wonder at this, for God sees the end from the beginning, and suffers them to live and do evil just so long as He can make their evil conduce in some way to some good, and no longer. And should they live a thousand times as long as they do, and do a thousand times as much mischief as they do, this would be no reason why we should fret, for God will husband the whole matter in a manner promotive of the highest good of beings.

20. Another reason why we should not fret at evil doers, is because they are among the "all things that work together for good to them that fear God." How often can we see that the trials into which we fall, the temptations of Satan, and the wickedness of men around us, are working together on the whole, for our edification and growth in grace. We thus learn many lessons which we could learn in no other way. What Christian has not thanked God for making Satan in many instances so useful to him? Or if Christians have not done this, what Christian has not reason to do it? I can plainly see that

from my greatest trials, I have often learned the most useful lessons of my life. And I have often been led to thank God for all the abuses and temptations of wicked men and devils.

21. Another reason why we should not fret is, the things at which we fret, are not worth fretting about. By this I do not mean that the sins of evil doers are not great and grievous sins, and in themselves greatly to be hated and deplored; but I mean that on the whole, considering the overruling providence of God and all the circumstances of the case, they are not worth fretting about. Did we see the end from the beginning as God sees, we should no doubt see this to be true. If they were worth fretting about, God would fret about them. But if He is perfectly calm and unruffled by them, if He has no good reasons for impatience and fretfulness in view of them, we may rest assured that there is no reason why we should fret at them.

22. The last reason I will mention is , that fretting makes us the very sport of Satan. Indulging fretfulness gives it all the power of habit, and when once the habit of fretting is formed, Satan is almost sure of his prey. He knows full well, that at any time he can seduce us from our steadfastness, and bring us into bondage. And such an enemy is he to our peace, and to our souls, as to take an infernal satisfaction in spending his leisure hours in causing us to fret. He loves to throw us into a tempest of fretfulness, and then tell it in hell, and excite a laugh in the infernal regions, at the fact that we profess religion, and yet are so easily provoked to fretfulness.

II. I come now to show, how to avoid fretfulness.

1. Sink into the will of God. Acknowledge and consider the universal providence of God. And know, that He is working all things after the counsel of His own will. Sink therefore into His will and learn to be sweetly and universally submissive. This is a sure antidote against fretfulness.

2. Have faith in the wisdom and benevolence of the providences of God. Settle down with your whole soul on the truth that everything that does or can occur, occurs under the direct or indirect control of infinite wisdom and benevolence. Let this be settled as an omnipresent truth, stable as the foundations of the universe, that nothing ever did, or ever will occur in the universe of God, that is not suffered, and in some sense brought about by the direction of infinite wisdom and goodness; that all this is perfectly

consistent with the liberty and blame-worthiness of evil doers.

3. Be self-possessed. It is of great importance to cultivate the habit of being calm and self-possessed, under the various trials with which we are surrounded. It is often important not to suffer yourself to speak a word till you have had time to think, and lift up your heart to God in prayer. Sometimes when I have felt it a duty to say something (to a person of an irritable temper) which I feared might induce fretfulness, I have found it useful to preface what I had to say with the request that he would not answer a word, nor speak on the subject, till he had had time for reflection and prayer. In such cases it is observable that persons will seldom fret when they come afterwards to converse upon it. Whereas had they made immediate reply, they would probably have been overcome by their temper.

Christian parents would often find it useful when they have anything to communicate to their children which they know will be a great trial to them, to request them before they make the announcement not at the time to make any reply, and even obtain a promise from them, that until they have had time for reflection and prayer they will not say a word. By being self-possessed I mean that a person should cultivate the habit of considering the reasons why they should not be irritated by circumstances around them.

4. Another excellent antidote against fretting is, duly and habitually consider the aggravation of your own faults. No man frets at the faults of others who duly considers his own. Only be well aware at all times, of what your own character and faults have been, and it will teach you to be very compassionate and considerate with respect to fretting at the faults of others.

5. Reflect much also upon the forbearance of God. I love to consider the infinite calmness of the divine mind, in view of all the provocations which He has to anger. His infinite patience, long-suffering and kindness to evil doers, is what I love to consider. It is of great importance to all Christians to habituate themselves to deep reflection upon the divine character and conduct in this respect.

6. Reflect much on the meekness, forbearance, and long-suffering of Christ.

Nothing is more calculated to prevent or subdue a fretful spirit, than to

inquire how would Christ behave under these circumstances. Under all the abuse which wicked men and devils heaped upon Him, He was never known in the least degree to fret. And how would His apostles have been shocked had they at any time witnessed impatience in Him! And how must they have admired and adored the sweetness of His temper, His meekness and long-suffering in the midst of all His trials; His kind and compassionate treatment of His greatest enemies. And when they heard Him on the cross praying for His murderers, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," how could anything prevent their fretting at evil doers, if the remembrance of this temper in Christ would not do it?

7. Avoid all undue excitement as far as possible.

We are too apt to imagine that religion consists in highly excited emotion and feeling. Whereas it consists altogether in the state of the heart or will. A highly excited state of the sensibility is often a very dangerous state. Cultivate therefore as far as possible a spirit of calmness, if you would avoid fretting. I have always observed in myself and others, that when highly excited even on the subject of religion, the feelings are easily diverted into a wrong channel. God's mind is calm. Christ generally manifested great calmness of mind; and what Christian is there who does not know that when he is most sunk into the will of God, and is most truly religious and consecrated to God, his mind is most like a sea of love, calm like the heart of God. See the Christian on a death bed, lying at the very gate of heaven. See the calmness of the countenance, the mildness of the eye, the sweetness and calmness of the temper, the even balance of the pulse; everything bespeaks a mind full of holy calmness. Cultivate that state of mind, it is a great antidote against fretting.

8. Learn not to look altogether on the dark side of things; consider the virtues as well as the vices of those around you. Dwell on the good and not altogether on the bad qualities of those with whom you associate. It is a dangerous thing for us to dwell too much on the evil doings of those around us. I have often been struck with the tendencies of certain minds, and the results of certain courses of conduct. Many of the Adventists and other come-outers and radicals of the present day, seem to be taken up altogether with considering the great wickedness of the church and of the world; and this has manifestly led them away from God. Great multitudes of them

seem not at all to be aware of it, but as sure as they are ever saved, just so sure must they come to a knowledge of the fact that they have fallen away from God. And if I am not entirely mistaken, the way in which they have fallen, has been by considering so exclusively the wickedness of the world and church, as finally to get into the spirit of anathematizing both. Said a good brother who had been acquainted with one of the principal defenders of the doctrine of Annihilation--"Until I saw him I could not understand how he came to fall into that error, but when I heard him preach I understood it. It was manifest that he had the spirit of annihilation in him. He seemed to see nothing but the dark side of the picture; and the evils that were in the world seemed to engross his thought." Now let me say this is a dangerous and wicked state of mind, and if you would avoid fretting, learn to look on the bright side of the picture, and see the good that is in the world, and learn what God is doing to promote the happiness and holiness of man. Consider the virtues of those around you and whatever is praiseworthy. Understand what Paul says in Phillipians 4:8, "Finally brethren, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if these be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think of these things."

9. Make due allowances for the circumstances, education, &c., of evil doers. Considering the circumstances under which they act, their want of light, and many other things oftentimes greatly moderate the tendencies of their conduct to make us fret.

10. Remember that it is God and not you against whom sin is committed. The government of the universe is not committed to you. The kingdom is the Lord's--all things are His. He has made all things for Himself--even the wicked for the day of evil; and you need not by any means take on yourself the responsibility of managing His affairs, nor suffer yourselves to fret because things do not go as you would have them. He will take care to secure the ends of His own government, without your getting into a passion about it.

11. Don't suffer yourselves to dwell much in thought on the evil doings of those around you. If you are abused don't dwell on it. Pray for the evil doer and dismiss it from your thoughts, lest it be to you too great a temptation.

12. Pray for evil doers. You never can fret at a man for whom you are

sincerely and earnestly praying. Fretting at an evil doer and earnestly praying for him, are things inconsistent with each other.

13. Labor to save their souls, and cultivate compassion toward them. If you are deeply engaged in pulling them out of the fire, if you are exercised with great love and compassion for their souls, you will not be apt to fret at them.

14. Beware of trusting to mere resolutions made in your own strength, that you will not fret. Such resolutions are as good as air. They promise much in the absence of temptation, but are of no value at all in the time of trial.

15. Reflect on the wickedness of fretting at evil doers. Consider how absurd and wicked it is for you to add sin to sin. How ridiculous it is because another sins, for you to get mad about it, and thus perhaps commit a sin of a more aggravated character than that about which you fret.

16. Realize the uselessness of fretting. Do but consider that it is of no use at all for you to fret.

17. Also consider the great evil of it. It is only making matters worse; for what will those around you say? This surely: "One man has committed an evil and others are fretting about it." And thus the last evil is worse than the first.

18. Consider what an excellent opportunity it affords you of honoring God. Consider that the greater the provocation the more highly may you honor God by manifesting a right spirit. This is what God does. The more provoking the conduct of His enemies is, by so much the more does He take occasion to honor Himself by the exhibition of a proper spirit in view of it. If their sin is great, His patience and forbearance are shown to be equal to the trial, and remain calm. Now consider that when evil doers do the worst they can, it afford you the most excellent opportunity of exhibiting the spirit and temper of Christ. If you do so, you will honor God more highly by how much the more provoking and outrageous is the conduct of evil doers. If you will take this view of the subject, surely you will not fret, but rather praise the Lord for these opportunities to glorify His name.

19. Consider the comparative lightness of your trials after all--what they amount to when compared with the trials which Christ, and the Apostles

and martyrs have had. Their admirable spirit under these trials, was the most convincing argument that could be used in favor of the religion of Christ. Now what are your trials compared with theirs?

20. Labor to improve these trials to the glory of God. As I have just said, they afford you an excellent opportunity for doing so. Now make up your mind that by the strength of God and by His grace, you will improve these occasions to His glory.

21. Labor and pray for such a development of the sensibility, such calmness, meekness and quietness of spirit as shall enable you on all occasions to possess your soul in patience.

22. Consider the declared design of these trials. The bible everywhere represents them as designed for the trial of our faith. Understand that here you are in a school of discipline, preparing for scenes of usefulness in another world. And understand, that although you may not now see the wisdom of those dispensations which try you, yet when you come to be removed to those spheres of influence and usefulness, for which you are preparing, you will perceive the perfect wisdom of God in making you pass through these fiery trials. God does nothing in vain. All these things are parts of the necessary discipline through which we must pass. This world is a great school, and every servant of God must take his degree. He cannot be discharged from these conflicts until by them he is prepared for glory.

23. Learn with the Psalmist to set the Lord always before you. Persons are very apt to fret at little things when they would not at great events, because in the less they see not, while in the greater they do see the providence of God. Learn then to let this be an omnipresent consideration, that in all things, great and small, the hand of God is present. Set Him always before you, and let your mind be filled with the idea, that in everything that occurs, in some sense God is present.

24. Lastly, learn to appropriate the grace of Christ to the complete suppression of this sin of fretfulness. The providences that develop the spirit of fretfulness, are designed to show us our weakness and the need of the grace of Christ to perfect the grace of patience in us. That which you need therefore, is to learn to lay hold on Christ in such a sense as to be kept from the commission of this sin. The Apostle said--let us draw near to a

throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Now grace is designed to help against the commission of sin. As, under the providences of God, one of our weaknesses and defects of character is developed after another, we should from time to time apply to Christ, and believe for the entire overcoming of the temptation and defect.

REMARKS.

1. Certain persons are constitutionally much exposed to the commission of this sin.

(1.) Those who have large development of order are exceedingly liable to fret, when brought into contact, or when intimately associated with those of an opposite development. Here is a man who has order large; he has a place for everything, and everything in its place. He can arise at night and put his hand on any book or tool that he wants to use. Now if he is associated in business with those around him who are of an opposite tendency, who have a place for nothing, and nothing in its place, it will be a grievous trial to him. If such an one has a wife of an opposite tendency from his own, whose kitchen looks like bedlam, and whose house, from the garret to the cellar, is in a state of disorder, he must have great grace, or he will live in a continual fret. There is a woman, whose development of order is large; her person and her house are but exhibitions of the perfection of order. Her meals are ready at a certain hour and moment. She has a time and place for everything, and everything is at the proper time, and in its proper place. Now suppose her husband throws off his dirty boots, and leaves them in the middle of the floor; he spits all over her carpet; throws his dirty clothes all about; wipes his dirty feet on her andirons, and does everything else under the law of disorder. Now, unless he can be reclaimed, and taught a different course of conduct, she might almost as well live with the devil as with him. He leaves the doors open, and everything is out of place, so far as his influence extends. His children have his tendencies of mind. The help in the kitchen are influenced by his example; and thus the poor woman is thrown on the rack, and is tried from morning till night. It is very difficult for such persons to live together, and yet the providence of God has brought them together, and afforded them a good opportunity of manifesting in these relations, the spirit and temper of Christ; the one to exercise patience, and the other to mend his ways.

(2.) Those who have a strong sense of right and wrong, if thrown into the

society of those who have but little sense of right and wrong, are strongly tempted to impatience. They are often amazed, and grieved, and disgusted with the want of principle, the loose morality, the want of conscientiousness and justice of those around them. They feel their indignation enkindled, and sometimes are strongly tempted to rebuke them in a manner and spirit that would do more hurt than good.

(3.) Dyspeptics are very much disposed to the commission of this sin. An acid stomach naturally tends to an acidity of mind, and where persons have weak digestive organs, they need much grace to keep them from fretting.

(4.) Nervous persons have also strong tendencies to fretfulness. Persons also of a bilious temperament. You see a person of a sallow countenance: and manifestly bilious tendencies, be careful in all your intercourse with him. He cannot in general endure, what others may, without fretting. In all your treatment of such an one, be kind and considerate, be compassionate and forbearing, else you will tempt him to sin against God in this respect.

(5.) An unsubdued will greatly exposes a person to the sin of fretfulness. When the will has not been subdued in childhood or youth, persons are extremely apt before they are aware to get into a passion if their will is crossed. They are impatient whenever they cannot have their own way in anything and everything.

(6.) A largely developed sensibility, exposes one to temptation in this respect. Those persons whose feelings are deep and quick on every subject, need to be much on their guard, lest when suddenly assailed with temptation, they should fret. There is a great difference among persons in this respect. Some persons are constitutionally much more mild and amiable than others. Some are constitutionally disposed to take almost everything easily, while others have naturally a quick, irascible temper. Their resentments are naturally quick and strong. This class of persons need peculiar grace, or they will frequently dishonor God by the indulgence of an evil temper.

2. I remark again, it is of the greatest importance to guard against fretfulness as a habit. Some persons have indulged in it until they really deserve to be indicted as common scolds. They really are a nuisance in community. I know a man who was a professor of religion, yet so much had he given way to this tendency to fretfulness, that he would sometimes break out into such a passion as really to

curse and swear. Such a professor of religion is a deep disgrace to the cause he professes to love.

3. I remark again, that those of an irritable temper, often fail, on account of striving to overcome this propensity by mere legal efforts, by the force of their resolutions, prayers, and watchfulness, instead of committing themselves in this respect, to the keeping of Christ. Christ is your keeper. You will never keep yourselves. Unless you commit yourselves to Christ to be kept from the commission of this sin, all our resolutions will be of no avail. You will fall as often as you are tempted, until you will be disheartened.

4. This leads me to remark again, that many persons have fallen into great discouragements with respect to the possibility of ever overcoming the temptation. They have prayed against it, they have fought, and watched, and resolved, and wept, and agonized, and tried and fallen, and resolved again, and so often have their prayers been repeated without avail, that they have sunk down in discouragement. Now let me say to such persons, when you have used all your own stock and exhausted your own strength, till you are worn out with attempts to keep yourselves, I hope you will learn to trust in Christ. Christ will keep you, if you will let Him, if you will not push Him back, and undertake to keep yourselves. You may not be conscious of doing this, but be assured you do not appropriate the grace of Christ, nor really consent to give yourself up to be kept by Him, or He would keep you.

5. Again, God in His providence is continually developing the weakness and imperfection of His people, that they may see their need of one mightier than themselves to save them. Do not then be discouraged, when by His providence He tries you, and develops your need of a Savior. But learn to lay hold of and appropriate the grace which is provided as your remedy.

6. Lastly, I love to reflect on the fact that God's plan embraces all events, that His plan is perfect, that He will do all His pleasure; that He can do all His pleasure, that the wrath of man shall praise Him, and the remainder of wrath He will restrain. That therefore we need not make ourselves wretched and unhappy, and vex our souls on account of anything that occurs in the universe, but compose our minds in view of it all, as God composes His; concern ourselves to do our own duty, and not suffer ourselves to fret about the conduct of others. Let us try to reform them, and try to do them good, pity and pray for them, but by no means suffer their evil doing to cause us to do evil, and to dishonor God. Always

remembering not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good.

[Back to Top](#)

Governing the Tongue

Lecture II

January 29, 1845

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--James 1:26: "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."

In remarking upon these words, I will notice:

I. The rule by which the tongue is to be governed.

II. The conditions upon which it is to be governed.

III. Show that where the tongue is not governed, there is and can be no true religion.

I notice--

I. The rule by which the tongue is to be governed.

1. The rule is that of perfect, disinterested, and universal benevolence or love. This is the unalterable law of right. Whatever responsible act of a moral agent is not conformed to this, is wrong; whatever is conformed to this, is right. Love, or benevolence is the fulfilling of the law. This is the one and only rule to which all responsible actions of all moral beings are always and universally to be conformed. This is the rule by which the tongue is to be governed. The tongue is directly and by a law of necessity governed by the heart or will. It cannot move unless moved by the will. It cannot be either good or bad without the will's consent and impulse. No other power can govern it, nor can any other power prevent its being used

in conformity with the action of the will.

2. The same rule stated in other language is, that of entire consecration to God and the good of being. This is only good willing or benevolence expressed in other language. Entire consecration to God and to the good of being, is an act or state of the will. It is the will in the attitude of devoting, consecrating, offering up the whole being to the promotion of universal good. Entire consecration is the rule by which the tongue is to be governed. It should be consecrated by the heart to the glory of God and the good of being, and used for no other purpose whatever.

3. The Scriptures recognize this truth. "But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." Idle words in the sense of this text are useless words, words not spoken to edification, nor with a design to glorify God and benefit man. Some commentators over-looking the rule by which the tongue is to be governed, have supposed by idle words in this passage, are meant slanderous, or false, or censorious, or bitter words. But the language is plain, and should be understood in its plain natural sense; for then and only then does it come up to the manifest rule by which the tongue is to be governed. That the tongue is to be governed by the rule of universal love, or entire consecration to God, none can rationally doubt. All words then spoken for any other end than to promote the good of being are idle words, and are sin against God. To bridle the tongue then is to so check and rein it in, and control it, as that its use shall be wholly conformed to the law of God.

II. The conditions upon which it may be governed.

1. The first condition indispensable to the government of the tongue in accordance with the rule as above stated, is perfect love in the heart, or in other words, that the will should be in a benevolent attitude--that the glory of God and the good of being should be its supreme aim, design, or choice. I have said that the tongue is governed by the will, by a law of necessity. The will is free, but the tongue is not free. It is connected by a physical or necessary law, with the action of the will. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth not only does but must speak, if it speaks at all. All our physical powers so far as they are directly under our control at all, are connected with the action of the will, by a law of necessity. At the bidding of the will

they move, or cease to move. Now where there is perfect benevolence of heart, no power that is under the control of the will can be used in any other than a benevolent manner. When the heart is in the attitude of supreme, disinterested benevolence, the tongue is used and cannot but be used for the glory of God and the good of being. But if this be not the state of the heart, the tongue cannot be used benevolently. All use of the tongue is idle and sinful when the heart is not in a benevolent state. No matter how much the tongue might edify men or glorify God, its use is an idle use so far as the speaker is concerned, if his aim be not benevolent. A man might teach mathematics, philosophy, or theology with a selfish heart, in which case the use of his tongue is sin, because his intention is sin. It is not conformed to the law of love, but is under the influence of selfishness. If God overrules this selfish use of the tongue to promote His won glory, no thanks to him who thus uses his tongue, for he means no such thing. His object is to glorify himself, to get a good name or a piece of bread. It should always be understood that any use of the tongue is sinful when the heart is not in a perfectly benevolent state.

2. The spirit of entire consecration is an indispensable condition to the government of the tongue. As I have already said, this is only another way of stating the same rule, and this condition is only another form of stating the spirit of the same condition. If the heart be entirely consecrated to God, the tongue will be, and must be, and cannot but be consecrated also; but when ever the heart is not entirely consecrated, the tongue if used at all, is used idly, with selfish intentions and not for the glory of God.

3. It is an important and often indispensable condition of governing the tongue that we abstain from very strong excitement. If the feelings become very strongly excited, they are very apt to control the will. At this point all virtue ceases of course. The will acts virtuously, only when it obeys the law of the intelligence, or in other words, the commandments of God as they are revealed in the intelligence. When the feelings instead of God through the intelligence give law to the will, there is no virtue. People are very apt to imagine that they are virtuous in proportion as they are governed by strong feelings; whereas exactly the reverse of this is true.

I have said that when feeling becomes very strong, it is very apt to control the will. The will then acts purely in obedience to the impulses of feeling,

under no other law than that of obeying the most strongly excited emotions. Now if the will in obedience to feeling governs the tongue, it is not governed by the law of love or benevolence. Be sure there is always feeling and sometimes strong feeling when there is true benevolence, and as the result of true benevolence. But the law of benevolence and not of feeling, should control the will and consequently the tongue.

Farther, when the mind is strongly excited we are apt to speak extravagantly and often falsely in fact, without ourselves at the time realizing it. We behold things through a medium which magnifies greatly. We almost of course represent them as they appear to us, which is usually a misrepresentation. For my own part, I can say that I seldom get strongly excited on any subject without having occasion afterward to repent of something that I said during my excitement.

4. A deeply considerate or reflective state of mind is indispensable to the proper government of the tongue. The man who speaks without consideration and without thinking, speaks idly and at random. Surely if he would speak for the edification of men and the glory of God, he needs to have his thoughts about him and to think well before he speaks.

5. Another condition is a sense of the divine presence. Let a man set God always before him, and realize that he is speaking in the presence of God, and he will bridle his tongue. His words will be few and well chosen. He cannot trifle, realizing that he is in the presence of the great, heart-searching God, nor will he speak falsely, censoriously, bitterly, or unnecessarily. Only let his heart be full of love, and let him have a conscious realization of the divine presence, and the law of love shall ever dwell upon his tongue.

6. Another condition of governing the tongue is the appropriate grace and strength of Christ. Indeed Christ must be in him, working in him to will, to say, and to do, or he will never govern his tongue. He must put off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man. He must abide in Christ and Christ must abide in him. He must live a life of faith in Christ Jesus. He must walk in the Spirit and entirely mortify the deeds of the flesh. He must know what it is to yield up his whole body, "a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God."

7. He must have faith to lay hold of and appropriate the grace, strength, and

promises of Christ for the complete subjugation of his tongue to the law of love. He must believe in Christ and receive Christ as the keeper of his tongue as well as of all his other powers. He will never govern his own tongue: he will never in this respect keep himself. He must have faith to lay hold of that class of promises which pledge sufficient grace to secure the entire consecration of all his powers to God.

8. He must have moral courage to dare to keep silence when he ought to keep silence. It is generally considered very odd and uncouth, unsociable and hateful for a man to keep silence when he has nothing important to say. The state of society seems to demand that to be good company, he must discharge from his tongue a perpetual stream of words. Volley after volley of sense or nonsense must be poured forth, or people will inquire, What ails you? You seem to be very silent, very unsociable; you seem to be brooding over some distressing subject; you need cheerful society and recreation, amusement or light-reading--something to give your tongue an impulse. Now in these days of incessant babble when the world is full of talk about beaux and belles, and novels and politics and every thing else, who does not know that it requires a good deal of moral courage to be silent when not called to speak for the glory of God and the good of man?

(a.) You must have moral courage to dare to speak when you ought, and what you ought. Men are often placed in circumstances where it is no small trial for them to speak what the circumstances demand--to reprove sin and hold up the truth in love. Now the proper government of the tongue, demands not only that we should abstain from speaking what we ought not, but that we should always speak when and what we ought. But to dare to do this, often requires no small amount of courage.

(b.) Again, you need moral courage to be as singular in all places, and at all times, as conformity to the law of love would make you. How eccentric a man would be called in these days, who should use his tongue neither more nor less nor for any other purpose than the glory of God and the good of man demand.

III. Where the tongue is not governed, there is and can be no true religion.

1. In proof of this position I cite the text. "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."

2. It is not intended that an occasional fall in the use of the tongue, proves that one has never been converted and is at no time truly religious; but that when he does not govern his tongue, he has at that time no true conformity to the law of God, and consequently no true religion. His heart is not then in the attitude of benevolence. It if were he could not misuse his tongue. But if he be not benevolent, he is not at the time truly religious. Again,

3. When the tongue is not habitually governed in accordance with this rule, there is no habitual benevolence--consequently no habitual true religion, which if the Bible is true, is the same thing as to say, there is no true religion at all. For the least that can be said of a true Christian, is that he does not habitually sin; that holiness is the rule and sin only the exception. "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure. Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him. Little children let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

4. I have already said that a benevolent heart will secure and by a law of necessity must secure a benevolent use of the tongue; that is, in such a case the tongue will be and must be used for the glory of God and the good of being. Where it is not so used, it is a palpable matter of fact that the heart is not right with God. Nothing can be more certain than that a spirit of idle talking is inconsistent with a benevolent state of the heart.

REMARKS.

1. The Bible represents the government of the tongue not only as indispensable to true religion, but as its most difficult duty. Thus James, in chapter three, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so, the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea is tamed and hath been tamed by mankind: but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be."

2. The Bible says much upon the necessity of bridling the tongue. I will only quote two or three passages in addition to those already quoted. Eccl. 5:2-3; "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter any thing before God; for God is in heaven and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by the multitude of words." Prov. 10:19; "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin; but he that refraineth his lips is wise."

3. If every idle word is sin, what multitudes of professors are living in sin! Great multitudes of professors give themselves up to unrestrained indulgence in talking, as really and fully as the great mass of sinners who make no pretensions to religion. Rely upon it, they will never go babbling on to heaven. Idle talkers and vain jesters are not among the ransomed of the Lord.

4. What a world of evil would be put away if the tongue were governed by the law of love. It is indeed "a world of iniquity; it often setteth on fire the course of nature, and is set on fire of hell." The tongue is the great instrument of excitement. We excite ourselves and we excite others by talking. All the busy play of passion, and all its monstrous developments are aroused, and quickened, and thrown into overwhelming commotion by the idle use of the tongue.

Let the tongue be governed by the law of love, and what a change would be

made in families and neighborhoods, in cities and towns, in all human society! What a change in our halls of legislation!

5. The government of the tongue is indispensable to entire sanctification; that is, no man is entirely sanctified unless he entirely governs his tongue by the law of love. Let this always be understood and kept in mind by those who profess to have attained, or who are aiming to attain to a state of entire sanctification.

6. It does not seem to be generally understood and believed, that every idle word is sin. Many who profess to keep a conscience void of offense, and to be from day to day not conscious of sin, seem manifestly often to use their tongues in a manner not conformed to the law of love. Who can believe that all the needless and idle talking that we hear among professed Christians is for the glory of God and the good of man, or that it is even intended to be?

7. Idle words are as really sinful, as false, censorious, or profane words. I say they are as really sinful. They may be vastly more sinful, or they may be less sinful according to the light enjoyed. One man may be in the sight of God vastly more guilty for levity in conversation than another for profanity. The degree of guilt depends upon the degree of light before the mind. There is great want of consideration upon this subject. If the most ignorant man tells a falsehood, or is profane, we cry out against him; and if he is a member of the church, we excommunicate him. Now this is all well; for the most ignorant man knows better than to lie or to be profane. But others, with greater light than he, may be equally guilty and equally deserving of excommunication, for an idle use of the tongue.

8. From this subject we see the necessity of judging our character in the light of this test. Every day and every hour we should examine ourselves in the use of our tongues. We are almost incessantly using them, and unless we keep the rule in view by which they are to be governed, a world of iniquity will accumulate upon our souls before we are aware of it.

9. This subject is of great importance to families. The necessity of governing the tongue should be constantly inculcated in every family. Observance of this rule is indispensable to the life and power of family religion.

10. The indispensable necessity of governing the tongue, should be urged in common schools, and in all places where children and youth are associated

together. If children are allowed to make an unrestrained use of their tongues in respect to levity and unrestrained talking, a most important part of their education is omitted. Why though they are taught that they must not lie, or be profane, or vulgar, or licentious in conversation, this is of little use, unless they are taught that their tongues are to be governed entirely by the law of universal love.

11. This subject is of great importance to ministers of the gospel. I have heard it said of some ministers--"When I see him in the pulpit I think he never ought to come out; and when I see him out, I think he never ought to go in." There are some ministers, I hope not many, who preach well and solemnly; but when out of the pulpit, they are very much given to levity, to jesting, and trifling conversation, insomuch that their idle talk out of the pulpit completely nullifies the spiritual power of their preaching in it. My brother, unless you use your tongue for God's glory out of the pulpit, you have no right to expect to be blessed in the use of it in the pulpit. Take care what you say, always, and in all places, and be sure you do not have the spirit of levity, and an idle gossiping state of mind; for if you have, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak, and the people will see it. Your Christian and ministerial influence will be destroyed, and you will become a stumbling-block to souls. O! a trifling minister--what a curse to human society--what a dishonor to God!

12. The tongue is a great occasion of backsliding. Let a man but open his mouth and give up the rein to the tongue in any company and at any time, and he will soon find that when he has done talking he cannot pray. Let him try it. I have no doubt that many professors of religion have grieved the Spirit of God an hundred and a thousand times by idle words--have found themselves away from God and without the spirit of prayer, with gross darkness covering them, yet do not realize the cause. Ask them what they have done to get away from God, and they say they can't tell. If they would but reflect upon the use they have made of their tongues, they would find cause enough. Let them take their pens and attempt to recall and record all the idle words, and they will soon be convinced that innumerable sins have accumulated upon their souls, and shut out from them the light of heaven.

13. An unbridled tongue is not only a great snare to him who uses it, but is a great temptation, a snare, and a curse to those who listen. One man or woman given to much talking, may divert the attention of hundreds of minds from God;

may engage multitudes of tongues in replying to their incessant babble; and indeed a world of words, idle as the wind, if not hateful and blasphemous, may be occasioned by some one great talker. A great talker, in the common acceptation of that term is a curse to any family, to any neighborhood, to any church, to any community, to the world. His unruly tongue must be restrained, or he will scatter around him, fire-brands, arrows, and death.

14. From this subject we can see the great evil and the great sin of what are termed social visits. Who does not know that it is almost impolite to talk otherwise than idly on those occasions? To introduce and confine yourself to religion or any other topic of serious import, designed for the glory of God and the general good of man, would be considered excessively ill-timed and out of place. The fact is, that social parties are designed for the unrestrained indulgence of the tongue. They would soon cease to be attended if no other conversation were allowed than what is for the glory of God and the good of man. How often, think you, would the gay and thoughtless multitude assemble in social parties, if no other conversation were allowed but such as is in accordance with the law of God?

It is amazing to hear professors of religion defend and plead for what they call the cultivation of the social powers. It is manifest that they often mean by this nothing more nor less than the cultivation of that idle gossip, that chit chat, idle, frivolous course of conversation, pursued in what are called social parties. How any person that even pretends to be consecrated to God can give up his tongue, his time, and his powers to be used in that manner, has always been mysterious to me since I have known any thing about religion.

15. Many persons never keep their tongues still long enough to be converted. They talk so incessantly, that if at any time the Spirit of the Lord comes near and strives with them, they grieve Him right away by their idle talk. They ought to understand that the Spirit comes to convict and persuade; that is, to make men think, and see things in their true light. They should know that without serious thought and deep, intense reflection, they will never turn to the Lord. Thus the Psalmist says, "I thought on my ways and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies." "Thus saith the Lord, consider your ways." God complains of His professed people, that "they will not consider." How can they consider, when they cultivate the habit of giving incessant license to their tongues? Many impenitent sinners seem never to have thought that they should restrain their tongues, and speak

only when and what duty calls them to speak.

16. It is a great evil to be thrown into the society of a great talker. He will neither think himself nor suffer you to do so; but babble on incessantly, like the running of a brook. If for a moment you try to think, some impertinent question, some trifling thing which you neither know nor care about, is thrust into your face, and demands a reply. O, if such men once knew the luxury of deep and silent thought, and would sometimes retire within themselves and let others think, they would do the world a favor.

17. Great multitudes of professors of religion seem unable to grow in grace and become established in religion, because of the idle use of their tongues. This sin must be overcome; it must be put away. Professor, it is too hard for you to attempt it in your unassisted strength. No man can tame the tongue, but Christ can tame it. Christ governed His own tongue, and can govern yours if you will give it up to Him and let Him become its keeper. Will you do it? When will you do it? Will you do it now? Will you consecrate your tongue to Him with the full understanding that you shall never use it any more but for the glory of God, any more than you would use it to blaspheme His holy name? Do it, my brother, my sister: do it now!

[Back to Top](#)

Dependence on Christ

Lecture III

February 26, 1845

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--John 15:5: "Without Me ye can do nothing."

In discussing this subject I shall show:

I. The meaning of the text.

II. What is implied in it.

III. The importance of understanding and believing it.

IV. The proneness of the human heart to overlook and practically deny it.

I. The meaning of the text.

The context shows that Christ means to affirm an impossibility, for He says, "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me." Now whatever metaphysical or philosophical distinctions we may be disposed to make here, it is plain that Christ intended to affirm the impossibility of doing anything without Him or independently of Him. This inability extends to everything, but the context shows that He means in this passage to affirm it only of holiness or goodness.

II. What is implied in it.

The text implies that we are not required to do anything without Him. If it be impossible to do anything without Him, it cannot be our duty to do it; for it can never be a man's duty to do what is impossible.

Again, that every command implies a corresponding promise, that is, if we are required to do anything by Christ, the very requirement is a virtual promise or proffer of all the aid we need to make it possible for us to perform it. Indeed, the command in itself is an implied proffer of all needed help.

It is often said that the commands of God are addressed to us as moral agents, and that as such, because we are moral agents, we are bound to obey, irrespective of any assistance from God. Now rightly understood this language is correct; but it is extremely liable to be misunderstood. The inquiry is, What is implied in moral agency? There is a difference between acting morally, and simply having the natural powers requisite for such action. A man may have eyes, but without light he cannot see, and is therefore under no obligation to see. So a man may possess the powers of a moral being, but without light on the subject of duty he is not prepared for moral action. He is a moral being in the sense of having the requisite natural powers; but light is the indispensable condition of bringing these powers into action, or in other words light is the indispensable condition of moral agency. His moral powers can be exercised on no subject until he has light upon it. He is under no moral obligation further than he has light. A heathen who has never heard of Christ is under no obligation to believe in Christ, and in

respect to Christ he has not the responsibilities of a moral agent. He possesses those faculties which will render him responsible as soon as Christ is made known to him; but without some knowledge of Christ, he can be under no moral obligation to believe in Him.

Light therefore, is a condition of moral agency, and, of course, of moral obligation. If supernatural light is needed, then supernatural light is the condition of moral obligation: if merely natural light or the light of nature is sufficient, then that is a condition of moral obligation. If the light of the written word of God is sufficient, then that is a condition. The kind and degree of light requisite to impose moral obligation varies upon different subjects. The mere light of nature may be sufficient to impose obligation in reference to a great multitude of duties; but on many of the great questions of the gospel, the light of divine revelation is needed to impose moral obligation, for without this revelation, the mind can know nothing of these duties.

To a right apprehension of many truths of the gospel, the illumination of the Holy Spirit is needed, and without His influence the mind does not and cannot comprehend the length and breadth, and depth and height of these truths, cannot apprehend them in any such sense as that an individual can embrace Christ and know either the Father or the Son without the Holy Ghost.

Now when Christ says, "Without Me ye can do nothing;" He doubtless means to affirm that without divine light shining upon the pages of inspiration and upon the works of God--without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, holiness is impossible to us. The assertion of the text therefore implies that divine light is proffered to us, and that this light is given by Christ.

Again, the text implies the absolute Deity of Christ. If Christ is not God it is absurd, and false for Him to say, "Without Me, ye can do nothing."

III. The importance of understanding and believing the doctrine of the text.

1. If we do not understand that we are dependent on Christ, we shall not and cannot believe it. It is impossible to believe what we do not understand. This is sometimes doubted, but if properly understood, the proposition must be self-evident. We cannot believe unless the mind apprehends that which is to be believed. Yet I may believe a fact without being able to explain the philosophy of the facts. For example, I may believe the fact that Christ died

for sinners without being at all able to understand the high policy of Jehovah's government upon which the doctrine of atonement is based, or which rendered His death necessary. Now I am not required to believe anything respecting the philosophy of the atonement, but simply the fact--a thing which I can understand. It may be gratifying and useful for me to search out the philosophy of it, but it is not at all necessary to my salvation that I should believe anything more than the fact of the atonement. So I may believe thousands of facts and truths, the philosophy of which I cannot comprehend; but I am not able nor am I required to believe anything more in any case than I can understand. The doctrine of the Father, the Son and Holy Ghost, I can understand; that the Father is God, that the Son is God, and that the Holy Ghost is God; but the exact sense in which these are three, and the sense also in which they are one, I cannot comprehend, nor am I under any obligation to comprehend it, nor to believe anything more respecting this or any other doctrine than I can comprehend.

It is therefore of great importance with respect to the doctrine of our dependence upon Christ that we should understand the fact as a fact. Whether or not we are able to understand the philosophy of this dependence is of no consequence. It is enough for us to understand that such is the fact, that without Christ we can do nothing.

2. To understand this doctrine is more than to admit it. I may admit a thing in theory which after all I don't understand. I may admit multitudes of truths, yea any and all the truths of the gospel without really understanding one of them. The truth of our dependence upon Christ is generally admitted, but not so generally is it rationally understood.

3. Properly to understand it is to realize it--to perceive it's truth; and have in the mind a felt realization of it's truth.

4. To believe this truth is more than to hold it in theory. A man may hold in theory the whole Confession of Faith, he may defend it, may argue in favor of it, and suppose himself to believe it, while in fact, in the gospel sense, he does not believe a word of it. Many who professed faith in the doctrine of the Second Advent of Christ, have held it and defended it as a theory, but manifestly have not believed it. Faith is the yielding up of the mind to be influenced by truth apprehended by the intellect. It is the mind's confiding, trusting, receiving a truth. Now nothing is more common than for persons

to hold and defend a truth in theory which they do not really believe. To believe the doctrine of our dependence upon Christ is to commit or surrender the mind up to the influence of this truth--to repose on Christ--to confide the soul really to His keeping.

5. To believe this truth implies the continual remembrance of it. It implies that we hold the mind in the attitude of dependence and trust. Suppose I am leading a little child by the hand, I give him my finger and lead him along upon the brink of a frightful precipice. I tell him, without me you will fall. Now if he believes this, he will hold fast to my hand. His mind will be in a constant attitude of depending, trusting, holding on to me. Now this illustrates what I mean by believing in our dependence upon Christ. The mind that believes in this will not attempt to do any thing without Christ.

But take another illustration. Suppose here is a man who has but one leg. He never attempts to walk without a crutch. When he sits down, he lays his crutch by his side, or sets it up within reach. Whenever he attempts to walk, the very first movement of his mind is towards his crutch. Just so with the mind that believes in the doctrine of dependence upon Christ. It is just as natural for this mind to throw itself upon Christ, in the performance of every duty as it is for the lame man to throw himself upon his crutch.

Again, not to understand and believe this is real infidelity in respects to Christ. It is a real rejection of the gospel of Christ and of Christ Himself. No man understands and believes the gospel in any saving sense, who does not understand and believe his universal dependence upon Christ.

Again, the rejection of this doctrine renders the soul proud and presumptuous. If a man depends upon his own powers, unenlightened by the Spirit of Christ, he is depending upon the bruised reed of his own resolutions, and must inevitably find himself in perpetual condemnation.

Again, to reject this doctrine is to dishonor Christ greatly, and as I have said, to discard His gospel entirely.

Again, to reject or overlook this doctrine leaves the soul to neglect due watchfulness. If a man is not sensible of his constant dependence upon the indwelling Spirit of Christ, he will not feel the necessity of watchfulness and prayer so as to retain the Spirit of Christ.

Again, the rejection of this doctrine makes us the sport of temptation. A man is certain to be overcome if he attempts to resist temptation in his own strength, just as certain as a man of one leg would be to fall if he should attempt to run without his crutch.

Again, the rejection of this doctrine leads to ultimate discouragement. When persons make attempts to stand in their own strength and find themselves continually overcome, they are soon led to doubt seriously whether there is any such thing as standing before the power of temptation. Finding themselves perfectly impotent in their own strength and not believing in Christ as they ought, they fall of course.

Again, the understanding and belief of this truth tends to results opposite to those just mentioned. To believe this truth causes the mind to be careful not to grieve the Spirit of Christ. It renders the soul humble and empties it of all its proud, self-righteous dependence upon self. It naturally engages the soul to love Christ, to honor Him, and watch carefully against doing any thing that might displease Him. It strips the mind of all dependence upon its own resolutions and unaided efforts; it teaches the mind where to go in the hour of temptation, and throws it upon Christ its all-sufficient support; keeps the soul out of bondage, begets gratitude, fixes the attention and thoughts upon Christ and engages the soul to live by faith in Him.

IV. Notice the proneness of the human mind to overlook and deny this truth.

1. In some sense everyone knows it to be true, and yet few realize its truth in any such sense as to make a practical use of it. This is evident partly from the fact that they do not think of it. They do not realize it as the lame man realizes that he cannot walk without his crutch. His dependence upon his crutch is with him an omnipresent reality. He always thinks of it whenever he attempts to walk. Now if an individual really receives this truth, it will be to him an omnipresent reality. The fact of his dependence of Christ will be so deeply settled in his mind that he will just as naturally and certainly turn to Christ for support as the lame man turns to his crutch.

2. But another evidence that few realize and believe this truth, we have in the fact that so little gratitude is felt and manifested to Christ. If our dependence were an omnipresent reality, we could not fail, having performed any duty, to feel our obligation to Christ for having wrought in

us to will and do this thing. We should not take the credit to ourselves, but be grateful to Him.

3. Another evidence that this truth is not believed by many, is the fact that they are so little afraid to sin against Christ. It cannot be that they would be so reckless of sinning against Him if they believed themselves absolutely dependent on Him for all their own right actions. Suppose that you were entirely dependent upon someone to lead and uphold you every step you take; could you suffer yourself to abuse your guide and supporter?

4. Another evidence we have in the fact that there is so little praying against temptation, so little looking to Him for grace to support and strengthen us at every step. The bible teaches that God works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure--that all our springs are in Him--that He is our life, and that there is no good in us only as it is wrought in us by the Spirit of Christ. Now that there is not much hearty confidence in these truths, even in the church, manifests itself in many ways. For example, there is but little prayer comparatively for restraining grace, for upholding grace, for the indwelling and energizing of the Holy Spirit. There is but little of the spirit of thanksgiving for the constant aid and agency of the Spirit of God.

Again, if for a short time Christians are kept from a besetting sin, they soon cease to thank Him for sustaining grace, and lose a sense of the fact that He is truly keeping them above it. They think they have so overcome the temptation to that sin, that they are dead to it, and their tendency in that direction has ceased. Their taking up this notion often makes it necessary for Christ to withhold His restraining grace, in order to remind them that not they but He has kept them from falling. Thus He teaches them by bitter experience, what they will not learn from His word, that without Him they can do nothing.

Again, in proportion as they are kept above sin, they are prone to lose a sense of the fact that the grace of Christ upholds them. If they are supported just enough to feel the keen force of temptation and the necessity of cleaving to Christ continually, they do not lose a sense of dependence; but if Christ only for a short time lifts them so high that temptation does not seem to touch them, they immediately become forgetful of their dependence, wax self-confident, dishonor and grieve His Spirit, and fall into temptation.

Again, as we do not see, nor hear, nor directly feel the hand that supports us, we are constantly prone to forget that we are supported. The influence which Christ exerts is not a physical but a moral one. It is the power of truth and persuasion, the power of divine light which sustains the mind. Now as we do not directly see the agency of Christ employed in sustaining us, we are very apt to overlook the fact that His invisible agency is our constant support.

Again, thoroughly to learn the lesson of our dependence upon Christ so that it shall be an ever-present reality to us, is one of the most difficult things in the Christian religion. There is nothing more contrary to the natural pride and independence of human nature. There is not a doctrine of the bible which we are more prone to disbelieve and practically reject than this. It may be admitted as a theory forever, without being ever believed.

Again, it is one of the most difficult things, always to remember practically that we cannot take one step in the path of obedience without depending on Christ, any more than a lame man can take a step without his crutches

Again, Christ has more trouble with us on this point than perhaps any other. It is easy for Him to support us if He could persuade us to depend upon Him. He can easily guide us if we will keep hold of His hand. He can easily carry our burdens if we will suffer Him to do so. He can work in and for us all that we need with infinite ease, if we will but trust in Him and surrender up our mind to His influence. In short, the greatest practical difficulty in the Christian religion, lies in the right understanding and belief of the doctrine of our dependence upon Christ. I say a right understanding and belief, because to believe this in one sense and in a particular form, is Antinomianism: to understand and believe it in another sense, is sheer legality. Legality rests in Christ as an atoning sacrifice, but not as an indwelling, upholding, all-sustaining, and controlling Spirit. It receives an outward but not an inward Christ--a Christ in heaven, but not a Christ in the heart; a Mediator between God and man, an Advocate on high, but not a present sanctification in the soul. It is receiving Him in the latter sense which constitutes the right belief of our dependence upon Christ. Indeed, He must be received both as an atoning sacrifice--a risen, reigning, glorified Redeemer--a Mediator and Advocate with the Father; and also as an indwelling, sanctifying, constantly operating, upholding, guiding, renovating Spirit. He must be received by the mind's own faith, to dwell in the inward sanctuary of our own being, there to

exert a constant sustaining and sanctifying influence, to work in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

Unbelief as it respects this doctrine, in the form in which I now state it, is the occasion of all our failures and of all our sins. It is a want of apprehending this doctrine, and of thoroughly embracing it that leaves so many souls in bondage to worry and flounder along in the state described in the seventh chapter to the Romans, without ever finding their way to the experience of the eighth chapter.

REMARKS.

1. As I have already intimated, many hold this doctrine in theory, who never realize or practically believe it.

2. To this class of persons, this doctrine is a fatal stumbling-block. Holding as a theory the doctrine of their dependence of Christ, and yet not actually depending on Him, inevitably leaves them in sin; for their theory prevents their making any effort to help themselves, and their unbelief prevents their casting themselves upon Christ, so that they settle down into Antinomianism, in the form so generally witnessed among professors of religion. They make their dependence their excuse for not obeying God; whereas, did they really believe this doctrine of dependence, and actually cast themselves on Him, they would do their duty. Now this class of persons are laboring under a great delusion. They suppose they truly believe the doctrine of their dependence upon Christ, whereas, they only hold it as a soul-crippling, God-dishonoring theory, and therefore it is to them a most fatal stumbling-block.

Again, the real belief of it as a gospel fact, will secure a real as opposed to a theoretical dependence upon Christ. If a man believes his dependence upon Christ because the Bible asserts it; if he believes it as a truth of the gospel and a revealed fact, he will of course believe farther than this, that in Christ, and with the help of Christ, he can do all things required of him. The Apostle Paul says, that of himself he was unable even to think anything as of himself; but adds in another place, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me." Now it is very manifest, that if the doctrine of dependence is embraced as a truth of revelation, the other fact will also be embraced as alike revealed; viz: That we can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us. The belief of this will of course secure obedience to Christ.

From what has been said, we may learn what the true doctrine of natural ability is, namely, that every moral agent is really able to do whatever God requires of him; that when God requires us to believe in Christ He gives us so much light as renders us able to believe; that when He requires us to repent, He gives us so much light that we are able to repent; but that we are not able to work out that which is good by virtue of possessing the powers of a moral being, independently of divine light.

Again, we may see what I meant by the assertion that Christ is the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Every moral agent, in just so far as he is a moral agent, is enlightened by Christ.

Again, it is of very little use to speculate about the philosophy of divine influence in the soul, or the manner in which Christ upholds and sustains us. The fact is the thing to be believed, and although I have myself speculated much, and often very much to my own injury, upon the mode of divine influence, still I am convinced that to lay hold of the fact without concerning ourselves to understand the mode of divine operation is the great thing to be attained to.

Again, we need to settle it as a fact of as much stability as the fact of our own existence, that we shall and can do nothing if the divine support is withdrawn; and yet that it is always so proffered to us that we are perfectly responsible for every duty enjoined in the scriptures.

Again, it is of the last importance that we understand what it is to depend constantly on Christ. Now we can acknowledge our dependence without depending. I can hold in theory and in fact that I am dependent, without being willing to be dependent; without the act of depending, without casting myself upon Christ, and settling down upon Him. Now depending is an act of the will or heart. It is, as I have said, a holding on to Christ. It is an ever active state of mind. It is a cleaving to Him, and is as really an act of the mind as it is to hold on to the hand of a fellow-being. The child upon the precipice who holds onto my hand, must hold his mind in a state of dependence, or he cannot hold on to my hand. Did his mind let go of me, the muscles of his arm would instantly relax, and he would let go of my hand. Now a depending and holding on to Christ, is as really an active state of the will as if we used our hand to hold on to Him. This needs to be understood, and a want of properly understanding this is the reason why persons do not abide in Christ. "If ye abide in Me and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you. Herein is

My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." Now to abide in Christ, is for the mind to cleave to Him, to depend on Him not as an outward and distant Savior or atoning sacrifice, but as a present, inward, in-dwelling support, a help at hand, a God as near to me as I am to myself. This is the true idea of depending on Christ. Without this dependence we can do nothing; with it, we do all things. Brethren, think of this?

[Back to Top](#)

Weights and Besetting Sins

Lecture IV

March 12, 1845

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Heb. 12:1: "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."

In discussing this subject I shall,

I. Show what race is here spoken of.

II. What is at stake.

III. The conditions of winning in this race.

I. What this race is.

In this text the apostle manifestly alludes to the Olympian and Isthmian games which were celebrated in the East, and with which his readers were familiar. As these games were extensively known, he often alludes to them, to illustrate the truths of Christianity. These games originated in the policy of government, to develop the physical powers of their subjects, and give them the greatest possible efficiency. Before gunpowder came into use, success in war depended much more than it now does upon the physical power and dexterity of an army.

Armies then met hand to hand with swords, spears and war-clubs, bows and arrows, and crossbows, and all those weapons to wield which required great physical energy and strength. Consequently it entered into the policy of governments to cultivate physical development as much as possible. For this purpose schools were established for training men to run foot-races, to handle the spear, the sword and the shield, and engage in all those exercises which serve to develop the muscular system to the utmost. In order to give great popularity to this system of exercises, these games were established and sustained by the highest civil authorities; even kings attended their celebrations. Great preparations were made for months and even years beforehand, by the most careful training of the competitors. Some of these games were foot races, it being in those times a matter of great importance that men should be able to run with great speed and for a long time. Alongside of the whole race-ground, seats were erected rising one above another, affording accommodations for an immense number of spectators. Indeed the great mass of the population of whole kingdoms was assembled on these occasions. When these seats, forming a vast amphitheater on either side, were all filled with spectators they might be called a "great cloud of witnesses."

The competitors in these games, of course made great preparations for running. Their dress, if indeed they wore any, was so arranged as to give every muscle the fullest play. Every thing was carefully avoided that might in the least prevent the freest and fullest exertion of their entire strength. They laid aside every encumbrance; exercised themselves daily; observed the utmost temperance in all their habits; in short, neglected nothing that was supposed to be conducive to their utmost speed.

Several things were to be attended to in running the race.

1. They must start right, or according to rule.
2. They must run the race through. If they started right, ran according to rule, and came out ahead of their competitors, they were crowned. Otherwise not.

Now in this passage the apostle manifestly alludes to these races, with which, comparing the Christian life, he calls it a race. The Christian life is also sometimes called a fight or battle. It is a great conflict, waged with the world, the flesh and the devil. The apostle's design is to bring out the truth

that in order to be successful in winning the race, we must make the utmost exertion.

It is the Christian race then that is here spoken of, or that struggle with the world, the flesh and the devil, with which every Christian is familiar, and through which he must pass to win the crown.

II. I am to show what is at stake in this race.

The prize is a crown of eternal glory. It includes all that is honorable and glorious in heaven--to share with Christ in His glory; to sit down with Him on His throne; to become kings and priests unto God; to be God's adopted children and have mansions in His palace; to sit at His table and enjoy all the honors and blessedness of sonship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

III. The conditions of winning in this race.

The first condition mentioned in the text is, that we lay aside every weight. This race or conflict is mental, not physical; it belongs to the mind and not to the body. We inquire therefore what is to be regarded as a weight or unnecessary encumbrance in running this race; I answer,

1. All unnecessary business. By this I mean any kind or degree of business to which we are not manifestly called by the providence of God. Any business in kind or amount to which we are manifestly called by the providence of God, and to which we attend with a single eye to His glory, is not inconsistent with our running the race, is not to be regarded as a weight, but as a part of our business and duty as Christians, and therefore as part of the race itself. But when a man engages in any business, however great or small, to which he is not thus called, he then takes an unnecessary burden upon himself. It is a dead weight upon him--nay, he cannot run at all with this business upon him because it is selfishness, and he has already apostatized from God and gone over to the serving of himself.

He has no right to do, say, or be anything more or less than that to which God calls him. If he undertakes any selfish business, or takes any more or less upon him than duty to God requires, he is then out of God's service, and consequently can no more win in this race, than a man could win in the Olympic games if he ran right the other way, instead of running towards the goal. Let it be forever remembered that for a man to undertake any business

in kind or amount which according to his best judgment is not for the glory of God and is not designed for His glory, is actual apostasy from God, and is a weight that must be laid aside or the soul cannot be saved.

2. Whatever draws unnecessarily upon our time is a weight that must be laid aside. All our time is God's; all to be consecrated to Him. Whatever is suffered to occupy a day, an hour, or even a moment of our time that is not demanded by our duty to God, is a weight that just so far hinders our progress in the Christian race. Suppose a racer in the Olympian games should suffer himself to be hindered by the compliments of the spectators; suppose he should stop to receive and return the salutations of his friends and acquaintance as he passed along; and thus lose time and distance instead of tasking his powers every moment--could he win the race? Now it should be forever understood that whenever a man suffers his time to run to waste, or to be desecrated from the service of God--whenever he suffers his time to be occupied with any other than God's business, he then takes upon himself a weight that must be laid aside, or he will never win the race.

3. All engrossments of every kind to which we are not called by the word, or Spirit, or providence of God, are to be laid entirely aside as weights. We have no business to be engrossed with anything to which we are not called by God Himself, whose servants we are. Our whole time, talents, powers, and all are His. The employment of our thoughts, and all our powers is to be entirely for Him.

Whenever therefore we take on our hands or on our minds any engrossments to which God does not call us, we have forsaken the service of God, and are employed by somebody else, or in other words we are engaged in serving ourselves instead of God. But this again renders it just as impossible to win the race, as it would be in the Olympic games if the racer should run in the opposite direction from the goal.

4. Whatever demands our attention, to which we are not called by God Himself, is to be given up as a weight.

God demands that we give our whole attention to His business, to glorify Him, to obey His commands and promote His interests. We have no right therefore to give any part of our attention to that to which He has not called us. Anything therefore that unnecessarily takes up the attention of our minds,

that is, every thing that is not a part of God's business, must be laid aside as weights.

5. Whatever engrosses our affections is a weight, and must be laid aside, or we can never win the crown. God demands that our supreme affections should be placed on Himself. Whenever we suffer them to be engrossed by any other object whatever, we have then encumbered ourselves with a weight that must be laid aside.

6. All unnecessary cares and burdens are to be considered as weights which must be laid aside. The real wants of human beings are exceedingly simple. And in general they have but few cares, unless they unnecessarily take them upon themselves. And we have no right to load ourselves down with a multitude of cares and burdens that don't belong to the service of God. Any cares and burdens to which God calls us, we may lay on Him who careth for us. But where we engage in matters to which He does not call us, and when we take burdens which He does not impose on us, it is tempting God to pretend to lay these on Him. We must therefore assume no cares, and no burdens that we cannot cast on the Lord. Whenever we voluntarily undertake that which is a matter of perplexity, carefulness, and anxiety to which He does not call us, we are out of God's business. We have taken burdens that we cannot bear and win the race.

7. All unnecessary furniture and equipage are to be laid aside as a burden which we cannot bear. See! that woman has to be engaged from morning till night, to see that the useless articles of furniture and trumpery with which her house is filled, are cleaned and dusted, and in good order. She runs from room to room with her dusting cloth, or calls her hired help from room to room, to see that her chairs and bureaus, her sofas and her side boards, and a hundred other things for show and not for use are kept in due order. A great house, much furniture, a small family and little company, and a multitude of things never really needed and seldom used. O! what a burden that woman has taken upon herself, and certainly God has not called her to it. Now can she have all this unnecessary care on her mind and get to heaven? I trow (think) not. And see that man; how he struggles to get along in his Christian race with that mass of useless equipage on his back! Surely God is not so cruel as to task him to run with such a load.

8. The care of all unnecessary property is to be laid aside as a weight.

By unnecessary property I mean that which is not and cannot be managed for the glory of God and the good of souls. I have often thought of a remark of the celebrated Mr. Law. In discoursing upon the folly and wickedness of endeavoring to be rich, he says that a man who labors to lay up one hundred thousand pounds sterling is just as unreasonably employed as if he were endeavoring to lay up one hundred thousand pairs of boots and spurs. It would require all his time to keep them from molding, rusting, and spoiling. He would never wear but few of them and they would occupy his whole time in preserving them. Just so with one hundred thousand pounds; a man can never use it, and it is a great deal of trouble to take care of it. He must occupy nearly his whole time in his counting room and with his books, notes, bonds, and mortgages, and musty papers, and what profit can his one hundred thousand pounds be to him? Why, it is only a burden which if he attempts to carry, will ruin his soul. All property therefore which is above a bare competency, and over and above what is sacredly consecrated to the service and glory of God, held and used for Him, is a weight that must be laid aside, or it is impossible to win the crown.

9. All unnecessary articles of dress are to be regarded as weights. Where a man or woman has a large wardrobe to over-haul, and see to, much wearing apparel to be cleansed and aired, and altered, and attended to, it engrosses the thoughts, takes up the time, is an object of care, and a weight that must be laid aside.

10. Fashion is another weight that must be laid aside. What a multitude are busy a great part of their time, as the different seasons follow each other in rapid succession and as the ever fluctuating fashions are introduced, in altering their dresses, making changes, getting new ones and disposing of old ones, running here and there shopping, conversing about the newest fashions, the most tasteful colors, the best milliners, and mantua-makers and tailors, and all the world of gossip and folly which engages the world of fashionables. Who can run the Christian race with a mind filled with such things as these? Who does not perceive at once that persons thus engaged are not consecrated to God? God has never called them to this service and these engrossments. This is selfishness and must ruin the soul. And it is impossible ever to win a crown of glory by living such a life as this.

11. Unnecessary attendance upon company is often a great weight. It is

often a great tax on a person's time to receive such a multitude of calls and complimentary visits, and have so many protracted conversations inflicted upon us as is often the case. Christians should always make their arrangements, so as to dispense as far as possible with all unnecessary company. They should be ever ready to exercise hospitality to the utmost of their ability, should receive their friends and be cordial in entertaining strangers, but withal should discountenance all unnecessary drafts on their time in any way whatever. It should be remembered that all waiting on company, receiving and entertaining company, or making visits for company's sake, to which we are not manifestly called by the providence and will of God, is a weight that must be laid aside.

12. All unnecessary reading is also to be laid aside. By unnecessary reading I mean all reading that is not necessary to our highest usefulness and well-being. Everything that is over and above this we are not called to, by the will of God. It absorbs our attention, is a waste of time, and often much worse than a waste, as it encumbers our minds with a multitude of things that are inconsistent with our highest holiness and usefulness.

13. All unnecessary conversation is to be regarded as a weight. It is surely a great burden to be obliged to keep our tongues from running. Many persons seem to talk for talk's sake, and to gratify a loquacious spirit. And they will often intrude upon you with some protracted conversation about nothing or that which is as good as nothing, greatly to the hindrance of your spiritual life. Now it should be remembered that our tongues are to be used only to the glory of God, and to the use of edifying, that for every idle word we must give an account in the day of judgment.

All unnecessary conversation should therefore be avoided as entirely inconsistent with growth in grace, and with running our spiritual race. "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."

14. Everything in short to which we are not providentially called and which is not therefore a part of our duty as Christians, would be regarded as a weight and be laid aside. Whatever is inconsistent with or not conducive to our highest usefulness should be regarded as a weight, and at once laid aside.

15. There is another thing to which I must call attention that may be regarded as rather of a delicate nature, I mean all untimely and unsuitable love affairs. Few things more completely engross the mind than love affairs among young people. Now, whenever circumstances are such that the providence of God makes it a duty to seek a wife, or to become a wife, these things are lawful, may be committed to God and attended to without distraction. But whenever the affections are engrossed with such affairs, where there is no call in providence to such a course, it is a grievous weight that must be laid aside. Oh! how much time is spent in brooding over such matters, in reading letters, and in all the multitude of engrossments of thought and feeling, and all the powers of the mind. These things must be laid aside, they don't belong to the service of God, because in the case supposed, there is no providential call for the mind's being given up to such matters; indeed where the mind is thus given up without consulting God and without being called in the course of divine providence to turn the attention in this direction, it is a real abandonment of the service of God, and making provision for the flesh. It is a real heart apostasy. It is an endeavor to please ourselves and not God. To win the crown in this way is impossible. Indeed the object is not to win a crown, but to win a lady; to win a wife or a husband, and that too, not for the glory of God, but to make provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof.

A second condition on which we can win in this race is that we lay aside all our besetting sins. A besetting sin is one to which on account of our constitution, or circumstance or both, we are peculiarly exposed, and into which we most easily and most frequently fall. Among these are;

1. Ill temper. This is one of the most easily besetting sins of most people. On account of their constitution or health or circumstance it is remarkable to see how many persons frequently become angry. This is a sin which so easily besets many persons, that they seem to be thrown out of balance, and to get angry, and often times to be filled with wrath on the slightest occasions. This must be laid aside.

2. Fretfulness is another easily besetting sin. This is anger but in a milder form. It is a peevish, passionate state of mind. Many persons who will seldom be filled with wrath or manifest what is generally called anger, are, nevertheless, extremely given to fretting. This must be laid aside.

3. Covetousness is another easily besetting sin. This is selfishness in a peculiar form. Some persons seem to lust after or to covet every thing they see, especially every thing that is a little superior to what they have themselves. A horse, a carriage, a farm, a house, a dress, or anything which exceeds their own things, they covet; little realizing that this is an easily besetting sin. Now all these desires indulged, are entirely inconsistent with running the Christian race. And whoever will notice the operations of his own mind, will find they always destroy his peace of mind, and communion with God. And whenever men indulge the wish of having this, or that, or the other thing, to the possession of which God does not call them, they are always out of the way, and should thrust such temptations entirely aside, or they can never run the Christian race.

Some persons seem never to be satisfied with what they have, but are always lusting after more and better things, just as long as any of their acquaintances have them. As the scripture says, "They enlarge their desire as hell." Now God often gives them their desire, but sends leanness into their souls. Have you never observed this, that when you have set your heart very much on having something which you did not possess, when you get it, it is a snare to your soul, engrosses your thoughts and time, and leads you away from God?

4. Another easily besetting sin is avarice. Avarice is a disposition to hoard up property. Some persons are so much disposed to this sin, that an opportunity to make a good bargain, a speculation, is a great temptation to them. There is a constant tendency in their minds to selfishness in this form. But this must be restrained and put away, or we shall never get to heaven.

5. Dishonesty is another easily besetting sin. Some persons find it extremely difficult to be upright and honest in what they say and do. They are tempted to little, petty frauds and over-reachings in almost everything, and frequently fall before these temptations. They are not sincere and honest with themselves in their religious matters, nor upright with God. In short, they strongly tend to a hypocritical state of mind. We cannot run a Christian race successfully without putting this entirely away.

6. Falsehood is another easily besetting sin of many people. They do not seem to possess a truthful spirit. They do not appear to love truth for its own sake, but are very prone to give a false coloring to almost every thing they say. The lights and shades are thrown in at their own discretion, in

such a way as to make a false impression. Now this sin so easily besets some people, that I never know exactly what to believe from what they say.

7. Trespassing on other's rights, is another easily besetting sin. It is astonishing to see what a tendency there is in some minds to trespass on other's grounds, by crossing their field perhaps with a team without permission, leaving down their fences, and committing trespasses on their rights in a great variety of ways, apparently without the least compunction of conscience. They go into their neighbor's land and get timber for wood and other purposes without leave, which is really stealing. Indeed it is surprising to see to what an extent many persons will go in disregarding the rights of those about them. They seem to be supremely selfish, and almost supremely reckless, and to go just as far as they think they can without its destroying their character, or reacting on them in a lawsuit. A person of this spirit can no more get to heaven than Satan can, unless he lay aside this state of mind, and cherish a most sacred regard for his neighbor's rights.

8. Unfaithfulness in business is another easily besetting sin of many persons. They are not faithful to God in their own business, and never pay that sacred regard to it which their duty to God requires. They do not seem to understand that they are the clerks and agents of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that He expects in them the most entire promptness and faithfulness. They are exceedingly loose, and reckless, and inattentive to business. If they are employed by others as clerks, agents, or laborers, either within doors or without, they are eye-servants, feeling little or no responsibility, attending to nothing only for the sake of wages. They are thus exceedingly unfaithful to their employers and to God, and never can get to heaven with such a state of mind as this. It is sheer selfishness and injustice, and anything but religion.

9. Slothfulness is another easily besetting sin of many persons. Multitudes are really too lazy to be religious. Every where in the bible the Christian life is represented as a race, a conflict, that to which the utmost attention must be given, and about which all the faculties of the mind are to be strenuously employed. It is represented as a life of the utmost activity; as much so as the foot races and conflicts in the games to which the text alludes. Now can a slothful person get to heaven? No. All the winds, and waves, and tides of this world's influence set right towards hell, and nothing but girding up our

loins and addressing our whole being to the work, will ever enable us to stem the tides, overcome the obstacles, win the prize, and plant our feet on the hills of glory.

10. Tale bearing is another besetting sin of many persons. God has said, "Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among the children of my people." There are some persons that seem to be so big with every secret which they may chance to know, that they are in agony till they can run about and tell it. They are in the habit of running up and down to tell the news. They are literally tale-bearers. They carry not the newspapers, but the unwritten gossip of the village and the neighbors. Such a person is a pest to society and a sinner, and must lay aside this easily besetting sin if he would ever get to heaven.

11. Evil speaking is another easily besetting sin. By evil speaking I mean, speaking of the real or supposed faults of others behind their backs; speaking that which is to their discredit, without being plainly called to it by providence. This is really slander in the spirit of it, whether the things spoken are true or false. It is totally inconsistent with the law of love, in doing by others as we would they should do to us. Consequently it is a sin, and with many an easily besetting sin. It must be laid aside or the race can never be won.

12. Levity is another easily besetting sin. Some persons, and indeed many persons are so much given to jesting, tittering, laughing, and idle gossip as not only to dissipate all the solemnity of their own minds, but to be sore temptations to all around them. Levity of mind is exceedingly inconsistent with the Christian religion. Triflers do not get to heaven. Let that be always remembered, and if you are given to this folly, lay it aside or you will lose your soul.

13. Envy is another easily besetting sin of many persons. When they see others rising above themselves in wealth, influence, intellectual or moral improvement; when they see others more beautiful, more humble, or more esteemed than themselves, they lust to envy. This shows a state of mind entirely inconsistent with the love of God and our neighbor. It must be entirely laid aside, denounced, and repented of as sin, or it can never be forgiven.

14. Jealousy is an easily besetting sin of many persons. By this I mean a suspicious temper. Some persons are exceedingly given to it. They seem to be constantly on the watch to see if they are not in some way slighted, if some other persons are not preferred to them, if something is not kept a secret from them which others are led to know. This state of mind manifests itself in a thousand ways, and is always a hateful temper, and must be laid aside as a besetting sin.

15. Ambition is an easily besetting sin of many persons. This sin takes on a great many forms. It often manifests itself among students, in a desire to rise above others in their class in the esteem of their teachers, in intellectual developments. It is a hydra-headed sin, and seems to be common to a great many persons, from the emperor on his throne, down to the slave who labors in his chains. You will see it in the common school, the college, the theological seminary, the pulpit, at the bar, on the bench, behind the counter, on a military field, everywhere where human beings are. This must be put away.

16. Intemperance in eating, is an easily besetting sin of great multitudes of persons. When a person eats more in quantity, or that in quality which is inconsistent with the laws of life and health he is guilty of intemperance. Intemperate eating is as really a sin, as intemperate drinking, and as really inconsistent with salvation.

17. Intemperate drinking. There is such a thing as drinking water intemperately, at times and in quantities which are exceedingly injurious to health. All use of stimulating drinks which is inconsistent with the most healthful operations of all the functions of life, is intemperance. God commands us to be temperate in all things. But it has come to pass in these days, that nothing is regarded as intemperance, but some of the most flagrant forms of it; such as the use of intoxicating drinks. Let it be remembered that every violation of the laws of life and health, to which we are not called by the providence of God, is intemperance. A man may be so circumstanced as to be under the necessity of both eating and drinking things that are not naturally wholesome, of exercising or resting under circumstances that will violate the laws of life and health. But when providence calls to this, it is not sin, and therefore is not the sin of intemperance.

18. Pride in vanity and dress, is another easily besetting sin. Persons are always guilty of this, when they put on that which they would not indulge in, were they expecting to receive a personal visit from the Lord Jesus Christ.

19. All fleshly indulgences are sins, and with most persons easily besetting sins. We are required to make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof. Whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we are to do all to the glory of God, and not for the sake of gratifying our appetites and passions. Self-indulgence is always selfishness and always sin. The spirit of self seeking, and self-indulgence must be put away, and whatever we do must be done from a higher motive than to please and gratify ourselves.

20. Unbelief is another easily besetting sin; none more common, and none more fatal than this. How infinitely strange it is, that this should be an easily besetting sin. It shows the great degradation of fallen human nature. That we should so basely distrust infinite truth, and disbelieve Him whom we acknowledge cannot lie. This is the grossest of all absurdities, and the most unreasonable of all abominations in the world, and yet seems to be the most easily besetting sin of all mankind. But it must be put away, or damnation is certain.

21. Every neglect of duty must be put away, or we cannot be saved. Some persons are ready to acknowledge that such and such things are their duty, but they will make the acknowledgment with entire indifference, while they neglect the duty. Now this course is as fatal as death itself. How can they be saved who acknowledge their obligations, and yet refuse to discharge them? who make their religion consist rather in confessing that they do not do their duty, than in discharging it? This will not do. Christ will not be satisfied with our confessing what we ought to do, and that we do not do it. Shall we recklessly turn away from what we ought, and do that which we ought not to do? It is true that confession is a duty; but who so confesseth and forsaketh, shall have mercy.

The third condition on which the race may be won is that we start right.

1. The first thing is to be born again. Unless persons are truly regenerated by the Spirit of God, they run in vain. For in fact, they are not in the way. They are running in a wrong direction altogether, and of course will run in

vain.

The fourth condition is that you run lawfully.

1. You must keep the commandments of Christ. You must live a life of faith on the Son of God. You must learn to walk by faith and not by sight. Christ everywhere makes obedience to His commandments the only evidence of acceptance with Him. The Apostle says, and in other places it is asserted, that they that run in a race are not crowned except they run lawfully, that is, according to the rules of the races. Nor shall we win the prize unless we comply with Christ's directions. He is the judge. So run therefore that you may obtain.

The fifth condition of winning the prize is perseverance to the end. The Bible everywhere conditionates salvation on perseverance in holiness to the end of life. So does the text--"And run with patience, that is, perseverance, the race that is set before us." Let this be ever remembered.

The sixth condition is deep earnestness and honesty in religion. No man will, according to Christ's direction, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, make this the first and the great business of his life, unless he is deeply honest and in earnest on the subject.

The seventh condition is entire consecration of our lives to the service and glory of God. Nothing short of entire consecration is real honesty and hearty sincerity in the work.

REMARKS.

1. It is fatal to encumber ourselves with any thing that is inconsistent with a holy, spiritual life. Anything that is inconsistent with our daily walking with God, is entirely inconsistent with our obtaining salvation.

2. From this subject we can see the madness and folly of great multitudes of professors of religion. What would be thought of a racer in the Olympic games who should load himself down with sand, or clay, or iron, or copper, or silver or gold, or should impede the action of his muscles by tight dressing and lacing? Or suffering his time or thoughts to be engrossed with things entirely inconsistent with his making the utmost exertion. Now it appears to me that a great many professors of religion misapprehend the true nature of religion, and what is

indispensable to their ever obtaining a crown of glory, Here is one man running the Christian race with an enormous load of unnecessary business on his back; and here is a woman attempting to run the Christian race laced up in such a manner as to be entirely unable to make any exertion. Should she attempt to make any extraordinary exertions, she would fail for want of breath. She has loaded herself down with trinkets and everything that is inconvenient for the race set before her. There is a man with his enormous pockets full of silver and gold, with an immense bundle of papers under his arm, a tin chest of bonds and mortgages, certificates of bank stock, and multitudes of things strapped on his back. There is another trying to run the Christian race, and driving a whole company of negro slaves before him. He is determined to get to glory, and not to leave his slave property behind. There is another with a monstrous brewing establishment, and another with a whiskey distillery on his shoulders. And in short, we see the racers coming on to the ground, with every variety of fantastic encumbrance on them--with all the weights and besetting sins that the devil could desire them to have, in order to prevent their winning the prize. Now let me say that the conduct of such professors of religion is not only most unreasonable, but so highly ridiculous as to be a mere burlesque on the Christian religion. It is the greatest libel and stumbling block that can be conceived.

3. Until you are prepared to make every needed sacrifice, to cut off a right hand and pluck out a right eye if it causes you to offend, you are never likely to win in this race.

4. You see the importance of counting the cost. It will cost you much to be truly religious. You can obtain a hope. You can pass for a Christian. You can gain a reputation with a worldly church, of being a disciple of Christ. But mark well what I say and what Christ says, except a man forsake all that he hath, he cannot be a disciple of Christ's. Selfishness under every form and in every degree must be cut up root and branch and put away entirely and forever, or you will make shipwreck of your soul.

5. From this subject we see the misery of creating such a multitude of artificial wants among mankind, and the necessity of simplifying as much as possible all our business and all our domestic arrangements, so as to leave the mind as unembarrassed as possible, and to give ourselves as much time as we need to cultivate that deep spirituality which is indispensable to salvation.

6. We see the folly of undertaking responsibilities to which we are not plainly

called by our Heavenly Father. These are not things with which we should encumber ourselves, let them be what they may. We should never suffer ourselves to be brought into circumstances of responsibility, to which we are not plainly called in providence. If we do, these will assuredly be stumbling blocks to us. We cannot pray for the blessing, and direction and support of God; and without His direction and support we shall fall, and make shipwreck of our souls.

7. The doctrine of this discourse is not to be admitted merely as a matter of theory, and we cannot get to heaven by merely saying this is true, and we ought to do so and so and then go as we have done. But let it be understood, we must really and in fact lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and run with patience--or, as it should have been rendered, perseverance, the race that is set before us. To acknowledge the obligation and not to comply with it, is fatal. Let this always be understood; when we acknowledge our duty, we must do it, or we have no right to expect the crown. Beloved, let us see to this.

[Back to Top](#)

Rejoicing in Boastings

Lecture V

March 26, 1845

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--James 4:16: "But now ye rejoice in your boastings; all such rejoicing is evil."

In discussing this subject I shall show,

I. When one may be said to rejoice in his boastings.

II. The wickedness of such boastings.

I. When one may be said to rejoice in his boastings.

1. When we have a self-complacent spirit. For example, when we feel a self-complacent joy in view of our worldly prosperity; when we look on our worldly prosperity as resulting from our own providence, prudence, economy or goodness, without giving the glory to God as the Author and Giver of every perfect gift. When we do not recognize Him as not only ordering the outward circumstances, but as giving such directions to our thoughts and efforts as to secure this prosperity. If our worldly prosperity has been brought about in a manner consistent with honesty and Christian integrity, God is of course to have the glory of so working providentially without us, and so working by His Spirit within us to will and to do, as to have secured this result; so that the glory belongs to Him. It is grace which has secured this result, and what have we that we did not receive? And who has made us in this respect to differ from others? Why then should we boast, and be self-complacent? Why should we take credit to ourselves, as if these things were not a gift? Whenever we do so, we rejoice in our boastings. But if our worldly prosperity has resulted from any dishonesty whatever, then of course to indulge in self-complacency, is not only to rejoice in our boastings, but to rejoice in our villany.

2. To indulge in a spirit of self-complacency on account of our influence in the world is rejoicing in our boastings.

First, because if our influence is great and good, grace working within us, by the Spirit, and providentially without us, has secured this result, and all the merit we can claim is that we yielded, or suffered ourselves to be persuaded by the infinite entreaties and persuasion of God to do our duty. Being as it were over-persuaded, we yielded, and when our reluctance was overcome, we consented to take the course that has given us this influence, and in this sense alone have we any reason to be self-complacent.

But in how much higher sense does all the glory belong to God, who from His own self-originated goodness set Himself to persuade us, and persevered until He did persuade us to take such a course as secured this influence. What reason then have we for self-complacency? Verily, none at all. And whenever we indulge it on account of our influence we rejoice in our boastings.

But if our influence is evil, to be self-complacent in that, is not only to rejoice in our boastings but to boast of our shameless wickedness.

3. When we are self-complacent on account of our intellectual attainments. If they are great, or whatever they are, it is a gift of God. He created our intellect. He has so arranged His providences as to give us opportunity to cultivate it. He has also by His providence without, and His working within, secured the application of our minds in such a manner as to develop our intelligence. And now in what sense have we a right to be self-complacent? Have we studied hard? It is because He has so constituted us, so arranged His providences, and all the circumstances of the case, as to persuade us to study hard. He has overcome our sluggishness, and pressed us onward by ten thousand influences without and within us, and secured this result. And now, do we take the credit to ourselves? Verily this is rejoicing in our boastings.

4. When we indulge self-complacency in regard to our spiritual attainments, we rejoice in our boastings.

But I am almost ready to say that these things are incompatible: that is, that self-complacency in respect to our spiritual attainments, would demonstrate

that we have made no spiritual attainments at all. But it is undoubtedly true that sometimes persons who have made some spiritual attainments, afterwards become self-complacent, and develop a disgusting amount of spiritual pride, or which is the same thing, rejoicing in their boastings. Buy why should we be self-complacent on account of any degree of spiritual attainments? We were totally dead in trespasses and sins. God began a work within us by first convicting us, creating desires, setting aside our cavils with all long-suffering, and persevering in the midst of all our obstinacy, rebellion, and sin, and using the most persuasive means to obtain our consent to be spiritual at all. He has never gained one step with us only by pressing us with truths and providences, so arranging His providences without and so enlightening us by His Spirit within, as to overcome our utter reluctance, enmity, and spiritual death, and after a protracted struggle, at last to gain our consent to follow Him and be saved. His Spirit has never succeeded in making us spiritually-minded, any farther than He has anticipated all our movements toward Himself, by first moving toward us, and beginning to call up our attention and press us with such considerations as to overcome our apathy, enmity, and unbelief, and finally succeeded in bringing forth the voluntary result of our present degree of spirituality. Prompted by His own sovereign goodness, He has thus moved on us, worked in us to will and to do--surrounded us without and enlightened us within, and at last got our consent. Now I ask, how much reason have we for self-complacency? And in how low a sense can it be said that we are worthy of praise? True we have been free. But it is also true that our liberty has been abused and used only in opposition to God, until finally overcome with His persevering and overpowering persuasions. True, we have done our duty at last. But why have we done it? Because God in the abundance of His grace has persevered till He has over-persuaded us, and finally wrung out from us our consent.

But observe in how much higher sense does the glory belong to God than to us. Verily instead of being self-complacent we have reason to take to ourselves the utmost shame that it should cost God all this effort to overcome our reluctance, and persuade us to do our duty. Are we to ascribe glory to ourselves, to be self-complacent, to plume ourselves, and rejoice in our own goodness? It is infinitely more reasonable to hide our faces in the dust, and to say we are unprofitable servants. We have only done that which it was our duty to do, and even that we have not done only as we have been overcome

by the persuasions and pleadings of infinite and persevering goodness.

Again. When we give ourselves up to rejoicing in our spiritual state, instead of rejoicing in God, we always rejoice in our boastings. I have seen persons who seem to me to be watching their spiritual state, and to be contemplating their own feelings, with a kind of self-complacency, from day to day. They remind me of a peacock when he struts in the sun-beams, and turns his head from side to side and views his gorgeous tail. He seem to delight himself in his own beauty and to be taken up with rejoicing in the glory of his own appearance. He struts and seems to say, "What is so beautiful as this? Am I not the most beautiful of birds? And have I not more reason to carry my head high than any others of the feathered tribe? Indeed I am quite satisfied with my own exquisite beauty." Now some persons seem to be taken up in the same way. They have worked themselves into a kind of ecstasy; have got certain views, as they say, of Christ that have brought their sensibility into a very happy state. They seem to be saying, "God I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, that I am not in bondage like this legalist." In words they ascribe the glory to God, just as the Pharisee must have done who is contrasted with the publican. It must be that in theory at least he ascribed his pretended goodness to God; else he could not have thanked God that he was so good, for why should he have thanked God unless in theory at least he ascribed his righteousness to God? "God," he says, "I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, or even as this publican." Now I have seen some that appeared to be precisely in this state of mind from day to day. Instead of rejoicing in God, they seem to be taken up with their own state of mind. They are contemplating what they call their own peace and their own goodness. The state of their sensibility is with them the chief subject of attention, and source of self-complacency. While they are practically inefficient in the kingdom of God and are doing nothing to pull sinners out of the fire or to sanctify the saints, they still have a wonderful degree of self-complacency on account of their state of mind. Now this is nothing but rejoicing in their boastings. How infinitely different from the publican, who, standing afar off, and not daring so much as to lift up his eyes to heaven, smote upon his breast and cried, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." By this I do not intend to

teach that a man must be conscious all the while of committing sin in order to be accepted of God, or that a sense of our sinfulness is in itself an evidence that we are accepted of God. But I do mean that a person in a right state of mind is never taken up with a self-complacent view of his goodness. But his rejoicings are always in God and never in himself.

Again, when we cherish self-complacency on account of our usefulness, we rejoice in our boastings. If we have been useful, to whom does the glory belong? If any good has been done through us, by whom has it been done? Has God done this, or have we done it? If we have so much as intended to do any good, God has begotten and perpetuated in us this intention. If this intention has been carried out, and has secured the desired result, why do we glory? It is God who has worked within and without. He has moved us to these efforts, and He has secured these results. What though we have been free, yet He has over-persuaded us to use our liberty as we have. Nothing but the most strenuous efforts on the part of God have ever secured in us an effort to do anything good. He has overcome our reluctance, He has put away our slothfulness, He has quickened our death, and surrounded us, within and without, with such influences as to lead us in this way in spite of all the natural tendency of our minds in an opposite direction. Surely, if any good has been done, the glory belongs to God. Shame and confusion of face belongs to us, that it has been so difficult for God to persuade us even to intend any good. What though we did at last intend it: what though He finally prevailed on us: let us take shame rather than praise to ourselves. Surely God has done it. He has worked in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure, and with great pains taking, has, through us, wrought some good results. And are we indulging ourselves in self-complacency in consequence of some good which has resulted from our labors? Shame, where is thy blush? All such rejoicings are rejoicings in our boastings.

Again, we rejoice in our boastings whenever we congratulate ourselves on account of the high stand we have taken on any moral question. If the stand we have taken be right, who has secured this result? Where should we have gone if not led and overcome by grace divine? Has not God paved all the way, guided us by His eye, lifted us up with His

hands, and brought all the influences to bear, both within and without us, that have finally over-persuaded us, and brought us to take right grounds? And are we the persons to be self-complacent? What if a man who was bent on murder should with the greatest possible pains-taking be persuaded to relinquish his object, and then plume himself on his virtue in abstaining from the bloody deed? Ought he not rather to say, ""God be merciful to me a sinner!" It was in my heart to have committed this horrible deed, and hadst Thou not over-persuaded me by Thy goodness, confounded and broken me down, and turned me away from this infernal project, my hands had now been red with a brother's blood! Be sure the glory all belongs to God."

So it is with whatever right ground is taken by us on any subject. Instead of being self-complacent, it becomes us rather to say, "God be merciful to me a sinner." It was in our hearts to have said and done anything else than what was right -- to have taken any other stand than a right one. But, O Lord, Thou hast persuaded us, and we have suffered ourselves to be persuaded.

Again, whenever we complacently regard ourselves as the objects of divine favor, we rejoice in our boastings. Suppose God blesses us, gives us His Spirit, makes us useful, enlarges us in any respect, and we feel self-complacent on this account, and rejoice in it as if He had blessed us on account of our own goodness, and intended to bear a testimony of our favor; this is rejoicing in our boastings. Why may not the veriest sinner that was ever converted take the same ground, and say that God has converted him because he was so good, or the veriest backslider that was ever reclaimed say that God has given him reclaiming grace because he was so good, and acceptable to God in his backslidings? The fact is, whenever we regard God's favors as a testimony of our own goodness, or as being bestowed on us on account of our own worthiness, we are always rejoicing in our boastings. All favors bestowed on us, are bestowed for an infinitely different reason, only for the sake of Him who died for us and rose again.

Again, when we fail to recognize the fact that it is not for our sakes, but for His own name's sake that we receive anything from His hand better than hell, we are rejoicing in our boastings. We have deserved

nothing but a dire damnation, and He takes particular pains to say to us, it is "not for your sakes, be it known unto you that I do these things, but for My great name's sake;" and whenever we fail to recognize this truth, and indulge a self-complacent spirit on account of any favors received, whether temporal or spiritual, we are always rejoicing in our boastings.

Again, whenever we fail to recognize the fact that He works all our goodness in us, and that too in spite of our natural obstinacy, and determination to have our own way. When I speak of His working love or goodness in us, I do not mean to imply that we are not free, moral agents. I do not mean that we are not in a sense co-workers with Him, for we really are, voluntarily; and the way in which He works in us is as I have already intimated, by over-persuading us, over-coming us by His powerful persuasions, and drawing us by these in an opposite direction from that in which we should have gone, if we had been left to ourselves, so that in every instance, in which we are conscious of doing our duty, we are to know assuredly that we should not have done it unless God by His grace had secured this result in us in spite of all our natural obstinacy and tendency in an opposite direction.

Again, whenever we fail to recognize all the good done to others through our instrumentality as being so absolutely God's work through the agency of His Spirit in us, and with us that we have no ground whatever for the least glory or self-complacency.

Again, whenever with self-complacency we compare ourselves with others in any respect. It is reported of Whitfield, that on seeing a poor drunkard reeling along the streets, he exclaimed with tears, "But for the grace of God, there goes George Whitfield." Paul could say, "By the grace of God I am what I am." Now in whatever respect we may be better than others, in better circumstances outwardly, or in a better state inwardly, we have no reason whatever for boasting. "Who hath made you to differ from another? or what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" says Paul. "But if thou didst receive it, why boastest thou thyself as if thou hast not received it?" If we are better than others, it is only because God has in His wisdom and benevolence secured this result. It was not because we were any better by nature, for we belong

to the mass of fallen humanity. We are by nature the children of wrath, even as others, we are only brands plucked out of the burning, are only a little clay, taken from the common lump and molded by the Potter, and are in no respect better, more praise-worthy than others, even the vilest of mankind, only as divine grace has overcome our downward tendency, and over-persuaded us until we have been subdued, and at last given our consent to be thus molded. Brethren, did you see that vile drunkard lying there in the ditch? Did you see his bloated face, his blood-shot eyes, his almost naked carcass rotting in the gutter? As soon as he could speak did you hear him swear and blaspheme? Now mark me, brother; but for the grace of God that is yourself. Had not the grace and sovereign goodness of God surrounded you, wrought within you and without you, to secure different results, you had today been like him, or perhaps even worse. And if you are not as degraded and wicked and miserable, as any sinner either in or out of hell, no thanks to you. You have no reason for self-complacency. God has brought this about, and all that you can say is that He wrought you over with His grace and His providence, within and without you, till He at last secured your consent.

Woman; are you priding yourself on your modesty, chastity, your comeliness without, or purity within? See that vile harlot. She sits before you on the curb-stone of one of our great cities. She is drunk. She has lost her bonnet, her shoes. She is ragged, polluted, disgraced, profane, a wretch too loathsome to look upon, and too degraded to be thought of without disgust. Now mark me, but for the sovereign grace of God you had been in that harlot's place. To be sure you have been free and voluntary in all your ways. But O! had not sovereign grace been busy arranging all the elements without you, and keeping up a busy play of thought and motive within you; had not God plied you with ten thousand moving considerations, arranged all His plans from eternity, laid all His trains, pressed every consideration and brought about things as He has until He has really persuaded you and overcome your reluctance, where had you been but in the gutter, in a brothel or in hell today? And now mark me again, in what respect soever any man or woman is any better in character or in any better circumstances than the damned in hell, the vilest of the vile, the most dissolute of the dissolute, the most profane of

the profane, the most abominable of the abominable, it is owing to the grace of God only. Grace has persuaded you to all this, and all the virtue you have is, that after great reluctance, you have barely suffered yourselves to be persuaded. Now is it for you or me to be self-complacent, to boast ourselves above others, to take the Pharisee's place and thank God on account of our own goodness? Shall we boast of our prudence on our worldly affairs, or of our efforts in our spiritual affairs? Shall we look around on the world of mankind and breathe out a selfish complacent breath, or shall we cry out, "God be merciful to us, sinners." "But for Thy glorious sovereign and preserving grace, we should have been as wicked and as miserable as any of the damned in hell."

Whenever we take credit for being better than the worst, or less miserable than the most miserable, whenever we indulge the least self-complacency in the comparison of ourselves with any other human beings, or even with any devils in hell, we are rejoicing in our boastings.

Again, when we ascribe to our own wisdom or prudence any success which may attend our efforts in any direction, we are rejoicing in our boastings. Who has developed this wisdom and prudence? And who has directed us in this way, and secured this result? Verily God! And to Him belongs all the glory.

Again, when we ascribe to our own virtue the avoidance of any crime, we are rejoicing in our boastings. Whenever we say we should not have been guilty of such and such a crime, or that we should have done thus and thus, which is better than others have done, and have the least self-complacency in these sayings, we don't know ourselves. We are abusing God. We are rejoicing in our boastings.

Again, when we have the slightest confidence in ourselves we should do any good, that we should avoid any crime, in short, when we have the slightest confidence in ourselves, in any respect whatever, we are rejoicing in our boastings. For surely we can be depended on for nothing but to sin, and only sin, and that continually, if left to ourselves. And in just so far as we fail to recognize this fact, we rejoice in our boastings. If we imagine that there is anything within us that is any part of ourselves, or for which we have the least occasion to boast, that can secure us against any crime however horrid, we are

deceiving ourselves, and are rejoicing in our own boastings.

Again, when we have any confidence at all in the efficiency of our own resolutions, and purposes of good. Whenever we comfort ourselves with the idea that these purposes of ours, will secure any good result whatever unsustained by the grace of God, we are deceived and playing the fool, and are rejoicing in our boastings.

Again, whenever we fall short of recognizing the fact that in us apart from grace, there dwelleth no good thing--that whatever attainment we may have made in holiness, still holiness could not live in us except as it is constantly sustained by the divine presence and energy, we deceive ourselves. If we imagine that any attainments in holiness are so thoroughly made, that any virtue is so lodged within us, that it will live a moment if the Holy Spirit is withdrawn, we are deceived. And whenever we comfort ourselves with any such ideas as these, we are rejoicing in our boastings.

Again, when we overlook the fact that all our tendencies are downward, away from heaven, away from God and towards the depths of hell, we are deceiving ourselves.

Again, whenever we fall short of what the most spiritual saints call self-annihilation, in respect to everything that is good, we are rejoicing in our boastings. By self-annihilation in this connection, is not meant that we are not active agents in obeying God; but that our activity and free agency are so overruled and directed by the grace of God, working without and within us as to secure a result which is the opposite of what had taken place, but for this divine agency.

II. Show the wickedness of rejoicing in our boastings.

1. It is wicked because it is rejoicing in a most pernicious falsehood. It is infinitely far from true that we have any good reason for self-complacency. On the other hand it is true that we have infinite reason to be ashamed of our wickedness, our great and astonishing aversion both to do and to be anything which we ought to do or be. And for us to rejoice in ourselves, is a rejoice in our boastings. The least degree of self-complacency in us, is infinitely inconsistent with reason and truth.

Again, it is wicked because it is unjust to take credit to ourselves. The praise belongs to God. All goodness originates with Him. He has at the greatest expense and with the greatest pains-taking barely secured our consent; and shall we after all this persuasion pride ourselves for being barely overcome by His strong persuasions and influences, so that we merely consent to do our duty?

Again, this is wicked because it is really robbing God of His glory; that is, it is attempting to rob Him, and is taking credit to ourselves where the credit belongs to Him only.

Again, for us to take the credit to ourselves, is denying the work and grace of the Holy Spirit.

Again, it is overlooking and denying the providence of God without and the grace of God within, that has secured all these results.

Again, it is a virtual denial of the Bible. For the Bible takes the ground that we have no reason for self-complacency, but infinite reason for humiliation and self-loathing.

Again, all self-complacency is spiritual pride, is infinitely unreasonable and odious in the sight of God. It is setting aside the gospel and is opposition to God.

REMARKS.

1. It is very important to understand the views of inspired writers on this subject. Hear Paul, "I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." Again, "I am crucified with Christ, yet I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God," and not by my own faith. Inspired writers seem fully to have recognized the truth of this discourse, and everywhere insist that God works all our good works in us; that it is God that works in us to will and do of His own good pleasure; and in short, that it is sovereign almighty grace that secures all human virtue.

2. There is a great deal of rejoicing in our boastings. It is amazing to see how much of this there is of which persons are not themselves aware. The egotism and filthy boasting with which the world and even the church are filled, must be

infinitely disgusting and abominable in the sight of God.

3. It is to be feared that there is a great deal of this boasting in spirit, where there is but little of it in form. Often, no doubt, much is ascribed in words to the grace of God, of which men give the glory to themselves and not to God.

4. No person gets clear of rejoicing in his boastings, unless he apprehends what it is to be "in Christ Jesus;" to live by the faith of the Son of God. To have that faith, patience, love, meekness, gentleness, goodness, and all the graces of Christ developed within himself until he understands what it is to put off self and put on Christ in the sense of becoming dead to his own goodness, and alive only in the life and activity of Jesus Christ.

5. Again, I remark that just in proportion as persons become really holy, they are indisposed to take any credit to themselves. Nothing is more offensive and infinitely abominable, shocking, and disgusting to a sanctified soul than self-complacency. Every shade and every degree of it is loathsome as the very filth of hell.

6. It is often very difficult to speak exactly the language of our own feelings and sentiments on this subject. We find Paul, as it were, often over-hauling himself. When he has spoken of himself as being good, or as having done anything good, he speaks as if he would take it back, and say--not I, not I, but Christ that dwelleth in me.

7. From this subject it is easy to see how Christians get into darkness. Whenever they indulge in the least self-complacency in any respect, they sin, grieve the Spirit of God, and get into darkness. Oftentimes they seem to be entirely ignorant of the cause of their darkness. They look around and ask wherein they have sinned. Finding nothing in their outward conduct to accuse themselves of, they are at a great loss to account of this spiritual desertion. Now if they would but direct their minds to thoughts and feelings indulged, they would often learn that they have been at least dividing the glory and praise of their goodness with God. They have been stealing from God. They have been secretly filching a jewel from the diadem of Christ, and would fain place it as a crown on their own head.

8. Spiritual pride, or rejoicing in our boastings is one of the most common forms of backsliding. How few persons there are that can bear prosperity, temporal or

spiritual, without indulging in self-complacency, and thus grieving away the Spirit of God. This no doubt, more frequently than anything else, causes the young convert to stumble. He stumbles without knowing at what he stumbles. He becomes spiritually proud without observing it. He rejoices in his own boastings, and falls, and sadly dishonors God.

9. Revivals of religion are more frequently put down by this sin than by any other. The minister and the lay brethren are powerfully moved by divine grace, and bestir themselves. God pours out His Spirit and a revival ensues. Directly they begin to be self-complacent. God is blessing their labors. They begin to tell what I have done, and what I have done, and how God blessed me in this labor and in that -- how this sermon, and that exhortation, and that prayer, and that fast had resulted thus and thus. And perhaps ever and anon there is a little puff in the newspaper, and a self-complacent sending out and trumpeting of our own fame, that the world and the church may hear. The Spirit of God is grieved; He turns away His face; He withholds His hand. Young converts stumble, sinners return to stupidity, the church return every one to his own way, and desolation drives its plough-share over the fair heritage of God.

10. Many persons apparently good have so rejoiced in boastings, that God seems to have left them. This has been true of ministers oftentimes--of those who have labored as evangelists, awhile successfully--of many laymen who have once known what it was to prevail with God. They have rejoiced in their boastings until God has forsaken them. He has thrown them aside, and there they lie and rot; and if they escape the depths of hell, it will be only by the persevering grace of God.

11. This subject ought to be a warning to all classes.

12. We are never right only as we lose sight of self, and rejoice only in the Lord, and glory only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Persons are never so nearly right as when they have the least apprehension of being right--as when they have the least thought of their own comeliness and virtue--when they are the most completely empty of all thoughts of their own goodness, and their minds are most entirely absorbed with the consideration of the goodness of God, and when all the powers of the mind are directed away from the contemplation of self, and most engrossed with the work of the Lord, the goodness and the infinite grace of God.

13. Persons who are really in a sanctified state, are not occupied with rejoicing in themselves. If they are really sanctified, it is impossible that they should be thus engaged in self-complacent rejoicing. For when sanctified, they are really emptied of all self-complacent rejoicings, and filled only with a sense of the adorable and sovereign grace of God. And with the utmost loathing and abhorrence of themselves, as for themselves they can say with all their hearts, "In me, that is, in my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing." "By the grace of God alone, I am what I am."

[Back to Top](#)

The Church Bound to Convert the World- No.'s 1 & 2

Lectures VI & VII

April 9, 1845

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 28:18-20: "And Jesus came, and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

LECTURE VI.

In discussing this subject I shall endeavor to show;

I. What the command to teach all nations, means.

II. On whom it is obligatory.

III. What is implied in it.

IV. Conditions of obedience.

V. The causes of failure.

VI. The great guilt of failure.

I. What does the command, "Go and teach all nations," mean?

In the margin of your Bibles, you will read, go and disciple or make disciples of all nations. This is undoubtedly the real meaning of the original. The word teach in the nineteenth verse, is not the same word which is rendered teach in the twentieth verse. The true meaning of the command is, go and make disciples or Christians of all nations.

II. On whom is this command obligatory?

It was addressed by Christ to those of His disciples who were then present, but doubtless was intended for all Christians, for it is not at all likely that Christ expected the disciples then present to do all this work. He doubtless meant to devolve the responsibility upon all Christians, to rest upon their consciences in all coming time until the work should be done.

III. The third inquiry is, What is implied in this command?

1. The command itself implies ability to obey it. Every command of God implies this in the strongest manner. It should be remembered that God is perfect in both love and wisdom: therefore He cannot be so unjust as to demand of us an impossibility, nor so ignorant as not to know the real limits of our powers.

2. But again let it be observed that Christ assumes our ability to obey this command on the ground that He has all power in heaven and in earth and has promised to be with the church in this work. In the eighteenth verse He says, "All power is given to me in heaven and in earth." The command follows; "Go ye, therefore, that is for this reason, because I have all power in heaven and in earth, go and make Christians of all nations; and lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world." We see then that Christ assumes our ability on the ground that He has all power in heaven and earth, and promises to be with us always even unto the end of the world; pledging His divine agency to work within us to will and to do, and without us to open the way providentially for our labor, and withal, to work by His Spirit in those to whom we publish the gospel. Thus Christ exerts His divine power in heaven and on earth so far as it is needed in accomplishing

this great work.

3. The command implies that the great work of the church militant is, to make disciples of all nations; in other words, to convert the world to God.

4. It implies that this is their only work, that the only business they have on the earth is to glorify God in the world's conversion. They are to do or say nothing, and be nothing, more or less than is conducive to this end. To this their whole being, time, influence, and possessions are to be consecrated. In that solemn parting hour, Christ doubtless meant to give them His whole mind in these few last words; Go, apply yourselves directly to the conversion of the world, and finish the great work which I have begun. I have given you the example; let your eye too be single, and your devotion unwearied and entire.

IV. I am in the next place to consider the conditions of obedience to this command.

1. The first condition which I mention is, hearty and entire consecration to this work. The church will never accomplish it, until they go forth in the true spirit of the requirement, being devoted with a single eye to this work as Christ was. By this it is not intended that every Christian should be a preacher of the gospel, for there are a great many kinds of work to be done. Preaching is but a small part of the labor. Printing, and writing, the mechanic arts, agriculture, commerce, merchandise, and in short all the useful employments of this world are to be employed by the church as parts of this great work. But they are all to be pursued with the same end, that is, to convert the world.

Again, not only must ministers be consecrated to this work, but lay-men and women also. Whatever the immediate occupation of each individual is, let him pursue it with the same singleness of eye, and entire consecration to the great end of the world's conversion that ministers are bound to have in preaching the gospel. Everybody understands that ministers ought to preach for the glory of God, and ought to consecrate themselves to the work of the world's conversion, that this is their great business, and that they really apostatize in heart from their work whenever they fail of giving themselves up heart and soul to it. Now this is true of ministers; and it is equally true of all Christians. That Christian who tills his ground, or stands behind his

counter, or writes, or prints, or does anything else, is bound to be as entirely consecrated to the glory of God and the world's conversion, as the minister ought to be, and unless he is he can never be saved. Lay-men and women judge right in respect to what is required of ministers in this matter, but they should understand that precisely the same is required of them. Until this is recognized by the church at large, and until the followers of Christ in every sect consecrate themselves to this work, with as single an eye as that which ministers are bound to have, the work can never be performed.

2. Another condition is, union of effort. By united effort I mean the opposite of sectarian effort. By union among Christians I do not mean that they must all be in all respect of one opinion, but that they should be one in heart, and in respect to doctrinal opinions be agreed in all the fundamental points, also be agreed in tolerating each other, and allowing each other the most perfect liberty of opinion in respect to all points not fundamental. They must agree to differ on minor points without controversy or jangling. They must love each other so intensely and labor for the world's conversion so sincerely as not at all to stick on any of the minor points of Christian doctrine. If the church waits till all her members think alike on minor points, the world will never be converted; or if she expects to convert the world while cut up into sects and jangling parties, she is entirely deceived. A sectarian church can never convert the world to God, any more than so many Bramins could. If they convert them to their respective parties, this is by no means converting them to God; it only makes them sectarians. I am humbly of opinion, that until union prevails in the church in the sense above described, the world can never be converted. But more of this in another place.

3. Another condition of obedience to this command is, the realization of individual responsibility. The fact is that there is a strange shrinking away in this matter. Christians do not seem to realize that every man and woman of them is pledged on the solemnity of an oath to do his and her utmost to convert the world to God. In making a profession of religion they pledge implicit obedience to Christ. Now this is His last, and I may say, His great command. This is, as it were, a summary of all His requirements. It is the condensation of the whole of gospel duty, to convert the world. Now to the accomplishment of this end, every Christian of every age stands pledged. His whole being, influence, time, property, talents, resources, everything he

has or is or can control, are pledged to this work on the solemnity of an oath. Nothing less than this is implied in pledging obedience to Christ and in making a public profession of religion. Now how is it that so few professors of religion have this idea standing out in strong development before them as the great idea which they are to aim constantly at realizing? Until this comes to be the omnipresent idea of the church, the great thing at which not only the whole but every individual aims, and which all endeavor constantly to accomplish, the world will never be converted. Every Christian man, woman, and child, must address himself and herself decidedly and exclusively to this work, or it will not be done.

4. The church must not expect to effect this wholly, or even principally through the instrumentality of a learned ministry. It is perfectly absurd for the church to expect ever to send forth a sufficient number of men, learned in the common acceptation of the term, to convert the world. Some learned men are indispensable to the accomplishment of this work. We need learned men to translate the Bible, to write books, and critical commentaries, to bring forth everything that belongs to the literature and philology of the Bible. These men have their places and their use, and are very important, and indeed indispensable to the accomplishment of this work. Yet really but little more than this can be expected of that part of the ministry which is devoted to the literature of the Bible. They have not time nor are they the men to go right forth and reap the harvest. They are as it were engaged in manufacturing the tools and preparing them for the work. They are stationed here and there to do a multitude of things which the less learned cannot do. But it should not be for a moment supposed that colleges and theological seminaries are going to provide men enough for the world's conversion. The fact is that lay-men and women must come up to this work and make personal and direct effort, and really preach the gospel; or to use a less objectionable phrase, they must in every way suited to their circumstance, tell the story of the cross, and press the truth upon the consideration of men. The colleges and theological institutions have their places, and in their place they are very important. They are designed to furnish the indispensable number of learned men for the accomplishment of this work. But these men of learning after all, if the world is converted, will be found only as one to a thousand or ten thousand of the laborers that are to be employed in this field.

5. Nor need the church expect to accomplish this work wholly or perhaps even mainly through the instrumentality of any ministry whatever either learned or unlearned. There are no doubt hundreds and thousands of men who are not learned in the common acceptance of the term who are men of sound minds, ardent piety, good judgment, great discretion, who may be safely put into the ministry, who ought to be put in and who must be put in before this world can be converted. But even these will not be enough. The colporteur system needs to be extended a hundred or a thousand fold. Indeed laborers should be sent forth and shed over the world like the leaves of autumn until the church, men and women, go everywhere, as in the early ages, proclaiming the word of life. Everyone who has read the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles attentively knows that the Apostles all labored for a considerable number of years in and about Jerusalem, while the lay-men and women went every where preaching the gospel. There had to be a great struggle at Jerusalem to prevent the light being put out altogether in Judea. The whole influence of the Apostles was needed there for several years. But when the persecution arose about Stephen, the infant church, except the Apostles, were scattered abroad. These under God were the means of diffusing the knowledge of Christ and the savor of His name in all directions.

6. Another condition of obedience to this command is, the exhibition of brotherly love and Christian confidence. Christ in His last prayer made this the condition of the world's conversion, and it manifestly is so. "Neither pray I," says He, "for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word, that they may all be one as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me." Where Christians manifest no mutual attachment and little mutual confidence, all their theorizing will only pass among mankind for mere theory. The gospel in their hands will never get hold of the mass of men until the world are compelled to say, "See how these brethren love one another." Christians will neither have nor deserve the confidence of the world till they both have and deserve the confidence of each other. If they will not confide in one another who shall confide in them? This question is natural and inevitable, so that I regard it as an indispensable condition of the world's conversion, that the church manifest every where intense brotherly love and perfect Christian confidence. This is

so in every community. You will find the wicked everywhere impressed with a sense of the importance of the gospel in proportion to the union, affection, and confidence of Christians among themselves. If professors of religion manifest but little attachment to each other, but little confidence in each other, the great mass of the unconverted are little or not at all impressed with the importance of religion; but if Christians are united, love each other with pure love, fervently, and show that they have the greatest confidence in each other, this impression arouses the world, and they begin immediately to inquire, What shall I do to be saved?

7. Another condition of success in this work and obedience to the spirit of this requirement is, confidence in the presence, power, and readiness of Christ to go right forward with the church to the accomplishment of this work. The Apostles and early Christians seemed to realize that Christ was in earnest in saying, "All power is given to Me in heaven and in earth; Go ye, therefore, and disciple all nations, and lo, I am with you even to the end of the world." They seemed to understand that Christ was really in earnest in this matter, and that He really was ready, able, and willing, and that His whole heart was set upon the work, and that He was indeed with them, giving efficiency to what they did. When they were persecuted and commanded not to preach or to teach in the name of Christ, hear what they say; "And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voices to God with one accord, and said, Lord, Thou art God which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that is in them. Who, by the mouth of Thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ. For of a truth against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed both Herod, and Pontius Pilate with the gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings; and grant unto Thy servants that with all boldness they may speak Thy word, by stretching forth Thy hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of Thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with

boldness. And with great power gave the Apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all." Here is a specimen of the manner in which they regarded and treated opposition, and of their faith in Christ in respect to the performance of this great work. How could they fail of success?

8. Another condition of success is the practice of all needed self-denial. This is requisite in order to furnish the means and the devoted men and women to go forth to every nook and corner of the world where human beings are, and proclaim to them the gospel of salvation. We want men who are willing to take their lives in their hands, who have health and strength and heart to the work, and who can labor as some of our missionaries are laboring among the Indians, and as some of the African missionaries do, and as some others do in various parts of the world. We need hundreds and thousands of these men, men like minded, or rather men possessing a hundred fold more if possible of faith, patience and power than these already in the field. I would not find fault in general with the men that are engaged in this work, nor say any thing that should imply a want of consecration in them, but they are laboring almost single handed, greatly straitened for want of means, and their calls for help are unutterably agonizing. What do they tell us they could do under God in converting the world if they had the men and the means? But recently I saw an account of an address delivered by a British missionary from India, in which he affirmed that the obstacles throughout India to the spread of the Gospel were fewer than they were in England, that if twenty thousand missionaries could at once be set down in India they might go everywhere preaching the gospel to large and attentive congregations, in which not a man could be found that had ever heard the gospel before; that the land is all open, the fields are white and waving for the harvest, and nothing needed but men and means, and faith in Christ to fire the train and spring the mind, and as it were blow up the very kingdom of the devil. O what a call is this! O what a door is here opened for the church to enter and achieve the world's conversion!

9. Another condition is patience in the performance of this work. No man ever accomplishes anything in the kingdom of God only as he suffers patience to have its perfect work. It is predicted of Christ that He should neither fail nor be discouraged till He had set judgment in the earth.

Whoever gets out of patience and begins to scold and find fault, or become discouraged, will immediately grieve the Spirit of God and altogether defeat his own success. Many revivals have been prevented in this way. The laborers have not sufficient patience. They suffered themselves to get out of patience and to fret, perhaps to scold, complain, and find fault because things did not go as they would have them. This grieved the Spirit, and if there was a revival it was a revival of fault-finding and not of love.

10. Another condition is perseverance. They must learn to hold on and be of good courage till God strengthens their hands and their hearts in the work. Let me recommend to you Moffatt's account of the labors of the missionaries in Africa. That is certainly an admirable book, and the patience of Moffatt and his associates is worthy of all imitation. I don't know when I have been so instructed, so affected, and so rebuked as by reading that book. The admirable patience and perseverance of the missionaries is worthy of the churches' most attentive consideration. Often times on reading it I was ready to wonder that they did not abandon the field and conclude that God had not called them to that work. But no, they persevered against discouragements and embarrassments that would have overcome any but men filled with the Spirit which they had, and consecrated as they were to the great work of saving souls. May God bless them forever and prosper them until all Africa shall know the blessed gospel, and Ethiopia stretch forth her hands to God.

11. There must be constant and prevailing prayer. Did God promise to enlarge His church and convert the world? He has annexed this condition; "Nevertheless for this will I yet be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." There must be constant prayer. It must be the prayer of faith, of sympathy with God. It must be the effectual, fervent prayer--that wrestling agonizing travail of soul that has power with God. This must extend through the church. It must be universally diffused abroad, and prayer for the world's conversion instead of being confined almost entirely to the monthly concert, must be the labor and burden of every day. The church must take the world on her hands and upon her heart. The minister and the laymen and women, all classes and ages of Christians must really travail in birth for the world's conversion. It must absorb their whole attention; it must engross their thoughts, rouse up and set on fire their feelings, and pour itself out before God in a flood of agony before the world can be converted.

Such prayer as is not commonly heard must be offered before this work can be done. We must have praying men and women, nay, the whole church must become a praying church, and be gathered around the mercy seat and lie on her face, and pour out her prayers with strong cryings and tears. This must be persevered in until they have come up to the full spirit and meaning of what God says, "Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give Him no rest until He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." They must besiege the throne of grace with the promises in their hand. There must be a great lifting up of heart and soul and a thousand times ten thousand hearts must echo and echo, "Thy kingdom come, Thy kingdom come," until this comes to be the universal cry of the church, until the heart of the church militant heaves like a volcano, and the gospel is like a burning fire shut up in her bones, and the promises are to them stable as the everlasting mountains; until she can plant her feet on them and stand and never retreat a hand's-breadth till the work is done.

LECTURE VII.

April 23, 1845

THE CHURCH BOUND TO CONVERT THE WORLD--No. 2

Text.--Matt. 28:18-20: "And Jesus came, and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

V. I am to show the causes of failure hitherto.

1. It is not for want of numbers. The church has always had numbers enough to have accomplished this work, if she had had a heart for it.
2. It is not for want of means. She has always possessed all needed means for its accomplishment.
3. It is not for want of a sufficient number of educated men to carry this work forward. The church has always possessed education enough, and the means of education sufficient to have accomplished this work.

4. It is not because God has not been ready.

5. Nor again is it for want of time, nor for the want of resources of any kind. All these things have always been at the church's disposal. But,

(1.) A want of faith has been the fundamental difficulty, a want of real confidence in the truth that Christ possesses all power, and is always present, ready and willing to grant all needed aid for success.

(2.) A want of entire consecration to this work. The few individuals living in different ages, who have been manifestly consecrated to this work, have really accomplished much. I have recently been reading an account of the spread and success of the gospel in every century since the commencement of the Christian era, and it is greatly edifying to see what individual effort has done--to see how much individuals who have really been consecrated to this work have effected. The fact is that wherever a man or a woman has had faith, and the spirit of consecration to this work, they have effected much. And it is very plain from what they have effected, that nothing is needed but the general consecration of the professed church of God to this work to have accomplished it centuries ago.

(3.) Sectarianism has been one cause of failure, perhaps the chief. Sectarian ambition, jealousy, collision--these and innumerable other evils have clustered around this growing abomination. Nine tenths, and perhaps I might say ninety-nine hundredths, of both ministerial and lay effort has lost its power by reason of a sectarian spirit. Go where you please over this great west and over the east too, and what do you see? Why! in a small village with a population perhaps just enough to make one respectable congregation, you find half a dozen or more feeble churches, of diverse sects with as many half-starved, and deservedly half-starved ministers, keeping up their sectarian bars, and perhaps undesignedly keeping alive the very prejudice that prevents the success of the gospel. One man comes on to the ground to attend to the Presbyterian or Congregational interests in that place and region. Another must be thrust in to attend to the Close Baptist interests and another to attend to the Free-will Baptists interests. Next there must be two or three Methodist ministers to attend to the Episcopal interests

and the Wesleyan Methodist interests, and the low church Episcopal interests; next, but no least, the New School interest, and the Old School interest, and among them all, they seem very generally to attend pretty thoroughly to the devil's interests. I mean that by this arrangement the devil's interest is really in the best way secured; not that they really intended any such thing; God forbid that I should make any such insinuation. They really mean, (as they profess) to secure the interests of their respective denominations. But in this way they most effectually hinder the success of the kingdom of Christ. In this way just those jealousies are kept up which grieve the Spirit, alienate the hearts of Christians from each other, weaken the hands of the ministers, disgust the impenitent, and please the devil. Now I have not the least doubt that in the great majority of cases, if not in nine cases out of ten, if all the ministers but one, in such villages should leave the ground, and let him belong to one of the evangelical denominations, I care not which, he could do more, perhaps ten times more than they can all do together. If they would all go off to the heathen, or to destitute regions in our own country, and spread themselves out, and never again think of their denominational interests, we should never again hear such things as going out to nurse the interests of this sect and that sect. They would give themselves directly to the work of converting the world to God, and almost infinitely more could be done than is done now.

This subject used to be the burden and agony of my soul before I came to this place. When I first came here I was resolved on using whatever influence I had to secure the adoption of a creed that should comprehend only the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, and also to secure a most perfect toleration of opinion on all minor points, so that all true Christians could unite. Then, if ever sectarians crept in, they should not do it under the pretense that their members were excluded from our communion. They should take the entire responsibility of introducing into this community that abomination from the pit, a sectarian spirit. Here we are thus far one congregation, and see what a crown I have around me; but what should we do if we were divided into a half dozen congregations, with as many ministers to stickle for their sectarian peculiarities? It would be the curse and the ruin of the place, of the

Institution, and of the cause of Christ in our midst. I wish to make a strong impression on this subject, and I would that I could succeed in making the church feel that sectarianism is doing more to prevent the world's conversion a thousand fold, than all the Infidelity and Universalism and Romanism, and every other ism that curses the world together. I fear this is not duly considered. Let any one man create among a people sectarian jealousies and prejudices, and he can never promote true and undefiled religion there. There is much delusion on this subject. Many who do nothing but promote sectarian interests seem to be fondly dreaming that they are promoting the cause of Christ. They think they are making real Christians, and converting men to God, but they are deceiving themselves. If they are creating sectarian prejudice, if they are merely fostering denominational interests, they may be compassing sea and land, and making many proselytes, but they are making them two-fold more the children of hell than themselves.

The fact is that the spirit of sectarianism instantly cools individual piety; it curses churches; it ruins communities; it swallows up a great part of the ministerial influence of the church. In most of the villages throughout the land, where they should all unite in one congregation, and where if they would, they are abundantly able to support the ministry and do much for the spread of the gospel abroad, being cut up as they are into little churches, they must build each of them a house, a little house, that will hold two or three or four hundred people, and get a minister, and measure out to him his sal and his potatoes, and he must preach on the Sabbath to some fifty or a hundred souls, and spend his week time chiefly either on a farm, or in some other lucrative employment to keep his family in bread. Now what do my brethren think themselves engaged in? Is this the way for ministers to be used up? What! when twenty thousand ministers are at once demanded in India, and hundreds of thousands in other parts of the world? Why, men and brethren, we might better than not spare eight tenths of all the ministers in the land, if they would clear out, and but one stay in a place. I have long thought that I never would consent to settle down and give myself up to preach the gospel under such circumstances as I have named. I would never occupy a position where there were a number of ministers, and the work might as well and better be done by one. I do not believe that God can ever bless any such thing

as this, and I am agonized and pained to my very heart to see this the general state of the church over the whole land. I have known that many of my brethren have felt with me, distressed on this subject. The remedy is at hand. Let the true spirit of the world's conversion only take possession of the entire ministry, and the days of sectarianism are numbered and finished. Then the present ministry may be spread over a field five or ten times as great as that which they now occupy, and even then much more fully meet the real wants of the people than they now do.

(4.) Another cause of failure has been that the church to a great extent has lost sight of the true spirit of what Christ says in the text. As I was presenting this thought not long since, to wit, that the church was commanded to convert the world, and through the strength and grace of Christ had power to do so, a brother remarked to me, Why this is new! This is entirely a new view of the subject. The church has not understood this. Now I would ask, To whom is it new? The brother to whom I replied did not mean that it was not the true meaning of the text, but that he and the church had not so considered it. I am afraid that it is new to hundreds and thousands of the professed followers of Christ. It would appear indeed that it has been lost sight of in a great measure. If I mistake not, Christians do not generally understand that the text requires them to make disciples of the sinners around them. But certainly this is its true meaning.

I fear many parents do not understand themselves to be required, even to convert their own children, and that churches do not generally understand themselves as being responsible for the conversion of the impenitent in their midst. But yet this is no doubt the truth of revelation. Who can deny that this is the true spirit and meaning of what Christ says in the text? If he commanded the church to make disciples or Christians of all nations, on the ground that He possesses all power in heaven and in earth, and will be with and aid them in this work, is it not our duty to convert those immediately around us? to make disciples of those in our own houses? who can deny it?

(5.) But not only has the command been lost sight of, but the annexed promise also, "Lo I am with you." The true spirit and meaning of what

Christ here says seems not to be generally recognized and felt. Neither ministers nor lay-men seem to take hold upon and anchor down upon what Christ really here intended. It is as if He had said, "I possess almighty power; Go forth, therefore, and convert all nations; and I will be with you and give you success." It is true, therefore, that whenever we go forth to this work we should expect to accomplish it. We are to rest assured that Christ is with us, and that in His strength the work can be, will be, and must be done.

6. Another thing that has greatly hindered the work has been that too much has been expected from human learning, and not enough by any means from Christ or from the Holy Spirit. Human learning has its place, and its importance, but learned men are altogether too apt to place too much reliance on their learning, and to little on the Holy Ghost. This also is a great error. They are looking for a man of talents, a man of eloquence in the church, a man of learning, instead of a deeply spiritual, praying man. The choice that the churches make of men to preach the gospel, proves to a demonstration that they really place more reliance on human eloquence and learning than they do on deep spirituality, and the power of the Holy Ghost. Where have you known a church in fact lay the principal stress on the faith, the piety, and deep spirituality of the man of their choice? No; the first thing sought is talents; the second, piety, last of all, deep spirituality and great faith and power in prayer. Now they have directly reversed the true order. Until they practically lay the principal stress on the deep piety, faith and spirituality of the man whom they choose as pastor, they may expect curses from God rather than blessings. The fact is, God will not give His glory to another; and where this stress is laid on human learning, and the idea of spiritual influence is thrown so much into the background, God cannot secure to Himself the glory, and therefore He will not work.

7. The work has been greatly retarded by a want of deep sympathy with Christ. The church as not loved a ruined world as Christ loved it, and as the Father loved it. Why, when parents will love their children as Christ loved them, they will make such sacrifices for their salvation as Christ made; nay, when they will but begin to approach this, they may expect their children to be soon converted. When the church really enters into sympathy with Christ, and so loves the world as to be willing to give themselves for its salvation, to live and to die for this purpose; when this spirit becomes

common, and the church will go forth as Christ went, and live and labor as Christ lived and labored, and lay down their lives on the battle-field as Christ laid down His, then the work will be soon accomplished. I verily believe it might as well be converted in fifty years as in five hundred or five thousand.

8. But again, the church as been discouraged. She has had so little faith that her efforts by way of missionary labor have accomplished comparatively little. Her success has no doubt equaled her faith, and perhaps surpassed it, but still she has been so unbelieving that comparatively little has been accomplished. Little can be accomplished until she will believe the promises of God.

9. Conformity to the world in almost every respect has been another great, and I may say, growing impediment to the world's conversion. This subject branches out in so many directions, I can but just name it.

10. Another hindrance has been that the attention and efforts of the church are directed to mere outward reforms. At this I have often been unutterably pained. Instead of doing as the apostles did, directly addressing ourselves to the hearts and consciences of men; instead of beginning within to reform, the church has been to a great extent satisfying herself with a mere outward reform.

11. Worldly ambition in young men who are professors of religion has stood greatly in the way of the world's conversion. They are in such a state that they have come to look on the ministry as rather a driveling business, and not recognizing themselves as pledged to convert the world, as soon as possible, they turn aside into other professions, and to other business, and leave the world and the cause of Christ to take care of themselves.

12. Another difficulty in the way has been clerical ambition. The whole history of the church shows this. In almost every age of the Christian church there has been a grasping after power, even among the ministers of Christ. They have become jealous of lay influence and have taken everything into their own hands. It would seem that they would fain do the work alone, but they never can. That is the best and most successful minister, who knows best how to bring the greatest amount of lay effort to bear on the world, and who actually accomplished this. Ministers can do but

a very small part of this work, and if they suffer themselves to become jealous of lay influence, and keep the lay-men and women still, and undertake to feed them and promote their piety without requiring them to consecrate their personal service to the work, they will surely find themselves greatly mistaken. It cannot be. It is contrary to the true nature of religion.

Every man and woman must have some spiritual labor constantly on their hands, or they cannot grow in grace. The great thing, it seems to me, which ministers ought to do is principally to plan labors for the lay men; to feed them with the sincere milk of the word; to give them spiritual food enough, and then press them up to perform the work.

I might mention a great many other causes of failure hitherto in this great work, but must not protract remarks under this head.

VI. I must proceed to the sixth and last head of this discourse, to wit, to consider in few words the guilt of this failure.

1. The truth we here insist on is this; that the blood of the world is in the skirts of the church. God informed the prophet that if he did not warn and do his duty to the wicked, the wicked should die in his sins, but his blood would He require at his hand. Now under the Christian dispensation the whole church are placed in the same position with the prophet in this respect. It was the prophet and the priest on whom principally the duty of warning the guilty devolved. But Christ has commissioned and commanded the whole church to do this. He has required her to teach and disciple all nations. This principle applied formerly to the prophet, must now be applicable to the whole church.

2. The great law of benevolence requires the church to do all in her power for the conversion of the world, and holds her guilty of the world's blood if she suffers it to be lost. Christ said of the church, "Ye are the light of the world. Ye are the salt of the earth." If therefore the world is not enlightened, it is the fault of the church. If it is not preserved from moral putrefaction, it is the fault of the church. If the name of Jesus is not familiar to every human being in every language and in every clime, it is the fault of the church. The church have had the time enough, have possessed all the requisite means, have had the promise of Him who has "all power in heaven

and in earth," to be with them, and give them all necessary aid. Where then is the blood of the world but in the skirts of the church?

I must close what I have to say with a few

REMARKS.

1. This guilt attaches to every Christian to whom the command in the text has come, and who is not entirely consecrated to the work of saving souls. It is high time that every Christian should understand his duty in this matter, and the greatness of his responsibility. He should daily consider to what he stands pledged, and the guilt he will incur if he suffers himself to be diverted from the great work for the accomplishment of which he is permitted to live in the world.

2. When God makes inquisition for blood, what will become of those professors of religion who have turned aside from this work and are attending to something else? I have said that the ambition of young men and I might add, of many young men who ought to prepare for the ministry, has turned them aside into law-offices and land-offices, and merchandise, and all manner of worldly employments, because these courses of life open to them prospects of obtaining greater wealth or worldly influence. To say the least, they have manifestly not taken the position in which they might most successfully and directly prosecute the great work of the world's conversion.

Now, young man, when God shall make inquisition for the blood of souls, He will say to you, Where is thy brother? The voice of thy brother's blood cries unto Me from the ground. Where art thou? What hast thou done? Wherefore hast thou not given thyself wholly and directly to the work of the world's conversion? "Take this unprofitable servant; bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The same may and must be said of all Christians who have turned aside from this great work of their own interests, and left the world in its blood to sink down to hell.

From this subject we can easily see how great a mistake was made by the church soon after the death of the Apostles. Various causes soon came into operation that developed an ascetic idea of religion. This immediately diverted the church from the great end of the world's conversion to seek after what they imagined to be a higher state of spirituality. Soon after the Apostle's days, as we learn from history, and indeed to some extent while some of the Apostles were yet living,

the idea had gained considerable currency that the world was coming to an end; that Christ's second advent was at hand; and that He was coming to judge the world. This idea doubtless had great influence in bringing about the state of things which I am just about to mention. They seem to have given up the idea of the world's conversion and supposed mankind to be, at least chiefly, devoted to destruction. Great multitudes retreated from the world and betook themselves to what they supposed to be a strictly religious life, practicing celibacy and various austerities, mortifications, and self-denials. They shut themselves out from society and lived in seclusion, seeming to suppose that to live in the world and associate with men as Christ and His apostles had done, was not consistent with the highest degrees of spirituality. They therefore betook themselves to an entirely different course of life, lost altogether the true idea of religion, and attempted to be spiritual without a particle of benevolence, or, in other words, without religion. They sought a spirituality that was anything but true Christianity. Instead of pressing the world's conversion with ardor, they began to build nunneries and monasteries and to establish institutions for the very purpose of secluding the spiritual ones from intercourse with the world. They shut themselves up in those places of spurious spirituality. Every reader of church history must be acquainted with the deplorable and fundamental mistake into what a great part of the church thus fell. Here, to a great extent, the efforts for the world's conversion ceased. Here a dark cloud shut down over the prospects of dying humanity.

3. From what has been said it is easy to see the mistake into which our Second Advent brethren of the present day have fallen. Many of them have given up altogether not only the idea of the world's conversion, and consequently all efforts to save the world, but have given up, and so far as their influence extends are endeavoring to persuade others to give up the idea and expectation of anymore sinners being converted at all. Now I would ask, by what authority do they shrink from carrying out the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, contained in the text? Suppose it were true that Christ is to come at any given time this year, or next year, is not the command in the text binding until He does come? And is not the annexed promise that He will be with us in this work good until the end? Has He said, "Go and make disciples of all nations until such a time and then cease?" I trow (think) not. Now whether it be true or false that Christ is soon to come, it is a wretched mistake for them to give up efforts for the conversion of sinners.

4. Does not the command with the subjoined promise in the text authorize and require the church to go forth to the conversion of the world, with the expectation that the world will be converted? Suppose the church should now arise and address herself to this work and lay hold of the promise of Christ; can it be supposed that Christ would say, "O you are too late now. I shall not wait for you now to convert the world. I shall not go with you now. I said I would be with you to the end of the world, but I shall be with you no longer. You need not go forth to this work; it is now altogether too late." Who believes that Christ would take back His promise and fail to go forth with His church to the conversion of the world?

5. From this subject we can see the mistake of those Antinomians who are waiting God's time, and who are saying "The time has not come to build the house of the Lord;" and are accusing us of going to work in our own strength if we attempt to promote revivals, and of trying to take the work out of the hands of God, of interfering with His sovereignty, of compassing sea and land to make one proselyte, &c. Why, what do they mean! waiting God's time! I have heard some of them talk in this way. They would insist that they must have an inward impulse or revelation to go forth to this work. They must wait to be sent of God. They don't believe in going out to convert sinners unless they are sent of God. Now what an infinite mistake is here! Has not Christ commanded the whole church to go; and now, shall she say she must wait for a revelation from God before she can go? Must she overlook the true letter and spirit of this command and promise, and wait for some other revelation? Indeed, there are certain individuals who it seems would fain persuade the church not to go until she is sent by the Spirit, not to move until God moves, and are telling those who would do something for the conversion of sinners that God has not required this at their hand, that they must remain quiet and rest until God moves them to this work. Now here is certainly a great error, a great and ruinous error. If God has required us in His written word to do anything, are we to wait for any other revelation? If God commands sinners to repent, are they to wait for some other revelation of His will? If He requires Christians to go right forth and convert the world are they to wait eighteen hundred years and then continue to sing the lullaby, "wait God's time, don't run before you are sent"?

6. These notions of the Adventists and Antinomians are doing very much to retard the great work of converting souls to God. The Adventists seem not only wholly to have lost their confidence and interest in this work, but they have

really shaken the confidence of a great number who are not Adventists, so far at least as greatly to have abated their zeal. I find it has come to be very extensively doubted whether the nations are really to be converted to God, or can be. The Adventists, many of them, have boldly proclaimed that it cannot be; that the nations must be destroyed and cannot be made the disciples of Christ; that to Christianize the world is out of the question; that the world is too wicked to be Christianized. They seem to have taken up a view of the Christian religion which is the exact opposite of our Savior's representation. They boldly proclaim--I have heard them proclaim, that the tendency of things in this world is to run out the Christian religion everywhere; to extinguish its light, and drive it from the world. But Christ's representation is exactly the reverse of this. He says, The kingdom of heaven, meaning by this true religion, is like a little leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened; that it is like a mustard seed, which is the least of all seeds, but when sown in the earth springs up and becomes a great tree. Daniel said it was like a stone cut out of the mountain, which rolled and grew as it proceeded until it became a great mountain and filled the earth. Now there are a vast many passages of scripture that thus speak of the kingdom of God, or of true religion in the world. These representations are exactly opposite to the representations of our Advent brethren. The only kingdom of God according to them, which can ever stand and prosper in this world, is a kingdom set up all at once, filling the whole earth by the destruction of the wicked. Is this like leaven? a little leaven hid in three measures of meal till the whole is leavened?

But to return to the point which I stated in the beginning of this paragraph, viz., that these brethren had done much to dishearten the church, to shake their confidence, to create doubts in many pious minds on this subject, and thus to weaken the energies of the church when she has just begun to awake to the importance of this great enterprise. In whose skirts shall the blood of thousands that will perish in consequence of it be found? With my present views, nothing could persuade me to put a damper on the rising hopes of the church in this direction.

7. I am fully persuaded that nothing but the absence of love, or in other words, of true religion, is the occasion of the sectarianism that is dividing and cursing the church. Nothing is wanting but for the church to be thoroughly imbued with the spirit of brotherly love, and of sympathy with Christ in respect to the world's conversion, to unite her energies, and concentrate them on this great work. It is

really amazing and agonizing that mere differences of opinion on points of minor importance, (as all are agreed,) should rend the church into parties, destroy her unity, and not only jeopardize, but awfully hasten and aggravate the ruin of the world.

The more I see of the working of things in the midst of us in this place, the more I am satisfied of the great error of division in the church in consequence of differences of opinion on points of doctrine not fundamental. Our Confession of Faith and Covenant were designed to embrace only those points of Christian doctrine that are supposed by us to be fundamental to the existence of the true church of God. We have by the blessing of God been enabled to live together now ten years as one church. Persons from nearly all the evangelical churches in the land have come and united with us. We have gone on without controversy and division hitherto, on the principle of the most affectionate toleration of theological opinions in respect to everything not fundamental. We have not yet found any difficulty in the prosecution of this work. There has been now and then a sectarian spirit here who has felt uneasy, and has made occasional efforts to introduce sectarianism, and put up sectarian bars in the midst of us. But the religious sentiment of the community has hitherto looked coldly on all such efforts, and the really pious among us, whatever their peculiar shades of opinion, have hitherto seemed to be united in frowning down all sectarian movements. Now why may not this be so in every village and every town in the land? I can see no reason why this should not be so.

8. If the ministers of all evangelical denominations would so thoroughly wake up to the world's conversion as to agree among themselves that two ministers should not occupy any field that could be supplied by one, and the Christians should not be encouraged to separate on account of doctrinal views where their differences are not fundamental, and if ministers should determine that they would no longer suffer themselves to be settled over little feeble churches where Christians are divided by sectarian prejudices; if they would resolve that no more than one minister of an evangelical denomination should be spared to one field, and if they would insist on it that where a village or town is not too large for one congregation but one minister should be left to occupy that field, such a state of things as this, would be as life from the dead. It would be vastly better for every village and every town in Christendom that the ministers should take this stand, and if all the rest were in heaven, or in Hindoostan, or in any part of the universe, it would be better than for them to be huddled together, three or four

ministers in reality supplying but one congregation or only souls enough to make one, and this too under such circumstances as must almost entirely exclude all true religion from the place. It does seem to me that ministers should resolve not to do this. When they find a town or a village occupied by a decidedly evangelical and pious minister where there are not people enough for more than one large and healthy congregation, they should refuse to settle under any circumstances to gratify the prejudices of a few sectarian spirits who wish to get up a church of another denomination. This is low business; it is anti-Christian. No; such sectarian spirits should rather be rebuked.

9. But again, I have often wondered how ministers could think themselves in the path of duty, in thus giving themselves up to minister to sectarian prejudices and to nurse the interests of a party--of one sect, instead of going forth in the spirit of true catholicism to pull souls out of the fire. There is no describing in words the folly and anti-Christian tendency of all such things as these. Just look at the church; see the ministers go from place to place, and where they find a few Presbyterians or a few Methodists or a few Baptists, they say, here are a few of our members; here we must plant a church. Here the interests of our sect must be nursed. They immediately set about gathering little churches, sticking up their stakes, putting up their sectarian bars and gathering around them all the paraphernalia of sectarianism. Now on comes a minister of another denomination and finds a few whose prejudices favor his sect, and he must gather a church, and then another minister does the same, and another, till you will see their little meeting-houses or other places of worship scattered here and there, with a few sectarian spirits gathered around a sectarian minister, all jealous of each other and making efforts as they say and as they suppose, to convert the world. Now what is the result? Why, one of these churches must have a protracted meeting. They must make an effort of a revival as the other congregations are perhaps gaining the advantage of them in point of numbers and influence. They must get the most eloquent preacher they can, and make an effort to build up their congregation, and establish their sect. The other churches look coldly on, and directly begin to feel, as if their church and congregation were in danger of being encroached upon, so they must begin a similar effort and have a protracted meeting. They must, if possible, get a more eloquent preacher than the other. They must bluster and pray and visit from house to house and appear to feel for souls; when it is greatly to be feared that the real spirit of their efforts and their prayers is, "Lord, build up our sect, make our congregation

popular, add to our numbers so that we can more easily support our minister, and give us decidedly the most popular and wealthy congregation in the place, amen." By this time another and another of these little churches begins to move in the same direction and for the same reason. They thus act on each other till they all become inflamed with great zeal, and greatly provoke each other, not to love and good works, but to sectarianism and party efforts. The result of the whole may be, some real converts, a number of thorough sectarian additions to the different churches, but much disgrace in the estimation of a thinking but impenitent community. Now how infinitely better had it been for but one minister to have occupied this field, no matter of what peculiar evangelical denomination. How much better were it if ministers would give no countenance whatever to the division of Christians into different sects in a place where they might just as well all unite in one church and in one congregation. It is almost ruinous to the cause of Christ to make these divisions. It is a stumbling-block to the church, a curse and an abomination the world, and when God makes inquisition for blood, then let sectarians be ready to answer. But it may be asked, what shall ministers do? If but one minister is to occupy a field on which reside only inhabitants enough for one congregation, a great many ministers will be thrown out of employment? I answer, all the better; they can be spared to go to the heathen, or to betake themselves to other necessary and useful employments. Why shall the church be obliged to support such a number of ministers where one can do the work better than all of them?

10. Christians stand greatly in their own light in dividing themselves into different churches where a truly catholic spirit would enable them all to dwell together and unite and labor harmoniously for building up the kingdom of Christ. Why will they load themselves with the burden of supporting two, three, or even a half dozen ministers in a town or village where the work might be more healthfully accomplished by one? Oh! Christians are not aware how much sectarianism there is often times in their own state of mind, and how infinitely foolish it is for them to be so sticklish for dogmas in opinions confessedly not fundamental as to alienate the hearts of brethren from one another, to stumble the world and grieve the heart of Christ.

11. Another great evil is the influence of sectarian newspapers. This evil is a rapidly growing one. Each sect must have its great organ. As the sect increases, multitudes of smaller ones are got up, the conduct and policy of which is anything but Christian. Generally they publish but one side on any question, and

in multitudes of instances keep their readers entirely in the dark in respect to the real questions and facts about which they speak. There is scarcely anything that appears more shocking and monstrous to me, more anti-Christian and God-dishonoring than the course taken by sectarian newspapers. It is not only grievous but truly shocking to see how often they are filled with misrepresentations. Now what is the effect of this, but to blind and mislead the different sects, destroy their Christian confidence in each other, sunder their hearts and their efforts; what but to chill and freeze and even drive the spirit of vital piety from among them. I have often asked myself, how can it be that the editors of these newspapers do not see, and that ministers do not see that to create such prejudices, to beget such misapprehensions, and to foster such a spirit in their churches is really to ruin them, to exclude all their real piety, and substitute nothing but bitter and sectarian zeal in its stead. With my present views, I would sooner have my right hand cut off and my right eye plucked out--indeed it seems to me that I would sooner have my heart torn from my body, than to put forth my hand to such a work as this, ministering to prejudice, alienating the hearts of brethren from each other, rending the church of God, nursing a party spirit. Oh! this is a work of death! When God shall make inquisition for blood, I say again, let those engaged in this work prepare to meet their God. My heart is full of this subject but I cannot enlarge.

12. Another thing has done much to retard the great work of the world's conversion. I mean a turning aside of Christians from their proper work, and from the direct effort to convert and sanctify the world to God, to various other matters of very questionable truth and tendency. I have been astonished to find that so many ministers have from time to time given themselves up to lecturing on phrenology, mesmerism, and such like things; have gone around the country and into our cities and collected large audiences and given them a course of lectures on these subjects, with nothing more than now and then an indirect allusion to God and Christ, and the salvation of the soul. It does seem to me that this is gross apostasy from the great work of the world's conversion.

13. It hardly need be said, and it grieves me much to be obliged to say that Christians, and even many ministers have been altogether too much diverted, especially of late, by party politics. Indeed, nearly all the reforms of the day have taken on to an alarming extent the type of a mere outward and of course temporary reform. Multitudes of ministers have forsaken the direct work of converting the souls of men to God, and have gone into various agencies for the

promotion of these mere outward reforms. I greatly fear that such efforts, pushed as they are at the present day, are after all making clean the outside of the cup and platter, while the "ravening and wickedness" within is left untouched.

Now, beloved, let us for a moment come right back to the question. What have we to do? What is the business to which we are to address ourselves? Here the command and promise of the text lie in all their force before us. We are to act as if Christ had just for the first time sounded this in our ears, and the church ought today to address herself to the work with as much zeal and earnestness and consecration as she would if Christ had for the first time this day stood on the earth and given out this great commission; 'All power is given Me in heaven and in earth; Go ye, therefore, and disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and Holy Ghost; and lo, I am with you even unto the end of the world.' Now let it be understood that no one who hears this command and does not obey in the true spirit and meaning of it, has a right to the name of a Christian, let him be who he may. If he does not consecrate himself to this work, if he does not hold on and persevere in doing what he can to accomplish it to the end of life, he has no sympathy with Christ, no regard for His requirements, and no title to eternal life.

[Back to Top](#)

Trusting in God's Mercy

Lecture VIII

May 7, 1845

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Ps. 52:8: "I will trust in the mercy of God forever and ever."

In discussing this subject I shall enquire,

I. What mercy is.

II. What is implied in trusting in the mercy of the Lord forever.

III. Point out the conditions on which we may safely trust in God's mercy.

IV. Allude to several mistakes which are made on this subject.

I. What mercy is.

1. Mercy as an attribute of God, is not to be confounded with mere goodness. This mistake is often made. That it is a mistake, you will see at once if you consider that mercy is directly opposed to justice, while yet justice is one of the natural and legitimate developments of goodness. Goodness may demand the exercise of justice; indeed it often does; but to say that mercy demands the exercise of justice, is to use the word without meaning. Mercy asks that justice be set aside. Of course mercy and goodness stand in very different relations to justice, and are very different attributes.

2. Mercy is a disposition to pardon the guilty. Its exercise consists in arresting and setting aside the penalty of law, when that penalty has been incurred by transgression. It is, as has been said, directly opposed to justice. Justice treats every individual according to his deserts; mercy treats the criminal very differently from what he deserves to be treated. Desert is never the rule by which mercy is guided; while it is precisely the rule of justice.

3. Mercy is exercised only where there is guilt. It always pre-supposes guilt. The penalty of the law must have been previously incurred, else there can be no scope for mercy.

4. Mercy can be exercised no farther than one deserves punishment. It may continue its exercise just as long as punishment is deserved, but no longer; just as far as ill desert goes, but no farther. If great punishment is deserved, great mercy can be shown; if endless punishment is due, there is then scope for infinite mercy to be shown, but not otherwise.

II. I am to show what is implied in trusting in the mercy of God.

1. A conviction of guilt. None can properly be said to trust in the mercy of God unless they have committed crimes, and are conscious of this fact. Justice protects the innocent, and they may safely appeal to it for defence or

redress. But for the guilty nothing remains but to trust in mercy. Trusting in mercy always implies a deep, heartfelt conviction of personal guilt.

2. Trust in mercy always implies that we have no hope on the score of justice. If we had anything to expect from justice, we should not look to mercy. The human heart is too proud to throw itself upon mercy while it presumes itself to have a valid claim to favor on the score of justice. Nay more, to appeal to mercy when we might rightfully appeal to justice is never demanded either by God's law or gospel, nor can it be in harmony with our relations to Jehovah's government. In fact, the thing is in the very nature of the mind, impossible.

3. Trust in mercy implies a just apprehension of what mercy is. On this point many fail because they confound mercy with mere goodness, or with grace, considered as mere favor to the undeserving. The latter may be shown where there is no mercy, the term mercy being applied to the pardon of crime. We all know that God shows favor, or grace in the general sense, to all the wicked on earth. He makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends his rain on the unjust as well as on the just. But to trust in this general favor shown to the wicked while on trial here is not trusting in the mercy of God. We never trust in mercy till we really understand what it is--pardon for the crimes of the guilty.

4. Trust in God's mercy implies a belief that he is merciful. We could not trust Him if we had no such belief. This belief must always lie at the foundation of real trust. Indeed so naturally does this belief beget that outgoing of the soul and resting upon God which we call trust, that in the New Testament sense it commonly includes both. Faith, or belief, includes a hearty committal of the soul to God, and a cordial trust in him.

5. "Trusting in the mercy of God forever and ever" implies a conviction of deserving endless punishment. Mercy is co-extensive with desert of punishment, and can in its nature go no farther. It is rational to rely upon the exercise of mercy for as long time as we deserve punishment, but no longer. A prisoner under a three years' sentence to State's prison may ask for the exercise of mercy in the form of pardon for so long a time; but he will not ask a pardon for ten years when he needs it only for three, or ask a pardon after his three years' term has expired. This principle is perfectly obvious; where desert of punishment ceases, there mercy also ceases and our trust in

it. While desert of punishment continues, so may mercy, and our trust in its exercise. When therefore the Psalmist trusts in the mercy of God forever, he renounces all hope of being ever received to favor on the score of justice.

6. Trusting in mercy implies a cessation from all excuses and excuse-making. The moment you trust in mercy, you give up all apologies and excuses at once and entirely; for these imply a reliance upon God's justice. An excuse or apology is nothing more nor less than an appeal to justice; a plea designed to justify our conduct. Trusting in mercy forever implies that we have ceased from all excuses forever.

Thus a man on trial before a civil court, so long as he pleads justifications and excuses, appeals to justice; but if he goes before the court and pleads guilty, offering no justification or apology whatever, he throws himself upon the clemency of the court. This is quite another thing from self-justification. It sometimes happens that in the same trial, the accused party tries both expedients. He first attempts his own defense; but finding this vain, he shifts his position, confesses his crime and ill desert, and throws himself upon the mercy of the court. Perhaps he begs the court to commend him to the mercy of the executive in whom is vested the pardoning power.

Now it is always understood that when a man pleads guilty he desists from making excuses, and appeals only to mercy. So in any private matter with my neighbor. If I justify myself fully, I surely have no confession to make. But if I am conscious of having done him wrong, I freely confess my wrong, and appeal to mercy. Self-justification stands right over against confession.

So in parental discipline. If your child sternly justifies himself, he makes no appeal to mercy. But the moment when he casts himself upon your bosom with tears, and says, I am all wrong, he ceases to make excuses, and trusts himself to mercy. So in the government of God. Trust in mercy is a final giving up of all reliance upon justice. You have no more excuses; you make none.

III. We must next consider the conditions upon which we may confidently and securely trust in the mercy of God forever.

1. Public justice must be appeased. Its demands must be satisfied. God is a great public magistrate, sustaining infinitely responsible relations to the

moral universe. He must be careful what He does.

Perhaps no measure of government is more delicate and difficult in its bearings than the exercise of mercy. It is a most critical point. There is eminent danger of making the impression that mercy would trample down law. The very thing that mercy does is to set aside the execution of the penalty of law; the danger is lest this should seem to set aside the law itself. The great problem is, How can the law retain its full majesty, the execution of its penalty being entirely withdrawn? This is always a difficult and delicate matter.

In human governments we often see great firmness exercised by the magistrate. During the scenes of the American Revolution, Washington was earnestly importuned to pardon Andre. The latter was eminently an amiable, lovely man; and his case excited a deep sympathy in the American army. Numerous and urgent petitions were made to Washington in his behalf; but no, Washington could not yield. They besought him to see Andre, in hope that a personal interview might touch his heart; but he refused even to see him. He dared not trust his own feelings. He felt that this was a great crisis, and that a nation's welfare was in peril. Hence his stern unyielding decision. It was not that he lacked compassion of soul. He had a heart to feel. But under the circumstances, he knew too well that no scope must be given to the indulgence of his tender sympathies. He dared not gratify these feelings, lest a nation's ruin should be the penalty.

Such cases have often occurred in human governments, when every feeling of the soul is on the side of mercy and makes its strong demand for indulgence; but justice forbids.

Often in family government, the parent has an agonizing trial; he would sooner bear the pain himself thrice told than to inflict it upon his son; but interests of perhaps infinite moment are at stake, and must not be put in peril by the indulgence of his compassions.

Now if the exercise of mercy in such cases is difficult, how much more so in the government of God? Hence the first condition of the exercise of mercy is that something be done to meet the demands of public justice. It is absolutely indispensable that law be sustained. However much disposed God may be to pardon, yet he is too good to exercise mercy on any such conditions or under

any such circumstances as will impair the dignity of his law, throw out a license to sin, and open the very flood-gates of iniquity. Jehovah never can do this. He knows he never ought to.

On this point it only need be said at present, that this difficulty is wholly removed by the atonement of Christ.

2. A second condition is that we repent. Certainly no sinner has the least ground to hope for mercy until he repents. Will God pardon the sinner while yet in his rebellion? Never. To do so would be most unjust in God--most ruinous to the universe. It would be virtually proclaiming that sin is less than a trifle--that God cares not how set in wickedness the sinner's heart is; he is ready to take the most rebellious heart, unhumbled, to his own bosom. Before God can do this he must cease to be holy.

3. We must confess our sins. "He that confesseth," and he only, "shall find mercy." Jehovah sustains such relations to the moral universe that he cannot forgive without the sinner's confession. He must have the sinner's testimony against himself and in favor of law and obedience.

Suppose a man convicted and sentenced to be hung. He petitions the governor for pardon, but is too proud to confess, at least in public. "May it please your Honor," he says, "between you and me, I am willing to say that I committed that crime alleged against me, but you must not ask me to make this confession before the world. You will have some regard to my feelings and to the feelings of my numerous and very respectable friends. Before the world therefore I shall persist in denying the crime. I trust however that you will duly consider all the circumstances and grant me a pardon." Pardon you! miscreant, the governor would say--pardon you when you are condemning the whole court and jury of injustice, and the witnesses of falsehood; pardon you while you set yourself against the whole administration of justice in the state? never! never! You are too proud to take your own place and appear in your own character; how can I rely on you to be a good citizen--how can I expect you to be anything better than an arch villain?

Let it be understood then that before we can trust in the mercy of God, we must really repent and make our confession as public as we have made our crime.

Suppose again that a man is convicted and sues for pardon, but will not confess at all. O, he says, I have no crimes to confess; I have done nothing particularly wrong; the reason of my acting as I have is that I have a desperately wicked heart. I cannot repent and never could. I don't know how it happens that I commit murder so easily; it seems to be a second nature to me to kill my neighbor; I can't help it. I am told that you are very good, very merciful; he says to the governor; they even say that you are love itself, and I believe it; you surely will grant me a pardon then, it will be so easy for you--and it is so horrible for me to be hung. You know I have done only a little wrong, and that little only because I could not help it; you certainly cannot insist upon my making any confession. What! have me hung because I don't repent? You certainly are too kind to do any such thing.

I don't thank you for your good opinion of me, must be the indignant reply; the law shall take its course; your path is to the gallows.

See that sinner; hear him mock God in his prayer: "trust in the mercy of God, for God is love." Do you repent? "I don't know about repentance--that is not the question; God is love--God is too good to send men to hell; they are Partialists and slander God who think that he ever sends any body to hell." Too good! you say; too good! so good that he will forgive whether the sinner repents or not; too good to hold the reins of his government firmly; too good to secure the best interests of his vast kingdom! Sinner, the God you think of is a being of your own crazy imagination--not the God who built the prison of despair for hardened sinners--not the God who rules the universe by righteous law and our race also on a gospel system which magnifies that law and makes it honorable.

4. We must really make restitution so far as lies in our power. You may see the bearing of this in the case of a highway robber. He has robbed a traveller of ten thousand dollars, and is sentenced to State's prison for life. He petitions for pardon. Very sorry he is for his crime; will make any confession that can be asked, ever so public; but will he make restitution? Not he; no--he needs that money himself. He will give up half of it, perhaps, to the government; vastly patriotic is he all at once, and liberal withal; ready to make a donation of five thousand dollars for the public good! ready to consecrate to most benevolent uses a splendid sum of money; but whose money? Where is his justice to the man he has robbed?

Wretch! consecrate to the public what you have torn from your neighbor and put it into the treasury of the government! No; such a gift would burn right through the chest! What would you think if the government should connive at such an abomination? You would abhor their execrable corruption.

See that man of the world. His whole business career is a course of over-reaching. He slyly thrusts his hands into his neighbor's pockets and thus fills up his own. His rule is uniformly to sell for more than a thing is worth and buy for less. He knows how to monopolize and make high prices, and then sell out his accumulated stocks. His mind is forever on the stretch to manage and make good bargains. But this man at last must prepare to meet God. So he turns to his money to make it answer all things. He has a large gift for God. Perhaps he will build a church or send a missionary--something pretty handsome at least to buy a pardon for a life about which his conscience is not very easy. Yes, he has a splendid bribe for God. Ah, but will God take it? Never! God burns with indignation at the thought. Does God want your price of blood--those gains of oppression? Go and give them back to the suffering poor whose cries have gone up to God against you. O shame to think to filch from thy brother and give to God! not merely rob Peter to pay Paul, but rob man to pay God! The pardon of your soul is not bought so!

5. Another condition is that you really reform.

Suppose there is a villain in our neighborhood who has become the terror of all the region round about. He has already murdered a score of defenseless women and children; burns down our houses by night, plunders and robs daily; and every day brings tidings of his crimes at which every ear tingles. None feel safe a moment. He is an arch and bloody villain. At last he is arrested; and we all breathe more easily. Peace is restored. But this miscreant having received sentence of death, petitions for pardon. He professes no penitence whatever, and makes not even a promise of amendment; yet the governor is about to give him a free pardon. If he does it, who will not say, He ought to be hung up himself by the neck till he is dead, dead! But what does that sinner say? "I trust," says he, "in the great mercy of God. I have nothing to fear." But does he reform? No. What good can the mercy of God do him if he does not reform?

6. You must go the whole length in justifying the law and its penalty.

Mark that convicted criminal. He doesn't believe that government has any right to take life for any crime; he demurs utterly to the justice of such a proceeding, and on this ground insists that he must have a pardon. Will he get it? Will the governor take a position which is flatly opposed to the very law and constitution which he is sworn to sustain? Will he crush the law to save one criminal, or even a thousand criminals? Not if he has the spirit of a ruler in his bosom. That guilty man if he would have mercy from the execution must admit the right of the law and of the penalty. Else he arrays himself against the law and cannot be trusted in the community.

Now hear that sinner. How much he has to say against his ill desert, and against the justice of eternal punishment. He denounces the laws of God as cruelly and unrighteously severe. Sinner, do you suppose God can forgive you while you pursue such a course? He would as soon repeal His law and vacate his throne. You make it impossible for God to forgive you.

7. No sinner can be a proper object of mercy who is not entirely submissive to all those measures of the government that have brought him to conviction,

Suppose a criminal should plead that there had been a conspiracy to waylay and arrest him--that witnesses had been bribed to give false testimony--that the judge had charged the jury falsely, or that the jury had given an unrighteous verdict; could he hope by such false allegations to get a pardon? Nay verily. Such a man cannot be trusted to sustain law and order in a community, under any government, human or divine.

But hear that sinner complain and cavil. Why, he says, did God suffer sin and temptation to enter this world at all? Why does God let the sinner live at all to incur a doom so dreadful? And why does God block up the sinner's path by his providence, and cut him down in his sins? Yet this very sinner talks about trusting in God's mercy! Indeed; while all the time he is accusing God of being an infinite tyrant and of seeking to crush the helpless, unfortunate sinner! What do these cavils mean? What are they but the uplifted voice of a guilty rebel arraigning his Maker for doing good and showing mercy to his own rebellious creatures? For it needs but a moment's thought to see that the temptation complained of is only a good placed before a moral agent to melt his heart by love. Yet against this the sinner murmurs, and pours out his

complaints against God. Be assured that unless you are willing to go the full length of justifying all God does, he never can give you pardon. God has no option to pardon a self-justifying rebel. The interests of myriads of moral beings forbid his doing it. When you will take the ground most fully of justifying God, and condemning yourself, you place yourself where mercy can reach you, and then it surely will. Not before.

8. You must close in most cordially with the plan of salvation. This plan is based on the assumption that we deserve everlasting death and must be saved, if ever, by sovereign grace and mercy. Nothing can save but mercy--mercy which meets the sinner in the dust, prostrate, without an excuse or an apology, giving to God all the glory and taking to himself all the guilt and shame. There is hope for thee, sinner, in embracing this plan with all the heart.

IV. We now notice some mistakes into which many fall.

1. Many really trust in justice and not in mercy. They say, "God is just--God will do me no injustice--I mean to do as well as I can, and then I can safely leave myself in the hands of a just God." True, God will do you no injustice. You never need fear that. But how terrible if God should do you strict justice! How fearful if you get no mercy! If God does not show you infinite mercy, you are forever lost, as surely as you are a sinner! This trusting in God's justice is a fatal rock. The sinner who can do it calmly has never seen God's law and his own heart. The Psalmist did not say, I trust in the justice of God forever and ever.

2. Many trust professedly in the mercy of God without fulfilling the conditions on which only, mercy can be shown. They may hold on in such trusting till they die--but no longer.

3. Sinners do not consider that God cannot dispense with their fulfilling these conditions. He has no right to do so. They spring out of the very constitution of his government, from his very nature, and must therefore be strictly fulfilled. Sooner than dispense with their fulfillment, God would send the whole race, yea, the whole universe, to hell. If God were to set aside these conditions and forgive a sinner while unhumbled, impenitent, and unbelieving, he would upset his throne, convulse the moral universe, and kindle another hell in his own bosom.

4. Many are defeating their own salvation by self-justification. Pleas that excuse self, and cavils that arraign God stand alike and fatally in the way of pardon. Since the world began it has not been known that a sinner has found mercy in this state.

5. Many pretend to trust in mercy who yet profess to be punished for their sins as they go along. They hope for salvation through mercy, and yet they are punished for all their sins in this life. Two more absurd and self-contradictory things were never put together. Punished as much as they deserve here, and yet saved through mercy! Why don't they say it out that they shall be saved after death through justice? Surely if they are punished all they deserve as they go along, justice will ask no more after death.

6. Persons who in the letter plead for mercy, often rely really upon justice. The deep conviction of sin and ill-desert does not sink into their soul till they realize what mercy is, and feel that they can rely on nothing else.

7. Some are covering up their sins, yet dream of going to heaven. Do they think they can hide those sins from the Omniscient Eye? Do they think to cover their sins and yet it "prosper," despite of God's awful word?

8. We cannot reasonably ask for mercy beyond our acknowledged and felt guilt, and they mistake fatally who suppose that they can. Without a deep conviction of conscious guilt we cannot be honest and in earnest in supplicating mercy. Hear that man pray who thinks sin a trifle and its deserved punishment a small affair. "O Lord, I need a little mercy, only a little; my sins have been few and of small account; grant me, Lord, exemption from the brief and slight punishment which my few errors and defects may have deserved." Or hear that Universalist pray: "O Lord, thou knowest that I have been punished for my sins as I have passed along; I have had a fit of sickness and various pains and losses, nearly or quite enough, thou knowest, to punish all the sins I have committed; now therefore, I pray thee to give me salvation through thy great mercy." How astonishing that some men should hold such nonsense! How can a Universalist pray at all? What should they pray for? Not for pardon, for on their principles they have a valid claim to exemption from punishment on the score of justice, as the criminal has who has served out his sentence in the State's prison. The only rational prayer that can be made is that God will do them justice and let them off, since they have already been punished

enough. But why should they pray for this? God may be trusted to do justice without their praying for it. I don't wonder that Universalists pray but little; what have they to pray for? Their daily bread? Very well. But the mercy of God they need not on their scheme; for they suffer all they deserve. Pleasing delusion; flattering enough to human pride, but strange for rational minds, and horribly pernicious! Restoration takes substantially the same ground, only leaving a part of the penalty to be worked out in purgatory, but claiming salvation on the ground of justice and not mercy. Mercy can have no place in any system of Universalism. Every form of this system arrays God in robes of justice, inflexible, fearful justice;--yet these men trust they say in the mercy of God! But what have they done with the gospel--what with all the Bible says about free pardon to the guilty? They have thrust it out of the Bible; and what have they given us instead? Only justice, justice; punishment enough for sin in this world, or at least in a few years of purgatory: sin a trifle,--government a mere farce,--God a liar--hell a bugbear and a humbug; what is all this but dire blasphemy as ever came from hell?

If we ask for but little mercy, we shall get none at all. This may seem strange, but is none the less true. If we get any thing we must ask for great blessings. Suppose a man deserved to be hung, and yet asks only for a little favor; suppose he should say so, can he be forgiven? No. He must confess the whole of his guilt in its full and awful form, and show that he feels it in his very soul. So, sinner, must you come and confess your whole guilt as it is, or have no mercy. Come and get down, low, lower, infinitely low before God--and take mercy there. Hear that Universalist. All he can say at first is, "I thank God for a thousand things." But he begins to doubt whether this is quite enough. Perhaps he needs a little more punishment than he has suffered in this life; he sees a little more guilt; so he prays that God would let him off from ten years of deserved punishment in hell. And if he sees a little more guilt, he asks for a reprieve from so much more of punishment. If truth flashes upon his soul and he sees his own heart and life in the light of Jehovah's law, he gets down lower and lower, as low as he can, and pours out his prayer that God would save him from that eternal hell which he deserves. "O," he cries out, "can God forgive so great a sinner!" Yes, and by so much the more readily, by how much the more you humble yourself, and by how much the greater mercy you ask and feel that you need. Only come down and

take such a position that God can meet you. Recollect the prodigal son, and that father running, falling on his neck, weeping, welcoming, forgiving! O! how that father's heart gushed with tenderness!

It is not the greatness of your sins, but your pride of heart that forbids your salvation. It is not anything in your past life, but it is your present state of mind that makes your salvation impossible. Think of this.

REMARKS.

You need not wait to use means with God to persuade him to save you. He is using means with you to persuade you to be saved. You act as if God could scarcely be moved by any possible entreaties and submissions to exercise mercy; Oh, you do not see how his great heart beats with compassion and presses the streams of mercy forth in all directions, pouring the river of the waters of life at your very feet, creating such a pressure of appeal to your heart, that you have to brace yourself against it, lest you should be persuaded to repent. O, do you see how God would fain persuade you, and break your heart in penitence, that He may bring you where He can reach you with forgiving mercy--where He can come and bless you without resigning his very throne!

To deny your desert of endless punishment is to render your salvation utterly impossible. God never can forgive you on this ground, because you are trying to be saved on the score of justice. You could not make your damnation more certain than you thus make it, if you were to murder every man you meet. You tie up the hands of mercy and will not let her pluck you from the jaws of death. It is as if your house were on fire, and you seize your loaded rifle to shoot down every man that comes with his bucket to help you. You stand your ground amid the raging element until you sink beneath the flames. Who can help you? What is that man doing who is trying to make his family believe Universalism? It is as if he would shoot his rifle at the very heart of Mercy every time she comes in view. He seems determined to drive off Mercy, and for this end plies all the enginery of Universalism, and throws himself into the citadel of this refuge of lies! O! what a work of death is this! Mercy shall not reach him or his family; so he seems determined--and Mercy cannot come. See how she bends from heaven--Jehovah smiles in love--and weeps in pity--and bends from the very clouds and holds out the pierced hand of the crucified One--But no! I don't deserve the punishment; away with the insult of a pardon offered through mere mercy! What can be more fatal, more damning, more ruinous to the soul?

You see very clearly why all are not saved. It is not because God is not willing to save all, but because they defeat the efforts God makes to save them. They betake themselves to every possible refuge and subterfuge; resist conviction of guilt, and repel every call of mercy. What ails those young men? What are they doing? Has God come down in His red wrath and vengeance, that they should rally all their might to oppose Him? O, no, He has only come in mercy--this is all--and they are fighting against his mercy, not his just retributions of vengeance. If this were his awful arm of vengeance, you would bow right soon, or break beneath its blow. But God's mercy comes in its soft whispers, (would you but realize it) it comes to win your heart--and what are you doing? You band yourselves together to resist its calls--you invent a thousand excuses--you run together to talk, and talk away all solemn thought--you run to some infidel or Universalist to find relief for an uneasy conscience. Ah, sinner this can do you no good. You flee away from God--why? What's the matter? Is God pouring down the floods of his great wrath? No, no; but Mercy has come, and would fain gather you under her outspread wings where storms of wrath can never come. But no, the sinner pleads against it--cavils, runs, fights, repels the angel of mercy--dashes from his lips the waters of life. Sinner, this scene is soon to close. The time is short. Soon God comes--death shakes his dart--that young man is sick--hear his groans. Are you going to die, my young friend? Are you ready? O, I don't know, I am in great pain. O! O! how can I live so? Alas, how can I die? I can't attend to it now--too late--too late! Indeed, young man, you are in weakness now. God's finger has touched you. O, if I could only tell you some of the death-bed scenes which I have witnessed--if I could make you see them, and hear the deep wailings of unutterable agony as the soul quivered, shuddered, and fain would shrink away into annihilation from the awful eye--and was swept down swift to hell! Those are the very men who ran away from mercy! Mercy could not reach them, but death can. Death seizes its victim. See, he drags the frightened shrieking soul to the gate-way of hell; how that soul recoils--groans--what an unearthly groan--and he is gone! The sentence of execution has gone out and there is no reprieve. That sinner would not have mercy when he might; now he cannot when he would. All is over now.

Dying sinner, you may just as well have mercy today as not. All your past sins present no obstacle at all if you only repent and take the offered pardon. Your God proffers you life. "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in your death, turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" Why will you reject such offered life? And

will you still persist? Be astonished, O ye heavens! Indeed if there ever was anything that filled the universe with astonishment, it is the sinner's rejection of mercy. Angels were astonished when they saw the Son of God made flesh, and when they saw him nailed to a tree--how much more now to see the guilty sinner, doomed to hell, yet spurning offered pardon! What do they see! That sinner putting off and still delaying and delaying still, until--what? Until the last curtain falls, and the great bell tolls, tolls, tolls the awful knell of the sinner's death eternal! Where is that sinner? Follow him--down he goes, weeping, wailing, along the sides of the pit--he reaches his own final home; in "his own place," now and forevermore! Mercy followed him to the last verge of the precipice, and could no longer. She has done her part.

What if a spirit from glory should come and speak to you five minutes--a relative, say--perhaps your mother--what would she say? Or a spirit from that world of despair--O could such a one give utterance to the awful realities of that prison house, what would he say? Would he tell you that the preacher has been telling you lies? Would he say, don't be frightened by these made-up tales of horror? O, no, but that the half has not been told you and never can be. O, how he would press you if he might to flee from the wrath to come!

[Back to Top](#)

The Old Man and The New

Lecture IX

May 21, 1845

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Eph. 4:22-24: "That ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

It will be my object in speaking upon this text to show,

I. What constitutes the old man.

II. What constitutes the new man.

III. What is implied in putting off the one and putting on the other.

IV. Sundry mistakes often made on this subject.

I. What constitutes the old man.

1. There are two sources from which all human activity, or in other words, all mental life flows. I use the term, life, now, just as we do when we apply it to the body. In the latter case we mean by it the activity, or rather the active state of the various organs. This is life; its opposite, death, is the cessation of activity, and a passing out of that state in which action is the law of our existence into another in which absolute inaction is the law.

Applying the term life now to the mind, we mean to denote its active state; and our remark is that there are two and only two ultimate causes or springs of all this activity; one, fallen human nature; the other, the Spirit of God.

Mental activity is first developed through our connection with a physical body. The new-born infant has constitutional wants; its appetites demand gratification; and its mind is thus first aroused to exercise. Here human nature begins to develop mental activity. We would not be understood to imply that this first action of the infant is sinful; it manifestly is not unless the intelligence is so far developed as to take cognizance of right and wrong;--the Bible every where assuming that some knowledge of obligation must be present, or sin cannot be. All that we can say now on this point is that our earliest mental activity is prompted by our connection with the body; and that the constitutional demands of the body lead to indulgence which, though not sinful before any knowledge of duty exists, yet becomes the main-spring of foul selfishness when this knowledge is developed and in the very face of it we prefer to please ourselves rather than God.

Another source of mental activity is the Spirit of God. We do not mean by this that the Spirit is a necessary cause of mental action, in such a sense that the mind under the Spirit's influence acts of necessity and not freely; we only mean that the Spirit excites to action, and is the occasion of such action as

would not take place without the Spirit. Thus the Bible represents God as working in us to will and to do, and Christians as walking with the Spirit, or after the Spirit and not after the flesh. The Spirit begets a peculiar kind of action, the very opposite of that produced by the workings of selfishness.

2. The old or first man, is the carnal mind, or principle of selfishness. It begins with caring for the flesh even before its action can have any moral character, and continues to care for the flesh ever after. Hence it is called a carnal mind, or a minding of the flesh. Its characteristic feature is that its own gratification is its supreme end.

3. It is called a "man" because it is the hidden source and cause of outward activity. It would seem as if the Bible language contemplated a hidden agent, working underneath the visible exterior of each individual, in the one class of character producing selfish action and in the other class, the opposite. These inward-working agents--the old man and the new--correspond to the ultimate intention of the will and control all our proximate volitions in the same way that we see it done by the ultimate intention. Indeed, they are but other names for the same thing. The ultimate intention of course always governs all our voluntary conduct. We never can act without intending something; and all our lesser subordinate volitions are only the necessary result of our ultimate purpose, this ultimate purpose being always either to please ourselves or to please God.

4. My last remarks substantially include my text; viz., that the "man" in the sense of our text is the reigning disposition. It is that which the mind is disposed, or rather which the mind voluntarily disposes and sets itself to do. The mind deliberately chooses its great end of existence--chooses the kind of good it will seek, and then of course sets itself to secure this kind of good by every means in its power. Hence arises a disposition of the mind: the mind shaping its efforts--all its mental activity to secure the good of its own ultimate end.

5. This is also an ultimate and efficient intention. In the form of the old man it is a deep and hearty committal of the soul to self-gratification. It controls all the activity of all unregenerate men. You do not see the old man with the external eye, but by its ceaseless development we learn its character and omnipresent agency.

II. What constitutes the new man.

1. It is a spiritual mind, or a disposition to please God instead of self. It is right over against the carnal selfish state. The mind is fully committed to pleasing God, so that this becomes the chief end for which the individual lives and acts. The new man is thoroughly committed to do the will of God just as the old man is to do the bidding of his carnal impulses. The former lives for God; the latter for himself.

Besides these two ultimate ends, no other can be conceived. All voluntary agents will seek to please either God or themselves. All action, therefore, results from one or the other of these ultimate intentions. And this is true not only of all men but of all other intelligent beings--of angels and of devils.

2. These two dispositions divide all mankind into two classes. Hence there are, as we often say, two sorts of men; and so the Bible says. The Bible represents all men as either saints or sinners; holy or unholy; spiritual or carnal; children of God or children of the devil. It makes them either old men or new men; born of the flesh, or born of the Spirit. The old state is first in order, and all pass into the channel of self-gratification which leads directly to it, unless some may be enlightened and converted by the Spirit from the womb. With this exception all others begin a course of self-gratification from their birth, which becomes sinful as soon as they know that God forbids their making this the supreme end of their existence and yet refuse to obey God.

The new man is born of the Spirit--born from above; the Spirit of God continually begets his moral activity, leading him thoroughly to renounce self, and commit his whole being to do the pleasure of God.

3. The old man is corrupt according to and in compliance with the deceitful lusts. So says our text. By lust is meant in the scriptures all forms of sensual desire. It includes the entire circle of our physical propensities. All these the old man commits himself to obey. He lives for their gratification. They are called deceitful for the obvious reason that the pleasure they promise in their gratification is always delusive. They flatter only to destroy.

4. The new man is sometimes spoken of as being the Lord from heaven, or Christ formed in the soul. So it is, not however in the sense of a physical

creation, but in this sense; Christ by His Spirit begets, produces, a state of mind in which we voluntarily commit our whole being to God. Then we become like Christ, and it is therefore as if Christ Himself were formed within us, His very Spirit and temper now reigning in our hearts, so that it seems as if Christ Himself were there, and indeed He is there by His spiritual and most efficient presence.

III. We are to inquire what is implied in putting off the one and putting on the other.

1. Regeneration. This putting off the old man and putting on the new is precisely what the Bible means by regeneration. This is the change of heart of which the Bible speaks.
2. Perseverance is also implied. We are to continue in this state. Paul is writing to Christians and urges them to put off the old man with his deeds and put on the new man. Of course he must mean that they should continue to do what they began to do at their conversion, and maintain in constant vigor that activity which then commenced.
3. It implies the death of the old man. This does not mean the annihilation of the appetites and the physical constitution: no, the former body still exists, and you must eat and drink for its support no less than before. It only means that all these appetites and propensities are held under the control of God's revealed will, to be indulged only in accordance with that will. They are no longer our masters; we have no master but God.

Some on this point have run into great confusion; some have stumbled into grievous error. Holding the doctrine of physical depravity, they make the Apostle say--"Put away your constitutional appetites, annihilate the flesh; literally crucify its constitutional propensities." But the Apostle means only this: Let them not control your moral activity. Hold them evermore subordinate to the will of God.

It should be observed that these physical appetites are not necessarily the source of our activity. We may act from love and obedience to God, these appetites still existing within us; for we may indulge them only because we rightly conclude that this will please God, and only so far as this seems to be the case.

4. Putting off the old, and putting on the new man, implies entire consecration to God. It is equivalent to putting away all selfishness, and acting only and alone from real benevolence; renouncing the dominion of the flesh, and submitting to the dominion of the Spirit. This, of course, is entire consecration to God. There is no middle or third state. He who puts off the old man must put on the new man; for the mind will have some spring of action, some ultimate end to gain, some prime source of its activity. It must therefore turn from one of these to the other. In fact the mind never puts off the old man except that it may put on the new. We never really renounce self except when the Spirit draws us to choose God as our supreme portion.

5. Heavenly mindedness is implied. God and heavenly things are now its chosen objects of supreme affection, so that the mind now runs towards its chief love, as it did when this chief love was earthly good. There is now a heavenly state of mind by the same law which before produced a carnal and earthly state, namely, "Where the treasure is, there will the heart be also."

6. Consequently the conversation will be of heavenly things. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

7. So will the thoughts also be of heaven. The mind turns toward God with delight. O, how does it dwell on the great things of God in the night watches, reposing sweetly on His universal providence, on His revealed promises, on the bosom of His ineffable love.

8. The treasure is in heaven. No longer does the soul seek its chief good here. Its portion is above. A pilgrim and a stranger here, the new man seeks a better country, even a heavenly. Content to forego earth for the sake of heaven, he lets off his eager pursuit of things temporal; pursues them for a totally different end, so far as it seems his duty to pursue them at all; and really has no other God but Jehovah. His God is in heaven.

9. Selfishness is put away and Christ put on in all things. This is the very essence of the Apostle's meaning. The new man put on, is the yoke of Christ taken, the Spirit of Christ imbibed and acted out; the law of love, supreme to God, and impartial to man, becomes supreme; a spirit of self sacrifice ensues, and the individual no longer asks what will gratify me, but what will please God. Now he puts on Christ, and grows up into Him in all

things, studying continually to conform every thought and act to the great law of his being--imitation of Christ and obedience to His will.

IV. We are to notice several mistakes into which persons are wont to fall.

1. They try to reform the old man, not considering that he admits of no reform to any purpose. Just consider what the old man is--namely, a supreme intention to please self; and you will see at once that this intention can admit of no reform for the better. You may change its direction from one form of selfish indulgence to another, but such reform as this, though very common, is yet perfectly useless, for it leaves the heart as completely enslaved to sin as before. Thus, often men change the form of their selfishness without in the least changing its moral quality. A man removing from a community where one form of selfish indulgence is popular, to another where it is unpopular, will probably adapt himself to his new circumstances, and pursue the most productive form of selfish gratification. Why not? Selfish happiness is his object; why shall he not make the most he can of it, and pursue it in the most hopeful way? This change may seem to him perhaps to be conversion, especially if he substitutes a more refined for a grosser form of selfishness; a form on which moral and Christian society frown, for one on which they smile. Yet in this very change he may be more thoroughly selfish than ever before; with this additional mischief that he is now deceiving himself, and blinding his eyes for the fatal plunge into perdition. All he has done, is just an attempt to reform the old man. It is no real reformation. He may put on a new face--it is only a mask; a new coat, a Sunday suit, but this changes not the hidden man of the heart.

2. The old and the new man in many things conduct externally alike. Both eat and drink; both use the necessities of life, but with this broad, fundamental distinction; the one has no higher, and no other end than self gratification; while the other both eats and drinks for the glory of God. The one aims only to please himself; the other only to please God. Both may eat when hunger prompts; both may find pleasure in the gratification of the demands of nature; but while the one has no higher end than the gratification, the other finds a double relish in the gratitude of his heart to God, the giver; eats, that thereby he may have strength to live for God; and takes no more and no other food than he supposes God would have him. This makes the broadest possible distinction between the old and new man.

Again, the old man and the new man both equally may marry, and be given in marriage; yet, observe, with this broad difference in the ultimate end had in view; the old man does it to please himself, and the new man to please God. The old man, remaining old, can do this from no other end than to please himself; the new man, "acting in the spirit of a new creature," can possibly have no other end than to please God.

Again, both attend apparently in the same way to the common business of life. Both may be behind the same counter, selling off the same lot of goods, at the same prices; yet one is there doing his own will, and the other doing God's will; the one pleasing his own self--the other pleasing his Master. Or, both the old man and the new may be following the plow, each to raise the same crop, yet each with a perfectly opposite ultimate end in view; the one to gratify self, the other to gratify God. Their motives and ultimate end are just as really different now as they will be when one of them shall be in heaven and the other in hell. Then, as now, the real difference will be only this; the one is supremely selfish; the other is supremely benevolent; the one caring only to please himself, and the other only to please God.

There are two students, pursuing the same studies, in the same class, attending the same recitation; they study equally well, and may appear externally in all points alike; yet one is the old man and the other the new; the former, striving to mount up over the heads of all his classmates, panting for fame, seeking great things for himself; but the other has bowed his whole heart to God's will, studies only because God would have him, and seeks only to please God by doing all His will.

Or take still another view. There are two young men, both preaching the gospel; both pray apparently much alike; both have the external air of piety; yet the Omniscient Eye sees one of them supremely selfish, selfish and supremely so in his prayers, for in all, his eye looks never beyond his own good. The other has crucified himself, lives now for God and for the good of his race, preaches and prays out of love to souls and love to Christ; this is a new man and the other is the old man.

3. Hence, the external developments being so similar, it is a common mistake not to distinguish between them. It is often impossible to know the hearts of others from mere external manifestations. For instance, you all

come into this house of God to worship, apparently alike; how can I tell who of you come in the spirit of the old man and who in the spirit of the new?

Persons often fail to make this discrimination in their own case. They might know their own hearts if they would honestly and deeply search themselves, and take cognizance of their motives and of all the deep springs of their action; but often, very often they do not, and hence deceive themselves. They never go to the bottom of their own hearts.

4. For want of making this discrimination, hypocrites are prone to flatter themselves while yet in their own deep corruption. They put on a decent exterior and are often comparing their life with the life of real, and spiritual Christians, inferring hence that themselves are real Christians. Indeed they often take pride in making their own external conduct quite unexceptionable, and hope to get a double reward for this good life, the gratification of their pride here and heaven hereafter.

No mistake in religion is more common or more fatal than the one of which I am speaking. Whole masses of professors go after the world in seasons of declension, that is, as soon as they can do so without disturbing their hope of salvation. They want to be as good as most others, and this they seem to suppose will bring them up into heaven with the mass. This being secured, the more they get of this world the better. How purely selfish! In a revival they wake themselves up, often tardily, yet when they must, they yield to the general influence and come along; bustle perhaps full enough for their credit and seem to reform, but this is only an attempt to reform the old man and his deeds--nothing else.

5. You may see the mistake often made by sinners in condemning the conduct of Christians. They condemn Christians for doing the same things as they themselves are doing. They say, "You, professedly holy men, eat and drink, buy and sell, plow and study, just as we do; wherein are you better than we?" The mistake is, that the wicked do not consider that while the external course is the same, the motive and the moral character of the course may be in the one case right, and in the other utterly wrong. The wicked man has no right to assume that the Christian acts from the same motives as himself, merely because he pursues the same business. This may be, and often is arrant censoriousness.

6. Many mistake the apathy of the old man for the peace of the new man. The old man sometimes becomes apathetic, vastly calm and indifferent to passing events, and this seems to him like that deep calm which the Christian feels because his own Father is at the helm. Nothing can be a greater mistake. The sinner's soul is a perfect stranger to the Christian's deep heavenly, peace-begetting trust in God.

7. Many mistake the zeal and legal bustle of the old man for the holy fervor of the new man. Legalists are wont to become very zealous; they strive hard to do some great thing, and often make a splendid bustle, and you would think that verily they were about to convert the world in a twelve-month; now they look back upon these developments, and comparing themselves with active Christians they judge themselves to have the holy fervor and divine love of apostles and martyrs. Yet in fact their motives and spirit are just as unlike the real Christians as hell is unlike heaven. They are the Jehus of the Church; "come, say they, come, see my zeal for the Lord of hosts." Perhaps they really think that they outstrip most real Christians.

8. Often men mistake the impatience of the old man for the holy jealousy of the new man. The old man frets at sinners because they sin, feels indignant at such horrible wrong-doing; but point out to him his own sins, and press his conscience to repent and confess, and O! he does not think that wrong under his circumstances; he has nothing particular to confess. His heart is not quite so indignant against sin in himself as against sin in others. In his own case he sees various extenuating circumstances which more than alter, which quite reverse the case. Thus he reveals himself.

Yet he often takes credit to himself for holy indignation against sin. The real Christian feels a holy indignation; Christ felt it and often could not repress it; yet it was a holy jealousy for the honor of God, and not a fitful irritation against wrong doing because it might injure some of his own interests, or because it offended against his virtuous principles.

9. Often men fail to distinguish between the selfish sorrow of the old man and the godly sorrow of the new.

The new man remembers his former sins with great sorrow; his soul is weighed down within him and often his tears gush out in the very streets as

he is reminded of his past deeds of shame and guilt; but not so the old man. He has a sort of sorrow for his old sins, especially if they have affected his reputation. But you do not see him loathing himself in his own sight for all his secret abominations. Yet he counts his own tears for sin, and things he has the sorrows of the real penitent.

10. Many mistake the selfish joys of the old man for the spiritual joys of the new man. The former however begin and end in selfishness; the man is pleased when good comes to himself, that is all. The latter rejoices in God, yea in God, his exceeding joy. He is happy when others get good, though himself has none.

11. Often people mistake the hope of the old man, for the hope of the new man. Each have their hopes. The sinner hopes to be happy in heaven--by what means is a thing of small care or thought to him. The Christian's hope is beautifully sketched by the apostle, "We know," he says, "that when Christ shall appear we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifies himself, even as He is pure." The hope of the new man rests on being holy, not merely nor directly on being happy. No. His glorious hope is that he shall be perfectly, universally, eternally holy. Give him this, and you gratify the ruling passion of his soul.

12. A mistake is often made of the turbulence and fanaticism of the old man for the holy firmness and faithfulness of the new. See that man finding fault--how censorious, how turbulent; he can denounce everything in most unmeasured terms, yet under the self-soothing pretense of being faithful to his fellow men. He means to clear his skirts of the blood of souls, so he traduces his brethren and measures off denunciations in a most terrible manner. Yet ask him why he does this, and he will refer you to Christ and to the prophets of old who had the word of the Lord shut up in their bones; and he says, did not Christ denounce? Little is this man like Christ that is trying to cast out devils through Beelzebub. With the very spirit of Satan, he would fain drive Satan out of his brethren!

Not so the new man. He is firm and faithful, but his spirit breathes gentleness and love. I do not say that every Christian is always bold and firm, nor that all who have been converted continue through life to act out the new man and him only; happy if it were so. But while they do act the new man, they are firm without malevolence; faithful without bitter denunciation.

13. The effervescence of the old man is mistaken for the unction of the new man. Yet the difference between the two is most radical. In each there is excitement, yet while the one is the boiling up of a selfish heart, the other is a holy unction from heaven.

14. The presumption of the old man is mistaken for the faith of the new. The former often talks of his great faith, assumes to have more than his brethren, but it is all presumption; he pursues such a life and has such a spirit that he has no right to trust God for anything but damnation.

15. Many mistake the self-will of the old man for the conscientiousness of the new man. They are obstinate, unyielding; yet it is only self-will--a committal of the will, and not the demand of an enlightened conscience.

16. The constitutional tendencies of the old man are mistaken for the spiritual developments of the new man. The natural humanity and kindness, for instance, of the old man are mistaken for gospel benevolence; conscientiousness of natural character, for that conscientiousness which is created, trained and expanded in the school of Christ.

REMARKS.

1. None but a spiritual mind will really make the distinctions which I have been pointing out. No others care to make them; and moreover, the qualities of the new man can never be clearly apprehended without experience. Yet it is a vastly desirable attainment to be able to distinguish between what originates with self, and what originates with the Spirit of God. How rarely made! From my acquaintance with Christians, I think this point is but feebly developed. They don't distinguish between pleasing self and pleasing God. Yet no two things can be more opposite to each other, and none should be more carefully distinguished. In eating, in all labor, in study, we should be careful to know whether we are doing all to please God, or to please ourselves.

Some years since, my mind was greatly exercised on this point. Almost every waking moment the question would press upon me--Why am I doing this and why that? This led me to settle in my mind a thousand points of difficulty, and thus became of great service to my soul. How can we labor together with the Spirit of God in our own sanctification, unless we get hold of the real distinctions between holy consecration, and refined selfishness?

2. On this subject sinners constantly deceive and flatter themselves. They take credit for much that they do as good which is purely selfish. Thus they build themselves up on self-righteousness, but on a foundation which the last flood will sweep away and great will be the fall of it.

3. We see how and why sinners constantly misjudge Christians. They see Christians doing some of the same things externally which themselves are doing, and then they falsely judge that the Christian acts from the same motive as himself. Thus they take a flattering unction to themselves, and wrong both their Christian neighbors and their own souls.

4. The old man is constantly corrupt. There is nothing good in him. Paul might well say of the old man, "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." No good originates there. You can say no good thing of the old man. He is wholly evil. You can place no confidence in him for anything really good. He is wholly selfish, and will do anything to carry his selfish ends.

5. No evil can be said of the new man. Understanding by this term the new, regenerate heart, it does nothing wrong. The converted person may sin, but if he does, it is because the old man is not dead, but rises up and rules, gaining a temporary ascendancy.

6. The old man is exceedingly tenacious of life. It seems as if you might kill him a thousand times and yet he lives. You gain the victory over him; you crush him down and he seems breathless; you flatter yourself he is dead and buried, but ere long up he comes--the old disgusting carcass, breathing out its fouled stench; your spiritual strength becomes weakness, and perhaps under this baleful influence, you return like the dog to his vomit. Ah! that old man, how he will live and keep coming up; and so there will be a tendency to this more or less while we are in the flesh;; we must watch, and often have to fight, and often kill our old man over and over again. Yet through Christ we may come off more than conquerors.

This leads me to say that a spiritual man is exceedingly jealous of the old man. He will always be watching his old enemy, and will never trust him at all. Yet, alas, even the spiritual are sometimes deceived by the old man and are lured into a selfish state before they are fully aware of it. But when they come to see it, O, how they loath the abomination! I have known persons so deeply disgusted with themselves for their own selfishness as actually to vomit. O, how horrid and how

loathsome! That young man goes out to preach. He has prepared his sermon. But when he was studying it out and making it up, something whispered--"Now get in some choice and splendid paragraphs--this very classical and elegant expression, that fine philosophical illustration--show the people that you are a scholar and a genius." Well, he has made up his sermon and goes to the pulpit--spouts it off--takes good care to make a good impression for himself; at length returns to his home and his closet; there the truth flashes upon him--serving myself--serving myself--none else but self--not Christ, but my own great self! O! how he loathes this abomination! He is disgusted, and turns away from himself as if he had met the very devil! He is ready to vomit or even spit in his own face! O, young man, that is a bad business--such letting up of self--such a resurrection of the old man in your heart. Beware!

The converted man falls into selfishness, but let him see it, and how he loathes it! Horrible! Detestable! He would fain spue his very self out of his own soul!

Here you may see who is really the new man. No better test of the new life can be had than this.

Beloved, how is this with you? Does the religion you possess make you new creatures in Christ Jesus, or does it leave your old selfishness still reigning, only somewhat dressed over perhaps, and fitted out sometimes in a Sunday suit; how is this? O, there is nothing that so perils the souls of men in this Christian land and in this passing age, as a refining the manners, and polishing the exterior of the old man, till he shall pass for that new man which is truly born of God, and molded into His divine image!

[Back to Top](#)

Coming Up through Great Tribulation

Lecture X

June 4, 1845

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rev. 7:14,15: "And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

In discussing this subject,. I shall attempt to show--

I. That great tribulations are the common lot of saints in every age and nation.

II. What these tribulations consist in.

III. The reasons why god causes christians to pass through such scenes.

I. Great tribulations are the common lot of saints in every age and nation.

It is most striking to observe how often and in how many various ways this fact is taught in the Bible. Everywhere throughout the writings of prophets or apostles, whether in its history or poetry, in the diaries of saints or in the precepts and promises of their Lord, the Bible teaches that the saints are moving on to glory through much tribulation. This fact stands out upon the very face of the Bible. You cannot read your Bible with any attention, without seeing it in bold relief on almost every page. It is every where implied; every where assumed. We are told how they passed through fiery trials; of Moses we are told that he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than enjoy the pleasures of sin, as if to go with God's people must be of course to suffer affliction. But I need not stop to quote passages of which the Bible is full. Christ told His disciples that they must expect tribulation. All the great leaders of the Church in every age

have found it true.

II. Some of the things in which these tribulations consist.

1. One is, persecution. In every age the wicked have persecuted the righteous. This persecution may take on different types in various ages according to external circumstances; yet it is still true--the wicked hate and persecute God's people. It is vain to expect, while the world lies in sin, that anybody will live godly without suffering persecution. It may take the form of cold and sneering contempt; it may develop itself in the venom of slander, or in the malignity of opposition to the gospel; but shut in as it may be by external forces, it will still burst out somewhere and annoy the saints of God.

2. Another form is that of Satanic temptation. The true children of God must always expect to be tempted by Satan. He has small cause to tempt the wicked; generally he can lead them captive at his will with little trouble, so great is their selfishness and so controlling their constitutional tendency to self-indulgence; but let them attempt to break quite away from his grasp and they must expect a fierce and frightful struggle. Real saints always have conflicts with Satan, and especially when they are about to snap the last bond of his that holds them. Satan growls hideously when he sees them about to ascend the table land of promise beyond his control. At this point they should look for a fierce struggle.

Again, saints often suffer much from spiritual desertion. Saints in all ages have had seasons of spiritual desertion in which the light of God's countenance has been withdrawn. I do not mean that in these cases God abandons them so as not to be in them and with them, and so as not to be indeed a Father to them, seeking ever their best good. I only mean that for the best of reasons He hides His face, and leaves them to grope awhile in darkness and great agony. Some of the bitterest scenes of anguish I ever saw have occurred in such cases. One man I knew intimately who had lived for some time in unclouded communion with God, often enjoying visions of divine glory most enrapturing, but for some just cause God withdrew this light of His face, and His deserted child wailed and groaned in agony. He fell to the floor and rolled in anguish, refusing to be comforted. No physician ever saw a patient suffer more, or seem in keener pain.

I am aware that this is among the extreme cases; yet I have seen many of the same sort, and similar cases are by no means infrequent.

Abraham knew what it is to have a horror of great darkness come upon his soul; nor he alone. Many others know what this means. Saints in every age have known it.

These are among the most severe trials they have or can have. Often they would not suffer more in the flames of martyrdom than they do under these hidings of the face of God. The man whose case I just now mentioned might better have burned at the stake than have endured the agony he did. The history of the church has taught us abundantly that under any amount of outward losses and pains, the soul may still be calm and peaceful, nay joyful, if the light of God shine on it. What Christian would not promptly say, Give me the light of God's face, and then I can bear the loss of all things else. All are not so much to my present enjoyment each moment as my God.

3. Another portion of these tribulations consists in the Christian's struggle with his own weaknesses and infirmities. I allude now particularly to those which result from the flesh and from habits of sensual indulgence. It often happens that these pernicious habits, during a long career of indulgence acquire the rigidity and strength of iron. Hence it costs the convert a mighty struggle to overcome them.

Some years since a man came into this place and called to see me at my study, who had long been a slave to the habit of using tobacco. When he came to see the claims of God upon his conscience to exercise self-control and self-denial, he was thrown into a fearful conflict. He fell on the floor of my study, and groaned and wailed out in agony, "I am an undone man. I never can subdue this tyrant appetite." Nor is this a solitary or a very peculiar case. Every saint who attempts to overcome and hold in complete subjection to reason and the will of God all his constitutional tendencies to self-indulgence will find work enough for severe conflict. Indeed were the whole diary of some Christians to be written out on this subject, you would see the drawing of many a battlefield, and you might be amazed to learn that the subjection of the flesh costs so many struggles, tears, and groans, and so much prayer ere victory is gained.

The pastor of a church near Boston told me of one of his church members, a

commodore in the navy, that in his struggles with one particular temptation, he often lay in agony whole nights, rolling on the floor and groaning like a wounded soldier in his blood, in such mental anguish and conflict as his athletic frame could scarce sustain. Yet he was a bold man, and could have faced the cannon's mouth undaunted. This was with him no quailing of timid sensibilities before imaginary evil; it was a real conflict with a hostile power of fearful strength in his own flesh.

Yet even in this case there is nothing very peculiar, certainly not in the nature of the conflict. Almost every person who has risen to adult years in the indulgence of his appetites, will find ample occasion for fierce struggles, groans, and agony.

There is no help for these protracted and terrific struggles, but in Christ. When His mild but mighty voice commands these agitated waves of passion, "Peace, be still;" suddenly there is a great and most blessed calm. O, how blessed if the whole church might learn that in Christ there is victory over both the flesh and the devil--indeed over every enemy that can rise up against our souls.

Again, many of these tribulations are occasioned by the perversion of the sensibility and the weakness of the intellect.

4. The sensibility have been grievously perverted by a long and greedy indulgence in sin, it becomes inevitable that God should compel its development in some other direction. Perhaps it is sometimes inevitable that He should wither our sensibility to some specific form of sinful pleasure by making us drink the bitter dregs of that same cup. He gives us the grief and disappointment which belong to that kind of indulgence and thus wakes up a different class of sensibilities. Through this pathway of flame, we may enter the haven of spiritual peace. How much it sometimes costs our Spiritual Teacher to bring us quite over from loving earthly good intensely, to loving as intensely the solid good of His presence and favor!

The intellect too, long crippled or perhaps knotted up by sin, must with much pains be unraveled and developed, and often in the school of tribulation. How many of God's people can testify that afflictions have made them really think as they never thought before, and consequently take views of truth never before taken.

Again, we must not omit to notice that many of the Christian's tribulations results from impaired health, poverty, losses, disappointments. With this fact every one is abundantly familiar. It enters into the experience and observation of every day life.

III. The reason why God causes His children to pass through such scenes.

These tribulations are often, properly speaking, unavoidable. By this is meant that the state of the world being what it is, nothing less than a miracle can entirely prevent the occurrence of tribulations. Thus, the world being as wicked as it is and as absolutely under the dominion of the devil, it would need as many miracles as there are saints and particular events, to shield every saint continually from being persecuted by the wicked.

The same substantially may be said of all those trials which result from the usual course of nature and of providence; for example, from sickness, losses, bereavements.

But again, very many of these trials are sent from the hand of God as parts of our needful discipline.

1. The spirit of a child of God needs to be subdued. The Bible represents God's people as being like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, in which case of course, they need to be "broken" before they can be safely used in the service of their Master. It should be observed, however, that this expression is used of the corrupt state of the ancient Jewish church, and therefore, as used by Jeremiah, may denote a really unconverted state. This seems probable, especially because Ephraim is immediately afterwards represented as praying--"Turn thou me, and I shall be turned:" and then as saying, "Surely after that I was turned, I repented." We may however plainly infer from the passage, that if God's real children apostatize into a rebellious state, God will follow them with His discipline till He breaks them into a submissive and docile spirit. Of course He can be satisfied with nothing short of this, and never ought to be.

Those of us who have children understand this. You know it costs you much trial and many tears often before you have completed the painful work of thoroughly subduing your children, as far as you can carry on the process. How much more then when God takes up the same sort of labor, and pushes

it to the radical cure of the heart; when He does not stop short as you sometimes do with mere external reform; and much more still, when it is considered that you wisely undertake your task while your children are yet young and consequently pliable; while God often and indeed usually has to carry His course of discipline into the rigorous and fixed habits of adult years. He takes up a fresh case perhaps after years of woefully perverse training, after the worst of sinful habits are formed, and knit together into the very fibers of the soul. O what a work is this to tear out these strong roots of sin, and wrench off these attachments by which the soul has suffered itself to be bound to sinful pursuits and pleasure! No wonder it should cost the saint of God many a trial ere he can say; "My soul is even as a weaned child." To subdue self-will is therefore the first step in this needful discipline

On this point however it should be well considered that this struggle will be long or short--will be sore, terrific, heart-rending, or will terminate soon in the sweetest submission, according as the individual shall attempt to do it mainly in his own strength, or shall take hold by faith of the promised strength of God. Let him fight out this battle alone by dint of resolutions, vows, mental struggles, and he will find toil enough to crush and weary out an archangel; but let him look up submissively and confidently into the face of his Savior, saying, "Save, Lord, that I perish not," -- let him throw his arms round the neck of this Heavenly Helper, and before he is aware the work is done, and his "soul is like the chariots of Amminadab."

2. The next object is to correct and duly develop the sensibility. After the will has been subdued in conversion, and yet even more thoroughly by a process of subsequent trial, the sensibility may be still but imperfectly rectified. It may have been long trained to a course of monstrous development, so as to exhibit a really monstrous enlargement towards some forms of sinful pleasure. The consequence of this must be a constant tendency to fall under temptations in that direction.

The only remedy is for God to subdue and purify the sensibility. This He does in part by trials. He throws the Christian into deep waters; gives him gall and wormwood to drink; stirs up and draws out all the keenest sensibilities of the soul, until its old habitudes are thoroughly broken up. He pushes on this work, overturning and still overturning; fouling every fountain of sinful pleasure, quickening the sensibility to other moods of action;

pushing the law-work of conviction until the soul really feels the bitterness of sinning, and turns with irrepressible loathing from those pleasures which it has so long trained itself to relish. The convicting power of the Spirit, co-operating often with afflictions from God's providence, brings the soul into deep trouble; the searching process goes on and develops more and more the fearful fact that the sensibility is too keenly alive to earthly good and far too insensible to heavenly; still God pushes the trial, until the sensibility seems to let go the earthly and be satisfied with the heavenly. In a certain respect, this process renews the scene of the soul's first conversion: the individual is brought to loathe those sinful pleasures he once relished so keenly, and then he turns with all his heart to those pleasures which flow immediately from God's own right hand. Smitten by the law till sinful pleasures are embittered, he turns to the gospel of infinite grace and finds that now his soul can feel in view of these blessed realities.

The sensibility of most wicked men is not developed at all towards the great law of God. Keenly alive to every thing else, they are really dead to this. Its precepts and its penalties alike affect them not. Why? Because their sensibilities are strongly developed towards selfish pleasure and towards worldly objects, but little or perhaps none at all towards these spiritual objects. Hence such persons need to be searched and smitten all the pieces and their souls agonized with conviction, before they will let off their keen sensibility to sinful pleasure and throw their souls out in another and opposite direction. This work is not usually if ever finished at the soul's first conversion. The radical cure of the sensibility demands yet another, a longer, often a different process. As a matter of fact, God very often secures this result by afflictions. Almost all Christians who have had much experience in the divine life can testify to this. They know how God has dried up the current of their sensibility towards selfish good till He has left them nothing but Himself to love, and then has drawn out their hearts towards Himself until they felt that this is bliss enough for them.

It is a sweet consideration connected with this point, that like a kind-hearted parent, God always prefers the milder mode of attracting the soul, rather than the more painful one of compulsion. The latter is adopted only as an alternative when the other utterly fails. It is only when the love and the cross of Jesus fail to touch and command our sensibility, that God pours wormwood into our cup of idolatrous pleasure, and compels us to give Him

our hearts.

It often happens that Christians under trial fail to understand the philosophy of God's dealings with themselves. Hence they are greatly stumbled. Yet if they would study their own moral state and the manifest result of tribulations as developed in a thousand cases under their own eye, they would see that often the design is simply to discipline and rectify the sensibility.

3. Another reason for sending tribulations is to develop the intelligence. Unconverted men often think they know much on religious subjects, while in fact they know almost nothing. They are mere children. Perhaps their minds have never been thoroughly roused to action on any subject. Hence the necessity of great intellectual development. For this end how often does God make use of great tribulations. What Christian has not observed that when God would really wake up his intelligence, He first throws his soul into a state of deep agitation and agony, so that the mind seems to heave like a volcano; the intelligence is wrought up to a state of most intense activity, on the rack to get hold of the great and deep truths of God.

4. For this end deep and thorough discipline is requisite. Fiery tribulations are often the means employed by God to rouse up the intelligence and quicken its search for truth into an earnestness almost like agony.

So are all the other faculties of our whole mental and moral being. They all need discipline. Made originally right and tuned to mutual harmony, it has been the constant work of sin and Satan to wrench them out of place and order, and fill them with the dissonance of hell. God must put the whole instrument in tune. Every string, every wire, every tube, must be set right, till under His master hand it shall pour forth the music of heaven. How beautiful the process! Yet sometimes how mysterious! The result will fill heaven with melody, and make the chastened saints more than thankful for all the pain of the needful process.

Thus is God perfecting the character and developing the whole being to fit the soul for heaven. Thus through much tribulation He develops faith. He shuts the Christian up in a strait place where he can find none else to trust but God.

Thus too He develops the patience of the saints. See that dear child of God

on a sick bed. Days and nights of weariness are allotted; why? Perhaps only to cultivate and develop the grace of patience. There may be nothing else lacking to put that soul into complete tune for the harmony of heaven; and now when this last wire is fitted, when this last tube in the great organ is properly adjusted, He will say -- "Now take it home. It will do for the choir above."

5. So God disciplines His saints here for usefulness hereafter. He has work for them to do there. Only Himself knows just what it is, and just what training is requisite for its successful prosecution. Then let us leave Him to go on in this school of training us for a service which lies open before His eye but not before ours.

Again, it is most manifest that Christ is preparing the saints to be glorified with Himself. He passed through this same school of discipline to His work and reward on high; so He asks us to follow Him in His tribulations that we may be ripened for the same final glory. Having Himself suffered being tempted and tried amid tribulations, He knows how to sympathize with those who are struggling along the same pathway. Who would not follow cheerfully such a Leader! Especially while cheered by such sympathy, and conducted onward to such a weight of glory!

Once more; the unbelief of Christians is the real occasion of very many of their trials. The Lord in mercy sets Himself to cure this unbelief; and for this purpose employs the two-fold agency of external providences and the internal work of His Spirit. Providences from without press, and the Spirit within constrains us towards God. Oppressed with trials, we must seek God and believe His word and promises; drawn by His Spirit, we renounce our unbelief and dare to trust our own Father.

Thus the Lord makes His providence and His Spirit conspire together to expel the Christian's unbelief and beget faith.

It is indeed a most interesting consideration that nothing can occur in the universe which does not tend towards this same result. "All things work together for good to those that love God." All the latitude given to external temptations is allowed and still controlled with reference to this very end. With every temptation, God will provide a way of escape that we may be able to bear it; and having borne it victoriously, we learn to trust God more

than ever. Thus every temptation through grace may serve to dispel unbelief, quicken faith, and ripen the Christian for future usefulness and final glory.

REMARKS.

1. The true picture of the Christian life is very seldom presented. Almost all Christians are prone to take partial, one-sided views of the Christian life; a fact which seems often to result from dwelling too exclusively on one particular aspect of practical religion. By consequence we fail to represent it accurately as a whole, and false impressions are given.

Thus, the Christian life is sometimes represented as almost wholly a state of bondage to sin. You are made to see the Christian daily groaning under a body of sin from which no deliverance comes or is hoped to come till death. You cannot help inferring that his state is one of the most pitiable forms of slavery the world every saw -- with no emancipation possible in the present life. Now this is a great perversion of the real truth.

Or again, the Christian life is represented to be a bed of flowers, with no toil, no ruffling anxiety, no strife within or without. This too is an extreme and one-sided view of the case. The fact is that the Christian life is a checkered, varied scene -- a storm and then a calm, a rugged mountain pass, and then a verdant valley -- the light and joy of hope and of victory, succeeded often by fell conflicts with Satan or with lusts, forming the dark shades of the picture.

So the Bible sketches the Christian life; so all experience and observation testify; so therefore it should be represented.

2. In consequence of these defective representations, real Christians and especially young converts are often greatly stumbled. Not finding religion to be what they expected, their confidence is shaken. If they have been told that all will be joy, light, quietude, with no sorrows, struggle, toil, they will be greatly discouraged when they find the fact to be otherwise. Hence a strong temptation to let go their confidence and apostatize from God.

It would be of vast service to every young convert, and indeed to every Christian to understand the relation of all these trials to their own spiritual improvement. Every Christian needs to know that these are the wisest means which God can use for molding, chastening, and purifying his own heart for the work of faith here and the bliss of heaven hereafter. Then no one need be stumbled. All would

love to see a Father's hand both wise and kind, in every form of tribulation.

3. These tribulations are not arbitrary or accidental. This is a great and a most injurious mistake. They always come from God, directly caused or at least permitted for some wise and good end. Nothing can come by chance.

Nothing can befall the children of God which is not suffered by God for their good. Whatever it be, God means it as an instrument for their greater sanctification and higher usefulness.

Hence it follows that God is just as good to His people in the afflictions He sends, as in those things which we are pleased to call mercies. They are all mercies. The only difference among them is that the one class seem for the present to be not joyous but grievous, though afterwards they yield the same peaceable fruits of righteousness. The other class may be a less unpleasant medicine. All alike tend to health, and God is just as benevolent in giving the bitter portion as the sweet.

Our experience meetings on Friday afternoons are exceedingly rich and instructive. In one of these meetings a few days since, a brother rose and said, "Rejoice, my friends, with me, for God has been peculiarly good to me of late." I wanted to reply at once, "Brother, you are mistaken --it is not merely of late that God has been good to you; He has always been as good to you as he could be; always doing the very best thing He could do, and the pleasantest thing for your present enjoyment that the nature of your case would admit. Think not that God is fitful, capricious, -- benevolent only now and then; peculiarly good by turns; no mistake can be greater than this."

You think perhaps that God is sometimes particularly attentive to your case and to your welfare. No so; He is always attentive to you, as much so as if you were the only Christian who needed His care in the whole universe, and the benevolent sympathy and regards of the Deity were all concentrated upon yourself.

It is like the case of that fond mother who has only one child in the world -- a darling son. See how she watches over him day and night; she joins him in his little plays and keeps her eye out against all harm; she kisses away his little pains; if he is sick, O, how she watches over his pale frame. But God watches over every one of His children with an eye as fixed, with love as strong, with

assiduity as unwearied as the fondest mother ever had -- nay with love infinitely surpassing that of the best of mothers.

Christian mother, God gave you one only son. It was a precious gift, and you thanked the Giver for His love. You watched over that dear boy with the buoyancy of hope till he could run about his play alone; and what then? Oh, you say, he seemed well -- till one morning he was sick. His little hand was hot, his cheek flushed; he rolled his wild eye in agony. Ah me, I saw him die -- and die too in so much suffering that I almost felt relief when his little bosom heaved for the last time. And do you suppose, afflicted mother, that God was any less good in taking away than in giving your dear boy? Nay, God has no fitful spasms of goodness; all alike is infinite love -- the best thing for you that He can possibly do.

But the Lord hid His face from you, did He? But even then, He did not forsake His throne of love, nor revoke His promises, nor dismiss our great Advocate; so you might still have a God to seek and find. Nay, Christian, in those seasons of your bitterest agony, your Father was none the less kind and sympathizing. He chastens only for your "profit;" and not from His caprice. You will then (will you not?) learn to praise Him for both -- for the affliction and the gift. O you must learn this, else the law of gratitude cannot be written deeply on your very soul. You cannot praise God as you ought till you learn to praise Him for every thing and see His own kind hand in afflictions not less than in His gifts of providence. "In every thing give thanks," is the inspired precept.

[Back to Top](#)

Delighting in the Lord

Lecture XI

July 2, 1845

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Ps. 37:4: "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."

In speaking from these words I shall,

I. Show what is implied in delighting ourselves in the Lord.

II. What is implied in the promise "He shall give thee the desires of thine heart."

III. Why this promise is thus conditioned.

I. What is implied in delighting ourselves in the Lord.

1. Supreme sympathy with him. No one can properly be said to delight himself in the Lord any farther than he sympathizes with God, in respect to the great end on which His heart is set, and in the means by which he is attempting to accomplish that end. He must adopt his principles, enter into his views and feelings, and be able to respond a hearty amen, to all the announcements of his word, to all the dispensations of his providence, to his character, works, and ways. One who has this supreme sympathy with God, and who deeply interests himself in God's character, government, policy, ends and means, will of course delight himself in the Lord; and no one else will.

2. Delighting ourselves in the Lord implies a supreme complacency in him. Complacency in God, is benevolence or good will toward him, modified by a consideration of his character and relations. This always implies delight. Complacency is often spoken of as if it consisted altogether in a delight existing in the sensibility of the soul. But properly speaking it is not so. Complacency considered as a virtue, belongs to the will or heart. But it always implies a corresponding state of the sensibility; and of course, implies a delight or pleasure in view of the character, government, relations, works, and ways of God. Without this complacency of heart in God, we cannot be said truly to delight ourselves in him.

3. Delight in the Lord implies that he is chosen as the supreme good of the soul. The text undoubtedly implies this. It is setting our supreme affections on him, and choosing him as our all-satisfying portion, making him the great center in which the affections and sympathy of our soul delight to rest.

4. Delight in God implies universal confidence in him. We could never be

said truly to delight ourselves in God, unless we had supreme, universal confidence in his character, in his providences, and in his word. Nothing could be chosen by us as an all-satisfying portion, unless the mind regarded it as infinite and perfect. The mind is so constituted that it cannot be satisfied with any thing else. The mind is naturally and necessarily dissatisfied in a greater or less degree with whatever is seen to be imperfect. Delight in God implies, that the mind regards him as possessing infinite fulness and perfection, truthfulness, and every attribute and perfection that can fill and satisfy the soul. It is common for men to seek what they suppose will make them happy, and to endeavor to find happiness in the creature. But after all, nothing but the infinitely perfect Creator can satisfy the wants and demands of the soul. And to delight ourselves in the Lord, in the sense of the text, implies that we are satisfied in God; that his fulness and perfection meet all the demands of our being; that in him we have enough; and that the mind regards him as an exceeding great reward, as a portion infinitely ample, satisfying, full and overflowing, infinitely glorious and eternal.

5. Delight in God implies universal submission of our will to his. The soul that is not entirely submissive to God, cannot be delighted in him. He is like a child whose will is not subdued to the will of his parent; he is restive under the divine government, often made unhappy by the dispensations of his providence and by the requirements of his Word. To have true delight in God implies that we have no will of our own--only that the will of God should be done. It implies that the soul has come practically to regard God as infinitely wise and good, to feel the fullest satisfaction with his appointments and his dispensations whatever they may be.

6. Delight in God implies a spirit of universal obedience to him; a state of mind that inquires after what God would have us do with a fixed intention to do all his will without hesitation; and to devote ourselves entirely to pleasing him. It implies in short, that our whole being is given up to it; that we have no purpose or design, but in all things, at all times, in all places, and forever, to live wholly to him.

7. Delight in God implies delight in obeying him, or delight in his service. It is one thing to obey, and another thing to have delight in obedience. To be sure our nature is such that true obedience always produces delight. But

obedience and delight are not the same thing. Where the true spirit of obedience exists, we shall find our delight and happiness of course in the service of God. We are always delighted with the course on which our heart is supremely set. When, therefore our hearts are given up to pleasing God, and we live to this end, when we are heartily and universally consecrated to God's glory and interests, nothing will of course afford us so great pleasure, we shall be so delighted in nothing else, as in waiting on God, doing his bidding, and in every thing engaging in his service. The service of God will be our meat and drink. We shall know what Christ meant when he said "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." "It is my meat to do the will of him that sent me." "I delight to do thy will, O my God."

8. Delight in God implies, a deep interest in his honor and glory. Everything we do and say will have reference to God. God will be the supreme end of all we say and do. In this we shall sympathize with God himself. God has a supreme regard to his own interest and glory, and is the chief end of all his works. This is by no means selfishness in God. It is not because it is his own glory, but because it is infinitely the greatest good, that he has a supreme regard to it. God's well-being is of infinitely more value than the aggregate of the well-being of all creatures that ever were or could be made. God's well-being is infinite. Whereas the well-being of all creatures will always be finite. Nothing can be infinite that is not eternally and necessarily so. Nothing finite can ever grow and increase until it becomes infinite. Therefore the aggregate well-being of all finite creatures, must always be finite and of course infinitely less than the well-being of God. Now if God would regard things according to their relative value he must of necessity lay infinitely more stress upon his own happiness and glory than upon the happiness and glory of all other beings together. There is no comparison between the finite and the infinite, and therefore the aggregate value of the endless happiness of all creatures is absolutely as nothing when put into the scale against the well-being of God. God so regards this; and it is reasonable and right and infinitely important that he should. Consequently himself, his own glory, and his well-being, are the supreme end of all his works. When I saw this fact announced in Pres. Edwards' writings many years since, I did not at once perceive its truthfulness. And I have often since heard persons speak as if they were stumbled by such announcements as if it implied selfishness in God. Now selfishness is preferring our own

interests to our neighbors, simply because it is our own. It is not selfish in us to prefer our happiness to the happiness of a goose, because ours is really more valuable. But it is selfish in us to prefer our happiness to our neighbor's, when his is equally valuable with our own. I repeat it again; it is not because the happiness or glory is God's that his heart is set supremely on it, but because of its intrinsic value, because it is so infinitely the greater good. Now delight in God implies that we regard this as he does, so far as we understand it; that we sympathize with him in this; that we regard his interests as the supreme and infinite good, and delight ourselves in promoting his glory and honor in the universe; that we find our supreme happiness and satisfaction of soul in this.

9. Delight in God implies that we supremely seek and desire eternal union and communion with him, that so far as our own happiness is concerned, this is all we ask, to have eternal union and communion with the ever blessed God;--that, give us this and we could lack nothing essential to our happiness; but deprive us of this, and nothing in the universe could satisfy us.

II. What is implied in the promise "Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."

The promise implies that we shall have those things on which we set our affections, or in other words that our desire, our really cherished desires shall be gratified. If we delight ourselves in the Lord we shall have all things on which we set our hearts. "He shall give thee the desires of thine heart"--here is no limit, but it is plainly implied that what we set our hearts on, and that which we pray for shall be granted. It seems to me that the text is to be understood, not that every transient desire or awaking of appetite shall be gratified, but that the supreme desire of the soul, that on which we can properly be said to fix our affections and our heart shall infallibly be granted to us.

III. Why this promise is thus conditioned.

1. Because without this condition the promise would be unsafe to the universe. For God to promise unqualifiedly to give us the desire of our heart, unless he knew that we had a complete sympathy with him, would be unreasonable, unsafe, and what he could not innocently do. What would it amount to for him to make such a promise without this condition? Why to

this--that our selfish desires should be granted. But when selfishness is slain, when our supreme desire is on God, and our whole soul sympathizes deeply with him, it is plain that our desires may be granted. It is then both consistent with the will of God, and with the highest good of being to grant our desires. God is then the great end and center of the desires of the soul, and in giving himself to the soul, he gratifies its desires.

2. God could not safely make such a promise but on this condition; because it would be impossible to fulfill it. Suppose he should make the unqualified promise to every individual that he should have the desires of his heart. With the endless lustings of men after objects around them, how often would it come to pass that different persons would desire the same things, when but one could possess them.

3. It is perfectly safe for God to make such a promise on the condition of delighting ourselves in the Lord, because whosoever delights himself in the Lord can never desire anything inconsistent with the will of God. The Spirit of God dwells in him; all his affections and desires are under the influence of the Spirit of God. And while he delights himself in God, he is sure not to set his heart on any thing unless he is drawn to it by the Spirit of God. In this case certainly he cannot at the same time be lusting after a forbidden object and delighting himself in the Lord.

4. This promise is thus conditioned, because God delights to bestow that on which the heart is set that delights in him. He loves to bestow himself, to communicate of his own fulness to those who set their hearts on him. He loves those that love him. There is a sense to be sure in which God loves his enemies; but his love to them is not a delight in their persons or characters. But he greatly enjoys the communication of himself to those who delight themselves in him. He loves to draw them into a participation of his joy, that they may drink of the river of his pleasure. He delights in making them partakers of his own divine nature, of his own holiness and of his own happiness.

5. It is of the highest importance to the universe that God should grant the desires of the heart which delights itself in him. It is for the highest good of being that he should do so. It is for his glory; it contributes to the stability of his government. It is not only highly honorable to God, but highly useful to his creatures to know that God will grant the desire of those who set their

heart on him.

REMARKS.

1. Those who delight themselves in God, will of course manifest great cheerfulness of mind.

(1.) Because this delight in God is of itself a cheerful state of mind, and

(2.) Because they have the desires of the heart.

An unsatisfied craving of mind, that produces unhappiness, gloom, despondency, and despair, is not the portion of the mind that delights itself in God. The soul that delights itself in God, is pleased with whatever comes to pass. It has no way or will of its own, and therefore cannot be disappointed. It has no craving or lusting of a selfish nature, and therefore is not made unhappy by being crossed, and denied things on which its affections are set, because its affections are set on nothing but God. While it delights itself in God it is of course cheerful and happy under all circumstances, and can rejoice evermore, and pray without ceasing, and in every thing give thanks.

2. From what has been said, we may see why so few prayers prevail with God. The fact is, there is so much dissatisfaction with God and so much lusting after other things, that God cannot fulfill the desires of such souls; it would be infinitely unwise and unsafe to do so. Then, as a condition of prevailing prayer, we must delight ourselves in the Lord, and when we do this our prayers will be dictated by God's Spirit, and of course will be answered.

Now look around over the world. How few seem to have their supreme delight in God. How few are seeking communion and fellowship with God. How few make union with God the supreme end of their lives. It is not strange then that our prayers are not answered. The conditions of prevailing prayer are not fulfilled. Many pray because they are pressed up to it by conviction, not because their soul pants after communion with God, and delights itself in God. Instead of loving to dwell in the Bible, and in the house of God, and in the closet--in short, instead of delighting itself in God, it is constantly roving about here and there, to see if it cannot find some good. "Who will show us any good?" seems to be its constant inquiry. Now those who are in this state cannot have their desires granted.

The reason why so many desires are ungratified, is, because they are not the right kind of desires. The truth is, where an individual delights himself in the Lord, he will have the desires of his heart. Instead of being wretched all the time, and setting his heart on some thing he cannot get, when he comes to delight himself in the Lord, all this scrambling and lusting after what is beyond his reach, will be gone; he will be like a weaned child, all peace. When the mind has God, it has enough.

Much prayer, or that which is called prayer, is after all, nothing but lusting in the Bible sense of the term. It is a craving of the mind after some selfish good. Much prayer is nothing else but the pouring out of these cravings of the selfish heart. The Apostle James speaks of this state of mind; "Ye lust, says he, and have not; ye kill and desire to have, and cannot obtain; ye fight and war, yet ye have not because ye ask not; ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it on your lusts."

3. When there is delight in God, the supreme desire of course, will be for union and communion with God. This will be the all-absorbing desire of the mind. It will, as it were, swallow up all other desires. I will explain a little. We often see one state of mind or desire that comes to swallow up all others. The mind becomes so engrossed with one object of desire as to care for little else besides. We see this state of mind often in this world. One desire seems to eat up and swallow up all the rest. We see this too sometimes in the case of individuals that are very wicked. The drunkard's appetite for strong drink sometimes, will kill and completely destroy every other appetite; even natural affection seems to be annihilated by it. Sometimes a husband's affection for his wife is so strong, that he cares for almost nothing else. If the object of his affection is lost, he says, "what have I more? I have nothing to care for now." His interest in every thing else is destroyed. Now let this illustrate what I mean here. When the mind becomes acquainted with God and the sensibility is rightly developed towards him, as it always must be before it can be at rest, and all the desires center in God, he comes to be the supreme end of the soul in such a sense, that take any thing that you will, and leave his God, and you cannot affect his happiness; this one desire so swallows up all the rest. With such a soul, nothing else weighs a straw in comparison to the love of God. Christ was so swallowed up at one time with this one great idea, that when it was told him saying, "Behold thy mother and thy brethren stand without desiring to speak with thee;" He replied, "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his

disciples and said, Behold my mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in Heaven, the same is my mother, and sister and brother." He meant to rebuke the idea that our blood relatives are to be considered so much dearer than our spiritual relatives. He would say to those who sustain this relation to God, "Ye are my mother and my brethren." Now whoever has his sensibility much developed towards God, comes to feel that every thing must sustain some relation to this end, or it is of no value. Nothing else pleases. It must bear a relation to God, to his government, and to his glory, to make it of any regard to such a mind. The thing nearest and dearest to men naturally, if it does not sustain this relation, will be cast off as of no value. Said an individual some time since to another, "I am praying that the Lord would destroy your influence." "Well," remarked the other, "I hope the Lord will answer your prayers, if my influence is not good; for it is of no use to me unless it can glorify God, and if it does no good, I hope it will be destroyed." Now I suppose that individual answered just as he felt. He felt that his influence was worth nothing. Unless it would do some good to the universe, he cared nothing about it. Now when an individual comes into this state of mind, he regards every thing in this light. I must be valuable to God or he cares nothing about it.

We oftentimes see persons so much attached to others in this world as to seem really to enjoy nothing only as it sustains some relation to the object of their affection. Husbands and wives sometimes sustain this relation so that every thing is valued or not valued according to the relation it sustains to the one or the other. Now I suppose the mind becomes so completely swallowed up in God, so "sick in love," and so ravished with the love of God, and comes to take such delight in him as to say with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, O God." The Psalmist knew what he said, "Whom have I in heaven but thee!" His father and mother, and many whom he had greatly loved, had gone to heaven, but still he exclaims, "Whom have I in heaven but thee?" His children, and those to whom he was greatly attached, were all around him, and yet when he comes to think of God, his whole soul cries out, "There is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." Now this will be the case with a mind that is so ravished, so carried away with the love of God. There is such a dying of the mind to all other things, to self, to the world, to friends, to every thing, that the individual comes to care for nothing, not even to take his food, unless for the glory of God. He is dead to all but God. How safe it is, then, for God, to make such a promise as this, to an individual who thus delights himself in God!

4. An individual who delights himself in the Lord, will postpone every thing that comes in competition with communion with God. You will not find him making excuses for not attending prayer meetings, for not spending time in his closet, and holding much communion with God. You see persons who seem to be really honest, in saying they would like to commune with God, they would like to attend the prayer meeting, but they have worked very hard to day, or they have so much to do, or there is some good excuse, and they cannot attend. Now I have learned that when persons come really to delight themselves in the Lord, that such excuses don't appear to be really important. Show me a man whose soul is panting after God, who can say with the Psalmist, "As the hart panteth after the water-brook, so panteth my soul after thee, O God," such a man will love to go where he can have communion with God. He will as naturally postpone every thing else that interferes with his communion with God, as he draws his breath. The truth is, when persons make such excuses about reading their Bible and attending meetings, the secret is, they have lost their keen relish for communion with God, and are beginning to lose their delight in him.

5. If we delight ourselves in God, he will delight himself in us; and he will delight himself in us just in proportion as we delight ourselves in him. As we seek communion with him, so will he seek communion with us. God loves society--the society of the holy. If we embrace him, he will embrace us. If we pant after him, he will pant after us. If we are drawn to him, he will be drawn to us. This is a law of mind. It is impossible that he should not delight in the soul that delights in him; impossible that he should not seek after the soul that seeks after him. It would be the same thing as denying himself, not to delight in those that delight in him. Whenever a mind seeks union with God, God sets his heart on that soul. It is as dear to him as the apple of his eye. He loves it as he loves his own soul. Why should he not? It is like him; it is a part of himself; it is, so to speak, flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone. It has come to be assimilated to his own nature. He comes to love it as he loves the man Christ Jesus, and for the same reason. And he will no more turn from it and not hear it than he would turn from his own beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

Now we ought to understand this, that whenever we find ourselves strongly drawn to God, God is infinitely drawn towards us; when our heart is panting after God, he is panting after us. More! it is God panting after us, that draws us towards him! This should be understood. It is of great importance that we should get this thing fixed in our mind, that when our mind is tending towards God, he

is tending towards us. "Draw nigh to me," says God, "and I will draw nigh to you, Turn unto me, and I will turn unto you." Love me, and I will love you.

6. The soul that delights in God, will greatly mourn, if for any reason, communion is withheld. Those will be days of mourning to that soul, when, for any reason God withholds the light of his countenance. It is impossible for him, then, to be cheerful and happy. He may have confidence, and say with David, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." Now in this case the Psalmist had confidence in God, but he mourned. In such a case, the soul is ready to cry out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

I have thought many times that there was not so much mystery in what Christ said, at the time, as many would make us believe. The Christian, that knows what it is to commune and walk with God, and to have God withdraw his countenance from him, will naturally use this same language. And he will cry out with the Psalmist, "Will the Lord cast off forever? and will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone forever? doth his promise fail forever more? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" It is not strange that Christ should cry out, as he did. God's countenance was withdrawn from him, and he could not help crying out to God to know why this was so.

Where an individual has come to delight himself in God, and falls into this state of mind in which he mourns, his mourning will be very submissive and very peculiar. It will be nothing like the mourning of this world. Not a rebellious, complaining state of mind; it will be the mourning of a "weaned child," very submissive,--a peculiar kind of mourning, and a peculiar kind of submission. It is not rebellious nor complaining, and yet it is not joyful. It is not distrustful. "Hope thou in God," is its language, "for I shall yet praise him." It expects good from God. "I shall rejoice! Yes, for my Father will not always hide his face from me."

When these seasons last long, they head the soul into such a state, and so show the individual to himself, that he is filled with such deep grief, and is led to utter such unearthly, heart-rending groans, and at the same time has such an expression of holy submission, such a child-like dependence on God and confidence and hope in him,--O if the sinner could only hear him, could listen to

such an individual when he supposed none but God near, he would go away and say, "Now I know, as I exist, I know there is such a thing as communion with God. O such expressions! such language! I know God was there!"

When I was an impenitent sinner, I had been out to attend to some law business. Returning and passing by a school-house, I heard a man praying. That prayer did more to impress my mind with the subject of religion, than all I had heard before, from my birth. I have not the least doubt but that such a prayer would affect almost any man of reflection, could he hear it. The man did not know that any one could hear him. He had left his work in the field, and had retired to the school-house for secret communion with God. And as I rode along, I heard him and stopped, and listened to what he said. And Oh! It set my mind on fire! That was what I had never witnessed before, It seemed as if I was brought right into the presence of God! The very tones of his voice, before I could understand what he said, seemed to come down upon me, like the voice of God from heaven. Every word he spoke seemed to come right from the bottom of his heart. His voice was frequently choked with groans, and sighs. It was the voice of a man pleading with God!

When an individual is in this state of mind I am speaking of, when he has fallen into darkness from any reason whatever, although he mourns, he will not betake himself to any other source of happiness. He has gone too far in this way, to go anywhere else for happiness. When a person has but little grace, he will sometimes betake himself to other objects, run into company, and go here and there, trying this thing and that, to get happiness; but when one has come to delight himself in God, and the supreme desire of his soul has centered in God--now let him fall into such circumstances as I have mentioned, and he will not betake himself to such and such places and scenes, to make himself happy! No. Indeed he will not. He will say, "O God, I cannot, I will not go anywhere else for happiness. O God, thou hast taught me to love thee; thou hast weaned my soul from everything else, so that I cannot love anything but thee, and now, wilt thou take thyself, thou who are my all, from me? O my God, I will find my joy in thee, or joy I will never have." Such will be the language of a soul in this state.

Hearer, do you know what this is? You will know if you will give yourself up to God, so as to be all absorbed in him, so that your whole being will be given up to God. If this is not the case with you, you need to be crucified.

7. The happiness which the soul, that delights itself in God, finds in Him, is so

different from all other delight, so peculiar, it is like no other happiness in the world. All other joy is nothing at all like it. It has such a peculiarity, such purity,-there is nothing else that can compare with it. The intelligence, the heart, the sensibility, the whole being is so satisfied in God. Oh! I wish I had some unspeakable word to express this! For we need some unearthly language to express what every Christian has, when he comes into such a state of mind with God. He is so elevated in God. He is drinking the very river of which God drinks. There is such a peculiarity, such sweetness in this, that the soul abhors all other joy. It cannot go and sip, and sip, in the polluted fountains of this world. What are they! What are they? Shall a man, who has bathed in the very atmosphere of heaven,--shall he go about to sip of the filthy cups of this world? Never! never! Only as he delights in God can he find any delight whatever. He cares for nothing else but what comes from God.

8. Be sure when you pray, that you fulfill these conditions, that you delight yourself in God.

9. He that will be content with God, and will really be satisfied with God, may have as much of God as he will. And just in proportion, as we give ourselves up to find our delight in God, just in that proportion shall we have delight in God. Go the universe over, and you will find, just in proportion as the soul gives itself up to God, just in that proportion, it finds its fullness in God. If you divide your enjoyment, how can God fill your cup? Just empty your whole heart of self and of everything else, then hold it up to God, and he will fill it with his own purity, with his own love and blessedness. Yes, you will have it filled with the ocean of God.

[Back to Top](#)

Having a Good Conscience

Lecture XII

September 24, 1845

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 Pe. 3:16: "Having a good conscience; that whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ."

The discussion of this text will lead me,

I. To define conscience.

II. To show what is implied in having a good conscience.

III. The conditions upon which we may have a good conscience.

IV. The importance of having a good conscience.

I. What is conscience?

I answer, conscience is said by some writers to be moral consciousness; that is, consciousness as exercised on moral subjects. Consciousness in general is the mind's notice of its own existence and of its own states. In its particular reference to moral states of mind, it might be considered as moral consciousness, and this is precisely the idea which some writers attach to the term, conscience.

In the popular sense, however, the term means more than this. It includes not only the mind's notice of its own moral states, but the accompanying state of feeling. Everybody knows that when a mind whose moral sense is not utterly perverted, notices its own right moral states, there springs up a delightful feeling of approbation; and when such a mind notices its own wrong moral states, there arises a feeling of intense and agonizing disapprobation. Now, in the popular conception of conscience, these feelings of approval and disapproval are associated together with the mind's recognition of its own right and wrong states as all included under the term conscience.

II. What is implied in having a good conscience.

1. That it be enlightened. Some persons hold such exalted or rather such perverse views of the sufficiency of human reason that they see no need of any divinely revealed light. Another class speak of conscience as being itself the light of God in the soul, and they deem this of itself amply sufficient for the perfect guidance of the human heart and life. Now, in opposition to both of these views, it is quite plain that we need the aid of a

written revelation, and the yet additional aid of the Spirit of God to give its revealed truth efficiency upon the heart.

Especially is it essential to a good conscience, that there should be in the mind a well-developed idea of the spirit of the law of God. If the mind errs on this point, or has defective views, there must of course be what is called an evil conscience. For example, suppose a man has no idea of the rule of duty, except as it respects outward conduct; he does not regard it as reaching the heart at all; then his conscience is not enlightened, and cannot be a good conscience. Its decisions must fail in a most fundamental point. It is only when the true idea of the law as a rule of duty is well developed, that a man can have a good conscience.

2. It is implied in a good conscience that it be quick and tender. There may be a well developed idea of law, and this one important condition of a good conscience may be present, and yet the mind may be so sluggish and apathetic in respect to its moral relations that the conscience becomes almost perfectly inefficient. There may be various moral states which the mind does not notice at all. For example, it may not notice indulgence of appetite; feelings of envy; violations of the law of love in business transactions. Now it is essential to a good conscience that it be quick to notice any and every departure from the law of love; in fact, it should notice instantaneously all our moral acts and states of mind. It should be in an active state of attention, incessantly comparing the mind's states and acts with the rule of duty--always on the alert to know whether every thing we say, do, or even think is pleasing to God.

A child may understand its parent's requirements well, and yet may be so negligent as not only to fail to do the things required, but he may fail even to notice his own negligence, and may not be really conscious that he is neglecting a most important filial duty. Now this, as every one must see, is a deplorable defective state of the moral faculties. The conscience of such a child is utterly wrong.

The same defects of conscience are often exceedingly apparent in our relations to God. The mind may understand the law of God, and yet may be so little disposed to attend to its own moral states and compare them with that law, that the man might as well have no conscience at all. In such a state the reason performs none of the functions that belong properly to the

conscience.

3. It is essential to a good conscience that it be persevering. I may perhaps illustrate what I mean under this head by alluding to the will. Some individuals have a great will; a will so resolute and persevering that they never give up anything they undertake. If their will is set upon any object, they never relinquish it till it is gained.

There is something extremely analogous to this in the conscience of some men. Their conscience will never rest till its demands are yielded. It persists in its work until it gains the ascendancy, and the desired change is effected.

Now it is vastly desirable that the conscience should have this quality of unyielding perseverance. When the mind becomes conscious of any particular form of sin, the conscience ought to persist in rebuking it until it be thoroughly and forever abandoned. Our conscience will do us no good if it stops short of this.

4. It is essential to a good conscience, that we obey its dictates. It will ultimately be weary of testifying for God if we refuse to hear and obey its voice. When its demands are long resisted and its voice unheeded, it seems to retire as it were into its inner sanctuary--cease to reiterate its unheeded remonstrances, and employ itself only in putting on record for future use all the contempt and abuse it is receiving. Its accounts will one day show that it was not dead nor sleeping. It was silently preparing for the judgment scene, and the eternal state beyond, where its claims shall be reasserted and its grievances be heard.

III. The conditions upon which we may have a good conscience.

1. There must be light; --a correct and thoroughly developed idea of duty. But,

2. There must be something more than the unaided light of the human understanding. The mind must have divine light, that light which God, and God alone can give. This light is promised to those who seek it, and all observation and experience show that without it, we seek in vain to find in any of our depraved race the true and well developed idea of moral obligation.

3. A third condition is indulgence. If I may use this term in this relation, I would say, you must indulge your conscience if you would give it efficiency.

It seems to be a law of all our mental and moral powers, that they must be indulged in order to be fully developed. For example, let the will be indulged, and its demands will become more and more imperative; its energy accumulates; its power is developed. On the other hand, let the will be suitably resisted, and in a proper way put down, and it yields--a great change takes place. Some children seem to have no will. They are perfectly submissive to the will of their parents. Their own will seems to be lost in their parent's will, so that the only will they have left is to do the will of their parents.

A similar change takes place where the soul really submits to God. It ceases to have any will of its own. Its only will now is to do God's will most perfectly. Nothing else can please such a soul.

Now, God must always bring the soul into this state before He can bless. Hence we see explained the thousand measures of His providence; they have for their end the discipline of the will. They are divinely planned to subdue the will and bring it to bow in perfect submission to the will of God.

While submission and discipline have this result, indulgence has the opposite. Indulgence strengthens the will against God, and against submission to any known authority but itself.

So of the sensibility. Indulgence greatly augments its power. Sometimes the emotions, by indulgence become overpowering, and the man loses all self-control. Discipline and restraint have the opposite effect.

The same law prevails respecting the conscience. Give it the moral supremacy which it ought to have--let it have its own way, and its efficiency and energy are greatly augmented. It speaks then with solemn authority as if it were indeed a voice of God in the soul. Its rebukes inflict keener pain; its smiles shed over the soul a sweeter joy.

Hence it appears that the conscience is under the same law as all our other mental faculties. Trample it down and it seems to yield; it rebukes you with less decision and authority. Continue to resist it, and it seems almost to die;

its voice is hushed; it ceases to remonstrate.

We may hence appreciate the importance of this condition of a good conscience. We must indulge it and give it its appropriate place among the powers of the soul. That place is the throne of dominion. Conscience ought to bear rule over all our powers and their entire action. Hence it should be obeyed, and its demands always treated with profound regard.

IV. We next consider the importance of having a good conscience.

1. It is intimated with great justice in our text that a good conscience is indispensable that we may commend ourselves to the consciences of other men. Nothing can be more true than this. To good men, especially, we never can commend ourselves, unless we have an enlightened and good conscience.

2. A good conscience is indispensable to self-respect. No man can really respect himself who does not keep a good conscience. It is impossible that he should. He may flatter himself in his own eyes, but genuine self-respect he never can have unless the foundation for it be laid in the ennobling consciousness of aiming evermore to do right, according to the dictates of an enlightened conscience.

3. It is essential to peace of mind. That real equanimity--that well-founded peace of mind, which he may have, who always obeys a good conscience, can never be had on any other conditions. The man who violates his conscience cannot have it.

4. A good conscience is essential to usefulness. Without it, you can have but little influence over others. Those men whose moral sentiments are loose will practice loosely wherever their interest prompts them to do so, and will surely lose the respect of the community. This once lost, the less they say about religion the better. The less they do to urge other men to be just and holy, the better. If their life and spirit is such that whenever they say a word to recommend religion, the thought rushes into everybody's mind, "Physician, heal thyself," that man may as well hold his peace. His first business should be to heal himself. Let him first set his own conscience right and live according to its dictates; then the time may come when people will hear and regard what he says.

When Paul and Silas were preaching the gospel at Phillippi, a sooth-saying woman was employed by the devil to frustrate their efforts. She had long been imposing upon the people until her character had become perfectly odious. Of course she was a good tool for the devil to use. He sends her after the Apostles, and just when they are getting the attention and the hearts of the people, he sets her a shouting--"These men are the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation." The people are at once repelled; they will not believe the best truth in the universe coming from such a quarter; they turn away, and the Apostles seem likely to be utterly nonplused in respect to introducing the gospel there. Paul is "grieved," and turning to the woman, commands the evil spirit in the name of Christ to come out of her. Then the word of the Lord had free course.

Now what this woman said was true enough--but, Oh, to have it said by such a woman! It was enough to undo and nullify all that the best preacher of the gospel on earth could accomplish.

So every where and in regard to all cases where men of a loose and evil conscience would fain try to do good. Let a drunkard blow his putrid breath into your face and exhort you to be a Christian. He could not do a worse thing for your salvation. Let a man of known dishonesty get up in your prayer and conference meetings to speak for God, and all that love the cause of God are agonized, and all that hate it are made full easy of their consciences. Let such a man go about in your families with ever so many good things on his tongue--yet if his dishonest life gainsay his fair words, it were infinitely better he should never say a word. Often has the cause of religion ample occasion to say, Deliver me from my professed friends.

If a man has loose notions of morality on any points of practice, he will be known, and his talk in favor of religion might as well be spared. It matters little whether he speaks for religion or against it, his life is against it, and his own words in its favor can be nothing better than a scandal.

5. Men who do not keep a good conscience must become odious to any good society. Such men could not be respected even in hell. Everybody knows that in a community of thieves and robbers they would be despised. Every community is constrained by the demands of self-preservation to insist upon obedience to conscience in at least some points. Hence the worst communities known to us in the universe have their moral regulations

which it is utterly disreputable and even scandalous to violate. Deeply as our moral nature has been corrupted by sin, it still retains some of the outlines of its original structure. Under some circumstances it will yet abhor and condemn wrong doing.

6. If we do not keep a good conscience we must be odious to God, to our neighbor, and to ourselves. Our state is odious in itself and it cannot appear otherwise than odious to any beings under whose observation it may come.

7. A man who does not keep a good conscience becomes a nuisance in society. You know there are such things as natural nuisances, as a pond or a marsh that breeds the ague, or a vessel that brings into port the yellow fever. So also there are such things as moral nuisances. The former acts injuriously upon the health--the latter upon the spirituality and piety of the people. A man of an evil conscience is a nuisance of the latter class. If our jurors could wisely take cognizance of such things they might complain of every such man as a moral nuisance to the community in which he lives.

8. Having a good conscience will secure the favor of God and peace of conscience. It secures these rich blessings by a law of necessity. God can never fail to bestow His smiles upon him who keeps an enlightened conscience void of offense, and surely he who maintains such a conscience will have the joy and peace of self-approbation.

9. Yet again he will have the respect of other men. The case may be such that he will have nothing else about him to command respect; yet even then he cannot fail to be really respected for maintaining a good conscience. You have all seen cases of this.

Such a man will of course be useful. His example is a blessing though he should never speak, or had not even the power of speech. The reputation of a good conscience will give any man such a character that what he does say will have weight. Hence he is furnished with a most valuable power of influence for doing good.

10. One consideration more. Maintaining a good conscience is absolutely indispensable to salvation. No man can be saved who does not mean to do right, and who does not take pains to know what is right in his own case and in all its varied circumstances. What! a man be saved without a good

conscience? Then it is a vain thing that God as said--"Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." What sort of a heaven is that man fitted to enter who does not keep a good conscience? How could he dwell in that city wherein shall "in no wise enter anything that worketh abomination or maketh a lie?" No; let that man lay it deeply to heart that if his conscience be not heeded--if its decisions are not obeyed, he has no possible ground for expecting to go to heaven.

REMARKS.

1. Those who have not a good conscience are not aware how they appear to others. I have not infrequently had occasion to expostulate with persons of loose conscience, and when I have told them how they were regarded in the community, they have been astounded. They had never so much as thought of this. It had never been told them, and they had not the discernment to see it themselves. Having managed to keep a pretty good opinion of themselves, they have been so blind to their own real character and have so misinterpreted its commonest developments that they have not been aware of the impressions which themselves are making upon the public mind.

Not long since I was in a community where a man lives whom I have known for many years. He is unlike any other man I ever saw. A neighbor said of him --"He seems to have no friends. Nobody loves--nobody respects him." Now this is precisely the result which ought to have been anticipated. Anybody else but himself would anticipate it, but he did not. He seemed not aware of the state of feeling towards himself, although this feeling was so strong that people could hardly meet him in the streets without giving vent to their disesteem and even contempt. The trouble with him was, he had no conscience. He seemed incapable of appreciating the rights and interests of others if those rights or interests came at all into competition with his own.

So not infrequently some persons run so low in point of conscience that they are universally despised and yet sometimes are so stupid, or self-conceited, or blind as not to be aware of the fact. They should be pitied and often blamed too.

2. Such persons are often annoying and harassing their neighbors exceedingly. Their own selfishness seems to have blinded their own eyes so much that they can see no other selfishness but their neighbors, they never see their own, even though it may be so prominent, and so glaring as to amaze the whole

neighborhood. It sometimes seems as if such persons would not scruple a moment to bring the small-pox into a neighborhood if it might in some perceptible degree subserve their own interests. The inquiry about the interests of others, either does not strike their mind at all, or if it does, it awakens not the least solicitude. What a conscience this!

Sometimes such persons will even go so far as to complain if they are not allowed to violate the most manifest principles of right and equity--as if they alone of all the world had a perfect right to trample on all other interests but their own!

It is indeed a great and sore trial to be so situated as to have much to do with men or women of this description. One needs in such a case to let patience have her perfect work. Surely there is any amount of occasion for its exercise.

There is one man who will keep unruly cattle, and let them run among his neighbors to destroy their crops. One such man is enough to chafe a whole community, and keep the body politic forever sore.

Others there are, and many others too will not pay their debts. Ministers and men not engaged in business are not apt fully to appreciate the evil of negligence in this thing. But business men feel the force of this. It is no wonder therefore that men who have much to do with commercial transactions should have the importance of perfect promptness and punctuality in this point thoroughly developed. But ministers and perhaps students too who are preparing for the ministry are notoriously delinquent, and very often greatly to their injury. Business men will not respect them, and are often so chafed by this negligence in ministers that they are thrown quite beyond the reach of any good influence from their preaching.

It is a great calamity for students preparing for the ministry to run into debt and keep in debt as some do throughout their course of study. There is the greatest danger lest they acquire a looseness of conscience in respect to paying debts, and learn to content themselves while they are wronging and perhaps distressing, or at least chafing and harassing those to whom they are indebted.

The evil in the case of students really becomes terrible when they get into such a state of mind that having means in their hands to pay their debts they can quietly go on, and spend their money in extravagant dress, riding for pleasure, or

indulging their appetites. Such young men must have made utter shipwreck of a good conscience. If they go into the ministry with such a conscience and with such habits, they cannot fail to curse the church and scandalize the gospel.

This matter of recklessness in paying debts is a sore calamity among any people. Especially when it prevails among professors of religion, it brings a grievous scandal upon the cause of God, and breaks the right arm of Zion's strength. She cannot hold up the glorious law and gospel of God as a burning and shining light so long as there rests upon her own name, the stain of daily and manifest dishonesty in business transactions. How can Christians hope to reach the consciences of ungodly men, while standing in such ill odor for looseness and perhaps rank injustice in business transactions?

Again, I remark that a virtuous community will very soon by a natural process throw off such persons as the scum of society. It is a curious process in the social action of a community, yet you may often observe its operation. As the scum in a vessel under fermentation, or as the chaff under a strong wind, so men of loose consciences seem to get loosened up on a community; they rise to its surface and soon disappear. The fact is that they see they are not respected, nor wanted there. They get chafed, restive, uneasy, and are glad to make it convenient to be off. This is the natural process of things where there is virtue enough to create a strong public sentiment in favor of right. Then those who will not yield to this sentiment will find it very inconvenient to stay.

Where there is not health enough in the community to throw off its social scum, it must be in a very bad state. Just as in the physical system, if there is not enough of the vital energy to throw off disease or poison, the man must die; so in the social state, if there is not enough of the vigor of virtue to throw off moral nuisances and moral poisons, languishing and death must ensue. Often this process of moral corruption goes on until the pernicious results become so apparent and so glaring even, that a reaction follows, and people seem frightened by the horrid consequences of vice and learn in some measure to appreciate virtue.

It is a rich luxury to have a good conscience. How mellow and glorious is the sun-light which it pours into the soul! Few only seem to know its blessedness--yet there are some who know it well. It is as you have sometimes seen the sun break forth from a cloud and all is glory before him. The universe seems to be lighted up into smiles of joy to greet his coming. Such is the atmosphere of

peace and glory in which the soul seems to bathe itself when it enjoys the luxury of a good conscience. There is in fact no apparent distinction between this and the broad sun-light of God's own presence upon the soul.

Scarcely anything will produce tears of joy more suddenly than for conscience to pour its sun-light approvingly upon the mind. When you have passed through a scene of great trial, through grace victorious, have you not found a delightful mingling of deep humiliation, and of overflowing gratitude to God that seems almost too rich a luxury of bliss for your heart to endure? You felt infinitely unworthy of such sustaining grace--you wondered how God could bestow it on such a one as you--yet was your inmost being stirred up to praise God for this grace, and you deemed it the richest joy of all, that God both deserved and would receive all, all the glory and the praise for all the good wrought in you by His Spirit and done through your being upheld by His power.

Your conscience approved of what through grace you had done, yet was there no pride--no self-gratulation; you cast yourself lower perhaps than ever at Jesus' feet to praise that grace which gave the victory.

The man who has a good conscience can be comfortable under any degree of outward reproach. Let all the world reproach him and cast out his name as vile, yet if conscience within is peaceful, all will be well. Let the men of his generation disown him--yea, let them wax hot in their rage against him and hustle him out of the world, yet may he be calm as a summer evening. What has he to fear? The deep foundations of his bliss are within--where no wrath or scorn of man can ever reach them. It is enough for him that conscience approves, and that his own infinite Father smiles upon his soul.

But right over against this, let that man have a vile conscience and he cannot have peace. Let all who know him conspire to approve and applaud him it is of no avail. Should angels from heaven mistake his character and give him honor, and devils from hell hide their faces before him in awe of his supposed virtue as if he were a bright angel, yet would his inmost being cry out and proclaim its earnest dissent against all such praise. Yet would his conscience upbraid him, and the lack of its approval, like the lack of Mordecai's homage to Haman, would be enough to poison all the joy derivable from all other honor and approbation. So vain a thing it is for any man to hope to be happy without a good conscience.

The most damning guilt of all belongs to those whose consciences are enlightened but are not quick and tender, and who do not obey its dictates. They know their duty but they do it not. With light enough to be angels in virtue they have stupidity and moral hardness enough to sink them to the rank of devils. No guilt can be so black as that of knowing the claims of God, and yet deliberately setting the mind, despite of conscience, to trample those claims under one's feet. No moral state can be worse than that of having a conscience thus abused, thus violated of its virtue so to speak, and rifled of its purity, till it ceases to persuade towards the path of life.

Are any of those impenitent sinners who hear me, going on this moment in that career of death? Sinners, beware!

[Back to Top](#)

Relations of Christ to the Believer

Lecture XIII

July 30, 1845

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 Cor. 1:30: "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption."

In speaking from this text, I shall,

I. Define briefly the terms used;

II. Show what is implied in Christ's being made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption;

III. Show how He becomes our wisdom &c. &

IV. The conditions on our part of His assuming these relations to us.

I. Define briefly the terms used.

1. Wisdom is a comprehensive term often used in the scriptures to denote true religion. Perhaps no other more strictly philosophical definition of true religion can be given than this--it is wisdom;--acting wisely, in view of all known truth which is important to our welfare. All who are truly wise will of course reverence and obey God.

Some commentators have supposed that wisdom is here put first in order, that it may cover the whole ground, being a comprehensive term which may include all that pertains to human salvation. Such would read the next word, "and," even; thus--Christ is made unto us wisdom, yea, even righteousness, sanctification and redemption. All these are comprehended in his being our wisdom. Or the meaning may be according to the common interpretation--Christ imparts to us each moment the wisdom we need in daily life. As his own words--"If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally."

"Righteousness" denotes justification, acceptance with God. This is the meaning of the term as often used in the scriptures.

"Sanctification" means holiness; the being made pure from sin, and becoming holy as God is holy.

"Redemption," as a part of the scheme of salvation stands intimately connected with our being justified and sanctified. Its figure supposes us to have been slaves of sin, and to be bought off from this state of slavery by Jesus. Henceforth, we are no longer held under either the curse of the law, or the control of sin.

Thus these various terms when all employed as in our text, denote salvation from sin itself and from all its penal consequences.

We are next to consider,

II. What is implied in Christ's being made our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

1. It implies our own fallen and helpless state. Christ would not become our wisdom if we were wise enough of ourselves. He never would become our righteousness if we could be righteous before God without him. Nor would he be our sanctification if we were not so wholly polluted as to need divine

cleansing; so hopelessly unclean that no efforts of our own either would be made, or could if made avail to transform us from utter pollution to intrinsic purity of heart. he would not have given himself for our redemption if we had not been fearfully enslaved, past the power of self-effected emancipation. Thus all just views of Christ's work serve to abase man, for they show that Christ becomes all in all to us because we are nothing and meaner than nothing in ourselves.

2. It is also implied that we have in him a perfect wisdom, a perfect righteousness, sanctification and redemption. If God presents us his own eternal Son as a supply for some specific want of ours, we may rest assured that the supply is perfect. The source is exhaustless. It is both adapted to meet the existing want and is amply adequate. If God should raise up to any one of us a Solon or a Solomon to be our wisdom, the supply might be valuable to the extent of their ability to teach us--but no further. If God gives us Christ, the supply must be just as perfect as Christ's own ability. So also, if Christ should give us some heavenly-minded saint, say from the upper world, to stand by us, and come into the closest relation to us which is possible for a heavenly and an earthly saint to sustain, in order that this saint might be our sanctification--then he would be worth just as much to us as he could do. His ability to effect our sanctification, would be the measure of his value to us. So of Christ. He is a perfect sanctifier, because he is able to "keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy;" because, "he gave himself for the church that he might sanctify and cleanse it, and present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that is might be holy and without blemish." This last passage shows that this cleansing is effected by means of "the washing of water by the word;" agencies which pertain to the present state. Of course the present is the state in which the sanctifying work takes place; unless it be already effected, none can see God in heaven. So also is Christ a perfect Redeemer. All that redemption can do for enslaved and accursed man--all that is need to do, if fully done by Christ.

3. It is implied that this wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, provided for us in Christ are such as God can accept. If we become righteous through Christ's righteousness, God will accept us. If sanctified in this way, our sanctification will be acceptable to God. If redeemed, God endorses the redemption-act, and we are held slaves no

longer. This must follow of course. The scheme of God's own providing, when legitimately received by us according to the true intent of the provision, God cannot disown and reject. God cannot accept our own righteousness, but will accept of Christ's. Our own self-made sanctification can never be worthy of his acceptance, but that wrought in us by an indwelling Christ, the Father can and will approve.

4. Let it not be forgotten, that God has made Christ our wisdom, righteousness and sanctification, and that Christ has accepted the office,--has undertaken the work. Of course nothing less than perfectly ample provisions are afforded for our being wise, righteous, sanctified and redeemed.

III. We next inquire how Christ is to become our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

It is manifestly one thing for God to set him apart for these purposes; another thing for Christ to be willing to undertake; and yet another for him actually to become so to any individual of the race.

1. Not by imputation. Many have supposed, strangely enough, that Christ works out a perfect righteousness in himself, not in us, and then makes it over to us so that by imputation it becomes ours. He first becomes holy, wise and righteous himself, and then accounts this holiness, wisdom, and righteousness ours, by some process of transfer, which, however, makes it ours not by causing us to be holy, wise, or righteous, but only by causing us to be so regarded.

This seems to be exceedingly unlike the true gospel system. The gospel scheme of salvation manifestly contemplates a real change wrought in the soul from folly to wisdom, from sin to holiness, from unrighteousness to righteousness.

2. Christ does become our wisdom and righteousness by uniting himself with us. It is not merely by entering into a covenant relation as some have supposed, but by entering into an actual relation of the most intimate sort; as the Bible often expresses it, by entering into us and dwelling in us, so that we are in Christ, and Christ is in us.

3. Having really entered into us in this spiritual union, Christ works in us by

the influence of his Spirit through his truth, thus enlightening our intelligence, molding our hearts, chastening our temper, and transforming us into his own image. In the language of the Bible, he "works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." It is not strange that by such a union, and by means of such influences exerted upon our souls, he should become our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

4. Contemplating righteousness and redemption in their strictly technical meaning, Christ becomes our righteousness and redemption by presenting us to the Father as redeemed through his blood and thus made right in the eye of law, the punishment due for our sins being set aside in consideration of Christ's having suffered enough to answer all the ends of public justice under the government of God. Consequently we appear before the great King of the universe, not as self-redeemed, but as redeemed by Christ--not as self-justified, but as justified only through the righteousness of Christ.

Again, in this spiritual union formed between Christ and the believer, Christ takes possession of our faculties and so controls them with his gracious influences that he rescues us from the power of temptation, and delivers us from the law of sin which is in our members. The Bible represents our very bodies as being emancipated from the thralldom of sin and satan. We become temples of the Holy Ghost, and so united to Christ that he says "we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones."

Such being our relation to the Lord Jesus Christ, is it any wonder that we should be accepted of the Father? It being most evident that we are thus accepted not for our sakes, but for Christ's sake; not for our righteousness but for his; nor for any thing in us which is primarily ours, but for every thing in Him.

Now however curiously we may inquire about the philosophy of our union with Christ--however we may push our inquiries to learn how one mind can dwell in and thus control another, or how the vicarious death of one being may avail for the pardon and life of another; there may still remain points about the subject to us inexplicable, and yet there should not therefore attach to them a doubt of their reality. There may be realities in the spiritual world and in the vast government of God which our short vision cannot fathom. The strong presumption is that there should be more in the universe than we can fully know to-day.

IV. We are next to consider the conditions on which Christ becomes our

wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

1. A full renunciation of ourselves. While we are trying to gain access to God and acceptance by ourselves, we are of course rejecting Christ, and he will of course reject us. It is all vain to expect success in this way. Our works and our persons will be alike rejected while we disown Christ and cleave to our own merits and righteousness. Why should it not be so? Our own works, out of Christ, are worthless; they are never right in themselves except as Christ works in us to make us do right. And as to pardon, there is nothing that we can do which approximates towards making an atonement for our sin on the ground of which God can remit the penalty of death eternal.

Whether therefore we think to merit a pardon, or to make ourselves so holy without Christ as to be accepted of God, we shall utterly fail. We must become quite empty of ourselves if we would be filled with Christ, and surely we must be filled with Christ if we would be right with God.

2. It is essential that we apprehend Christ as being our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, and understand what is meant by these precious words. We must know in some good degree what is meant by the oft-recurring language of the Bible which represents Christ as being our Life,--Christ our Light,--Christ our All; which affirms that Christ is in us--dwells in us and is our sanctification. Until we understand these passages intellectually, we cannot believe in Christ and receive him in these relations. Faith begins with the intelligence; hence the idea must be in some measure developed in our minds before we can put forth moral efforts to realize this state in our own experience.

3. There must be a hungering and thirsting after Christ--a state of mind ripe for giving up every thing that stands in the way of receiving Christ. We must be ready to renounce self altogether and put the Lord Jesus Christ on the vacant throne. Christ must take the place so long held by self.

During my ministry I have seen striking cases of persons who have groped a long time after Christ as if they were ready to embrace him if they might find him, but yet when the idea of embracing Christ came to be fully developed, and they saw what it really was, they drew suddenly back and would not embrace such a Savior on such conditions. Before, they thought themselves

quite ready and anxious to get such a Savior as they supposed Christ to be; but when they saw how much self-denial and self-renunciation were implied in receiving Christ, they turned away like the young man in the gospel history--"sorrowful--for he had great possessions." How could he make up his mind to give them all away?

Thus many are very often deceived. They think themselves quite ready to receive Christ. They suppose themselves really to thirst for gospel salvation, and think that surely if they could see it and find it they are of course ready to embrace it;--but let me tell you, my own experience testifies that this does not follow of course. I know that some may be greatly anxious for relief and apparently most ready to receive it; and yet when they come to see how much self renunciation it demands, they draw back. Hence a positive readiness to welcome Christ, though at the utter sacrifice of self and of all that is dear to self, is an indispensable condition of receiving him.

4. If Christ is received at all by us in all these relations, it must be as a whole--a whole Savior, one who delivers us from all sin, one who demands absolute and universal self-renunciation. It must be understood that every sinful indulgence must be crucified, and Christ become all in all to our life and happiness.

5. The great, comprehensive condition is faith--that act of the mind which receives Christ for all that he is offered--as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. It is faith on our part which consummates this blessed union between our soul and Christ. Christ has of a long time been ready to enter into this relation to us; and now the moment the soul commits itself to him and truly yields up to receive Christ in all his relations, the thing is done: Christ is of God made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. It is impossible that this union of our soul with Christ should take place without faith on our part. Christ may be at hand--may reveal himself to the soul and show us what he stands ready to do for us; yet if we do not voluntarily receive him, he does not become our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

6. In order that Christ may become our wisdom, we must receive him for all that he is. We must really cease to trust in our own wisdom and practically rely entirely upon his. So we must receive him as our righteousness, sanctification and redemption, taking him alone for the full supply of every

want in all these respects, and utterly renouncing ourselves as at all sufficient to do of ourselves what Christ is provided to do for us.

REMARKS.

1. It may be proper to present in few words the true idea of salvation through Christ: namely, Christ living and reigning in the soul; a vital union between a living God and the very soul of the believer. This is the very thing which Christ so beautifully and forcibly illustrated by the figure of the vine and its branches. As the branch is in the vine and cannot live and be fruitful unless it be, so no more can we except we abide in Christ.

2. It is remarkable to see to what an extent the Church has lost the true idea of faith and union with Christ, and how nearly they have lost sight of that which is the very soul of the whole gospel. The Old School hold that Christ's salvation is something imputed to us; not a living union, effected by Christ's dwelling within us, but a something made and done by Christ, and reckoned ours by imputation, that is, by being so regarded.

The New School hold no such ideas, but hold simply that we are forgiven through the atonement of Christ, and then as to salvation from sin, we must work that out ourselves. Yes, some of their great leaders say, if you want to become free from sin, you must work for it. This is the very language of Dr. Chalmers in his commentary on Romans. After arguing forcibly and at length the doctrine of imputed holiness and righteousness, he asks; "How shall we get personal holiness and righteousness?" He answers, "I tell you, you must work for it."

Precisely the same answer was given by the Synod of New York and New Jersey. They maintained strenuously, that personal sanctification must be got simply by working for it; they use the very language of Dr. Chalmers.

What a development this of the fallen doctrine of the Church! Instead of receiving Christ for holiness, they put our own works in his place. Nothing is said, apparently nothing is believed concerning a living union between the soul and God, whereby a mighty transformation is wrought and fruit brought forth to God: this view seems to be entirely lost, or overlooked; imputed righteousness is made to answer for pardon, and then as for personal holiness, "you must work it out."

3. A full salvation is equally open to all, to all of every grade, of all ranks of

society; a door is set wide open, and whoever will, may rise and enter. The whole of this salvation is open to each and all. When self is rejected and Christ received, you have the whole of it, nothing more remains. The rich, and the poor, the free and the bond, may have it all on these only conditions.

4. This great and full salvation may be received by any and by all, now, at this very moment. Let me ask the impenitent sinner in this house; Did you suppose when you came here this morning that it was possible for you to be as really saved and blessed to-day as the purest soul on earth is? Did you not suppose that the work was too difficult, and the time requisite for doing it so long that you must of course delay till some more convenient season; till some season less filled up with studies, business occupations, &c? Did you suppose it possible to be fully saved from sin and death at once?

But you say, must I not work? Must I not be convicted, and thus get ready for a work of grace? Oh, sinner; you do not understand the great simplicity of the gospel system. But you must understand it, or never come to Christ at all. You think you must work much and long; but no mistake can be greater. God wants not those works of yours; he will accept of Christ, but not of your works; you might go about till doomsday to get ready, and not even approach the subject. In this way you never begin, you make not the least advance. God does not ask of you any of those works; he can receive nothing but Christ, and he offers you Christ to-day. Christ on the cross, your pardon; Christ in your soul, your sanctification; this is all, and when you accept of him in all his relations, the work is done; until you do, nothing is done at all. God will no sooner accept you out of Christ, than he would accept the Devil. He will no sooner accept at your hands one thing than another; your prayers no sooner than your curses; your reading the Bible, no sooner than your reading Tom Thumb; your going to church, than your going to a brothel--all is odious, abominable, shocking to him, only as seen in Christ. Abandon then forever the idea that you must make these preparations. All are of no use, only that you may thus use up all your own efforts and learn that you must renounce them all, utterly, and forever. Will you push your prayers and your self-righteousness into the very face of God? Will you set yourself up to merit his favor? Horrible!

"O my God, said a sister, who had long been fasting and praying and had worn herself all out; O Lord, said she, I give it all up, I leave it all; I cast it all away; Jesus is all my salvation; this is enough; I want nothing more; I put away all

things but Christ; let me have Christ only, and Christ forever."

But perhaps some sinner will say; "Must I not first be converted? You are urging Christ on me before I am converted."

Sinner, what is it to begin? What is it to be converted? Conversion is the very thing I am talking about. Paul did not say to the Jailer, go and pray--go and read the Bible--do penance; but go at once and believe on Christ--believe, believe now.

So sinner, Paul says to you, now; all the things you would do before you come to Christ are of no use. You might work hard, but like the boatman in the rapids of Niagara, despite of your hard rowing you would go over the falls.

5. From what has been said, it can be easily seen why so few embrace the gospel. If this entire self-renunciation is an indispensable condition of receiving Christ, then the reception of Christ has met with two obstacles; often this condition has not been thoroughly preached and insisted on; and again, when it has been, many have stumbled upon it, and could not receive Christ on such terms.

6. The true and glorious idea of the gospel being left out, men have of course been left in bondage to sin. How could they be saved when they were not told that they must receive Christ as of God made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption?

7. This view of the subject presents the most adequate remedy for our necessities; the only thing that can really save our souls. Let me inquire of those in this house who have made great efforts. Did not those efforts leave you in a yet more wretched state, except when Christ was with you, and led you to receive him alone? What did all your other efforts avail? Ho! some of you can say, I know what this fruitless toil means; I have tried it all, and got into the experience described in the 7th chapter of Romans, and there I groaned out, "O wretched man that I am;" and there I found nothing but wretchedness and fruitless struggles till I went forward and found peace, and no condemnation in Christ Jesus.

8. Hitherto the mass of the church have gone only into the 7th of Romans, and then have floundered along, plunging deep in the mire like Bunyan's pilgrim in the slough of despond, toiling, agonizing. O, what cases of agony you would

find if you were to go about the churches. I can not tell you how much my soul has been agonized as I have found such multitudes, confused, confounded, agonized, crying out, "O wretched man;" and all this time supposing that this is the highest attainable state of experience in this present world, and the very state in which Paul was when he wrote the epistle. Alas, if God had really doomed the church to such a life till death comes for their relief! Alas, yet more if the Church dooms herself to such a living death, when God has provided so simple and immediate a deliverance through Jesus Christ our Lord!

9. It is infinitely dangerous to mistake the true idea of the gospel. The more I see the real state of the Church, the more I am perplexed to conceive how the Church can be saved in such a state of darkness and unbelief.

10. How infinitely important that a ministry be raised up to go out and preach this true, and whole gospel; O, how much good one such minister may do! Let him go where he will, he will find not a few who are crying out in agony, O wretched man! If he can only reveal to them a living, redeeming Savior, what a work he may achieve! O, is it not time, young men, to be awake to these things? Will you not get hold of this glorious gospel yourselves, and then go out and tell the churches its glories, and its power to save? But, alas, there is a young student, yes, perhaps a theological student; he goes out and lectures; not on the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, but on Mesmerism and Phrenology! Horrible!! Instead of preaching to the churches a full salvation and leading forth her desponding sons and daughters into glorious liberty, he goes about manipulating heads and working upon the nerves of some pale invalid--Alas! I cannot tell you how much my soul has been agonized to think that there ever could be a theological student here who could do this! O let him only be full of Christ, so full of Christ that he can think and talk about nothing else, and he will lecture on something very different from Mesmerism and Phrenology. Let all these young men be filled with Christ, and this Institution can shake the world! When every student is full of this one great idea, and every Professor also; and every Christian in this church; then let it pour forth abroad like waves of light and glory over all the land. O, hast that day of salvation!

11. Many have put faith in the soul in the place of Christ in the soul. Now Christ is received by faith, but Christ in the soul, and faith in the soul, are very different things. We never should rest till our faith be such as really receives Christ into the soul; then we shall have Christ there and not faith only.

12. We may see the relation of faith to sanctification. Faith must take the lead in all truly gospel exercises. Faith receives Christ, and then Christ becomes our sanctification. Christ once received in the soul, then works in us to will and to do, develops every grace, and leads us along to the stature of perfect men.

Let no one stumble at the mystery of Christ in the soul, achieving there the work of salvation. I have often injured my own soul by philosophizing about the work of faith; but now I have learned that Christ is my all, that Christ received within us works in us and effects all that need be wrought.

13. It is easy to see why this doctrine is regarded by many in the Church as so mysterious. It is because they still hold on to the notion of self-sanctification by faith or by works, without Christ. They are in great agony, they toil hard; and no wonder; they have not the true gospel. They are working out their salvation without Christ.

15. It is a present and universal duty to receive Christ thus. All who do not are living in sin. Whatever they may think of themselves, they are in bondage to the flesh and to Satan.

Beloved, if you live in sin, you will die in sin, and whither Christ goes, you cannot come. You are rejecting Christ, and you can have no salvation out of him. Verily there can be no salvation without receiving Christ into the soul as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

Now, if this be so, what is the state of many professors of religion here? Many of you have not received Christ by a living faith--you have no rest in Christ--no rest any where. Until you find Christ, you have not found the true gospel, nor its salvation. You are living, not in Christ, but in yourself. You are not conscious of having eternal life actually in your possession. You do not realize its vital, sin-subduing, soul-purifying power. And will you rest there? Can you?

I am afraid that very many of this congregation have not the power of the gospel in them. That young man who can go out and preach nothing better than Phrenology and Mesmerism; is his soul running over with the flood tides of the gospel? Do you think that young men, if their souls were filled with the love of Christ, could go about and lecture on politics? Nay, truly; could they go out and tell people how to vote for President if their own souls were full of Christ, and they knew that many hundreds and thousands abroad in the land are stranger to

the glorious gospel of a full salvation.

O, it does seem to me that we are crazy if we will not wake up to the fact that the Church knows not Christ, and that Christ must be held forth in his fullness before his gospel can become truly the power of God unto salvation to the souls of the Church.

O, I am constrained to believe that very many now here know not this glorious gospel yet! Their souls do not teem with the subject. O, how I want to see every student here, and every man and woman in this place in a blaze! Then might this Church begin to be the light of the world. Who will not pray God that his own mighty power may come down and abide upon our Zion.

[Back to Top](#)

The Folly of Refusing to be Saved

Lecture XIV

August 14, 1845

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Pr. 17:16: "Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?"

In ordinary discourse the term "fool" is used in various senses; but generally in only one sense in the Bible. We sometimes speak of a natural fool, meaning one that is born so, or that becomes so by some injury of the brain. Sometimes persons are called fools who are deranged; and sometimes the term is applied to those who in common matters act unwisely.

Moral fools are those whose intelligence remains unimpaired, but who refuse to use it, and who give themselves up to be controlled by their sensibility and their passions as if they had no intelligence at all. This is the sense in which the Bible uses the term, fool.

It deserves special notice that this is the worst and most disgraceful sense of the

term. Fools in most of the other senses of this word are not much if at all accountable; perhaps they are not moral agents at all; and hence the term as applied to them is not reproachful. We may pity them; but it were unreasonable and cruel to blame or even despise them.

But a moral fool, who has reason and will not use it, who gives himself up to his own gratification as if he had no intelligence and meant to stultify all the sense God has given him -- he is a mean man, and the term fool which the Bible applies to him is intrinsically and most justly reproachful.

The term wisdom in scripture, denotes true religion, virtue, or holiness. It implies a knowledge of things as they are, and especially some right knowledge of God, and a corresponding conformity of heart to this knowledge. It always involves these two elements; enlightened intelligence, and a systematic yielding of the heart to the control of known truth.

The meaning of our text is obvious. It asks why sinners should possess all the means of salvation, and have the opportunity of laying hold of infinite good, and yet have no heart to use it. Wherefore is it that they have so great a price lodged in their hands? Why does God give them the means to buy, when they don't want the commodity?

The text assumes that sinners really have all the requisite means of salvation--that they have no heart to lay hold of it though it be an infinite good; and that, acting thus, they are really fools. It is taken for granted that having price enough in their hands to buy infinite good and yet refusing to buy, they are fools indeed. Then the inquiry is pressed; why is this so? Why are so many facilities afforded, and no use made of them?

This naturally leads us to inquire in the first place what constitutes the price which sinners have in their hands?

To this we answer,

1. God has removed the obstacles to their salvation by giving Christ to die for them. Now if they will only give themselves up to Christ and accept His atonement for their sins, there remains no need of their suffering the penalty of the law. They are indeed condemned to hell already, and most justly; but through the death of Christ, the redemption-money is put into their hands, and they may redeem themselves if they will.

2. God tenders to them the advocacy and mediation of Christ. It only remains that they accept it, and it is theirs -- freely, faithfully, unceasingly. God has given His own Son to mediate between sinners on the one hand, and the infinite government and throne of Jehovah on the other. Now He only asks the sinner, will you have My own Son for your prevailing advocate? I "hear Him always."

3. Christ Himself in all His official relations is offered to sinners. Every thing that He is appointed to do, He offers to do for them. The true Christian can say in truth, Jesus is mine, my Teacher, my Mediator, my atoning Sacrifice, my everlasting Friend, my All. Now everything that Christ can do for the soul, He offers to do for every sinner. The price is put into the sinner's hands to obtain this immeasurable good.

4. God offers him also the Holy Spirit. Yea, this Spirit is given, is sent to strive with even the wayward, unwilling sinner. Fain would the Spirit lead him to forsake his sins and live. The heavenly voice calls, entreats, implores; the Divine Agent throws light before his mind; awakens solemn thought; bears long with his stubbornness and folly; so that no sinner can say -- There is none to plead with me that I would turn and live, for the Spirit of God is doing this very thing.

5. All the promises are given the sinner. God has given you all these exceeding great and precious promises that He may encourage and incite you to lay hold of everlasting life. They cover every want you have or can have, they come down to meet you just where you are, like a golden chain let down from the eternal throne to lift you out of the horrible pit, and raise you up to heaven. O, what promises! Surely such words could come from none but God! What a price are they! They are written pledges -- the express bonds of the government of God -- government bonds, sinner, enough to insure you the infinite riches of the treasury of Jehovah, yet they are laid at your feet -- a price put into your hands to get wisdom.

6. God gives you all things requisite to life and godliness. All needed grace is provided and proffered you to make sure to you eternal life. Provision enough is here to meet all your need for time and for eternity. You may have the prayers of this people, their sympathies, their counsels; all the aid they can afford you in your way to heaven. You cannot imagine a thing essential to your salvation which God has not furnished you -- not one

thing. On His part all is done. Nothing remains except what necessarily devolves on you to do.

There are some things essential to the salvation of the sinners which God cannot do. They must be done by the sinner himself. God cannot repent in your stead, you must repent for yourself. Neither can God believe on Christ for you; this also you must of necessity do yourself. The Deity cannot be born again for you, so that it shall answer instead of your "making yourself a new heart and a right spirit." It is no part of the provisions of salvation to relieve you of the responsibility of these duties. Indeed it is in the nature of the case impossible that you should be saved unless your own mind consents to obey God and accedes to the whole plan of salvation. No other being in the universe can give this consent of the mind in your stead, so as to exonerate you from the responsibility of doing it yourself.

But everything that God could do, He has done. He knew the whole ground beforehand. His eye ran through the whole subject; He knew your guilt and condemnation, and consequent need of an atonement; He knew your ignorance and need of instruction; your waywardness and consequent need of guidance and quickening; your reluctance and aversion, and consequent need of mighty influences to constrain you to turn and live. Hence it is with the utmost truth that the Deity, looking over the whole case, says of you as of His ancient people, "what could have been done more to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?"

And now in view of all that God has done to bless the sinner by putting in his hand a price of infinite value, how can we say less than this, that every sinner who has this price given him to get wisdom and will not use it, is a fool, really a fool in the worst sense of that term?

Sinner, your conduct is infinitely unreasonable. It would be wicked to call you anything else than a fool. If any one should call you anything else than a fool, he would be a liar like yourself. You can rightly bear no other name than this, No other word so perfectly expresses your real character, and so well distinguishes you from all other beings in the universe. By pre-eminence, and in distinction from all other beings, you are a fool. Yes, a fool and a liar in the worst sense of the term are you -- in the same sense in which Satan is a fool and a liar. Did I say, in the same sense in which Satan is a

fool? I take that back. The devil has no price put into his hands to get wisdom. Who knows that if he had, he would play the fool with it as you do? Go bear this price to hell, and then put it in the hands of Satan and his angels, and see if they will scorn it as you do. Let them have Bible societies there, and the glorious effusions of the Holy Spirit, and let the tidings ring through all the deep caverns of hell -- "Behold now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Who knows that they would hear with cold indifference, and spurn with proud contempt as some of you do? We are too fast then, in saying that Satan and his legions are as wicked fools as those ungodly sinners who will not have salvation. We should not condemn them before they are proved guilty. Put on trial, they might show vastly more wisdom than you do. It is by no means improbable that you are greater fools than they. We do not know that they would not reject the offer of eternal life. True they once played the fool when they broke away from their rightful allegiance to God. They did then just what you did when you began to sin; but no offers of mercy ever fell upon their ears. Who knows that they would have been so great fools as to have trampled Mercy underneath their feet? Surely they have never evinced that superlative folly which characterizes the sinner who will not have a redemption which costs him nothing but which cost the Son of God a cruel death.

But let us enter into some particulars which show the infinite folly and unreasonableness of the sinner's course.

1. Sinners prefer their own gratification to the happiness of God and of the universe. They had rather please themselves than please God, though they know that God's pleasure is perfectly right and perfectly vital to the happiness of the universe. O, what infinite folly to be willing to see the well-being of the universe put in jeopardy, or even sacrificed, to secure their own selfish gratification!

What should you think of a man who should see a city taking fire and know that by an effort he might extinguish the fire and save the city; but prefers some slight gratification, and sees it burn down. He had rather read a novel, or finish his dinner, or play with a whistle, any such paltry gratification he places before the saving of a city from devouring fire! O, you would cry out, What a contemptible fool! What a wicked fool, and a wretch! O, you would cry -- what! would he stop to read his novel, or finish his dinner, or jingle a

rattle-box, and give this mean gratification the preference over the salvation of a city from fire! What a fool!

We do not call the fowls of the air or the beasts of the field fools, for they know no better; but the beings whom God has given intelligence and who then make themselves like brutes, should be called fools in the worst sense of that term.

2. Sinners are fools because they give time the preference over eternity. These little interests that can endure but for a moment, they value more than those momentous interests that must endure through ceaseless ages. Just think of this! They not only hazard, but cast away eternal interests for those which are transient as a dream. If this is not folly, what can be?

3. Sinners prefer their own present gratification to eternal happiness with God. God promises them His own infinite smiles of love and favor; they of their own accord forfeit this blessedness every day they live for the sake of the pitiful pleasures of sin. What infinite folly is this!

4. Sinners are fools because they really care more for men than for God; care more for the good opinion of men than of God; are more afraid of offending men than God; care more to be loved by men than to be loved by God, and would sooner please man than God. All this you know is the fact. Some of you are conscious that it is your state of mind this very moment. You can all look back to the time when you practically acted and really felt as I have just described. You thought a thousand fold more of men than of God. Was there ever greater folly than this in hell?

How do you suppose that angels must regard this? What can be more wonderful to them than such folly in beings whom God has made capable of wisdom? What can astonish and amaze them more than to see how men treat God? How they must feel to see men treat their Infinite Father with absolutely no respect whatever -- with not a thousandth part so much respect as they show to most of their fellow mortals! O, they never saw God so abused and insulted in their worlds of light and love! O, they cry out -- why does God bear with such outrageous insult? Why does He let any sinner breathe His air or see His sun light another moment?

And if they wonder that God should bear with the sinner's folly, surely they

cannot any the less wonder that sinners should be such fools. O, they say, why will those sinners lose heaven and go down to hell for absolutely no good reason whatever -- nay, when every imaginable reason urges them to win eternal bliss and shun eternal woe?

5. Sinners show their folly inasmuch as they care more for their bodies than they do for their souls. What hosts there are over all the land who really care more for dress than they do for heaven; or more for the low forms of sensual gratification than for the noble enjoyments of benevolent affections. O what folly to put the body before the soul! And what is that body, sinner, for which you care so much? Pray what is it made of, and what is it? Made of the same matter which last year was gathered in from your wheat field -- the same which a little farther back was carted out from the dung-hill; -- now you are strutting about with a portion of this same substance in your body; and you are proud of it, and value it more than your immortal soul! And where may this choice body of yours be when another summer shall have come and gone? Where? There is a place for it on yonder hill, and there are worms there to consume it. Ah, sinner, is this worth more to you than the soul that never dies?

Your soul -- what is it? A spark of God -- a living, thinking agent, made like it's Author to exist onward, and still onward through everlasting ages. In its essential nature as intelligent, and moral, it is made like God. Like God, your soul must exist eternally, reaping forever the fruits of seed sown in these passing years of your existence.

And yet this soul you value less than that earthly body! You would think a man mad if he should pay more attention to his shoes than to his feet -- if he should value the cloth he wears more than the body that wears it! Yet your folly is greater far than this.

6. The sinner's folly is apparent also in this; he prizes other books more than the Bible. He reads other authors much; the Bible little, or perhaps none at all.

What strange conduct is this. Consider, of what does the Bible treat? Is it merely of history, or of philosophy, or is it to be valued merely for its poetry? No, no; it is far more than this; it is a guide from earth to heaven -- rather a guide from the way of hell to the way of heaven; it leads away from the

doom of the lost to the joys of the blest. It puts into your hands a pearl of great price. O how precious! But in its place you put Byron and Shakespeare -- and what next? Perhaps Tom Thumb or Don Quixote -- nothing can be so mean or so frivolous that you will not prefer it before the glorious word of God.

Some of you probably know so little about the Bible that you would not know whether the preacher had quoted from the Bible or the Koran! Shame on such ignorance of such a book as the Bible! Let me ask these young men and young women; how much have you read in your Bible the past year? Is it so much that you are advancing in that knowledge of God which it reveals? Are you sure that you have made some fresh accessions to your knowledge of the Bible during the past week? Suppose your Bible could speak and were called on to testify how much you had read in it; what sort of testimony would it bear? If that Bible could also testify how much you have neglected its pages and how much you have read other books of far less importance; if it could testify also to the small interest you have felt when you seemed to be reading its sacred lines and to your great interest, when you have read other pages inspired with far other spirits; what a testimony would be borne! How full of condemnation to your soul! Let this come home to every heart.

7. The sinner's madness appears also in this; they postpone the one thing needful for almost any trifling matter. Religion is put off and made to give way to every thing else. One man pleads that he must pay his debts first; another must get his lessons first, or perhaps get through college first; and then, after all the more important things are done, he will attend to religion. Thus in practice religion is made the last of all things, and in time of being attended to it comes last of all. In theory, however, these same men will admit and even maintain that it should be first of all.

Now there can be no greater or surer mark of folly than to pursue a course directly the opposite of what we know to be right. This every sinner is doing.

You cannot conceive a more desperate folly in the universe than that of the sinner who has such a price put into his hands to get wisdom but who has no heart to improve it. Do you suppose there was ever heard of in the whole universe anything so shocking, so monstrous, so absurd, so foolish, so hateful, so devilish -- devilish did I say? -- so much worse than devilish, as this folly of the sinner who might buy heaven, but chooses to throw away his

price and go to hell! O, this is the perfection of folly! Surely nothing in the line of folly can outdo this!

But we must pass now to answer the inquiry -- "Why is this that such a price is put into the hands of sinners, when God who gives them the price foreknew the madness of their hearts?" Perhaps some are ready to think that God was not very wise to do so much for the salvation of the finally lost, and then leave things so that they do ultimately perish.

There are some things here to be taken into consideration in order to get the whole subject before us.

1. The making of these provisions has been instrumental in actually turning the hearts of many from sin to God. They could never have been saved if no such provision had been made. Their eternal happiness is a great good to the universe.
2. God has put this price into the hands of a great many who never use it, because in no other way could He give the price to those who would use it. In every age and country where the gospel has been preached, "some have believed the things spoken and some have believed not." How could the former have heard to their salvation, if the latter had not also been permitted to hear, although they refuse to obey and it issues in their damnation?
3. God doubtless designed to leave all sinners utterly without excuse. Hence He gives them the most perfect opportunity to secure their own salvation, and there leaves them -- alone responsible for rejecting the gospel if so they choose, and thus deciding their own destiny. It is His policy to leave free agents to act freely and bear alone the responsibility of their own free actions. So shall "every mouth be stopped, and all the world" of the ungodly stand guilty before both God and the universe.

Again, it is plainly revealed that God's design in putting such a price under such circumstances into the hands of sinners is to glorify Himself; that is, to pursue such a course as all the universe will approve as being perfectly holy and perfectly honorable to Himself. They will see that God was moved throughout by the purest love -- that every act of His, breathes good will to man -- that God plainly has done and has intended to do all He wisely could do for the salvation of all, even of those who will finally choose death and

have their choice. All intelligent beings will be perfectly convinced that no sinner ever perished because of any want of love for his soul on God's part, nor for want of any effort that God could reasonably and wisely make for his salvation. They will see that every lost soul is lost because they would not have salvation when God had done enough on His part, and nothing remained but for them to do theirs. Then, seeing all this, they will glorify God. They will most perfectly exonerate Him from all responsibility for the eternal death of the sinner. They will infinitely applaud and adore both the wisdom and the love of God in this whole scheme of salvation.

And yet we often meet with a sinner who is full of impious fault-finding against God. Let us pause and reason with such a sinner.

Why should you look up into the face of your Maker and say, "Did you not know that I should act just so?" Your Maker might answer, "yes, I foreknew it, but the universe did not, and they never would have known it if it had not taken place before their eyes. If I had forborne to create those who will finally perish and had simply told the universe who I foresaw they would have acted in case I had created them, no intelligent beings in heaven, earth, or hell, would have believed Me. If I had attempted to show them how you would have rejected My dying Son, and done despite to My Spirit; how long you would have resisted every effort I could make; how you would have hardened your heart under the richest mercies I could have shown you, and forced your way to hell through the strongest persuasions, and fiercest terrors I could have thrown in your pathway to ruin, no one would have believed it possible. Suppose I had done just what you now demand; suppose I had forborne to make provisions of grace for those who would despise them, and had forborne to create those sinners, who if created would not embrace the gospel, and instead of letting such sin and such grace develop itself in action, had simply proclaimed what it would have been; who would have believed Me?" Neither the folly of the rejecting sinner, nor the grace of the long-suffering Savior could have been believed if facts had not compelled belief.

It is doubtless infinitely wise in God to make the fullest possible manifestations of His own love and wisdom. He will so develop His own course towards the wicked that no stain can attach to His own blessed throne. He will so arrange all His course that no suspicion can arise in heaven, no murmur spring up in hell.

O what glorious developments there will be of the great fact that God is love! This alone will explain the reason why there is a price put into the sinner's hands to get wisdom, though he has no heart to improve it.

REMARKS.

1. Incidental to this arrangement is the fact that the sinner's refusing to improve the price put into his hands will greatly aggravate his own guilt. It must be so. No sinner can possibly avoid this result. If you will not improve your facilities for knowing and obeying God, and securing heaven, you must become vastly more guilty than without this price in your hands you could have been. The Bible is most explicit on this point. "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the final day than for those cities which Christ taught. Everybody knows that reason harmonizes on this point with revelation.

2. Your ultimate damnation will be greatly aggravated if you will utterly reject this price put into your hands for wisdom. It had been better for you never to have heard of the gospel -- yea; better never to have been born than to have salvation made possible and then rejected by your foolish guilty choice.

Perhaps you would stop me here and ask, "why then did God give me birth at all? Why in such a land as this; why among Bibles, Sabbaths, and Christian friends? Why did He give me all these things when He knew that I would abuse them, and thus aggravate my own damnation?"

Sinner, does it become you to ask such questions as these? Are you not perfectly free in all you do? Is it not of your own free choice that you keep on in sin, despite of all God does to stop you and turn you back to obedience? Are you not most fully conscious that you pursue your career of rebellion against God, of choice, and of choice do not embrace the Lord Jesus as your Savior? Who then have you to blame but yourself?

You may lie down at last in hell, yet will God appear glorious in all that He has done. He will appear before all heaven, and all hell too, to have been kind and most sincere--most truly desirous of your salvation; yea infinitely concerned and anxious to save you. So anxious that He spared not His own Son, but made Him for a propitiation for the sins of the world. And who has fought God in all His efforts to save you? Who, but yourself? Who then is in fault? Who must bear the

responsibility of the sin of your soul? Surely not its Maker, for He sent His own Son to save that soul! Have you done as much to save it? Have you not done everything you could to destroy it? Then on whom lies the guilt and responsibility of its eternal ruin?

Now, for the sake of relieving you of the burden of this responsibility and guilt, shall the Deity withhold these glorious developments of His own wisdom and love? Shall He, for your sakes, rob the universe of the blessings accruing from these developments?

The text rather assumes than asserts the fact that the sinner has no heart to improve his price for salvation, yet this is an appalling fact. None can deny it. Precisely this is the great and the only difficulty in the way of your being saved. You need this salvation greatly, but you do not feel that need, you do not care for this salvation; you don't desire it and ask it with any earnestness which at all corresponds with its value. How can you expect to find by such seeking? You long for happiness--not for holiness. You would fain be saved from hell and not from sin. For a salvation from sin you have no heart whatever, you would like to be saved from hell by some scheme of your own providing; but this scheme of God's providing, you scorn. You cast it from you, and dash it away. You cannot bear to be wholly indebted to the grace of God for it, and you do not like another claim which it imposes, viz. that you should wholly die to sin.

Such an abuse of one's own intelligence or reason is the greatest curse a man can inflict upon himself. It is infinitely more wretched and cursed than to be a beast, nay, more than to be transformed to a beast. I have sometimes seen persons who were convinced of this. They saw themselves so guilty and so utterly without excuse that they envied the very beasts, and longed to become beasts themselves. Yes, they have sometimes cried out--O that I might become like the toad, or that dog which is kicked about the streets. O, sinner, if you will not yield to the law of your reason, how dreadful to you, must be the curse of having a reason! How fearful the guilt and the doom of being made a rational being, and of having prostituted your reason to the basest of folly!

Again it is impossible really and truly to respect impenitent sinners. Nobody can respect them. They do not respect one another. They do not even respect themselves. Their course is such as most utterly to forbid all proper self-respect. Self-respect demands for its foundation what by no means exists in their case. There can be no proper self-respect unless we are conscious of acting according

to the best light we have. Every man who acts otherwise must be, in his honest moments, ashamed of himself. Hence a man can have no just self-respect, who knows that he has the price of salvation placed in his hands, and yet is conscious of having no heart to use it.

Plainly then, a man who forfeits his own self-respect, and the respect of all mankind, has no right to demand the respect of his fellow men. You cannot respect him, any more than you can respect the devil. How would you feel if you should see the devil? Could you treat him with respect? Suppose you had before your mind in an instant his whole character--his towering intellect, and his utter perversion of it to hellish purposes--his whole career of malice and rebellion against God; could you respect him? Add to all this the supposition that Satan has had a Savior provided and offered, and that he has proudly and madly spurned this salvation; suppose that God has given him the Holy Spirit, and watched over him and kept him out of his deserved place in hell for half a century, "not willing that he should perish, but that he should come to repentance;" and yet Satan had only grown tenfold more desperate in sin. Then, knowing all this of him, could you respect him? Oh, no; your soul would recoil from such a monster in wickedness with horror! Oh, you would cry, what do I see? The very prince of devils--a being who has fought against God, who has spurned the redeeming love, and the redeeming blood of Jesus--who has resisted and grieved away the Holy Ghost, and has madly sought to ruin himself forever and ever! O what a being is this? Could you forbear to curse him? Your soul would so deeply execrate such conduct, methinks the spirit of cursing would burn in your soul, and you could not forbear to cry aloud; O cursed be the monster that can fight against God, and deny His Son, and do despite to His Spirit! Let curses scathe the being who can stultify his intelligence for the sake of being as wicked as he can be.

And in these feelings of deep horror at such dreadful sin and folly, there might be no malevolence; it might be only the deep response of the inner soul against such wrong, the burning testimony of uprightness against such horrible perversity. Listen to St. Paul. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema, accursed." So the pure spirits in heaven feel. When they see your wickedness they will be horrified, just as you would be to see the devil himself, and to see disclosed the depths of his depravity.

Again, it is impossible that we should not intensely loathe the conduct of sinners.

It infinitely deserves to be loathed, and all right-minded beings must loathe it.

Again, it is just as impossible that sinners should not loathe themselves whenever they come to take a fair and full view of their own conduct. Now, I beg of you, sinners, not to complain of others for not giving you that respect which you cannot give yourself. The fact is, that both you and we are so made that we cannot rationally have any other feelings than compassionate abhorrence of such a character as yours. All mortal beings must abhor you. All hell, all heaven, and if there be any other moral beings in the universe, they need but to see what you are, and what you have done, and they will utterly abhor you.

Let me go round and ask this assembly. Young friend, you have lived here these many years in impenitence, how ought this church to regard you? You have been rejecting salvation all your life. You have lived through several revivals in this place, hardening your heart more and more, and becoming more and more mad in sin. Four years or more perhaps you have spent in an institution founded in prayer, watched with tears, taught by men who labor for Christ, and supported by the "two mites" gathered from the humble cottages where there are tears and prayers for Zion; in such an institution you have passed your four years term, and still can scorn the service and the redeeming blood of Jesus. O, when you came up unto this stage to deliver your commencement speech, would it be strange if hosts of the "spirits unseen, who walk the earth" should break through the curtain that commonly veils them from our view and vent their hisses and curses upon you before the great assembly? Would it be an undeserved doom if God Himself should hurl you from this stage to hell?

It is at least safe to say that there would be bitter grief over the career of folly. How does that praying mother feel? I knew him well, she says, he was needy and I took him into my family and boarded him; he was sick, and I nursed him; he was far from God and I prayed for him, and with many tears have I besought him to return to his own Savior--O must it be in vain! And there is the agent who labored to collect funds to sustain the Institution. Faint and sick he held on his weary way, gathering up the little offerings made by piety and self-denial upon the altar of Immanuel. He wanted to raise up a spiritual ministry; he felt that the world needed such a ministry and he would not shrink from being spent in such a service. And yet, to such an institution you come and pervert all its facilities for education that you may train yourself for mightier warfare against God, and for pulling down a heavier damnation upon your own head.

You know that these things are so. Then do not call this scolding, and let your heart rise up against it. No. It is not scolding, but is truth and deep compassionate sympathy. When you get to hell, will you parade yourself in your pride and supposed dignity? Nay; you will hide your head in shame and everlasting self-reproach.

When sinners set up a claim to the respect of their fellow men, they are dishonest. They demand what they know no man can honestly give. What then can we say of you? Only that you are a poor degraded fool.

Now, do not suppose from anything that I have said, that angels and spirits do not pity you. They do. I pity all the devils in hell. Often, as I have thought of their condition, I have said, "poor devils, poor devils, how much I pity you!"

Do the people treat you kindly? Everything that is better than the fires and curses of hell, is better than you deserve--is gratuitous kindness. Don't imagine that this is real respect for you. No, it ought not to be, for you don't respect yourself and never can, so long as you madly fight against God and against your own well-being.

It is an infinite pity that you should have this great price in your hands, and no heart to use it. O, what an infinite pity! You need salvation, and God has in great mercy, and at great expense brought it within your reach. What is that which the sinner holds in his hands! O, it is the price to get wisdom; alas, that he will not use it! Salvation is brought to his parched and burning lips, but he will not drink. Madness is in his heart.

Go to your closet sinner, and tell God--say to Him; Thou hast held me up from hell unto this day, and given for me Thine own Son to die. Christ put into my hands the price of wisdom--but Lord, I have not the least inclination to use it. I feel nothing in my heart but contempt of this great salvation. I cannot forsake my sins today, if I knew I should thus secure the richest glories of Heaven.

Now, sinner, be honest enough to say this before God, and confess it before men. Fix your eye steadfastly on this dreadful pride and madness of your own heart, till you loathe, abhor, and forever renounce it.

[Back to Top](#)

Seeking the Kingdom of God First

Lecture XV

August 27, 1845

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

The Jews were greatly mistaken in respect to the nature of that kingdom which their Messiah was to set up. They expected a kingdom like the kingdoms of this world, invested with earthly splendor, fitted to aggrandize their nation, and minister to their national pride. Christ sought to undeceive them. He told them that His kingdom did not come with outward show--that it must be within men, and that it was not of this world. He would have them understand that it was spiritual, and not temporal; demanding the homage of the heart, and not the pomp and pageant, so commonly rendered to royalty. The simple idea of this kingdom is that Christ Himself reigns in the hearts of His people, securing the perfect submission of the will, and the consecration of every power to Himself. Thus His kingdom is within; it is invisible. It puts on no outward glare. In the hearts of men He writes His laws by His Spirit, and thus rules over them to deliver them from Satan and sin, and translate them into His own kingdom of peace and love.

The subjects of this kingdom are shut up to no particular location. Each in the sphere where providence has called him to reside and to his master's will, may there be truly a member of this invisible kingdom. Christ may be reigning over him, and he may be indeed a subject and a citizen of this kingdom of God.

This is the kingdom we are required in our text to seek. To seek it implies that we seek to belong to it--seek to know Christ's will and to do it--seek to be recognized by Christ as one of His subjects, and seek to promote the interests of this kingdom, as all true subjects of any kingdom do, and should do if the government deserves their support. He who truly seeks first the kingdom of God, seeks to be as really and perfectly governed by Christ now, as the holy in Heaven

are. He would have Christ living and reigning within him so that every thought shall be brought into obedience.

We are required, not only to seek the kingdom of God, but also "His righteousness." The original word here rendered righteousness, is sometimes rendered justification. The radical idea seems to be simply this--being right with God--coming into a state of acceptance with Him. This we know must in our case include both the free pardon of past sin and the being sanctified so that we are not actually sinning. So long as His law condemns us for unpardoned sin, or so long as we are actually sinning, it would be monstrous to suppose that God can accept us as righteous, and that we are right in His sight.

Hence, when the righteousness of God as in our text, is spoken of as a thing for us to seek, it must include both pardon and sanctification.

The command to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first, enjoins upon us to treat this subject as of absolute and supreme importance. This must be the great business of our lives. Nothing else is allowed to have any practical importance compared with this.

The injunction--seek God's kingdom first, implies that we seek it first in point of time. It should be the first thing attended to. It is not merely to be admitted as of first importance, but should really be put first in point of time. The first thoughts of each morning should be given to it. And whenever God's word, or His providence brings before our mind the invitations or the claims of this kingdom, we are to remember that now is the accepted time. Now, first in order, before anything else, let the concerns of your soul with the kingdom of God and His righteousness have the first regard.

It is also implied that we seek this kingdom with supreme earnestness. This is fully involved in the points just spoken of. We are required to agonize to enter in at the strait gate--to press hard for entrance, with the greatest earnestness, and the most strenuous efforts. Let the soul be indeed in agony to carry the point and make sure of admission into the kingdom of God. To the same purport are very many passages which I might quote from the Scriptures, all going to show that God requires us to seek with all our hearts, to lay out the utmost strength of our souls, if we would successfully resist the devil, and really break the chains of sin, and secure so great a treasure as eternal life.

It is also implied that we seek the kingdom of God with perseverance. We must press on till we obtain. This is the great business of life--to get back from revolt, to obedience--from our state of rejection, cast out from God, to a state of acceptance, where we shall be sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. Then let us persevere in seeking the whole of this change until it be completely effected. The nature of the case demands such perseverance. The blessings within reach are too great and precious to be lost for want of perseverance in the pursuit. They will amply reward you for a whole life of most earnest seeking.

Again, the kingdom of God would be the object of supreme engrossment. You must bring all your powers into action. Your intellect must be thoroughly awake--your sensibility to the claims of truth must be all alive, and your will must act with inflexible decision. Absolutely your whole mind must be aroused to its utmost exertion.

Still again, the command implies that everything else must be postponed to this. The spirit of the precept demands that everything else be thrown into the background, and this be placed foremost of all.

When Christ was upon earth, He admitted no apology for delay--would allow nothing to interpose between the soul, and its present duty. On a certain occasion, Christ called a man to follow Himself. The man replied, "Suffer me first to go and bury my father." No, said Christ, "leave the dead to bury their dead"--the dead in sin to bury the natural dead--"but go thou and preach the kingdom of God." One might suppose that if any circumstances would justify delay, these would. God has said, "Honor thy father;" and the instinctive feelings of propriety, as well as respect for the dead are wont to secure a prompt regard to these last offices which we can pay to the departed. Shall we then forsake a father's burial, and leave to others, yea to wicked men, these last obsequies? Yea, let the dead bury their dead; thou hast a call from God--go thou and preach the kingdom.

But "let me go first and bid them farewell which are at home in my house." No; said Christ, no man putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Now it is plain that our Savior puts these strong cases for the very purpose of enforcing strongly this point--that nothing else whatever may be placed before prompt obedience to this great precept, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His

righteousness."

The spirit of the text requires that everything shall be promptly sacrificed that comes in competition with this. Let nothing else come up to crowd this aside; seek this first; make this your present business; if your father is dead, no matter, attend to this; cut off your right hand if it interfere with this work--make any sacrifice whatever which needs to be made in order to your successful prosecution of this great work of seeking first the kingdom of God. No consideration whatever may be allowed to divert the mind from this subject.

To this command Christ has annexed a promise. This next claims our attention.

You will observe that the condition of this promise is, "Seek first the kingdom of God;"--as if He had said "If you will seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, you shall have all these earthly things of which He had been speaking. You shall be fed as surely as I feed the ravens, and clothed as well as I clothe the lilies. You need not be anxious for these things. It is my business to provide them. Mark the lilies of the field; how they grow--they toil not--they spin not; yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. And if God so gloriously attires the grass only for a day, and is burnt tomorrow, will He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" Therefore, be not anxious about these earthly things. Let the Gentiles who know not their Father on high, seek after these things anxiously--but remember that your Father knows your wants and will take care to supply them. Only, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

Consider also that your anxieties about these things can do no good. Which of you by ever so much anxiety can add to his stature one cubit?

We are to understand this promise as including all that is necessary for us, either in time or eternity. The connection however, shows that Christ had principal reference to provisions for our earthly wants. He knows what these wants are. He formed the constitution which creates them; and He passed through this very state of physical want Himself. He understood how strong the tendencies of our minds are to excessive anxiety about the requisite supply. Hence He says--I will take away from you all apology for neglecting the things of My kingdom--you shall have no excuse for not making religion the chief thing; let it be your first business--first in point of time--first in your esteem--first in the earnestness with which you seek it; then trust Me to make up all the other things that you need.

Do My business and I will do yours. Take care of My kingdom--throw your whole soul into its interests, and I will supply your physical wants. Do your duty as I enjoin it, and I will be responsible for these lesser things.

It is very easy to see that for Christ to take this course, and require us to seek the kingdom of God first is very reasonable, even though He had annexed no promise; because,

1. It is of supreme importance to us that we should attend to these spiritual things. The infinite well-being of the soul depends upon it.
2. The time is so short: and the fact that we know not how short it is, renders it indispensable that we should attend to it immediately. Life is so uncertain that we can place no dependence upon the prospect of doing another day what we put over from this. "Who knoweth what a day may bring forth?"
3. Another consideration: Every hour's delay makes success more doubtful, and your peril of damnation more portentous. Your heart will be more hardened, temptations will have gained more power, and a mightier struggle will be demanded ere victory can be sure.
4. If you neglect but for one moment too long, it will be fatal. There is a moment beyond which if you neglect seeking the kingdom of God, you can never attend to it with success thereafter. If you wait beyond that point, no mercy remains; the door of heaven is shut against you; your damnation is certain.

We cannot know where this point is. It may be this hour, this moment. This sinner, may be your last opportunity. If so, how important that Christ should require you to seek salvation now! And how vital that you should heed and obey the call!

5. Unless the subject is treated as of supreme importance, it is of no use to attend to it at all. Some persons attend to it just enough to make their damnation as certain as it can possibly be made, and as dreadful. Let one attend just enough to quiet his conscience and lull his fears--just enough to keep the truth before his mind and learn to resist it--just enough to habituate himself to resist the claims of God and do despite to the Spirit of grace; he is in the worst condition possible. He is commonly decent enough to

prevent being aroused and alarmed by his own open wickedness. He does nothing that shocks his own moral sense and startles him from his deep lethargy; so he moves along waxing daily worse and worse, till he wakes at last in hell.

Now it were better for this man to let the subject entirely alone than to attend to it in this sleepy, profitless, heart-hardening way. It is better also for the sake of others that he should let the subject alone than give it only such attention; for he will greatly stumble others and lead them down to perdition. His example induces others to follow him; and if his course is the most ruinous that can be for himself, so will it be for his followers. But it was in view of this very influence that Christ said of some, "I would that thou wert cold or hot; because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth." Christ therefore prefers that you would let the subject entirely alone, rather than attend to it just enough to quiet your fears, evade conviction, harden your heart, induce others to ruin, and never do your duty.

6. The supreme importance of the subject would render Christ's command in the text more reasonable even without the annexed promise. For even if we were to suffer the want of bread and the worst pinchings of poverty, this were infinitely better than to lose the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Therefore, it must be wise to seek the kingdom of God first.

It would be supreme folly to grasp the lesser good so eagerly as to lose that which is infinitely greater. How much more now, since to him who seeks first God's kingdom, the promise is given--all these things shall be added unto thee. Indeed we have no reason left us for neglecting obedience to this great and good command.

REMARKS.

1. The command and promise in our text strongly illustrate God's great care for our souls. If God had no care for us, or but little care for us, He would not use so much effort to urge us to secure salvation. Why is it that God reiterates these commands so incessantly, giving line upon line, and precept upon precept? Only because He would awaken and urge us to those efforts which our case demands. But especially I ask, Why does God append to His commands to great and precious promises? He knows our circumstances. He sees how great our wants are, and how many, and therefore He says--your soul is in danger and will be lost

if you suffer your chief attention to be engrossed in cares for earthly things. I entreat you, therefore, to take care of your soul, and I will see to your physical wants. Do you by all means seek first My kingdom and righteousness, and I will see that your "bread shall be given and your water shall be sure."

This is just like an infinite Father. It is as if a father should come out from the East to visit his son in Ohio, and should find him almost worn down with toil, laboring hard to get in his wheat and his hay that he might feed his family and pay his debts--but his great labor and care are crushing his health and putting his very life in peril. See, he raises blood, and his cold night sweats but too plainly show that he must change his course and get relief, or his wife is a widow and his babes are orphans. The father sees all this in an instant. My son, he says, attend first to your precious health and do all you can to restore it and prolong your life; I will take care of your hay and your wheat; I will see that all the other things you need shall be added if you will only secure your precious life. So he writes home to his distant family that they need not expect him home again for a long time yet;--he finds business with his son of more importance than anything else can be.

Now this would be a striking case of parental sympathy and interest--just such a case as we have in our text of the parental care of our great Father for our salvation.

2. The disinterestedness of God is very affectingly manifested in this command and promise. What would you say of a father who should do as I have just represented? Just leave all care of your business to me, he says to his son; go at once into your house and take your bed as much as your health needs; and he sends home to the dear ones there that they must forego the pleasure of seeing him for some months yet, for here are other interests not his own which his heart will not allow him to leave neglected; this father you would say manifested a most admirable degree of disinterested affection. You might perhaps naturally expect all this of one who was really a father, yet it would show that indeed he had a father's heart. So of God. In making these provisions for supplying our earthly wants and in taking from our minds the burden of earthly cares, He has shown Himself a God of love. That He should be so careful to urge us up to duty and to remove all hindrances so that nothing need divert or interrupt us--this indeed shows us a God full of goodness and rich in love.

3. To refuse to be diverted from God's service by worldly cares and to give our

whole heart to the Lord, is the only way to make sure of earthly good. If any of you would make sure of whatever temporal good you need, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Then you shall have a promise which is infinitely more secure than any stocks or deposits in all the land. It will be safe to trust God. He who makes the rain and the sunshine; He who clothes the lilies and feeds the young ravens, knows how to reach your wants and fulfill His own promises. He cannot lack either the resources or the will.

4. Unbelief urges a very different course from this. Unbelief always professes to be sorely afraid of tempting God by neglecting temporal matters. So much afraid is it of overdoing this thing of having faith in God's explicit promises!

Now it cannot be doubted that the Savior meant to rebuke this unbelief and urge strongly the duty of casting all our care upon God, only taking care on our part that we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. He meant to show us that we have no room for fear about earthly good, provided we take all due care of our souls and of all the things of His kingdom.

And this was in our Lord a most wise and beneficent foresight. For who does not know that for one reason or for another, almost all persons are excusing themselves for neglecting the soul. The student must study. Most certainly, and without doubt, he must now get his lessons. What! do you call him away from his lessons to seek the kingdom of God first! What! he cries out, shall I not lose my education if I listen to such a call? Now is my harvest time--now is the time to cultivate my mind--I came here to study--it were a pity if I may not get my lessons first, and seek the kingdom of God when I have a convenient season!

Yet let me say here that ever so much proper attention to religion can never be any loss to us. It never robs us of other things which are really better. The student who seeks first the kingdom of God rationally, will not need to neglect any useful study. He cannot lose anything on the whole by putting each and all things in their proper places, and giving to each its due measure of attention. The wise-minded student may not know so much of Shakespeare or of Byron--may have less to do with Homer or with Virgil; but he will not therefore fail of learning the things that are most useful. I do not hesitate to say that the student who shall obey this precept will come out ahead of all his fellow-students who disobey it; he will not be an intellectual drone, a lounging idler, only half awake to the value of knowledge, and only half alive to pursue it. No, his mind will apprehend the value of truth and will press forward with quenchless longings to

attain it. Hence his mind will move under such impulses and be encompassed with such an atmosphere of light that he will be a better man, will have more of all useful knowledge, and will have a better balanced mind than any of his associates who seek first something else and not God's kingdom.

The same may be said of men of any condition in life--of those who till the ground--of those who fill the shop, or move behind the counter. Let a man anywhere obey this precept you will find that his temporal wants will be supplied. He may not get so rich or get rich so fast or by such means as shall load himself down too much to run the Christian race at all--so much as to crush himself down to hell--this may not be his course, but he will have all real good.

5. Everything really valuable must be lost by disobeying this command. If a man neglects the kingdom of God, nothing which he can obtain is really valuable to him. Suppose he gets an education. This will only aggravate his final condemnation.

I wonder if this is usually understood. Do these young men and young women understand this principle? It is plain and undeniable. Our future happiness and misery will be as our mental cultivation and as the development of our intelligence. The more mental power and the wider range of views we have, the larger is the scope for bitter reflection, and the keener the pangs of self-reproach and remorse in that world where the wicked become their own worst tormentors.

Did you ever consider what Byron's state of mind must have been when he spent whole nights in writing poems to save his soul from the unutterable agonies of reflection upon himself--to keep himself from rolling in hell while he yet lived upon the earth! And do you ask, why was this? Because his mind was highly cultivated, and its original endowments were of the very first order--because he saw truth and its relations clearly, and felt its force deeply--and therefore could not bear the terrible reactions of such mental powers when they turned in upon his soul to scourge and lash himself as the guiltiest being on earth. In mental power and in self-inflicted torment too, he is like the devil. Perhaps one more like the devil never trod the earth.

Sinner, if you don't mean to serve God, I advise you to be as near an idiot as possible. Keep away from knowledge; go beyond the Rocky Mountains--go and fish for whales--shut off every flashing ray of light you can--contract your mind within the narrowest possible compass; don't seek knowledge unless you mean

to pile up a mass of fuel that shall burn your soul forever. Keep away from knowledge and mental cultivation. What have you to do with an expanded mind, and sharpened intellect? It will only inflict the keener stings of remorse and furnish you the more scope for everlasting self-torment.

I said, nothing is valuable to you unless you mean to seek first the kingdom of God. Every enjoyment, even life itself, is a curse to him who is treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. Every abused mercy augments that fearful treasure of wrath. The sooner you stop eating and drinking and breathing the better. "Every beating pulse you tell" will rise up in the judgment against you to swell the evidence of your great guilt in not seeking life when God besought you to live. It were better for you not to have lived at all unless you seek first the blessing of God and eternal life.

Hence, if you neglect to seek first the kingdom of God in pretense of seeking other good first, you are infinitely mistaken. You will lose the good you seek, and also the greater good you would not seek but should have sought. Let me tell that student who neglects the kingdom of God and drives his studies that he may keep up with his class or keep before them; that he drives on upon his own ruin. The good you seek to gain will be an infinite curse to you. If it should prove a blessing, it must be in spite of God's threatened curses; and surely you ought to know that it is a vain thing to fight against God. Surely whom the Lord blesses is blessed, and whom the Lord curses is cursed. You will find it so.

6. Again, it is plainly implied that if we seek first the kingdom of God, we shall not only have these other things promised, but have the kingdom of God too. Certainly our Lord meant to imply that we should have the very thing we seek first.

7. If we really obey this command, it will be manifest in all the arrangements of our common life. Observe a business man who obeys this command. He never takes upon himself any business which must crowd out a proper attention to religion. You will see in all his arrangements, that he makes provision for religious duties as much as he makes provision to eat his daily meals. When did you ever know a man lay out his business so as to reverse no time for his daily food and nightly sleep? Go into any house and you see provision made for sleeping and eating. You will see perhaps articles of food and means of cooking it. You will say--well, these people expect doubtless to eat and to sleep. This enters into their arrangements. So of every man who means to seek first God's

kingdom and His righteousness. Whatever his principle business is, you will see his arrangements made accordingly. So long as he has his reason, he never can make his arrangements for his time so as to leave his principal business unprovided for. If his principal business be to seek the kingdom of God, everything will be shaped accordingly. He will no sooner fail to do this than fail to make his family arrangements for eating and sleeping.

But let us go into that student's room. We can probably learn what he is seeking first. The door opens; we pass along in; there are his books; there lies Byron and Shakespeare; let us look for his Bible. Aye, his Bible is not there; we look for it on the table, for possibly he keeps it there and goes to it regularly for his spiritual bread--but no, it is not there. Look under his pillow. Alexander the Great is said to have slept always with his Homer under his pillow--but not so with this student. You find no Bible there. At last it is found in the bottom of his trunk. It has not been opened since his mother put it there on the very day he left that home of his childhood. It was his mother who put it there we know; for see, she has marked many passages with her tears. O, she did hope this dear son would ponder and learn to love those blessed pages. With what throes of heart, such as none but a parent feels, did she send him away and commit him to her own Father and Savior. O, has he forgotten all a mother's prayers?

But perhaps the Bible has been taken out of his trunk, but has lain on his shelf unmoved until the dust has coated it over--a witness against him that he heeds not the words of eternal life. Or you find it at last on his table, but under his Cicero and a huge pile of newspapers and novels--ah, that youth is not seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. His arrangements are not made at all for this end.

But there is another scene. Here is a student's Bible worn with much and constant use--wet with many tears--Oh, how often has his soul been feasted as with angel's food from those exceeding great and precious promises!

It is said of one of the Apostles that after his death his knees were found to be callous from his frequent and long-continued kneeling in prayer. So it might be with you if you were really given to prayer and mighty wrestlings with God.

8. When persons are really engaged about their souls, they will not suffer themselves to be placed in circumstances so engrossing as to be crowded away from seeking God supremely. They would dread such a state worse than death.

9. Many hold this truth in theory who after all utterly deny it in practice. Almost everybody will admit that we ought to seek first the kingdom of God, and that religion is the supreme business of life; yet how almost constantly is this denied in practice?

As I have kept my eye upon the course of things in this community, I have seen almost everything crowded in here to draw men away from God. The students get up society after society to cultivate the intellect; but where are the societies got up to cultivate the heart? If all were right here, should we not see a different course of things; should we not see something crowded in almost everywhere to make the heart better--to awaken religious feeling and arouse attention to religious truth, and carry abroad a religious influence over all hearts. O, if this truth were really believed, we should see it reduced to practice by the students and by all the church, let their vocation be what it may. But now we see a great many students constantly pressed--full of engrossing business and wasting care--and why? What are they doing? Are they making ceaseless efforts to promote their own or others spirituality? Their efforts surely are ardent and vigorous enough to lead you to suppose so. O, if such were only the fact!

But judging from the actual life of many of these students, one would suppose that Christ had said--Seek first to get your lessons--seek first to master your Algebra or your Latin. And the course of things in the business community is such as it might rightly be if Christ had said--Seek first to get your business done in good time and in the most perfect manner;--first see to it that your crops are duly sown and timely gathered; then shall all needful things be added to you.

Such is a very common state of things in this community. It is such also with many of the students, but not with all as I am happy to know. There are some here who show that their hearts are upon the Zion of God. But having made these exceptions, the rest seem to live as if Christ had said to the student--Get your studies first, and you shall lose nothing in point of spirituality.

The fact is, if we are ever going to be seriously and thoroughly pious, we must make all our arrangements accordingly. Wherever you see a man thoroughly pious, you see a man who in fact does make all his arrangements with a view to this great object. He will not let labor or business of any kind interfere with his going to meeting, when he can go without fearing to displease God by neglecting some other apparent duty. His seasons of prayer are too precious to be lost. He cannot on any account forego the pleasure of meeting with God a few times at

least each day. He is conscious that he needs to be strengthened daily with might in the inner man. Hence he cannot live without prayer.

10. No Institution can do much to bless the world unless it practically sets religion foremost. I mean what I say--practically; not in theory only, but in practice. An Institution which takes some other practical ground, may make students intellectual--may train them well enough for the bar or for medicine; but students so trained, must suffer fearfully in their spirituality, and if they go into the ministry, they can do little indeed to promote the salvation of souls. They cannot have power without deep piety, and they cannot have this unless they seek it first. The first place is its only right place. Make piety a secondary thing in any Institution, and the Spirit of God feels Himself dishonored, and cannot bless.

Oh, brethren, let us anchor this Institution fast to this only right principle--religion the chief concern--seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

[Back to Top](#)

Faith in its Relations to the Love of God

Lecture XVI

October 22, 1845

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

By the "world" in this passage is meant the human race. The passage affirms God's love for the whole human family.

The word "perish" does not mean annihilation, nor does the word "life" denote mere existence. It is plain that here, as often elsewhere, these terms are contrasted, so that if "life" meant mere existence, "perish" might, by the force of the antithesis, denote non-existence. But neither of these words can have these

sense in the text. In fact, the words perish, destruction, &c., do not primarily denote annihilation, but only a change in the mode of existence. It is one of the greatest errors in biblical interpretation to force upon them this meaning. This narrow, short-sighted view of their meaning entirely overlooks both the glory of that life which comes to us through Christ, and the fearfulness of that woe which awaits the finally impenitent.

But we must pursue the thread of our discourse and inquire,

I. Into the kind of love here spoken of.

II. What it is to believe in Christ.

III. What is implied in true faith.

I. The kind of love here spoken of.

In the text we are told that God so loved the world as to give his Son for it. Does the emphasis upon the word so turn solely upon the degree of this love without respect to its nature? Does the text mean simply to assert that God loved the world so much, or that his love was moreover of such a nature that He could yield up his Son for a lost world? Plain the latter comes into consideration, and we are to study the nature as well as the degree of this love.

Directing our attention to this point it is obvious to remark,

1. That this was not the love of complacency. Complacency is a delight in the character of its object, or in other words is benevolence modified by the consideration of a holy character in its object. Now at the time God so loved us as to give his Son, there was nothing in us upon which complacency could rest. God so loved us as to form the purpose of giving up his Son before any soul was converted--while the race lay before his mind in the attitude of rebels. God commendeth his love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. It could therefore have been no love of complacency which loved us while yet sinners.

2. It was not the love of fondness or natural affection--such love as parents have for their children. Some seem to suppose that this was the love of God--but they utterly mistake its real nature.

3. But positively this love is without doubt benevolence--good-willing, a disposition to promote the highest good of beings, not, as some conceive of it, without regard to their persons as individuals, but with such regard to individuals as to their own personal state and wants. This in general is doubtless the true conception of this love of God which induced him to give up his Son.

4. This love on the part of God is entirely disinterested. This is most fully apparent in the fact that God was willing to make personal sacrifices for the end in view. Instead of having any immediate good to himself as the object, the text tells us that he so loved the world as to make the greatest possible personal sacrifice--that of giving up his own Son to ignominy, torture, death. What more decided proof could be given of disinterested love than this!

5. It was impartial love. It fasted on the race, on all the individuals of the race, and on all without respect to persons. It had no special favors for certain castes; it looked not at certain classes as such; it made no distinction between the rich and the poor, the free and the bond, the high or the low, the white or the red or the black; no; it rested impartially and equally on all. It looked not with such an eye as men often cast over their fellows--scorning some and adoring others; nay, it was an eye of pity and love for all. It raised no other question than this--What is the value of each person's well-being? Then each is appreciated according to its real value.

6. It was a holy love. Intense affection it was indeed for sinning man; yet had it no complacency towards sin. Nothing could be more utterly opposed to sin than this love which sought the good of sinners. Else it had never devised such a plan of salvation, had never made a sacrifice of the just for the unjust. Love sought earnestly to save, yet only by putting away all iniquity--only by providing a way of pardon which fully honored the divine law--only by providing such influences as should effectually cleanse the soul from its pollutions.

7. This love was just. God could not let his love conflict with justice. He could not leave this throne to suffer by the pardon of sin without such an atonement as should fully sustain the dignity of law and effectually secure the interests of other beings who might be tempted to sin. God's love was blended with justice, else he had not given up his Son.

8. This love of God for sinners was real. Sometimes persons speak of both the love and the wrath of God, as if it had no reality--as if the Bible language on these points was wholly an accommodation to human weakness, meaning perhaps that God will act as men do when they love or are angry, while yet no such affections as these really exist in the divine mind. But the truth is that God really feels, yes, really has the very affections and states of mind which these words describe--and in all their most fervid intensity. His love is most intense, most sincere--all-absorbing--self-consuming. If you have experienced it you know how strong affections sometimes absorb and seem to consume the very vitality of the soul; the physical powers fail under the consuming, exhausting influence of intense mental action.

You know it was said of Christ, "The zeal of thine house has eaten me up"--as if his very being were consumed by his burning zeal for the house and the cause of God. It seems clear from several intimations in scripture that our Savior had the appearance of premature old age. "So marred was his visage more than any man and his form more than the sons of men," that kings and nations wondered at the strange spectacle.

On one occasion the Jews said to him "Thou art not yet fifty years old." We may infer from this that he appeared to be nearly fifty years old, though in fact as the Bible shows he was not much over thirty. Hence we may presume that his physical frame was intensely shattered while yet young in years. He must have used up his vital powers with consuming, self-regardless efforts for human well-being and by the intense, burning power of his mental excitement.

So of the love of God. It is not to be supposed that mind itself is consumed with intense action; but the body is; and in mortal flesh, the waste upon the body becomes an index often of the intense and exhausting action of the soul. The love of God may be seen in the love of Christ. "He that hath seen me," said Christ, "hath seen the Father."

9. This love is great, beyond all finite comprehension. Perhaps we get the most vivid conception of God's love by means of comparisons. See that parent who loves his child most tenderly. His son may be wayward, insolent, ungrateful; yet shall you see the father's love unchanging; still he

forbears, still he is patient and long-suffering; still he waits and hopes, and plans every conceivable method to restore that way-ward son. Verily here is love, but it is only such love as God's towards us--but infinitely less in degree.

See also that affectionate mother. Her little infant frets and cries--her love endures it patiently. That dear child will not let her sleep, and her nervous system is well nigh prostrated; still for her own child what will not a mother's love endure?

But oh, what is all this compared with the matchless forbearance and long-suffering of the God of Love! We shall never appreciate this till we see in their true colors the sinner's abuse and contempt of God's law and of his gospel too--till we see how God waits on the sinner and how the sinner grows only the more stubborn and insolent; how God sends him repeated tokens of his love and he only mocks God's mercy in return. Such is God's love that He not only forbears to punish, but sends his own Son to save,--yea sends his own Son to die that the rebel might live. What a spectacle! There lay spread out before the eye of God a world steeped in wickedness, reeking in its own pollutions--mad in its own rebellion; yet the heart of God pitied--there burned in his bosom the most intense love, and from his inmost soul he cried out--"How can I give thee up!" O what love was this! Love not only sincere and real, but infinitely great.

We are to think of this love to enemies; not to friends. It was not such love as husbands have for their wives, or parents for their children; no, but "God commendeth his love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." This it is that commends and sets off this amazing love of God in a light so glorious. Behold, says another apostle--behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we--that such as we,--should be called the sons of God! Well might he say--"what MANNER of love!" Was ever love like this in earth or heaven?

10. This is a most persevering and efficient love. It is not a mere emotion that flashes and burns itself out without producing action. It is not that sort of good feeling seen among men, that goes off in good wishes and leaves no fruit behind; that says to each object of need, "be ye warmed, and be ye filled," but gives not the things requisite. O, had God's love for man been only such as this, how deep and dire the ruin in which we had sunk,

hopelessly, and forever!

The love of God to man was no empty and evanescent emotion. It has continued to sway the attributes of Deity for thousands of years, and will for coming ages, how many soever may be included in the divine plan for perfecting this glorious scheme of salvation. The love of God to man has called forth his infinite wisdom to devise, his omnipotence to execute, and we might perhaps say that this love has employed, not to say, used up, the divine energies since the creation of the world. O, who can adequately estimate all that God has done already in devising and carrying into effect this great scheme of human salvation?

11. This love moreover is particular, and not merely general. By this, I mean that it fastens upon individuals, seeking their good, and does not merely embrace the mass as a whole. We are too apt to conceive of this love as only general, and not as particular at all. We are not wont to feel that God truly and deeply loves us--yea, our own insignificant selves. Yet, this is the only right mode of apprehending the love of God. That eye that marks each falling sparrow, and counts the hairs of our head, is surely able to notice the meanest of his intelligent creatures, and the smallest circumstances which can affect their happiness.

II. What it is to believe in Christ.

It is something more than to be convinced of the truth of what is said in the Bible. This conviction may be in our minds as firm as the mountains; and yet we may have no gospel faith. Devils may believe, and in this sense they do--wicked men may and usually do have this faith of conviction--they may be convinced of the truth respecting Christ, and yet have no more saving faith than devils have.

But positively, faith is trust, it is depending upon Christ, relying upon him for every thing which as a Savior he promises to do for us. The soul, believing, thoroughly commits itself to God, yielding up all its interests to be disposed of according to his wisdom. More on these points soon.

III. What is implied in faith.

1. A realization of our actual dependence upon him. This idea of dependence must become a living idea, a practical reality to the mind, or we shall never really depend upon Christ.

This remark applies both to justification and to sanctification. As to justification, we must fully realize that without Christ we never can be pardoned and restored to a state of acceptance and justification before God. Else we shall never look to him in the gospel sense so as to receive justification unto life.

So also in respect to sanctification. Until it becomes a reality which the mind deeply feels, that we can be cleansed from sin only through faith in Christ, it is absolutely certain that we shall never by faith take hold of those promises for life.

2. It implies a realizing sense of the nature and extent of our death in sin. We must see and feel that we are really dead in sin; for until we see this, we shall of course be full of self-righteous efforts. No man ever will, or ever can believe on Christ till he sees this. Why should he? He seems in his own eyes able to help himself, and nothing therefore is more natural than to prosecute self-righteous efforts until the conviction fastens upon the mind that all is hopeless and fruitless till Jesus interpose. The man must see that he is hopelessly dead in sin--as much lost beyond hope without Christ as if he were already in hell, or had been there for ages.

3. It implies a penetrating sense of our utter disinclination towards any good. This is indeed the same thing as being dead in sin, and is only another phraseology for the same idea.

Many who are not Christians have no just sense of this. Indeed they have no just view of God and of his law. Perhaps they think they want religion, and are inclined to embrace it. O, how deceived! They need to see their utter disinclination towards any good. Then they would see their dependence upon Christ. They would see that unless Christ interposes while they are in this state of utter disinclination, they are so utterly selfish that they never will embrace Christ for salvation. Let me ask, will an individual ever depend upon Christ, so long as he thinks himself well disposed by nature, and has no just views of his utter death in sin? No; never.

Faith then implies that we understand our utter moral impotency, and utter disinclination towards God while in an unrenewed state. When one sees this, he is prepared to see that unless a sanctifying Christ undertake for him, damnation is certain. He sees that the thing he needs to be saved from is this

selfish, morally dead state of mind.

Around this point, there hangs in the views of many minds an unaccountable darkness. They do not see the very thing, to pardon and remove which they need Christ. They are feeling about after some particular sins, lying, perhaps, or theft, or Sabbath-breaking, from which they suppose they need Christ to save them. Yet, what are all these, and all such sins, but the mere bubbling up of a certain state of mind--a little of the overflowing water from that deep and vast ocean of iniquity which spreads itself all over their inner moral being? It is this state of mind--this deep sink of iniquity, the rooted selfishness in which you have accustomed yourself to live and move and have your being--this it is from which you need to be saved. This is the great thing which needs to be set right. Do you understand this? What is it that you need when your heart sighs within you for peace, and you look to religion for help? What do you need? This only--to have your disposition to sin taken away, and in its place, a disposition to serve and please God. When you come to see yourself as you are in all your relations to God and duty, you will see that your own state of mind is the very thing you need to be saved from. You will see that this is really more terrible, and more to be feared than all the devils in hell. You need not fear the mightiest devils if your own state of mind is not radically wrong.

What then are you doing? Groping about to get rid of some one or two sins as if these were all from which you need be saved? Have you not yet learned that the thing you need first and chiefly is to be saved from a selfish state of mind, a state which is radically averse from, or enmity against God?

4. Another thing implied is a realization that God loves us. I mean just this--that God loves us, not the world merely and in the general sense, but ourselves in particular. The idea must come to the soul with convincing, melting power--God loves me. His pity and compassion reach even me.

Unless one understands this, how can he be penetrated with penitence, gratitude and love? No, until this idea is realized, that God is so infinitely gracious and benevolent that he has set his love on me,--until this thought comes home, the soul feels that it dare not approach him. This will be the effect just in proportion as the guilt and plague of sin are thoroughly realized. If these are deeply realized, the soul must needs realize also the great love of God, or it will fly away from the presence of God as if that presence were

hell itself.

I have known men often feel as if they could fly in any direction away from God, so deeply did conscious guilt oppress them, and so terrible to their souls was the thought of meeting God. Some of you have heard me say of Father Nash that his sense of God's awful presence was such when under conviction that he would have leaped into a lake of liquid fire at once if he could have thereby escaped the presence of God.

Hence, a realization of God's love to us is essential to real trust. First, you must see your sins--and then to prevent despair, and to save you from being repelled by your own conscious guilt from the presence of God, you must apprehend his infinite love. Seeing this, the soul cries out--"after all my guilt and ill-desert, God does love me. Yes, so much has he loved me, as to give his Son to die for me. Now, I see that I may come back at once to my own Father."

Without this view of the love of God, you feel as if you could not approach God at all; but this love being seen and felt, you come sobbing back, with a heart all broken to pieces. When you see not only that God loved the world, but that he even loves you--and so loves you that he gave his own Son to die for you, then you feel yourself aroused by mighty attractions. How can you resist the melting power of such love? O, you say, what can I do for God? How can I ever praise him enough?

Such a gospel meets human want and affords an adequate remedy for human selfishness. It presents tangible points of blessed truth upon which a guilty, despairing sinner may take hold.

5. An apprehension of the nature as well as degree of this love is essential to, and is implied in real faith. The mind must clearly see that this love of God to us is not complacency, but compassionate benevolence.

6. Finally, it implies an actual dependence upon Christ in all his offices and relations. This is obvious in itself, and has been so often illustrated before you that I need not enlarge upon it now.

REMARKS.

1. Many persons confound dependence with depending upon Christ. They talk

about their dependence, without really depending upon Christ at all. Now it is one thing to say--I cannot be saved without Christ; and quite another thing actually to depend upon Christ. Father Nash used to say--I could sometimes see my dependence so clearly that I would gnash my teeth and swear and curse, daring God to do his worst; yet I was infinitely far from really depending upon Christ.

2. Faith always implies a sense of dependence, but this sense of being dependent does not always imply faith. Yet often people who talk much about dependence, have no realizing sense of the thing, and really make this talk an apology for doing nothing.

3. Many overlook the identity between depending on Christ and true faith. Let this then be ever remembered, that depending on Christ is the same thing as real faith. Real faith is a depending for justification on Christ, and on nothing else; it also in the same exclusive manner depends on Christ for sanctification. In regard to both of these blessings, real faith is a depending on Christ. We are greatly deceived if we think these are different things, for they are precisely the same thing.

We can easily understand what it is to depend on Christ, for dependence of a similar sort is a perfectly common thing in the ordinary relations of human life. One young man comes here to study. He knows that various expenses will be accruing, for board, for books, for clothing, &c. Now he has no expectation of paying these bills himself--he depends on his father to pay them for him. He is not anxious on these points; he knows very well that his father is both able and willing to do all for him that he can need.

But another young student may be here who has no father to depend on; but perhaps he looks to the church to which he belongs, as they may have pledged themselves to help him; and still another, having neither parent, nor pledged supporters to depend on, depends upon himself. He expects to labor during the terms of study, and teach in vacations.

I allude to cases of this sort to show that the idea of depending on others is perfectly familiar to all minds. We are trained into it from the very dawn of life.

Such is the Christian's depending upon Christ. To Him the Christian looks for his ceaseless supply of every want. This is faith.

4. The doctrine of human ability as it lies in many minds produces nothing else than self-confidence and self-dependence as opposed to faith. Many have such an idea of human ability that they suppose they shall readily, by dint of their own resolutions and efforts, do what God requires of them. Such an idea renders dependence on Christ morally impossible. How can he depend on Christ when he thinks he can just as well depend upon himself? It is therefore wholly indispensable to true faith that the doctrine of human ability should be in such a shape in the mind as to encourage faith,--nay, rather, as to enforce the conviction that without aid from Christ, obtained by depending on Him, we are certainly undone. In fact the idea of human ability as often apprehended, is nothing else than the spirit of Anti-Christ. It stands directly and insuperably in the way of the soul's reliance upon Christ for the grace requisite for saving the soul from sin. Faith is forever impossible till this notion of self-sufficiency is utterly put away.

5. The doctrine of dependence, also, as it lies in some minds works mischief; for it begets a self-justifying spirit. Persons get the idea that they are in such a sense naturally unable that God cannot rationally require of them obedience. In conversation with a lady sometime since, she said, "I believe God was bound in justice to send Christ to die for sinners, and is bound now to do for sinners all that he requires them to be and to do." When she came to explain her views it appeared that she considered herself as not guilty, but only unfortunate on account of her sinful nature--unfortunate in having ever sinned at all, so as to need a Savior's atonement; unfortunate in having a state of mind so selfish and averse from God, that without gracious aid she never would accept of a Savior already provided. Hence she thought God would be unjust if he did not help her out of the troubles into which under God's universal agency she had unfortunately fallen.

After I had shown her that she had fundamentally mistaken the nature of sin, and that she could not be innocent in entertaining such views, condemned as they certainly were by her own reason and conscience, the husband said--"I have sometimes thought my wife one of the most pious of women, and again I have thought that he had no piety at all." The wife rose, and went to her chamber in a dreadful agony and conflict of mind--kept her room for two days--and then came down, all melted, subdued, transformed to the very spirit of a lamb. She no longer held God accountable for her sins, or bound in justice to give her converting grace.

6. True and deep conviction of sin is the only remedy for either of these errors. In the first case, where the man has high notions of his own ability; only let God show him his own utter wickedness, the deep and fearful depravity of his voluntarily selfish heart, and he will see that his ability is only a mountain of lead on his soul to sink it deep in the waves of damnation. Look at that sinner. Suppose God shows him just what he is doing; makes him see his own voluntary agency in sin--makes him see that he might have done good rather than evil--that God endowed him with capacities for doing all his duty; then let the Spirit of God also show him how he resists and fights against God with all his might, and make him see his own heart to be black and guilty as hell;--then see what he will say. "O," he cries, "this ability of mind is working out for me the deepest damnation. My whole heart is set upon iniquity. No other being in the universe can be so vile as I. O, surely, I am working my way down to the deepest hell."

When the Lord has thus shown him his amazing guilt, he will no longer depend on the fact of his being philosophically able to repent. He will neither deem this a meritorious thing, nor will he rely upon it for his own salvation. He will see that this ability of his has been the occasion of his meriting a deeper damnation than he otherwise could have done; and that his infatuated abuse of it is always such that he can depend on himself only to work out his own damnation.

So of the other man who makes God responsible for his own sin, for his being impenitent, and for giving him repentance. Let this man only be convicted thoroughly of his own sin, and he will no longer say--"God in justice ought to help me out." O, how he will abhor this very thought and the state of mind that can admit it for a moment! Now his mind turns upon himself in bitter self-execrations. He sees that he has no one to condemn but himself.

7. The love of God to man is entirely consistent with his anger against sin. There is a father who finds it necessary for the best good of his child to punish him. But does this prove that the father does not love his son? By no means. He never gives a more conclusive proof of his love for his son than when his intense desire to secure his highest good is so strong as to overcome all the reluctance a father's heart feels to the infliction of pain upon a child. This is the love of real benevolence.

The same benevolent regard to the good of the rest of the family might constrain a father to punish his son, even though the hope of reclaiming him may be entirely abandoned and form no part of the motive for punishing. So God in love

to the universe may punish the sinner after all hope of his being thereby reclaimed has past away forever. He may do this for the sake of a public example.

8. The love of God is of such a kind as to demand that he should abhor the wickedness of man and man on account of it.

The reason of this is obvious. This love of God is real benevolence--a sincere desire for the happiness of his creatures. But God knows perfectly well that sin necessarily and fatally destroy happiness; hence he cannot but hate it, and hate men and devils too on account of it.

9. Self-righteous men often mistake the nature of this love, supposing it to be fondness, and that it does not involve a holy and infinite abhorrence of all sin. No mistake could be greater than this.

10. It is hard for a selfish being to realize the nature of this disinterested love. This is one of the most difficult conceptions for the selfish mind to form. The reason of this difficulty is obvious. Men are naturally inclined to judge the character and motives of the Deity as they do their own, making God altogether such a being as themselves. Consequently being supremely selfish themselves, they suppose God also to be selfish. When you hear a man therefore denying that God is really benevolent, or speaking of him as if he were selfish like sinning mortals, you may know that that man is supremely selfish.

It sometimes seems impossible to make wicked men conceive of God as being truly benevolent. It is so perfectly unlike their own state of mind, they seem almost incapable of apprehending what it is, and withal are by no means very ready to admit that God is so very much better than themselves.

In the same way the sinner is prone to conceive of Christians as feeling towards him as he does towards them. He often has no idea that Christians really love him intensely, and feel the deep yearnings of compassion over him in view of his present wretchedness and coming doom. He seems to have no idea that God, angels, saints, and all the holy in earth or heaven, feel utterly different from himself.

Sometimes impenitent sinners have been broken down completely by kind treatment. Such treatment where they had reason to expect its opposite, has sometimes made the idea flash into their mind that there is real benevolence in

other hearts, although there is none in their own.

Many years since I knew a man who had abused a Christian in the worst possible way. So outrageous was this abuse that on reflection he felt constrained to go and make some confession to the Christian whom he had abused. What was his amazement to find that this Christian man had not the least ill feeling towards him--had no rebukes or reproaches to utter--that he had cherished no other feelings than compassion; and now, as soon as he saw him, his benevolent heart gushed out in compassion and sympathy. O when the wicked man saw this, it brought before his mind the new and thrilling idea--It may be that God really loves me. Perhaps God too and all other holy beings are seeking my good and really care for my soul.

This is one of the most important considerations to get before the mind of any class of sinners, whether of backsliders or of those who have never professed repentance. There is a most melting power in the thought--God, my Maker and my Father, feels real and infinite compassion for me. Many a heart has bowed before God and been broken in godly sorrow under the power of this consideration.

It is a striking fact that the Bible often presents this feature of the divine character in a strong and most affecting light. "Since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving kindness have I drawn thee." O could you who have wandered and backslidden only get this idea into your mind--could you only see how sincerely and earnestly your Maker is entreating you to return to himself--you could not refuse to come. Hear what the Psalmist said--"Has God forgotten to be gracious? and will he be favorable no more? Has he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Then I said, "This is my infirmity." Truly so. This is your infirmity, that you should cherish such apprehensions of God. O how can you cherish such thoughts of cold unbelief? Could you but understand how greatly God desires your return--could you see for once how deeply his compassions are awakened towards you and how cordially he would welcome you back to his bosom, it could not fail to break down all your pride, and melt your soul in penitence.

11. There is no danger that this view of the love of God should make men hard-hearted, stupid and reckless. Nothing else has such power as this to soften and

melt the hearts of men. Nothing else can be compared with this to subdue rebellion; transform selfishness to benevolence, and regenerate the polluted soul into the image of God.

12. A realization of the nature and reality of the love of God is indispensable to true religion. Without this, all will be hard-hearted. Without this no one can know what it is to have an unction shed over all the soul, drawing it into deep communion with God, and awakening a calm and settled confidence in the Lord of Hosts as our own God and Father.

13. An apprehension of this needs to become an omnipresent reality, before men can be established in grace. I can testify on this point from experience. Nothing has had such an influence on my mind as this. When I go to God deeply realizing that he loves me more than I love myself, and loves to give more than I love to receive, then I feel that I may be strong in prayer and in faith. When I go to prayer for my family and can feel that God loves them more than I do--when I pray for my sick wife, and can see that God cares for her comfort and usefulness and for the interests of my family more than I possibly can, I then feel that it were cruel unbelief not to trust God for every possible good. So when I pray for Oberlin, it is good to feel that God planted this vine and he can water it at his will, and can defend it so that the "bear out of the wood shall not waste it, nor the wild beast of the field devour it." If this vine is good for any thing in his vineyard, he values it more than I do; he loves its prosperity more, and is more ready to make efforts for sustaining and enlarging it.

Every thing in short which pertains to his kingdom, he loves more than I do. His whole being is awake to these interests--yea, more, to every body's interests,--his word having told me that he feeds even the ravens when they cry, and much more will feed his "little ones."

14. A realization of this truth is indispensable to prevalence in prayer. In order to prevail in prayer you need to realize that God loves you infinitely more than you love yourself--that He loves Zion more than you do, and loves to see sinners converted infinitely more than you ever have, or ever will. Your heart will then be strong in prayer when you see that He truly cares for you, and cares for all human happiness, so that you have no need to excite his feelings, for his soul is already on fire, all awake with most intensely glowing emotions of love, and with one changeless purpose to promote the highest happiness of every sentient being in his universe as far as he wisely can. O, to have such a God to pray to,

and to come before him with these realization of his ineffable love--this quickens faith and gives vitality to the soul of prayer. Brethren, do learn how to pray to such a God as this!

[Back to Top](#)

Victory over the World through Faith

Lecture XVII

November 5, 1845

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 John 5:4: "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

The discussion of this text naturally leads us to make four inquiries.

I. What is it to overcome the world?

II. Who are they that overcome?

III. Why do they overcome the world?

IV. How do they do it?

These are the natural questions which a serious mind would ask upon reading this text.

I. What is it to overcome the world?

1. It is to get above the spirit of covetousness which possesses the men of the world. The spirit of the world is eminently the spirit of covetousness. It is a greediness after the things of the world. Some worldly men covet one thing and some another; but all classes of worldly men are living in the spirit of covetousness in some of its forms. This spirit has supreme possession of their minds.

Now the first thing in overcoming the world is, that the spirit of covetousness in respect to worldly things and objects be overcome. The man who does not overcome this spirit of bustling and scrambling after the good which this world proffers has by no means overcome it.

2. Overcoming the world implies rising above its engrossments. When a man has overcome the world his thoughts are no longer engrossed and swallowed up with worldly things. A man certainly does not overcome the world unless he gets above being engrossed and absorbed with its concerns.

Now we all know how exceedingly engrossed worldly men are with some form of worldly good. One is swallowed up with study; another with politics; a third with money-getting; and a fourth perhaps with fashion and with pleasure; but each in his chosen way makes earthly good the all-engrossing object.

The man who gains the victory over the world must overcome not one form only of its pursuits, but every form--must overcome the world itself and all that it has to present as an allurement to the human heart.

3. Overcoming the world implies overcoming the fear of the world.

It is a mournful fact that most men, and indeed all men of worldly character, have so much regard to public opinion that they dare not act according to the dictates of their consciences when acting thus would incur the popular frown. One is afraid lest his business should suffer if his course runs counter to public opinion; another fears lest if he stand up for the truth it will injure his reputation, and curiously imagines and tries to believe that advocating an unpopular truth will diminish and perhaps destroy his good influence--as if a man could exert a good influence in any possible way besides maintaining the truth.

Great multitudes, it must be admitted, are under this influence of fearing the world; yet some, perhaps many, of them are not aware of this fact. If you or if they could thoroughly sound the reasons of their backwardness in duty, fear of the world would be found among the chief. Their fear of the world's displeasure is so much stronger than their fear of God's displeasure that they are completely enslaved by it. Who does not know that some ministers dare not preach what they know is true, and even what they know is important

truth, lest they should offend some whose good opinion they seek to retain? The society is weak perhaps, and the favour of some rich man in it seems indispensable to its very existence. Hence the terror of these rich men is continually before their eyes when they write a sermon, or preach, or are called to take a stand in favour of any truth or cause which may be unpopular with men of more wealth than piety or conscience. Alas! this bondage to man! Too many gospel ministers are so troubled by it that their time-serving policy is virtually renouncing Christ and serving the world.

Overcoming the world is thoroughly subduing this servility to men.

4. Overcoming the world implies overcoming a state of worldly anxiety. You know there is a state of great carefulness and anxiety which is common and almost universal among worldly men. It is perfectly natural if the heart is set upon securing worldly good, and has not learned to receive all good from the hand of a great Father and trust him to give or withhold with his own unerring wisdom. But he who loves the world is the enemy of God and hence can never have this filial trust in a parental Benefactor, nor the peace of soul which it imparts. Hence worldly men are almost incessantly in a fever of anxiety lest their worldly schemes should fail. They sometimes get a momentary relief when all things seem to go well; but some mishap is sure to befall them at some point soon, so that scarce a day passes that brings not with it some corroding anxiety. Their bosoms are like the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.

But the man who gets above the world gets above this state of ceaseless and corroding anxiety.

5. The victory under consideration implies that we cease to be enslaved and in bondage to the world in any of its forms.

There is a worldly spirit and there is also a heavenly spirit, and one or the other exists in the heart of every man and controls his whole being. Those who are under the control of the world of course have not overcome the world. No man overcomes the world till his heart is imbued with the spirit of heaven.

One form which the spirit of the world assumes is, being enslaved to the customs and fashions of the day.

It is marvelous to see what a goddess Fashion becomes. No heathen goddess was ever worshipped with costlier offerings or more devout homage or more implicit subjection. And surely no heathen deity since the world began has ever had more universal patronage. Where will you go to find the man of the world or the woman of the world who does not hasten to worship at her shrine?

But overcoming the world implies that the spell of this goddess is broken.

They who have overcome the world are no longer careful either to secure its favour or avert its frown; and the good or the ill opinion of the world is to them a small matter. "To me," said Paul, "it is a small thing to be judged of man's judgment." So of every real Christian; his care is to secure the approbation of God; this is his chief concern, to commend himself to God and to his own conscience. No man has overcome the world unless he has attained this state of mind.

Almost no feature of Christian character is more striking or more decisive than this--indifference to the opinions of the world.

Since I have been in the ministry I have been blessed with the acquaintance of some men who were peculiarly distinguished by this quality of character. Some of you may have known Rev. James Patterson, late of Philadelphia. If so, you know him to have been eminently distinguished in this respect. He seemed to have the least possible disposition to secure the applause of men or avoid their censure. It seemed to be of no consequence to him to commend himself to men. For him it was enough if he might please God.

Hence you were sure to find him in everlasting war against sin, all sin, however popular, however entrenched by custom or sustained by wealth, or public opinion. Yet he always opposed sin with a most remarkable spirit--a spirit of inflexible decision and yet of great mellowness and tenderness. While he was saying the most severe things in the most decided language, you might see the big tears rolling down his cheeks.

It is wonderful that most men never complained of his having a bad spirit. Much as they dreaded his rebuke and writhed under his strong and daring exposures of wickedness, they could never say that Father Patterson had any other than a good spirit. This was a most beautiful and striking

exemplification of having overcome the world.

Men who are not thus dead to the world have not escaped its bondage. The victorious Christian is in a state where he is no longer in bondage to man. He is bound only to serve God.

II. We must enquire Who are those that overcome the world?

Our text gives the ready answer: "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." You cannot fail to observe that this is a universal proposition,--all who are born of God overcome the world--all these, and it is obviously implied--none others. You may know who are born of God by this characteristic--they overcome the world. Of course the second question is answered.

III. Our next question is, Why do believers overcome the world? On what principle is this result effected?

I answer, this victory over the world results as naturally from the spiritual or heavenly birth, as coming into bondage to the world results from the natural birth.

It may be well to revert a moment to the law of connection in the latter case, viz., between coming into the world by natural birth and bondage to the world. This law obviously admits of a philosophical explanation, at once simple and palpable to every one's observation. Natural birth reveals to the mind objects of sense and these only. It brings the mind into contact with worldly things. Of course it is natural that the mind should become deeply interested in these objects thus presented through its external senses, especially as most of them sustain so intimate a relation to our sentient nature and become the first and chief sources of our happiness.

Hence our affections are gradually entwined around these objects, and we become thoroughly lovers of this world ere our eyes have been opened upon it many months.

Now alongside of this universal fact let another be placed of equal importance and not less universal, namely, that those intuitive powers of the mind which were created to take cognizance of our moral relations, and hence to counteract the too great influence of worldly objects, come into action very slowly, and are not developed so as to act vigorously until years are numbered as months are in

the case of the external organs of sense. The very early and vigorous development of the latter brings the soul so entirely under the control of worldly objects that when the reason and the conscience come to speak, their voice is little heeded. As a matter of fact, we find it universally true that unless divine power interpose, the bondage to the world thus induced upon the soul is never broken.

But the point which I particularly desired to elucidate was simply this, that natural birth with its attendant laws of physical and mental development, becomes the occasion of bondage to this world.

Right over against this, lies the birth into the kingdom of God by the Spirit. By this the soul is brought into new relations--we might rather say, into intimate contact with spiritual things. The Spirit of God seems to usher the soul into the spiritual world, in a manner strictly analogous to the result of the natural birth upon our physical being. The great truths of the spiritual world are opened to our view through the illumination of the Spirit of God; we seem to see with new eyes, and to have a new world of spiritual objects around us.

As in regard to natural objects, men not only speculate about them, but realize them; so in the case of spiritual children do spiritual things become not merely matters of speculation, but of full and practical realization also. When God reveals himself to the mind, spiritual things are seen in their real light, and make the impression of realities.

Consequently, when spiritual objects are thus revealed to the mind, and thus apprehended, they will supremely interest that mind. Such is our mental constitution that the truth of God when thoroughly apprehended cannot fail to interest us. If these truths were clearly revealed to the wickedest man on earth, so that he should apprehend them as realities, it could not fail to rouse up his soul to most intense action. He might hate the light, and might stubbornly resist the claims of God upon his heart, but he could not fail to feel a thrilling interest in truths that so take hold of the great and vital things of human well-being.

Let me ask, is there a sinner in this house, or can there be a sinner on this wide earth, who does not see that if God's presence was made as manifest and as real to his mind as the presence of his fellow-men, it would supremely engross his soul even though it might not subdue his heart.

This revelation of God's presence and character might not convert him, but it would, at least for the time being, kill his attention to the world.

You often see this in the case of persons deeply convicted; you have doubtless seen persons so fearfully convicted of sin, that they cared nothing at all for their food nor their dress. O, they cried out in the agony of their souls, what matter all these things to us, if we even get them all, and then must be down in hell!

But these thrilling and all-absorbing convictions do not necessarily convert the soul, and I have alluded to them here only to show the controlling power of realizing views of divine truth.

When real conversion has taken place, and the soul is born of God, then realizing views of truth not only awaken interest, as they might do in an unrenewed mind, but they also tend to excite a deep and ardent love for these truths. They draw out the heart. Spiritual truth now takes possession of his mind, and draws him into its warm and life-giving embrace. Before, error, falsehood, death, had drawn him under their power; now the Spirit of God draws him into the very embrace of God. Now he is begotten of God, and breathes the spirit of sonship. Now, according to the Bible, "the seed of God remaineth in him," that very truth, and those movings, of the spirit which gave him birth into the kingdom of God, continue still in power upon his mind, and hence he continues a Christian, and as the Bible states it, "he cannot sin, because he is born of God." The seed of God is in him, and the fruit of it brings his soul deeply into sympathy with his own Father in heaven.

Again, the first birth makes us acquainted with earthly things, the second with God; the first with the finite, the second with the infinite; the first with things correlated with our animal nature, the second with those great things which stand connected with our spiritual nature, things so lovely, and so glorious as to overcome all the ensnarements of the world.

Again, the first begets a worldly, and the second a heavenly temper, under the first, the mind is brought into a snare--under the second, it is delivered from that snare. Under the first, the conversation is earthly--under the second, "our conversation is in heaven."

But we must pass to inquire,

IV. How this victory over the world is achieved.

The great agent is the Holy Spirit. Without him, no good result is ever achieved in the Christian's heart or life.

The text, you observe, says, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." But here the question might be raised: Does this mean that faith of itself overcomes the world, or, is this the meaning, that we overcome by or through our faith? Doubtless the latter is the precise meaning. Believing in God, and having realizing impressions of his truth and character made upon our mind by the Holy Ghost given to those who truly believe, we gain the victory over the world.

Faith implies three things.

1. Perception of truth.
2. An interest in it.
3. The committal or giving up of the mind to be interested and controlled by these objects of faith.

Perception of the truth must come first in order, for there can be no belief of unknown and unperceived truth. Next, there must be an interest in the truth, which shall wake up the mind to fixed and active attention; and thirdly, there must be a voluntary committal of the mind to the control of truth. The mind must wholly yield itself up to God, to be governed entirely by his will, and to trust him and him alone as its own present and eternal portion.

Again, faith receives Christ. The mind first perceives Christ's character and his relations to us--sees what he does for us, and then deeply feeling its own need of such a Saviour, and of such a work wrought in and for us as Jesus alone can do, it goes forth to receive and embrace Jesus as its own Saviour. This action of the soul in receiving and embracing Christ is not sluggish--it is not a state of dozing quietism. No; it involves the soul's most strenuous activity. And this committal of the soul must become a glorious, living, energizing principle--the mind not only perceiving, but yielding itself up with the most fervid intensity to be Christ's and to receive all the benefits of His salvation into our own souls.

Again, faith receives Christ into the soul as King, in all his relations, to rule over the whole being--to have our heart's supreme confidence and affection--to receive the entire homage of our obedience and adoration; to rule, in short, over

us, and fulfil all the functions of supreme King over our whole moral being. Within our very souls we receive Christ to live and energize there, to reign forever there as on His own rightful throne.

Now a great many seem to stop short of this entire and perfect committal of their whole soul to Christ. They stop short perhaps with merely perceiving the truth, satisfied and pleased that they have learned the theory of the gospel. Or perhaps some go one step further, and stop with being interested--with having their feelings excited by the things of the gospel, thus going only to the second stage; or perhaps they seem to take faith, but not Christ; they think to believe, but after all do not cordially, and with all the heart welcome Christ himself into the soul.

All these various steps stop short of really taking hold of Christ. They none of them result in giving the victory over the world.

The true Bible doctrine of faith represents Christ as coming into the very soul. "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with me." What could more forcibly and beautifully teach the doctrine that by faith Christ is introduced into the very soul of the believer to dwell there by His gracious presence?

Since my mind has been drawn to the subject, I have been astonished to see how long I have been in a purblind state of perception in respect to this particular view of faith. Of a long time I had scarcely seen it; now I see it beaming forth in lines of glory on almost every page. The Bible seems to blaze with the glorious truth, Christ in the soul, the hope of glory; God, Christ, dwelling in our body as in a temple. I am amazed that a truth so rich and so blessed should have been seen so dimly, when the Bible reveals it so plainly. Christ received into the very soul by faith, and thus brought into the nearest possible relations to our heart and life;--Christ himself becoming the all-sustaining Power within us, and thus securing the victory over the world;--Christ, living and energizing in our hearts--this is the great central truth in the plan of sanctification, and this no Christian should fail to understand, as he values the victory over the world and the living communion of the soul with its Maker.

REMARKS.

1. It is in the very nature of the case impossible that if faith receive Christ into the soul, it should not overcome the world. If the new birth actually brings the

mind into this new state, and brings Christ into the soul, then of course Christ will reign in that soul; the supreme affections will be yielded most delightfully to him, and the power of the world over that mind will be broken. Christ cannot dwell in any soul without absorbing the supreme interest of that soul. And this is of course equivalent to giving the victory over the world.

2. He who does not habitually overcome the world is not born of God. In saying this, I do not intend to affirm that a true Christian may not sometimes be overcome by sin; but I do affirm that overcoming the world is the general rule, and falling into sin is only the exception. This is the least that can be meant by the language of our text, and by similar declarations which often occur in the Bible. Just as in the passage--"He that is born of God doth not commit sin, and he cannot sin because he is born of God,"--nothing less can be meant than this--that he cannot sin uniformly--cannot make sinning his business, and can sin, if at all, only occasionally and aside from the general current of his life. In the same manner we should say of a man who is in general truthful, that he is not a liar.

I will not contend for more than this respecting either of these passages; but for so much as this I must contend, that the new-born souls here spoken of do in general overcome the world. The general fact respecting them is that they do not sin and are not in bondage to Satan. The affirmations of Scripture respecting them must at least embrace their general character.

3. What is a religion good for that does not overcome the world? What is the benefit of being born into such a religion, if it leave the world still swaying its dominion over our hearts? What avails a new birth which after all fails to bring us into a likeness to God, into the sympathies of his family and of his kingdom; which leaves us still in bondage to the world and to Satan? What can there be of such a religion more than the name? With what reason can any man suppose that such a religion fits his heart for heaven, supposing it leaves him earthly-minded, sensual, and selfish.

4. We see why it is that infidels have proclaimed the gospel of Christ to be a failure. You may not be aware that of late infidels have taken the ground that the gospel of Christ is a failure. They maintain that it professes to bring men out from the world, but fails to do so; and hence is manifestly a failure. Now you must observe that the Bible does indeed affirm, as infidels say, that those who are truly born of God do overcome the world. This we cannot deny and should not wish to deny it. Now if the infidel can show that the new birth fails to

produce this result, he has carried his point, and we must yield ours. This is perfectly plain, and there can be no escape for us.

But the infidel is in fault in his premises. He assumes the current Christianity of the age as a specimen of real religion, and builds his estimate upon this. He proves, as he thinks, and perhaps truly proves that the current Christianity does not overcome the world.

We must demur to his assuming this current Christianity as real religion. For this religion of the mass of nominal professors does not answer the descriptions given of true piety in the Word of God. And moreover, if this current type of religion were all that the gospel and the Divine Spirit can do for lost man, then we might as well give up the point in controversy with the infidel; for such a religion could not give us much evidence of coming from God, and would be of very little value to man;--so little as scarcely to be worth contending for. Truly if we must take the professedly Christian world as Bible Christians, who would not be ashamed and confounded in attempting to confront the infidel? We know but too well that the great mass of professed Christians do not overcome the world, and we should be confounded quickly if we were to maintain that they do. Those professed Christians themselves know that they do not overcome the world. Of course they could not testify concerning themselves that in their own case the power of the gospel is exemplified.

In view of facts like these, I have often been astonished to see ministers setting themselves to persuade their people that they are really converted, trying to lull their fears and sustain their tottering hopes. Vain effort! Those same ministers, it would seem, must know that they themselves do not overcome the world, and equally well must they know that their people do not. How fatal then to the soul must be such efforts to "heal the hurt of God's professed people slightly; crying peace, peace, when there is no peace!"

Let us sift this matter to the bottom, pushing the inquiry--Do the great mass of professed Christians really overcome the world? It is a fact beyond question that with them the things of this world are the realities, and the things of God are mere theories. Who does not know that this is the real state of great multitudes in the nominal Church?

Let the searching inquiry run through this congregation--What are those things that set your soul on fire--that stir up your warmest emotions and deeply agitate

your nervous system? Are these the things of earth, or the things of heaven? the things of time, or the things of eternity? the things of self, or the things of God?

How is it when you go into your closets?--do you go there to seek and find God? Do you in fact find there a present God, and do you hold communion there as friend with friend? How is this?

Now you certainly should know that if your state is such that spiritual things are mere theories and speculations, you are altogether worldly and nothing more. It would be egregious folly and falsehood to call you spiritual-minded, and for you to think yourselves spiritual, would be the most fatal and foolish self-deception. You give none of the appropriate proofs of being born of God. Your state is not that of one who is personally acquainted with God, and who loves him personally with supreme affection.

5. Until we can put away from the minds of men the common error that the current Christianity of the Church is true Christianity, we can make but little progress in converting the world. For in the first place we cannot save the Church itself from bondage to the world in this life, nor from the direst doom of the hypocrite in the next. We cannot unite and arm the Church in vigorous onset upon Satan's kingdom, so that the world may be converted to God. We cannot even convince intelligent men of the world that our religion is from God, and brings to fallen men a remedy for their depravity. For if the common Christianity of the age is the best that can be, and this does not give men the victory over the world, what is it good for? And if it really is of little worth or none, how can we hope to make thinking men prize it as of great value?

6. There are but very few infidels who are as much in the dark as they profess to be on these points. There are very few of that class of men who are not acquainted with some humble Christians, whose lives commend Christianity and condemn their own ungodliness. Of course they know the truth, that there is a reality in the religion of the Bible, and they blind their own eyes selfishly and most foolishly when they try to believe that the religion of the Bible is a failure and that the Bible is therefore a fabrication. Deep in their heart lies the conviction that here and there are men who are real Christians, who overcome the world and live by a faith unknown to themselves. In how many cases does God set some burning examples of Christian life before those wicked, skeptical men, to rebuke them for their sin and their skepticism--perhaps their own wife or their children, their neighbours or their servants. By such means the truth is

lodged in their mind, and God has a witness for himself in their consciences.

I have perhaps before mentioned a fact which occurred at the South, and was stated to me by a minister of the gospel who was acquainted with the circumstances of the case. There resided in that region a very worldly and a most ungodly man, who held a great slave property, and was withal much given to horse-racing. Heedless of all religion and avowedly skeptical, he gave full swing to every evil propensity. But wicked men must one day see trouble; and this man was taken sick and brought to the very gates of the grave. His weeping wife and friends gather round his bed, and begin to think of having some Christian called in to pray for the dying man's soul. Husband, said the anxious wife, shall I not send for our minister to pray with you before you die? No, said he, I know him of old; I have no confidence in him; I have seen him too many times at horse-races; there he was my friend and I was his; but I don't want to see him now.

But who shall we get, then? continued the wife. Send for my slave Tom, replied he; he is one of my hostlers. I have often overheard him praying and I know he can pray; besides I have watched his life and his temper, and I never saw anything in him inconsistent with Christian character;--call him in, I should be glad to hear him pray.

Tom comes slowly and modestly in, drops his hat at the door, looks on his sick and dying master;--Tom, said the dying skeptic,--do you ever pray? do you know how to pray? can you pray for your dying master and forgive him? O yes, massa, with all my heart; and drops on his knees and pours out a prayer for his soul.

Now the moral of this story is obvious. Place the skeptic on his dying bed, let that solemn hour arrive, and the inner convictions of his heart be revealed, and he knows of at least one man who is a Christian. He knows one man whose prayers he values more than all the friendship of all his former associates. He knows now that there is such a thing as Christianity; and yet you cannot suppose that he has this moment learned a lesson he never knew before. No, he knew just as much before; an honest hour has brought the inner convictions of his soul to light. Infidels generally know more than they have honesty enough to admit.

7. The great error of those who profess religion but are not born of God is this:--they are trying to be Christians without being born of God. They need to have that done to them which is said of Adam--"God breathed into him the breath of life, and he became a living soul." Their religion has in it none of the breath of

God: it is a cold, lifeless theory; there is none of the living vitality of God in it. It is perhaps a heartless orthodoxy, and they may take a flattering unction to their hearts that their creed is sound; but do they love that truth which they profess to believe? They think, it may be, that they have zeal, and that their zeal is right and their heart right; but is their soul on fire for God and his cause? Where are they, and what are they doing? Are they spinning out some fond theory, or defending it at the point of the sword? Ah, do they care for souls? Does their heart tremble for the interests of Zion? Do their very nerves quiver under the mighty power of God's truth? Does their love for God and for souls set their orthodoxy and their creeds on fire so that every truth burns in their souls and glows forth from their very faces? If so, then you will not see them absent from the prayer meetings and from the class meetings; but you will see that divine things take hold of their soul with overwhelming interest and power. You will see them living Christians, burning and shining lights in the world. Brethren, it cannot be too strongly impressed on every mind that the decisive characteristic of true religion is energy, not apathy: that its vital essence is life not death.

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses

to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is

moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

End of the 1845 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1846
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Lecture I. [The Nature of Impenitence and the Measure of Its Guilt](#)
- Lecture II. [The Rule by Which the Guilt of Sin is Estimated](#)
- Lecture III. [On Divine Manifestations](#)
- Lecture IV. [On the Lord's Supper](#)
- Lecture V. [Forfeiting Birth-Right Blessings](#)
- Lecture VI. [Afflictions of the Righteous and the Wicked Contrasted](#)
- Lecture VII. [On Becoming Acquainted With God](#)
- Lecture VIII. [God Manifesting Himself to Moses](#)
- Lecture IX. [Coming to The Waters of Life](#)
- Lecture X. [The Blessedness of Enduring Temptation](#)
- Lecture XI. [Quenching the Spirit](#)

Lecture XII. [Responsibility of Hearing the Gospel](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

The Nature of Impenitence and the Measure of Its Guilt

Lecture I

January 21, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 11:20-24: "Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee."

In speaking from these words, it will be my object,

I. To show what is included, or implied, in a state of impenitence.

II. To point out the guilt of this state of mind, and show that it is in proportion to the light under which it is indulged.

I. In a recent sermon I aimed to show what repentance is; I now wish to show what constitutes impenitence.

1. It is not, as many seem to suppose, the mere negation of repentance. It is not a negative, blank state of mind--a mere nothing; but is absolute and positive. It involves moral action of the most positive kind.

2. It is that state of self-seeking into which men not influenced by the Spirit

of God, always fall. In this state men make themselves and their own supposed good, the object of supreme regard. Their ultimate design in all they do, is their own gratification. I mean all this, and precisely this; in all they do for others, and in all they think themselves to do for God, their own self is the supreme and ultimate end. Everything terminates in self--or they feel no interest in it.

In other words, impenitence is a state of consecration to self. Beyond all controversy, impenitent men are entirely consecrated--only it is not to God, but to self. To their own gratification, and their own supposed interests, they are supremely devoted.

It is a great mistake, to suppose that impenitent sinners are not devotional. They are most profoundly and perfectly so. You could not ask for more perfect specimens of devotion to a given object--but the object in their case is their own self. It cannot be said that they fall short of entire consecration. With them consecration is never unsteady, fitful, imperfect. Self being their idol, the worship they pay is always ardent, hearty, and consistent with their whole life. Furthermore, the impenitent man consecrates not only his own efforts and interests to himself, but the interests of every other being--of God as far as he can, and of his fellow beings also. All sentient beings in the universe within his reach are laid under contribution to minister to his supreme deity--self. He cares not for God, only as he can make God subservient to himself. He would pray to God, if he could thereby make God his own servant--not otherwise. If he does good to any of his fellow beings, you may be sure he has himself for the ultimate object--this is all; he cares for nothing in the universe, except so far as he can make it subservient to himself.

3. Impenitence is a state of self-exaltation. In this state the man sets himself above everything else--even above God, and every other being or interest in the universe. Every impenitent sinner makes his own interest and his own will supreme; neither God nor angels, earth nor friends, are placed above self; all are placed in his esteem below himself, and made to bow down in homage and subservience to his own shrine.

4. It is a spirit of self-will; a state in which a man will have everything in his own way. This man would be ready enough to be a Christian--in his own way; would go to heaven very cordially if he might go as Universalists

expect to go, or as infidels dream of going; his own will being supreme, and his own way being granted him.

5. It is a spirit of self-indulgence. I am aware this sentiment has been expressed in other language; but you will allow me to turn this subject over and over, that you may see all sides of it, and all the terms under which it has been clothed. Now the impenitent man does not always indulge himself in the same way. He may not always choose the gross and scandalous forms of self-indulgence; he may not everywhere be a glutton, a drunkard, a debauchee; he may deem it more for his interest to taste, to consult his love of reputation, and may choose to indulge this. This may be his strongest passion, and if so, thorough self-indulgence will make him hold in check his grosser passions and appetites, especially if he resides in a truly moral community. But if a good name be his ruling motive, his decent moral conduct, having this for its end, is as real self-indulgence as you ever see in the veriest glutton or debauchee. No matter what the form of self-indulgence may be--its moral character turns upon the fact that it is self-indulgence, and not at all upon the greater or less decency it may have in the estimation of men.

This point ought to be thoroughly understood. Impenitence is self-indulgence in some form, and what the form shall be, will turn upon the relative strength of his several passions, and his estimate of the expediency under his circumstances of gratifying one rather than another. He may love money too well to be a drunkard, or his reputation too well to be licentious; but while in impenitence, whether he drink or abstain, it is to indulge himself; whether he be a glutton or be temperate in food; whether he be avaricious or prodigal; moral, or immoral; self-indulgence is evermore the one ruling end of his life.

This is equally true of all impenitent men. All the forms of morality you see among them, have the same, and no other root. Whether he go on a pilgrimage, or immure himself in a monastery, or subdue his flesh in his asceticism; each, or all, are only forms of self-indulgence, one or another being chosen, according to his taste or his faith in its efficacy to subserve his great end of life--selfish good. All is self-indulgence. That devotee who crawls on his knees a thousand miles, and dies, still crawling, does it all for the same end as he who gives himself up to gluttony, or to intoxication--the main difference being that the one expects his good to come now--the other

is content to wait for it, say till after death. The woman who takes the veil and goes for life into the nunnery, may go for the very same supremely selfish end as she who betakes herself to the haunts of ill fame. With each her own gratification is the supreme end--if the mind be in a state of impenitence towards God.

6. Another phase of the impenitent spirit is its self-dependence. It never depends on God--always and only on self.

Again, it is a spirit of self-righteousness. It everywhere and always rejects Christ's righteousness, and goes about to establish its own.

It is a state of mind, finally, which cleaves to self, despite of all the claims of God, or of all the universe. Nothing is permitted to sever, or even weaken its supreme regard for its own self.

II. I am to show that the guilt of an impenitent state is always proportioned to the light sinned against.

It is plain that this state of mind in which self is preferred to everything else, begins in the infant mind, where there is no light at all--when the idea of right and wrong is yet undeveloped. There the little infant chooses his own gratification, by the same law that all other animals choose theirs, and for ought we can see, as innocently, until its reason is in some degree developed, and duty to other beings and other interests is seen to impose a counter claim. We cannot tell how early the reason may begin to develop itself; it is not incumbent upon us to do this; but whenever it is, there moral agency commences; there impenitence begins in the selfish preference of its own little interests, to the greater interests of God, or of other beings. And as ray after ray of light breaks in upon that young mind, setting forth the claims of God right over against the demands of its own self-gratification, guilt is every moment increasing, if this light and the divine claims which it reveals are resisted. Nothing can be plainer than this.

The text obviously teaches this doctrine. It assumes its truth, and bases its augmented woe, upon the cities where Christ preached, on this very ground. So on another occasion Christ said, "If I had not come and spoken among them they had not had sin; but now have they no cloak for their sin."

Again, as light increases, the obstinacy of the sinner's mind increases, or he cannot remain in a state of impenitent resistance. He must gird himself up to

resist, or he could not withstand the force of this light. How much I have seen of this in revivals of religion. Light pours in--the sense of obligation is quickened--conscience lifts her voice; but the sinner girds himself for desperate resistance, as he never did before. I have seen it often in this place. Young men here, pressed by truth and the Spirit of truth, to yield to God, band themselves together, as if they could not hold out if they stood alone. They hold each other up--taking the same course that devils themselves would take--they gird up their loins for more vigorous effort to resist the claims of God, and maintain their position of impenitence. Of course the guilt of sinners thus resisting, is augmented with fearful rapidity. The woes of Capernaum fall thick and fearfully upon their heads.

Again, as light increases, impenitence continuing, hardness of heart increases. This is only the same thing in other words. Greater and growing resistance of truth involves greater hardness of heart.

Yet again, as light increases, and the sinner girds himself to resist it, God has the greater reason to be incensed against him. How could he provoke God more and worse than he does! He sets at naught both the justice and the mercy of God, and seems determined to thwart every effort God can make to save him. Why should not a holy God give scope to law and justice?

As light increases, sinners see more and more of the folly and madness of their own impenitence. I once fell into conversation with a lawyer of eminence in the State of New York. He began to cavil resolutely against the claims of the gospel. I headed him in on every side, and showed him that all his cavils only rebounded upon his own head, and aggravated his own guilt. He saw it, and finally acknowledged it, saying, "Well, I know my system will not do to reason upon; I may as well stop as try. I know there is no foundation for my cavils." You do, then, replied I, understand that you have no foundation for your objections against God and His gospel? Yes, I do. Now if this man goes on still in sin, he is in the most guilty state conceivable.

Thus, as light increases, sinners see more and more of the infinite reasonableness of God's claims.

Often, for a time, sinners almost believe their own lies. Perhaps they really labor under great errors of opinion in many points, and these serve to weaken the pressure of God's claims upon their consciences. They see perhaps, a great many

difficulties in the way which they know not how to surmount. I know but too well from my early experience, that sinners may involve themselves in error and darkness, from which they cannot readily extricate themselves. As the Bible says--"The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble."

But often, at last, they open their eyes and see the infinite reasonableness of truth. I never shall forget the hour when in my own case the truth broke upon my mind--when I saw that all my cavils were groundless--that all God's ways were right, and all mine wrong. I had been brought up in great darkness, yet in the midst of a Presbyterian congregation, often listening to Old School preaching. But the strain of it was--"You can and you can't," and it filled my mind with utter confusion, and put every great truth of the gospel out of joint, in my mind. It seems to me now, that in all those years of my youth, I never heard one gospel sermon, not one that I think presented the gospel in its clear and true light. It threw me headlong into all the absurdities of Old School theology, and there I stumbled along, only getting deeper in the mire. I at first got a Bible and placed it among my law books, to study law out of it. This led me to read portions of the Old Testament, and from this for a time I derived no benefit. But at length I took up the claims of religion as I would any point of law, and while I sought to justify myself in sin, I found, to my surprise, that truth and reason were all against me. Conviction broke on my mind, that God is all right--that I am all wrong. And do you suppose that I was easy under this conviction? Infinitely far from it. My mind chafed like a chained bear; truth had harpooned me, and I could neither escape nor rest. I fretted, raved against the truth, abused professors of religion; but all this neither changed the truth, nor helped me. My mind rushed one way, and then another way; but in vain, for God, by His Spirit, had anchored His truth deep in my soul, and I seemed to have no power to dislodge it. My mind worked like a steam engine, and seemed laboring under a mighty pressure. So you may have seen the sinner agitated and struggling--God attempting to break him off from his sins, but his iron heart resisting, and holding out in stern rebellion. But guilt is all this while accumulating with fearful rapidity.

Once more; as light increases, impenitence becomes a hard and troubled course. Conscience is ill at ease; the sinner must needs brace himself up against the heaven-sent impulses to repentance; it costs him fresh and painful efforts to remain in impenitence. O what guilt this sinner must incur who will fight his way down to hell against such influences put forth by God to save his soul.

REMARKS.

1. Impenitence is the whole of sin. Nothing else in all the universe is sin but this. Outward actions being only the evidences, or manifestations of the inner moral state, we must turn our eye away from these, and look only at the heart. Then we see that nothing else is sin but impenitence towards God--that supreme regard for self which puts the mind in the attitude of rebellion against God, and against an appropriate regard for any other interests but those of its own self. Self-gratification becomes the one controlling law of action. No matter what form it may take on; its nature changes not. There is only this one thing sought as an ultimate end, by any sinner in earth or hell--self-gratification. The only difference among them all turns upon the different degrees of light sinned against, and this difference affects only the degree, not the kind, or moral quality of their conduct. So, the angel in heaven, and the saint on earth, so far as he is a saint, have each and all but one end in view--to please and glorify God; and here, too, the only difference turns on the different degrees of light which they may enjoy. The saints in earth or heaven, pursue a course right over against that of the sinner; but each class has but one heart--one supreme intention, for this is what is meant by heart. This is uniformly the Bible representation of saints and sinners.

2. There is no difference among sinners, only that the guilt of those who have had greater light, exceeds the guilt of those who have had less. It is vastly important that people would break through the shell and see the kernel of this truth. It ought to be seen by all, and may be. As I said before, no matter where the sinner is, whether in earth or hell; nor who he is, nor what his pursuits are; all is perfect sympathy among sinners of every name and grade and place--even between sinners in hell, and sinners on this earth--just as much as there is perfect sympathy between saints on earth and saints in heaven. Developments and degrees of guilt will vary according to light possessed and controlling circumstances; but no other difference will or can be found.

3. Outward acts are not sin, but are merely the evidences of the mind's state. There is not a particle of sin in your muscles. Even though they may be nerved up to stab your neighbor, yet those muscular movements are not your sins--these lie in an impenitent or selfish heart.

4. Outward acts and manifestations will of course be modified by circumstances. Suppose a man has for his supreme end his own gratification. Place him under

one set of circumstances, and you will see one development of character; change his circumstances, and you will see another development of character. Take a man who in a loose community has been of loose morals himself, and transfer him to a religious and moral community, and you may anticipate a marked change, not in his character, but in its manifestation. If his love of reputation is strong, he will conform to his company enough to secure reputation as well as he conveniently can. He will be likely to become outwardly a religious man. He will probably become very moral, and perhaps a professed Christian. Why? Because his love of reputation is a controlling principle

The truth will justify a still stronger supposition. Let an impenitent man change his circumstances as we have supposed, and it will not merely affect his outward conduct, but will lead him to sympathize very strongly in his feelings with Christian people. This will be a natural result of his association with them. And yet the man may not be at all aware that it is his love of reputation that has brought him to this state of feeling, so changed from what he experienced when associated with wicked men. Hence it will be no strange thing if he comes to think himself a Christian. And indeed a great change has come over him, if you look only at his external conduct and his sympathy with his associates.

We may suppose that before a young man comes into this community, he was in the habit of frequenting balls, often drank freely, and nearly to intoxication and spent his money generously so as to be thought a hale fellow among his comrades; but he comes here--finds a different set of associates--breaks off his former habits and falls in with theirs--finds that his sympathies set almost as strongly with his new associates as they did with his old ones, and, amazed, he cries out--How changed I am! Surely this must be religion! It must be that I have become a Christian! I have no taste for strong drink; can do without my cigars; am just as happy without balls and routes; indeed I seem to take much the same pleasure in religious meetings now as I did in my social convivialities then; it must be that I am indeed converted! Now this man does not consider that all this change in him may result from the change in his circumstances, and that under the influence solely of his love of reputation and of the law of sympathy with associates he may experience all this change without a particle of religion. Indeed if he loves his own reputation and is a thoroughly selfish man, he will naturally modify his course to suite his changed circumstances.

Again, as selfish considerations alone produce this change, the improvement

made in his deportment or in his sympathies may not make his guilt at all the less; nay, it may be really greater now than it was before. If his light is greater, of course his guilt will be.

Let us look at this supposed case again. That young man who came here used now and then to get drunk--to visit her "whose house is the way to hell"--to laugh and jeer at prayer and piety; but now mark the change;--he comes into a religious family and bows the knee with them in prayer; he goes regularly with them to social worship, nay perhaps he even prays sometimes in his closet; the profane oath, the derisive laugh at religion and the daring deeds of sin are abandoned; and with one voice the people say--how much this man is improved! But mark ye; if his light has increased and he has not repented of his sins before God, his guilt is greater than ever before, instead of being less. He is just as selfish--just as really opposed to God as he ever was, and the fact that he manages it in a more decent way and has adopted a mode of sinning which conforms itself to his circumstances only shows that he uses some discretion in carrying out the ruling principle of his heart.

But we may take a case even stronger still. Let a man come into Oberlin who has been an atheist and a pirate--for most pirates are in principle atheists; take one who has been raised among bloody men in the Spanish West Indies, who boasted in New York city that he had murdered five hundred men--let this man come into Oberlin to reside among us. He has a friend here and after staying awhile with his friend, he takes it into his head that he will get an education. You may look into his trunk and you find it full of bowie knives and pistols; examine his overcoat, you will find his pockets freighted with death-weapons; he wears them for awhile, but soon is ashamed to do what nobody else here does and lays them carefully away where none will ever see them. By and by you see him in a prayer-meeting--the man who used to make the very air blue around him with horrid blasphemy, is in the place of prayer and on his knees, and possibly you may hear his voice in supplication; at all events, you see him civil, respectful towards religion--he gives up his atheism; but we may suppose continues still impenitent. Yet he professes to approve the plan of salvation and proclaims it a glorious plan. Now this man, so changed--so humanized, so much better as a citizen than before, may really be ten-fold more the child of hell now than ever before. Do you ask, how can this be? I answer, for the simple reason that his light is indefinitely greater than it was before, and yet he remains a selfish, impenitent man. His resistance to light and consequently his guilt against God

are vastly enhanced by this change through which he has passed.

Until we get hold of the true idea of sin and holiness, we can never tell when men are growing better. We shall make the most egregious mistakes, and have no standard by which to correct them.

You might take this man, formerly so vile, and vicious; you might wash and white-wash his exterior ever so much; you might fit him for any lady's saloon, nay so far as the exterior is concerned, you might fit him to grace a mansion among angels, yet if he remains an impenitent sinner, he has only become the more wicked; that outside finish is only the garnishing of a sepulcher, which within is all pollution.

There are probably in this place, nay even under the sound of my voice, persons more guilty than any pirates in the universe--more monstrously wicked than the pirate Gibbs, who boasted that he had murdered so many men. The selfishness of Gibbs took one particular form; the selfishness of gospel-hardened sinners here, a different form; different, but not a whit less hostile to God, or less odious in His sight, or less really depraved and worthy of eternal condemnation. The blackest malignity as estimated by God belongs to that form of selfishness which has resisted and still resists most light.

There may be some young women here more abominably wicked than you can find in the most polluted harlot's house--even young women against whose virtue and external conduct no charge can lie, and who can scarce hear the word licentiousness without a blush. Now wherein lies the difference between this refined, impenitent young lady, and the most corrupt harlot? Only in this; that each seeks her own self-gratification, but in different ways, and the one persists in this self-seeking despite the influence of more light and stronger dissuasives from heaven, earth, and hell, than are present to the mind of the other. She who has most of Capernaum's light to sin against must have most of Capernaum's woes to suffer, and for the best of reasons. The ultimate end of moral action--the only thing at which God looks, being the same in both cases, each has the same kind of moral character; and the difference in degree of guilt remains to be estimated by the amount of light enjoyed and resisted.

Again, as each sinner, remains impenitent, resists all the light he has, he is just as wicked, as under his circumstances, he can be. He persists in being supremely selfish despite of every reason known to him why he should repent; how then

can he be any more wicked, until he has more light to resist? You will all see this point clearly if you once get thoroughly before your mind the two points I have been laboring to elucidate--namely:

- (1.) That guilt is always and only in proportion to light resisted. And,
- (2.) That while impenitence continues, all those modifications of the external conduct which are only choice among different forms of rebellion against God, have absolutely nothing to do in the estimation of a sinner's guilt. Let these points be well understood, and you will readily see that every sinner who resists all the light he has is just as wicked as, under his circumstances, he can be.

Again, just in proportion as light increases, sinners are in danger of committing the unpardonable sin. It is plain from what the Bible says of this sin that only those commit it who have great light and who resist and abuse that light. Those Pharisees who blasphemed the Holy Ghost, knew full well that Christ's miracles were wrought by the finger of God, and yet they impiously ascribed them to the devil. They had great light, and they greatly abused it.

Now we may ultimately see that more persons commit the unpardonable sin in Oberlin than anywhere else in all the land, for the reason that great light is enjoyed here, and by some is greatly and impiously resisted.

This is the climax of all sin. To know enough of God to make you an angel and then resist it madly and malignantly enough to make you a devil--what can be a greater sin? What can be greater folly and shame and madness?

Yet we are not wont to estimate guilt according to these plain principles of the Bible and of reason. We see a pirate--we are shocked; we cry out--"He is a pirate! Horrible! He has murdered a hundred men! Oh, such a wretch! Surely he is not fit to live." Indeed he is a wretch, a horrible and wicked wretch; but there perhaps, sits another impenitent sinner who could not see blood spilt without having his own blood creep in his veins, who yet is the guiltier sinner of the two. This sinner, here in Oberlin, has been brought up religiously, has heard preaching enough to have converted a thousand souls, but has heard it only to harden his own heart--this sinner may be a hundred fold more guilty than any pirate, and much more likely to have committed the unpardonable sin. Let the gospel-hardened soul take warning!

Again, in the light of this subject we see how to account for the events which not unfrequently occur in the world's history. The most notorious sinners, it sometimes happens, are soon converted when they come under instruction, while in very religious places, it is almost impossible to promote a revival of religion and secure the conversion of sinner. You may go into the Sodoms of the land--the no-God settlements, as they are or may be called, and there you may find the word of God will fall with power on many hearts. I once went into a place called Sodom--notorious for its daring wickedness, where there was but one professor of religion and he bore the name of Lot. This man had invited me there to preach. I went--I came to the place of meeting and the people were all there; yet I felt strangely--could not fix my mind on any text to preach from--seemed perfectly shut up--but trusting in God I began the exercises: felt enlarged in prayer, and finally seized upon the text--"Up, get ye out of this place, for the Lord will destroy this city." It was a curious looking congregation. For a while I thought they would very likely pitch at me and drag me out of the house--they seemed ready to devour me in some way--but presently I saw what was moving their minds--the truth of God fell like quick, successive peals of thunder on their hearts; one after another fell from their seats; weeping, wailing, cries, screams, and prayers for mercy filled the whole house. I had to stop preaching, for I could not go on at all; and why? What was the matter? Only this: there was a company of ignorant persons who had indeed been regarded as the most wicked of sinners, but they had not hardened their hearts under the preaching of the gospel, and now when they came to hear a gospel sermon, its truth fell on their hearts like life from the dead.

So when you see a harlot converted, or a profane swearer or a notorious Sabbath-breaker, how do you account for the fact? You can ascribe it to the circumstance that they have not resisted so much light as thousands who have lived their life long under the gospel and consequently have not committed the unpardonable sin.

But look into that deacon's family, and that minister's family: there is a son or a daughter there who has lived amid the focal blaze of God's truth for years; is he converted? No--he is gospel hardened.

Finally, gospel hardened sinners and backsliders are the very worst people this side of hell. No matter how morally or genteelly their outside deportment may be modified, they have resisted all the light God could give them and have fearfully

filled up the measure of their guilt, That pious father may have great hopes of his morally behaved son--may think perhaps to train him for the ministry--Oh! does he not see that his hardened son is more fit for a minister of hell than of Christ and of heaven? That son may know enough of the gospel, it may be, to preach it; but if, with all this knowledge, he only hates that gospel: if he has trained himself to resist all this truth and all these motives which he has heard until they are to him an old story: then indeed is he far more fit to be an apostle of Satan than of Jesus Christ. The very worst character such a man can bear is that of an impenitent sinner. He cannot possibly do a worse thing than to persist in his impenitence under all the light which God pours upon his path from heaven.

[Back to Top](#)

The Rule by Which the Guilt of Sin is Estimated

Lecture II

February 4, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Acts 17:30-31: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead."

I recently preached a sermon on impenitence in which I dwelt at length on the guilt which attaches to sin committed against great light. I purpose now to discuss this point still farther.

The text declares that God will judge the world in righteousness. I shall not at this time dwell on the fact that God will judge the world, nor upon the fact that this judgment will be in righteousness; but shall endeavor to ascertain what is the rule by which our guilt is to be measured; or in other words what is implied in judging the world in righteousness. What is the righteous rule by which guilt is measured, and consequently the just punishment of the sinner allotted?

In pursuing this subject, I shall deem it important:

I. To state briefly what the conditions of moral obligation are; and

II. Come directly to the main point, the rule by which guilt is measured.

I. State briefly what the conditions of moral obligation are.

1. Moral obligation has respect to the ultimate intention of the mind. The end had in view, and not the mere external act must evermore be that to which law pertains and of which guilt is predicated. Surely guilt cannot be predicated on the outward act merely, apart from intention: for if the outward act be not according to the intention as in the case of accidents, we never think of imputing guilt; and if it be according to the intention, we always, when we act rationally, ascribe the guilt to the intention and not to the mere hand or tongue, which became the mind's organ in its wickedness.

This is a principle, which everybody admits when they understand it. The thing itself lies among the intuitive affirmations of every child's mind. No sooner has a child the first idea of right and wrong, but he will excuse himself from blame by saying that he did not mean to do it, and he knows full well, that if this excuse be true, it is valid and good as an excuse; and moreover he knows that you and everybody else both know this and must admit it. This sentiment thus pervades the minds of all men and none can intelligently deny it.

2. Having premised so much, I am prepared to remark that the first condition of moral obligation is the possession of the requisite powers of moral agency. There must be intelligence enough to understand in some measure the value of the end to be chosen or not chosen, else there can be no responsible choice. There must be some degree of sensibility to good sought, or evil shunned; else there never would be any action put forth, or effort made; and there must also be the power of choice between possible courses to be chosen. These are all most manifestly requisites for moral choice, or in other words for responsible moral action and obligation.

3. It is essential to moral obligation that the mind should know in some measure, what it ought to intend.

It must have some apprehension of the value of the end to be chosen, else there can be no responsible choice of that end, or responsible neglect to choose it. Everybody must see this, for if the individual when asked, why he did not choose a given end, could answer truly, "I did not know that the end was valuable and worthy of choice," all men would deem this a valid acquittal from moral delinquency.

4. Supposing the individual to know what he ought to choose; then his obligation to choose it does not grow out of the fact of God's requiring it, but lies in the value of the end to be chosen. I have said that he must perceive the end to be chosen, and in some measure understand its value. This is plain. And this apprehension of its value is that which binds him to choose it. In other words, the moral law which enjoins love, or good willing must be subjectively present to his mind. His mind must have a perception of good which he can will to others, in connection with which a sense of obligation to will it springs up, and this constitutes moral obligation.

These are substantially the conditions of moral obligation; the requisite mental powers for moral action; and a knowledge of the intrinsic value of the good of being.

Before leaving this topic, let me remark that very probably, no two creatures in the moral universe may have precisely the same degree of intelligence respecting the value of the end they ought to choose; yet shall moral obligation rest upon all these diverse degrees of knowledge, proportioned evermore in degree to the measure of this knowledge which any mind possesses. God alone has infinite and changeless knowledge on this point.

II. I come now to speak of the rule by which the guilt of refusing to will or intend according to the law of God must be measured.

1. Negatively, guilt is not to be measured by the fact that God who commands is an infinite being. The measure of guilt has sometimes been made to turn on this fact, and has been accounted infinite because God whose commands it violates is infinite. But this doctrine is inadmissible. It lies fatally open to this objection, that by it all sin is made to be equally guilty, because all sin is equally committed against an infinite being. But both the Bible and every man's intuitive reason proclaim that all sins are not equally guilty. Hence the measure or rule of their guilt cannot be in the fact

of their commission against an infinite being.

2. Guilt cannot be measured by the fact that God's authority against which sin is committed is infinite. Authority is the right to command. No one denies that this in God is infinite. But this fact cannot constitute the measure of guilt, for precisely the reason just given--namely, that then all sin becomes equally guilty, being all committed against infinite authority; which conclusion is false, and therefore the premises are also.

3. The degree of guilt cannot be estimated by the fact that all sin is committed against an infinitely holy and good being; for reasons of the same kind as just given.

4. Nor from the value of the law of which sin is a transgression; for though all admit that the law is infinitely good and valuable, yet since it is always equally so, all sin by this rule must be equally guilty--a conclusion which being false, vitiates and sets aside our premises.

5. The rule cannot lie in the value of that which the law requires us to will, intend or choose, considered apart from the mind's perception of the value; for the intrinsic value of this end is always the same, so that this rule too as the preceding would bring us to the conclusion that all sins are equally guilty.

6. Guilt is not to be measured by the tendency of sin. All sin tends to one result--unmingled evil. No created being can tell what sins have the most direct and powerful tendency to produce evil; since all sin tends to produce evil and only evil continually. Every modification of sin may for ought we know tend with equal directness to the same result--evil, and nothing but evil.

7. Guilt cannot be measured by the design or ultimate intention of the sinner. It does indeed lie in his design and in nothing else; yet you cannot determine the amount of it by merely knowing his design; for this design is always substantially the same thing--it is always self-gratification in some form, and nothing else. I endeavored to show this in my last sermon on impenitence, and we need to get this idea thoroughly into our minds. The general design of the sinner being always self-gratification, and it making very little if any difference in his guilt what form of self-gratification he

chooses, it follows that the measure of guilt cannot be sought here, and must therefore be sought elsewhere.

8. But it is time I should state, positively, that guilt is always to be estimated by the degree of light under which the sinful intention is formed, or in other words, it is to be measured by the mind's knowledge or perception of the value of that end which the law requires to be chosen. This end is the highest well being of God and of the universe. This is of infinite value; and in some sense every moral agent must know it to be of infinite value, and yet individuals may differ indefinitely in respect to the degree of clearness with which this great end is apprehended by the mind. Choosing this end--the highest well-being of God and of the universe always implies the rejection of self-interest as an end; and on the other hand, the choice of self-interest or self-gratification as an end always and necessarily implies the rejection of the highest well-being of God and of the universe as an end. The choice of either implies the rejection of its opposite.

Now the sinfulness of a selfish choice consists not merely in its choice of good to self, but in its implying a rejection of the highest well-being of God and of the universe as a supreme and ultimate end. If selfishness did not imply the apprehension and rejection of other and higher interests as an end, it would not imply any guilt at all. The value of the interests rejected is that in which the guilt consists. In other words the guilt consists in rejecting the infinitely valuable well-being of God and of the universe for the sake of selfish gratification.

Now it is plain that the amount of guilt is as the mind's apprehension of the value of the interests rejected. In some sense as I have said, every moral agent has and must of necessity have the idea that the interests of God and of the universe are of infinite value. He has this idea developed so clearly that every sin he commits deserves endless punishment, and yet the degree of his guilt may be greatly enhanced by additional light, so that he may deserve punishment not only endless in duration but indefinitely great in degree. Nor is there any contradiction in this. If the sinner cannot affirm that there is any limit to the value of the interests he refuses to will and to pursue, he cannot of course affirm that there is any limit to his guilt and desert of punishment. This is true and must be true of every sin and of every sinner; and yet as light increases and the mind gains a clearer apprehension of the infinite value of

the highest well-being of God and of the universe, just in that proportion does the guilt of sin increase. Hence the measure of knowledge possessed of duty and its motives, is always and unalterably the rule by which guilt is to be measured.

The proof of this is two-fold.

(1.) The scriptures assume and affirm it.

The text affords a plain instance. The apostle alludes to those past ages when the heathen nations had no written revelation of God, and remarks that "those times of ignorance God winked at." This does not mean that God connived at their sin because of their darkness, but does mean that He passed over it with comparatively slight notice, regarding it as sin of far less aggravation than those which men would now commit if they turned away when God commanded them all to repent. True sin is never absolutely a light thing; but comparatively, some sins incur small guilt when compared with the great guilt of other sins. This is implied in our text.

I next cite James 4:17. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." This plainly implies that knowledge is indispensable to moral obligation; and even more than this is implied; namely, that guilt of any sinner is always equal to the amount of his knowledge on the subject. It always corresponds to the mind's perception of the value of the end which should have been chosen, but is rejected. If a man knows he ought in any given case to do good, and yet does not do it, to him this is sin--the sin plainly lying in the fact of not doing good when he knew he could do it, and being measured as to its guilt by the degree of that knowledge.

John 9:41. "Jesus said unto them, if ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, we see; therefore your sin remaineth." Here Christ asserts that men without knowledge would be without sin; and that men who have knowledge, and sin notwithstanding, are held guilty. This plainly affirms that the presence of light or knowledge is requisite to the existence of sin, and obviously implies that the amount of knowledge possessed is the measure of the guilt of sin.

It is remarkable that the Bible everywhere assumes first truths. It does

not stop to prove them, or even assert them--it always assumes their truth, and seems to assume that every one knows and will admit them. As I have been recently writing on moral government and studying the Bible as to its teachings on this class of subjects, I have been often struck with this remarkable fact.

John 15:22, 24. "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sins. He that hateth Me, hateth My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father." Christ holds the same doctrine here as in the last passage cited, light essential to constitute sin, and the degree of light, constituting the measure of its aggravation. Let it be observed, however, that Christ probably did not mean to affirm in the absolute sense that if He had not come, the Jews would have had no sin; for they would have had some light if He had not come. He speaks as I suppose comparatively. Their sin if He had not come would have been so much less as to justify His strong language.

Luke 12: 47-48. "And that servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."

Here we have the doctrine laid down and the truth assumed that men shall be punished according to knowledge. To whom much light is given, of him shall much obedience be required. This is precisely the principle that God requires of men according to the light they have.

1 Tim. 1:13. "Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." Paul had done things intrinsically as bad as well they could be; yet his guilt was far less because he did them under the darkness of unbelief; hence he obtained mercy, when otherwise, he might not. The plain assumption is that his ignorance abated from the malignity of his sin, and favored his obtaining mercy.

In another passage, (Acts 26:9) Paul says of himself--"I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." This had everything to do with the degree of his guilt in rejecting the Messiah, and also with his obtaining pardon.

Luke 23:34. "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." This passage presents to us the suffering Jesus, surrounded with Roman soldiers and malicious scribes and priests, yet pouring out His prayer for them, and making the only plea in their behalf which could be made--"for they know not what they do." This does not imply that they had no guilt, for if that were true they would not have needed forgiveness; but it did imply that their guilt was greatly palliated by their ignorance. If they had known Him to be Messiah, their guilt might have been unpardonable.

Matt. 11:20-24. "Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for thee." But why does Christ thus upbraid these cities? Why denounce so fearful a woe on Chorazin and Capernaum? Because most of His mighty works had been wrought there. His oft-repeated miracles which proved Him the Messiah had been wrought before their eyes. Among them He had taught daily, and in their synagogues every Sabbath day. They had great light--hence their great--their unsurpassed guilt. Not even the men of Sodom had guilt to compare with theirs. The city most exalted, even as it were to heaven, must be brought down to the deepest hell. Guilt and punishment, evermore, according to light enjoyed but resisted.

Luke 11:47-51. "Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchers of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witness that ye

allow the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchers. Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: that the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation. From the blood of Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you it shall be required of this generation." Now here, I ask, on what principle was it that all the blood of martyred prophets ever since the world began was required of that generation? Because they deserved it; for God does no such thing as injustice. It never was known that He punished any people or any individual beyond their desert.

But why and how did they deserve this fearful and augmented visitation of the wrath of God for past centuries of persecution?

The answer is two-fold: they sinned against accumulated light: and they virtually endorsed all the persecuting deeds of their fathers, and concurred most heartily in their guilt. They had all the oracles of God. The whole history of the nation lay in their hands. They knew the blameless and holy character of those prophets who had been martyred; they could read the guilt of their persecutors and murderers. Yet under all this light, themselves go straight on and perpetrate deeds of the same sort, but of far deeper malignity.

Again, in doing this they virtually endorse all that their fathers did. Their conduct towards the Man of Nazareth, put into words would read thus--"The holy men whom God sent to teach and rebuke our fathers, they maliciously traduced and put to death; they did right, and we will do the same thing towards Christ." Now it was not possible for them to give a more decided sanction to the bloody deeds of their fathers. They underwrote for every crime--assume upon their own consciences all the guilt of their fathers. In intention, they do those deeds over again. They say, "if we had lived then we should have done and sanctioned all they did."

On the same principle the accumulated guilt of all the blood and miseries of Slavery since the world began rests on this nation now. The guilt involved in every pang, every tear, every blood-drop forced out by the

knotted scourge--all lies at the door of this generation. Why? Because the history of all the past is before the pro-slavery men of this generation, and they endorse the whole by persisting in the practice of the same system and of the same wrongs. No generation before us ever had the light on the evils and the wrongs of Slavery that we have; hence the guilt exceeds that of any former generation of slave-holders; and, moreover, knowing all the cruel wrongs and miseries of the system from the history of the past, every persisting slave-holder endorses all the crimes and assumes all the guilt involved in the system and evolved out of it since the world began.

Romans 7:13. "Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, worketh death in me by that which is good, that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." The last clause of this verse brings out clearly the principle that under the light which the commandment, that is, the law, affords, sin becomes exceeding guilty. This is the very principle, which, we have seen, is so clearly taught and implied in numerous passages of Scripture.

The diligent reader of the Bible knows that these are only a part of the texts which teach the same doctrine: we need not adduce any more.

(2.) I remark that this is the rule and the only just rule by which the guilt of sin can be measured. If I had time to turn the subject over and over--time to take up every other conceivable supposition, I could show that none of them can possibly be true. No supposition can abide a close examination except this, that the rule or measure of guilt is the mind's knowledge pertaining to the value of the end to be chosen.

There can be no other criterion by which guilt can be measured. It is the value of the end chosen which constitutes sin guilty, and the mind's estimate of that value measures its own guilt. This is true according to the Bible as we have seen; and every man needs only consult his own consciousness faithfully and he will see that it is equally affirmed by the mind's own intuition to be right.

A few inferences may be drawn from our doctrine.

1. Guilt is not to be measured by the nature of the intention; for

sinful intention is always a unit--always one and the same thing--being nothing more nor less than self-gratification.

2. Nor can it be measured by the particular type of self-gratification which the mind may prefer. No matter which of his numerous appetites or propensities the man may choose to indulge--whether for food, for strong drink--for power, pleasure, or gain--it is the same thing in the end--self-gratification, and nothing else. For the sake of this he sacrifices every other conflicting interest, and herein lies his guilt. Yet since he tramples on the greater good of others with equal recklessness, whatever type of self-gratification he prefers, it is plain that we cannot find in this type any true measure of his guilt.

3. Nor again is the guilt to be decided by the amount of evil which the sin may bring into the universe. An agent not enlightened may introduce great evil and yet no guilt attach to this agent. This is true of evil often done by brute animals. It is true of the mischiefs effected by alcohol. In fact it matters not how much or how little evil may result from the misdeeds of a moral agent, you cannot determine the amount of his guilt from this circumstance. God may overrule the greatest sin so that but little evil shall result from it, or He may leave its tendencies uncounteracted so that great evils shall result from the least sin. Who can tell how much or how little overruling agency may interpose between any sin great or small and its legitimate results?

Satan sinned in betraying Judas, and Judas sinned in betraying Christ. Yet God so overruled these sins that most blessed results to the universe followed from Christ's betrayal and consequent death. Shall the sins of Satan and Judas be estimated by the evils actually resulting from them? If it should appear that the good immensely overbalanced the evil, does their sin thereby become holiness--meritorious holiness? Is their guilt at all the less for God's wisdom and love in overruling it for good?

It is not therefore the amount of resulting good or evil which determines the amount of guilt, but is the degree of light enjoyed,

under which the sin is committed.

4. Nor again can guilt be measured by the common opinions of men. Men associated in society are wont to form among themselves a sort of public sentiment which becomes a standard for estimating guilt; yet how often is it erroneous? Christ warns us against adopting this standard, and also against ever judging according to the outward appearance. Who does not know that the common opinions of men are exceedingly incorrect? It is indeed wonderful to see how far they diverge in all directions from the Bible standard.

5. The amount of guilt can be determined as I have said only by the degree in which those ideas are developed which throw light upon obligation. Just here sin lies, in resisting the light and acting in opposition to it, and therefore the degree of light should naturally measure the amount of guilt incurred.

REMARKS.

1. We see from this subject the principle on which many passages of scripture are to be explained. It might seem strange that Christ should charge the blood of all the martyred prophets of past ages on that generation. But the subject before us reveals the principle upon which this is done and ought to be done.

Whatever of apparent mystery may attach to the fact declared in our text--"The times of this ignorance God winked at"--finds in our subject an adequate explanation. Does it seem strange that for ages God should pass over almost without apparent notice the monstrous and reeking abominations of the Heathen world? The reason is found in their ignorance. Therefore God winks at those odious and cruel idolatries. For all, taken together, are a trifle compared with the guilt of a single generation of enlightened men.

2. One sinner may be in such circumstances as to have more light and knowledge than the whole Heathen world. Alas! how little the Heathen know! How little compared with what is known by sinners in this land, even by very young sinners!

Let me call up and question some impenitent sinner of Oberlin. It matters but little who--let it be any Sabbath School child.

What do you know about God?

I know that He is infinitely great and good. But the Heathen thinks some of his gods are both mean and mischievous--wicked as can be and the very patrons of wickedness among men.

What do you know about salvation? I know that God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son to die that whosoever would believe on Him might live forever. O, the Heathen never heard of that. They would faint away methinks in amazement if they should hear and really believe the startling, glorious fact. And that Sabbath School child knows that God gives His Spirit to convince of sin. He has perhaps often been sensible of the presence and power of the Spirit. But the Heathen know nothing of this.

You too know that you are immortal--that beyond death there is still a conscious unchanging state of existence, blissful or wretched according to the deeds done here. But the Heathen have no just ideas on this subject. It is to them as if all were a blank.

The amount of it then is that you know everything--the Heathen almost nothing. You know all you need to know to be saved, to be useful--to honor God and serve your generation according to His will. The Heathen sit in deep darkness, wedded to their abominations, groping, yet finding nothing.

As your light therefore, so is your guilt immeasurably greater than theirs. Be it so that their idolatries are monstrous--your guilt in your impenitence under the light you have is vastly more so. See that Heathen mother dragging her shrieking child and tumbling it into the Ganges? See her rush with another to throw him into the burning arms of Moloch. Mark; see that pile of wood flashing, lifting up its lurid flames toward heaven. Those men are dragging a dead husband--they heave his senseless corpse on to that burning pile. There comes the widow--her hair disheveled and flying--gaily festooned for such a sacrifice; she dances on; she rends the air with her howls and her wailings; she shrinks and yet she does not shrink--she leaps on the pile, and the din of music with the yell of spectators buries her shrieks of agony; she is gone! O, my blood curdles and runs cold in my veins; my hair stands on end; I am horrified with such scenes--but what shall we say of their guilt? Ah yes--what do they know of God--of worship--of the claims of God upon their heart and life? Ah, you may well spare your censure of the Heathen for their fearful orgies of cruelty and lust, and give it where light has

been enjoyed and resisted.

3. You see then that often a sinner in some of our congregations may know more than all the Heathen world know. If this be true, what follows from it as to the amount of his comparative guilt? This, inevitably, that such a sinner deserves a direr and deeper damnation than all the Heathen world! This conclusion may seem startling; but how can we escape from it? We cannot escape. It is as plain as any mathematical demonstration. This is the principle asserted by Christ when He said--"That servant which knew his Lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to His will shall be beaten with many stripes; but he that knew not and did commit things worthy of stripes; shall be beaten with few stripes." How solemn and how pungent the application of this doctrine would be in this congregation! I could call out many a sinner in this place and show him that beyond question his guilt is greater than that of all the Heathen world. Yet how few ever estimated their own guilt thus.

Not long since an ungodly young man, trained in this country, wrote back from the Sandwich Islands a glowing and perhaps a just description of their horrible abominations, moralizing on their monstrous enormities and thanking God that he had been born and taught in a Christian land. Indeed! He might well have spared this censure of the dark-minded Heathen! His own guilt in remaining an impenitent sinner under all the light of Christian America was greater than the whole aggregate guilt of all those Islands.

So we may all well spare our expressions of abhorrence at the guilty abominations of idolatry. You are often perhaps saying in your heart--Why does God endure these horrid abominations another day? See that rolling car of Juggernaut. Its wheels move axle deep in the gushing blood and crushed bones of its deluded worshipers! And yet God looks on and no red bolt leaps from His right hand to smite such wickedness. They are indeed guilty; but O how small their guilt compared with the guilt of those who know their duty perfectly, yet never do it! God sees their horrible abominations, yet does He wink at them because they are done in so much ignorance.

But see that impenitent sinner. Convicted of his sin under the clear gospel light that shines all around him, he is driven to pray. He knows he ought to repent, and almost thinks he wants to, and will try. Yet still he clings to his sins, and will not give up his heart to God. Still he holds his heart in a state of impenitence. Now mark here; his sin in thus withholding his heart from God under so much light,

involves greater guilt than all the abominations of the heathen world. Put together the guilt of all those widows who immolate themselves on the funeral pile--of those who hurl their children into the Ganges, or into the burning arms of Moloch--all does not begin to approach the guilt of that convicted sinner's prayer who comes before God under the pressure of his conscience, and prays a heartless prayer, determined all the while to withhold his heart from God. O, why does this sinner thus tempt God, and thus abuse His love, and thus trample on His known authority? O, that moment of impenitence, while his prayers are forced by conscience from his burning lips, and yet he will not yield the controversy with his Maker--that moment involves direr guilt than rests on all the Heathen world together! He knows more than they all, yet sins despite of all his knowledge. The many stripes belong to him--the few to them.

4. This leads me to remark again, that the Christian world may very well spare their revilings and condemnations of the Heathen. Of all the portions of earth's population, Christendom is infinitely the most guilty--Christendom, where the gospel peals from ten thousand pulpits--where its praises are sung by a thousand choirs, but where many thousand hearts that know God and duty, refuse either to reverence the one or perform the other! All the abominations of the Heathen world are a mere trifle compared with the guilt of Christendom. We may look down upon the filth and meanness and degradation of a Heathen people, and feel a most polite disgust at the spectacle--and far be it from me, to excuse these degrading, filthy or cruel practices; but how small their light and consequently their guilt compared with our own! We therefore ask the Christian world to turn away from the spectacle of Heathen degradation, and look nearer home, upon the spectacle of Christian guilt! Let us look upon ourselves.

5. Again, let us fear not to say what you must all see to be true, that the nominal church is the most guilty part of Christendom. It cannot for a moment be questioned, that the church has more light than any other portion; therefore has she more guilt. Of course I speak of the nominal church--not the real church whom He has pardoned and cleansed from her sins. But in the nominal church, think of the sins that live and riot in their corruption. See that backslider. He has tasted the waters of life. He has been greatly enlightened. Perhaps he has really known the Lord by true faith--and then see, he turns away to beg the husks of earthly pleasure! He turns his back on the bleeding Lamb! Now, put together all the guilt of every Heathen soul that has gone to hell--of every soul that has gone from a state of utter moral darkness, and your guilt, backsliding Christian, is

greater than all theirs!

Do you, therefore say--may God then, have mercy on my soul? So say we all; but we must add, if it be possible; for who can say that such guilt as yours can be forgiven! Can Christ pray for you as he prayed for His murderers--"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?" Can He plead in your behalf, that you know not what you are doing? Awful! Awful!! Where is the sounding line that shall measure the ocean-depth of your guilt!

6. Again, if our children remain in sin, we may cease to congratulate ourselves that they were not born in Heathenism or slavery! How often have I done this! How often, as I have looked upon my sons and daughters, have I thanked God that they were not born to be thrown into the burning arms of a Moloch, or to be crushed under the wheels of Juggernaut! But if they will live in sin, we must suspend our self-congratulations for their having Christian light and privileges. If they will not repent, it were infinitely better for them to have been born in the thickest Pagan darkness--better to have been thrown in their tender years into the Ganges, or into the fires which idolatry kindles--better be anything else, or suffer anything earthly, than have the gospel's light only to shut it out and go to hell despite of its admonitions.

Let us not, then be hasty in congratulating ourselves, as if this great light enjoyed by us and by our children, were of course a certain good to them; but this we may do--we may rejoice that God will honor Himself--His mercy if He can, and His justice if He must. God will be honored, and we may glory in this. But oh, the sinner, the sinner! Who can measure the depth of his guilt, or the terror of his final doom! It will be more tolerable for all the heathen world together than for you.

7. It is time that we all understood this subject fully, and appreciated all its bearings. It is no doubt true, that however moral our children may be, they are more guilty than any other sinners under heaven, if they live in sin, and will not yield to the light under which they live. We may be perhaps congratulating ourselves on their fair morality; but if we saw their case in all its real bearings, our souls would groan with agony--our bowels would be all liquid with anguish--our very hearts within us would heave as if volcanic fires were kindled there--so deep a sense should we have of their fearful guilt and of the awful doom they incur in denying the Lord that bought them, and setting at naught a known salvation. O, if we ever pray, we should pour out our prayers for our offspring as

if nothing could ever satisfy us or stay our importunity, but the blessings of a full salvation realized in their souls.

Let the mind contemplate the guilt of these children. I could not find a Sabbath school child, perhaps not one in all Christendom who could not tell me more of God's salvation than all the Heathen world know. That dear little boy who comes from his Sabbath school knows all about the gospel. He is almost ready to be converted, but not quite ready; yet that little boy, if he knows his duty, and yet will not do it, is covered with more guilt than all the Heathen world together. Yes, that boy, who goes alone and prays, yet holds back his heart from God, and then his mother comes and prays over him, and pours her tears on his head, and his little heart almost melts, and he seems on the very point of giving up his whole heart to the Savior; yet if he will not do it, he commits more sin in that refusal than all the sin of all the Heathen world--his guilt is more than the guilt of all the murders, all the drownings of children and burnings of widows, and deeds of cruelty and violence in all the heathen world. All this combination of guilt shall not be equal to the guilt of the lad who knows his duty, but will not yield his heart to its righteous claims.

8. "The Heathen," says an apostle, "sin without law, and shall therefore perish without law." In their final doom they will be cast away from God; this will be perhaps about all. The bitter reflection, "I had the light of the gospel and would not yield to it--I knew all my duty, yet did it not"--this cannot be a part of their eternal doom. This is reserved for those who gather themselves into our sanctuaries and around our family altars, yet will not serve their own Infinite Father.

9. One more remark. Suppose I should call out a sinner by name--one of the sinners of this congregation, a son of pious parents, and should call up the father also. I might say, "Is this your son?" Yes. What testimony can you bear about this son of yours? I have endeavored to teach him all the ways of the Lord. Son, what can you say? I know my duty. I have heard it a thousand times. I know I ought to repent, but I never would.

O, if we understood this matter in all its bearings, it would fill every bosom with consternation and grief. How would our bowels burn and heave as a volcano. There would be one universal outcry of anguish and terror at the awful guilt and fearful doom of such a sinner!

Young man, are you going away this day in your sins? Then, what angel can compute your guilt? O, how long has Jesus held out His hands, yes, His bleeding hands, and besought you to look and live! A thousand times, and in countless varied ways has He called, but you have refused; stretched out His hands, and you have not regarded. O, why will you not repent? Why not say at once; It is enough that I have sinned so long. I cannot live so any longer! O, sinner, why will you live so? Would you go down to hell--ah, to the deepest hell--where, if we would find you, we must work our way down a thousand years through ranks of lost spirits less guilty than you, ere we could reach the fearful depth to which you have sunk! O, sinner, what a hell is that which can adequately punish such guilt as thine!

[Back to Top](#)

On Divine Manifestations

Lecture III

March 18, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--John 14:15-17; 21-23: "If ye love me, keep my commandments; And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, the he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, (not Iscariot,) Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

Text.--2 Cor. 6:17, 18, and 7:1: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive

you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

In remarking upon these verses it is not my design to dwell upon all the thoughts they present or might suggest. I shall aim to illustrate,

I. The conditions of acceptance with God as here developed.

II. The conditions of hearty obedience to God.

III. The conditions of Divine manifestations.

IV. What is implied in these manifestations.

I. The conditions of acceptance with God.

This topic has been recently dwelt upon at considerable length in your hearing, and it has been shown most conclusively that the once unalterable condition of acceptance with God is entire obedience to his law. You must fully set your heart to obey God in all things--at all times--under all circumstances--you must in fact obey the whole law of God in spirit; that is--it must be the supreme, fixed, strong purpose of your soul to do all the will of God.

This is undoubtedly assumed in our texts, especially in the one from 2 Corinthians. In the context the Apostle urges the church at Corinth not to connect themselves unequally with unbelievers, urging as a reason that sin can have no fellowship with holiness; the temple of God no agreement with idols; "for ye," said he, "are the temple of the living God, for God has promised to dwell and walk in you;" and the condition of this promise is that you come out from among them and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing; then God will receive you, and will be a father unto you and ye his sons and daughters. Dropping the borrowed language of the Old Testament, the Apostle goes on to give in his own language what he understands to be the import of these promises and of their conditions. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." These therefore are the conditions of God's dwelling in us--cleansing ourselves from all filthiness--perfecting holiness in the

fear of God. Becoming pure in heart and life--renouncing all filthiness of either the flesh or the spirit;--this and nothing less than this can be the condition of acceptance with God.

This same truth is also plainly implied and taught in the passage from John's gospel. "If ye love me, keep my commandments. Then will I pray the Father and he will give you the Comforter &c." So again, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself unto him." Obedience and love, evermore inseparable, are here made the condition of the divine favor.

So every where throughout the Bible we are taught that God accepts only those who fully and most heartily obey him.

Indeed it cannot possibly be otherwise. The nature of God forbids that it should be. What! God accept a rebellious spirit and own him as his child! God smile on a heart still sinning! This were to subvert his throne, and abolish all moral distinctions in his kingdom! This were to treat sin and holiness alike, and show that he regards neither! This is just as impossible as for God to cease to be holy!

It must be therefore that God makes sincere and full-hearted obedience the one unalterable condition of his favor. It would be infinitely dishonorable to him to accept anything less.

The same truth is implied in making repentance a condition of being accepted of God. For repentance is nothing else than a hearty turning away from all sin to the full-hearted love and service of God.

II. We must next inquire for the conditions of rendering this obedience.

Full obedience, we have seen, is the condition of God's favor; but we have still to look for the conditions of this obedience itself. How shall we obey? Under what influence and motives and efforts may we hope to yield this obedience?

1. Faith. It has often struck my mind forcibly in reading the seventh and eighth chapters of Romans that the Apostle is here illustrating the impossibility of obeying the law of God without faith in Christ; not the impossibility of obeying it at all; but of obeying it under legal motives. Hence he shows that the law when it comes in contact with a depraved heart, the cross not being present, only provokes resistance and stirs up the

depths of the heart's depravity. And the utmost that can be effected is to elicit ineffectual struggles between the reason and conscience on the one hand, and imperious lusts on the other. But faith coming in gives the victory.

Such is manifestly the strain of his illustration in these chapters.

Again in Hebrews 11:6, we read that without faith it is impossible to please God. This is a most concise and explicit assertion to our point.

Galatians 5:6 teaches that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails any thing; but faith (alone avails) which works by love." That faith which becomes efficient through love is the capital thing in the gospel scheme. This avails; nothing else does or can.

In Acts 5:9 we have a passage strikingly in point. Peter is there testifying before the great council at Jerusalem, as to the manner in which the Gentile converts were sanctified. He says, God gave them the Holy Ghost even as he did us, and "put no difference between them and us, purifying their hearts by faith." By faith then did they come into a state of purity of heart and thus sincerely and fully obey God.

To the same purport is Acts 26:18 where the Lord appears to Paul and commissions him to go to the Gentiles and "open their eyes...that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified--(how) by faith that is in me." On this point then we see that the testimony of scripture is ample and explicit.

III. We are next to notice the conditions on which God and Christ will manifest themselves unto the soul.

This is expressly stated in the passage taken from the gospel of John. The entire scope of this passage is worthy of consideration. Christ was about to leave his disciples by his own death and ascension to heaven. Yet he bids his disciples not to grieve--tells them that he will come again,--yea come himself, with the Father, and take up his abode with them. The world, says he, shall not see me in these visitations and indwelling of my presence with you, but ye shall see me. How, asks Thomas, how can this be that thou wilt show thyself unto us, and yet the world shall not see thee? Then comes the explanatory answer. "If a man love me, he will keep my words and my Father will love him and we will come unto him

and make our abode with him." Love, therefore, leading the Christian to keep Christ's words--that is, love prompting and securing full obedience--these are the conditions, as here revealed.

So elsewhere throughout the Scriptures. So in our passage from Corinthians. "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and I will receive you." "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God;" so shall we realize the fulfillment of those exceeding great and precious promises which pledge us the indwelling presence and manifestations of God.

I have shown that according to the scriptures, faith is the condition of real and full obedience. Of course faith is also a condition of these manifestations. The soul must first believe in Christ and take hold of divine strength for its aid and of divine truth with realizing apprehension, before it will be thoroughly obedient.

Now considering faith as one of the conditions of these divine manifestations, the question may be asked--Must our faith fasten specifically on these promises of manifestations and plead with confidence for this particular blessing before it can be received? This is an interesting and important question.

In answer to it I remark, that this form of faith is not particularly alluded to among the conditions given in either of our texts. Obedience and love--purity of heart and life--are the things there specified.

Yet the general law in the spiritual world is clear and decisive on this point. When God gives a particular promise like this of manifesting himself to his people, he requires specific faith in that promise--a definite laying hold of those very words or at least of the idea of that promise, and a pleading of the faithfulness of God for its fulfillment.

Famine rages in Israel. Drought has parched all the land. The Lord is about to send rain, and to send it in answer to prayer. Yet he simply tells Elijah to go and meet Ahab. Elijah obeys. But we well understand that rain does not come without special prayer. In due season he bows his soul with mighty energy for rain.

There are passages of scripture which plainly show that specific blessings being promised, specific faith must take hold of these promises as a condition of their being given. In Ezekiel 36:37, the Lord having promised to cleanse his people

and give them a new heart, declares explicitly--"I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." This is given here as a universal principle of the government of God. So far as we know, the Lord never departs from this principle in his spiritual administration towards his people. Whenever he has promised a blessing either to his church or to individuals, the mere promise does not secure the bestowment; faith must take hold of that promise; you must ask, and ask believing that plighted word of the Lord;--then he gives it and not before. Thus God elicits prayer--makes us prize the blessing and love the Giver.

The conditions then, briefly, of these manifestations are;--full-hearted obedience to all known duty--walking in faith, love and obedience; and taking hold by faith of God's promise for this very blessing. Take hold of this promise and wait earnestly and in confidence, honestly and earnestly meeting every revealed condition. Then shall the blessing be given.

IV. What is implied in Christ's manifesting himself to his people?

It would seem that it must mean something more than is commonly meant by faith; for the word manifest refers our minds rather to sight than to faith. I will do more, Christ seems to say, than make you believe; I will make you see. Your apprehensions of God and of his Son shall be most vivid. It shall be as if you saw with open vision. This shall be more than mere faith.

It is also something more than love--at least more than such love as is implied in keeping God's commandments; for so much as this is a condition of these manifestations; hence must precede them; and therefore cannot be the blessing itself.

We have a clue to the real meaning in the paraphrase which our Lord himself gives. "My Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." O there must be precious meaning in such words as these. "We will come unto him"--the Father and the Son will come to visit him and reveal themselves to his soul--and this for no transient hour; but "we will take up our abode with him." This must be very like heaven! What more, we might almost ask, would be requisite to make one's bliss like heaven?

What then, ask we again, is implied in these promised manifestations? More of course than giving a man the Bible--and more than making a man understand the

Bible. These gifts, great though they be, are never designated in such language as we find in the text. Positively:

(1.) These manifestations imply, the baptism of the Spirit. The context plainly shows that Christ had this in his mind. After giving the promise as in our text, He proceeds to promise the Comforter, to show that he would teach all things and bring those things to their remembrance which Christ had said to them. He would "glorify Christ, for he would receive of Christ's and show it unto them."

(2.) The text shows that the blessing promised, means the indwelling of the Father and of the Son by the Spirit. And this, as I have said is declared to be not a visit merely, but taking up an abode--not as a way-faring man who tarries for a night, but as a resident who makes your house his home.

Let it not be supposed from what I have said that the child of God to whom these manifestations are made, and who received the special baptisms of the Spirit, has of course never had the Spirit before. Let no one imagine that the faith and love and obedience which as I have said must precede these manifestations as their condition, can ever exist without the Spirit. By no means. But there is a higher kind and measure of the Spirit's influence and also a lower. The latter is essential to any sincere faith and love; the former comes only in those glorious manifestations of which our Lord here speaks.

This higher influence is said in our context to be sent by the ascended Savior on those who truly love him and fully keep all his commandments. The disciples plainly had received a lower measure of the Spirit's influence before;--now they receive a higher measure in the baptism of the Spirit.

(3.) Another thing is implied in these manifestations. Christ will actually reveal himself to the mind so that it shall know him in his official character and relations. And there is a deep and precious meaning in this. Often have I been struck with this in my own experience. Some new aspect of the Savior's character, or some new point in his relations comes before my mind with great vividness; I wonder I had not seen this before; I seem not to have been aware that Christ sustained this relation, and I now embrace him in this new relation and rejoice that I find him meeting and supplying one more want of my soul.

Thus for example, when Christ revealed a new feature of his relations to me through these words--"Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins." Then I saw him not merely an atoning Redeemer, but a Sanctifier--one who came to save his people from sinning. Then my soul knew Christ in this other and more glorious relation. But more of this.

(4.) When Christ manifests himself to the soul, the Christian is rather a knower than a believer. He does indeed believe--but he also more than believes. He not merely believes that Christ died and made atonement, but he is made to know Christ. How natural is the language which a Christian enjoying these manifestations uses so spontaneously--"I believed before, but now I know it." I was often struck with the strong language of Elder Marks on his sick and dying bed. He did not say--"I believe," but "I know." He would sit in his great chair, when he could not lie down, and laugh and then cry, overcome and convulsed often with deep, unutterable emotions because God was showing him his own blessed truth so that he knew it.

Now in such cases, this strong perception which we call seeing and knowing is not of the body but of the mind. It is not your external eye that sees, but your internal eye. Hence your perceptions are so clear and so vivid.

We here observe that when Christ manifests himself, there is something more than mere belief. There must be belief before this; a belief that begets love and obedience; but when Christ manifests himself by his Spirit, there is something more than this, Christ says, "the world shall not see me, but ye shall see me." Did he mean that he would come again during their life-time in his body, and that they should see this? No; but that he would make such revelations of himself that they should know that they had a personal interview with their Lord. He told them he was going away to heaven, but they need not grieve, for he should return again and show himself. Now did all this mean only that they should have faith in him? Much more than this;-- it meant that he would return and show himself and they should know assuredly that Christ was with them.

Again, when Christ manifests himself to the soul, it must be that the mind in some way has an assurance that it is not deceived, and that the manifestation is actual.

I have spoken of personal interviews with Christ. You are aware that in various

ages there have been many saints who have asserted that they had interviews with Christ. There were many cases of this before Christ's incarnation. Christ manifested his glory to Moses; to Isaiah--to John in Patmos--to Paul as he himself assures us. And in every age since, there have been those who have supposed themselves to have interviews with Christ. They are wont to say--"I have seen him." I have heard a man in this place say, he had seen Christ. He could not rid himself of the impression that he had truly seen the Lord.

Now on this point I am not going to say that Christ manifests himself to the bodily eyes of the saints, but the revelation is such that they do not know but they see him with their eyes. Perhaps it seems to them altogether as if they did.

I have often in your presence alluded to the circumstances attending my own conversion. When Christ first revealed himself to me, I certainly seemed to see him, and to rush and fall at his feet as really as if I were to turn about now and fall at Br. Mahan's feet. I felt a powerful drawing of soul towards him, as if my very soul would be drawn out of me;--I rushed into a private room and there I seemed to meet him. There--so it seemed--was Jesus--the very Savior!

Now this I do not mention because it is a peculiar case; it occurs or has occurred somewhat frequently in the experience of the people of God. Christians have often felt that they have seen Christ. They have no more question about the fact than about any other. They do not know that they see him with the bodily eye, but their mind sees Christ, and it makes all the impression on the mind of seeing.

Christ does not usually manifest himself so that one sees a form and shape; but so that the soul is perfectly conscious of the presence of Christ. I know a minister who has told me that at one particular period of his life it was frequently just as real to him that Christ was with him as that any man ever was. It seemed to him a matter of consciousness that Christ was present as much as it ever was that another man is present;--as much as if Christ had actually come down from heaven and kept by his side daily. This is Christ's making himself manifest.

It is intimated also that the Father comes and takes up his abode in the soul. This implies that the Holy Ghost reveals both Christ and the Father. Now it is certainly remarkable that in all Christian experience there is such a distinction between the Father and the Son. The Father is revealed as a father; Christ as Savior and Redeemer. The soul seems to know God distinctly in these two relations. It has no misgivings in respect to God's being indeed a father, more

than any child has respecting his own earthly father. So also the soul regards Christ as really the Redeemer, and comes to him as such.

Another thing. These manifestations involve the establishment of the soul's love and confidence. This is no doubt one of the principal designed objects of those manifestations. In the case of the primitive disciples, Christ meant to give them such a hold of the gospel as should prepare them for coming trials;--and should make them knowers and not mere believers.

Another result. Whenever Christ is thus manifested the external evidences of revealed religion have no longer any special force on the mind, comparatively; the minds' reliance is hence-forward chiefly on the internal evidence. I have often thought that if Christ had not revealed himself to me so that my mind took hold powerfully of the internal evidence, and was impressed forcibly by the manifestations to which I have alluded, I should have been an infidel, and should have apostatized utterly. It has often seemed that my natural incredulity is so great that nothing else but this could have kept me from being an infidel. My mind was in the habit of constant agitation under the questions--How do I know that this is so? How do I know but all this is delusion? Satan would often present these difficulties in the strongest light. I would set myself to reason upon them, and could see that according to all the rules of logic, all is clear and certain; yet at the same time I was conscious of such a state of mind that I knew I should not have believed if Christ had not given me conscious and certain manifestations.

These manifestations greatly confirm the mind in its convictions. Religion becomes a matter of experience so that the soul cannot but believe. If Christ manifests himself to the soul once, it can doubt no more. Yet such manifestations may be frequent, and if the conditions are fulfilled, will be.

Light from the scriptures is another result. The promise as applied to us, is that the Spirit shall take of the scriptures and show to us. Persons thus enlightened and privileged see more of the Bible than ever before. They have a new kind of confidence in it. They take up their Bible and find there new things unseen before.

RESULTS.

1. Many professors of religion seem to have lost sight of this truth. It is remarkable to see to what an extent this is true. Perhaps they have lost sight of

the strong faith which must precede them; perhaps they conceive of nothing better in religion than a dim hope, and enjoy nothing more. They seem to forget the conditions--"If a man love me, he will keep my sayings, and my Father will love him." In fact some seem to have lost the whole subject.

Again, there are not a few who understand this subject--know that they may have such manifestations; but have got the idea that it means more than it does; or their notions of what it is are entirely vague; they call it perhaps assurance of faith, or assurance of hope. but they fail of attaining because they quite overlook the conditions, or seem to forget that there are any conditions at all. Or as the case may be, they misapprehend the conditions, and set themselves to get it in some antinomian or legal way, and hence fail of any good result.

Others have the idea that obedience itself depends upon divine manifestations, and hence suppose they cannot obey till they get these manifestations. But this is not the Bible view of the subject. Our text says--If a man obey and love--then shall he have the manifestations--then, and not before.

Some set themselves to seek for these manifestations selfishly, for the luxury they may afford. Of course they fail of fulfilling the conditions and seek in vain. To seek these manifestations as some do that they may be distinguished and get honor to themselves, or if their motive be any other than the glory of God, the very seeking is an abomination to God, and will cause him to manifest to such seekers his wrath rather than his glory.

When persons set themselves to seek this blessing selfishly, they are commonly deluded by Satan, and suppose themselves to have obtained some great blessing when they have obtained no spiritual blessing at all. Satan, transformed in appearance to an angel of light deceives such men and makes them believe that God has revealed himself to them, when it is only the devil. This is my opinion as to such cases, and I will tell you why I think so. I have known several instances in which persons have related a most remarkable experience of most astonishing manifestations of God to the mind as they supposed; but the results were a bitter, hard, acrimonious spirit--a spirit of fierce denunciation instead of gentleness and love--a spirit such as the Holy Ghost never begets--but which is the genuine offspring of Satan's manifestations. Forthwith they plunge headlong into the most fantastical and absurd errors, and the most anti-christian practices. And yet in all these things, they will most pertinaciously insist that God is leading them. I have known several who gave up family prayer, and closet

prayer, and yet insisted that God led them in all this. By the fruits we may know that it was not God but Satan who induced them to abandon prayer.

This is the history of their case. They learn from the Bible that God promises manifestations; from merely selfish motives they seek this blessing; and God answers them according to their seeking and his promise. They set up the idol of their own selfishness in their hearts, and seeking God thus, He answers them according to their idols as He has said he would. The Lord suffers Satan to deceive them. No wonder they are exceedingly positive and as bitter as they are positive. The hand of Satan is in all this. How else can you account for their state?

Yet let it be well considered--such cases do not at all impair the integrity of these promises, and ought not to shake our confidence in them. The false prophets revealed strange things; yet we know that this was the work of Satan. There were true prophets none the less, and their messages were none the less worthy of confidence. Real prophecies did not fail of coming to pass because Satan deceived some false prophets.

It is doubtful whether such persons are for any considerable time very positive that God is leading them, and that the manifestations they have are from him. Usually God gives them so much light that they might, if they would, see that their leader is not God but Satan. Sometimes under these Satanic hallucinations the mind is thrown from its balance. Such cases are an exception to the remark last made.

Again I remark, it is of vast importance that this doctrine respecting divine manifestations should be fully developed throughout all the church, and especially among all gospel ministers. Suppose that all ministers had these interviews with Christ and lived so near to him--nay rather, had Christ and the Father abiding continually in their hearts;--would they not preach as if they had a Savior and knew him? Would not all their preaching then be full of Christ, and would it not reveal Christ to their hearers? Verily they might then say with John, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."

It is one of the greatest difficulties with ministers that they have lost this experience. They do not know Christ by the living experience of their hearts through his presence abiding within them. All that they can say about the gospel of Christ, they say upon mere faith as opposed to the clearer vision of these

promised manifestations. All is mere faith and often very dim. O how much better to see Christ and be able to testify from the burning impressions made by such divine visions of Jesus!

It is indeed well to be able really and fully to believe that Christ is with us; but the mind needs greatly to know this and have it in the mind as a living, burning reality, kindling every energy of the soul by its presence and power. Every minister needs this in order to preach with energy and demonstration of the Spirit. The whole church needs it and must have it before she can be clothed again with the glory and power of apostolic days.

Many persons call these divine manifestations, sanctification. But this seems not to be the scriptural view. The Scriptures plainly represent obedience and love as the conditions, and these manifestations as consequent upon their being fulfilled. Of course sanctification precedes as a condition and is not merely an effect. At the same time it is doubtless true that these abiding revelations of Christ to the soul exert a most hallowing agency, and may well be called a spiritual cleansing. They do indeed rectify the sensibility, mightily quickening it towards God and his truth, and thus serve to purify the soul. To the individual Christian they are life from the dead, giving a glorious vitality to all his spiritual apprehensions. If they might only become general, they would be like from the dead to the whole world. If all the church were to come under this influence--if all missionaries went forth with this experience; if it were a universal fact among them that Christ manifested himself among them so that they should know him as they know each other, and be as conscious of his presence and of his guidance too as they ever are of a Christian brother's presence and counsel. O what tremendous power would this give to the whole missionary enterprize!

This gave the early apostles their great power. Driven by fierce persecution, they assemble together; Christ comes among them; the whole place is shaken where they are assembled together; they pray for a bold and fearless spirit that they may preach Christ in the face of scorn and scourging--and they have it. Nothing can daunt such men--and nothing stand before them.

It would be richly instructive to read this portion of the apostle's history with the eye on this point, and see what the results were of having such manifestations as they had on Christ, and such baptisms of the Holy Ghost.

This great blessing should be sought by every Christian. None should rest till he

obtains it. Let his object in seeking it be the glory of God and his only; let him know that it is for the glory of God that he should have it, and that he cannot eminently glorify God without it--then let him know that if he will fulfill the conditions the blessing is surely given.

Every Christian is authorized to take this ground and ought to take it at once: If the conditions are within my power, as the Lord liveth, I will have it.

Let me say to those who doubt--this is the course you should pursue, for this will bring you the blessing you want. You need not be afraid to come to Christ and tell him all your difficulties; come in the simplicity and fulness of your heart and say, Lord thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee; thou knowest it is in my heart to know and do all they will; now come and manifest thyself unto me, and take up thine abode in my heart.

You need, brethren, only to seek these blessings with all your heart and you will obtain. I have been greatly struck with the fact that within the circle of my own observation these blessings are obtained of the Lord usually in this manner. Led by the Spirit of the Lord, an individual sets himself with great earnestness to mortify every lust and subdue every sin; he spares not his dearest idol; he loathes and abhors every thing that can separate his soul from his Savior, and puts it utterly away;--this being done his Savior comes and makes his gracious presence manifest. This is just what we might expect from Christ's language. When a Christian puts down every appetite and lust of body or mind that leads the heart away from Christ, and does all this for Christ, then let him know that he may lay hold of this promise of the Savior and say--Lord, I have humbly sought to fulfil all the conditions; now in thy mercy and faithfulness bestow on me the blessing." This is the remedy for doubting.

Then will the Savior come to your soul and reveal his glories. Then he will so attract your soul that you will cry after him in the spirit of adoption, entreating him to reveal himself yet more and more, until you can say--Surely the Lord hath done great things for me whereof I am glad and I will praise him; surely he hath done exceeding abundantly above all that I could ask or think; and to his name be all glory and praise forevermore.

[Back to Top](#)

On the Lord's Supper

Lecture IV

April 1, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 Cor. 11:23-29: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat; this is My body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death until He come. Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."

This text gives us the original institution of the Lord's supper. In discussing it I shall,

- I. Explain the design of this ordinance.*
- II. Show what is not implied in an acceptable reception of it.*
- III. What is implied in coming to the Lord's table acceptably.*
- IV. The consequences of an unworthy participation.*

I. The ordinance appears to have two great objects;

One, to show the bearings of the death of Christ in its governmental relations, as a substitute for the death of all who else must die; and the other, to show forth the spiritual relation existing between Christ and His people whereby they live by faith on Him. The breaking of this bread and the pouring out of this wine may

well represent the breaking of Christ's body and the shedding of His blood, and these emblems so far considered, doubtless set forth the atoning death of Christ as a sacrifice for our sins.

But the ordinance includes another important part; this bread is to be eaten, and this wine His people are to drink. Now the frequent instructions of Christ to His disciples have made us quite familiar with the use of this emblem to denote the life of faith; the fact that the hearts of Christ's people are purified, and animated with the spiritual life of the gospel, by means of receiving Jesus to their souls thus to purify and animate. Of this spiritual life, He is the living bread. Whoever eats shall live forever; whoever eats not, has no spiritual life.

Now the fact that Christ had already made so frequent use of this emblem and had so abundantly explained it, leaves us at no loss to assign this same relation as a secondary design of the ordinance of the supper. The breaking of the bread which He said denoted His body, might of itself indicate His death, and might suffice to exhibit its governmental relations; but the other great idea--the life of faith sustained by its appropriate spiritual food, required for its full illustration that these emblems of the Savior's body and blood should be received as food and incorporated into our very being.

Hence this ordinance not only shows forth Christ's death, but shows that by His death we live. If the question then be asked--Why do you eat this bread? The answer might be--To show that we live by Christ. In Him in a most precious spiritual sense, we live and move and have our being.

Again, this ordinance is intended to remind us of our sins, and of our relation as sinners to the death of Christ. When He gathers us round His table and spreads before us those elements which represent His mangled body and His flowing blood, and says so mildly and impressively, "This is My body which was broken for you," who can fail to think of those sins of his own for which Christ died? And who can be so hard of heart as not to be melted under the thought--my life, and peace cost the Son of God such a death--a death of fearful agony!

Yet again, this ordinance reminds us how hopeless was our condition as sinners, without Christ's interposition. Surely we cannot fail to reason this;--The Father would not have given up His well beloved Son to such a death if any sacrifice less costly could have sufficed. If man could have wrought out his own redemption; or if there had been any other eye to pity and other arm of adequate

power to save, then would the sacrifice of the blessed Jesus have been spared.

The hopelessness of our condition sent up its imploring cry to the throne of God for help. Deliverance could come from no lower source.

Still another object of this ordinance is to awaken and quicken our compassion for sinners. Around this table we see the fresh manifestations of the Savior's compassion for sinners; this should enkindle ours. Did He feel compassion for sinners, and shall not we also? Did His compassion burn so deeply and so strongly that He could die for sinners, and shall not our compassion at least move us to pray and weep and toil and deny ourselves that they may live? Shall there be no power in Christ's example to make us feel as He felt?

Yet again, this ordinance should keep alive in our hearts a sense of that great love which Jesus had for His enemies. We must not forget that it was for enemies--for us while we were yet sinners, that Christ died. Let us never lose sight of this fact, nor of the lesson it reads us respecting the feelings we should cherish towards all the enemies of God.

Oh, what a flood of light does this great fact shed upon the infinite compassion of Jehovah! Could He send His own Son to die for His enemies! Then we may hope in His mercy--if we will repent and trust Him.

Again, this ordinance is valuable as affording conclusive evidence of the truth of the Christian religion. Everybody knows that this ordinance exists. No fact of history is better attested than that it has existed as far back as the death of the Apostles.

But even if it were otherwise--if the historic evidence were very much less than it is, we should still stand on solid ground in affirming the utter impossibility of imposing such an ordinance upon mankind, if it had not been instituted by our Lord Himself. The fact of its existence therefore stands an incontrovertible proof of the great facts of the gospel scheme. It proves that Jesus Christ did die for the sins of men--and that He desired His followers to show forth this great fact to the end of the world.

II. We pass now to enquire what is not implied in an acceptable coming to the Lord's table.

It does not imply an avowal on our part, of Christian confidence in all those who

come with us, or of Christian fellowship with them. I have often met with persons who hesitated to come to this ordinance; and when I have asked them why they hesitated, they have replied--"There are persons there of whose piety I stand in doubt. Therefore I do not feel free to come." Now this position assumes that in coming to the Lord's table we endorse the piety of all who come with us.

But this cannot be correct ground. Judas was present when Christ first partook of the supper with His disciples. The disciples to be sure might not have suspected his hypocrisy, but Christ knew it well. The example of Christ therefore in coming and allowing His faithful eleven to come also and eat with the known traitor, forever settles this point.

Suppose the disciples had known Judas' true character. The circumstances might still have been such as to justify them in coming with him to the table. This is not the place to go into detail upon the duty of disciplining those who give evidence of hypocrisy; suffice it only to say that we do not of course make ourselves responsible in coming to the Lord's table for the sincere piety of all who come. They come on their own responsibility.

If I held the views of which I am speaking, I could not commune with any church I ever saw. I could not administer the supper to any church with which I have ever been acquainted. I may believe the church to be a church of Christ, and yet may not have satisfactory evidence of the piety of some of its individual members. The general confidence I have in Christian character of the church justifies me in administering the ordinance, or in communing with them.

Yet such scruples as I here refer to are very common, and are the alleged reason why many absent themselves from the Lord's table. The reason is not a good one. If the devil should come, I would come too. Why should I be kept away by him! If he comes, let him bear his own responsibility.

III. We next enquire what things are implied in coming to the Lord's table acceptably.

1. A living, efficient faith, as opposed to a faith that is dead and inefficient. A dead faith is a mere opinion, held in the intelligence, but not affecting the heart or the conduct. Men sometimes hold certain opinions, and suppose themselves to hold them with entire sincerity; yet those opinions have no efficient influence upon their life. Such a faith is of no avail.

On the other hand a living faith is a vital, efficient belief which at once affects and controls both the heart and the life. In every case of living faith, the mind receives the truth in love and cheerfully obeys it. This receiving the truth in love is a living faith. It is a trusting, confiding, committing the mind to the influence of truth. The efficiency of such a faith will be manifest.

It overcomes the world. "This is the victory that overcomes the world--even our faith."

This faith worketh by love--being efficient because love and trust are sweetly blended together,--this constitutes a fitness for acceptable coming to the Lord's table. But no amount of knowledge--faith being inefficient--can fit the soul to come to this table of the Lord.

2. Sympathy with Christ in His love for His church. All who come acceptably must have this. Christ's love was so great that He is represented as giving Himself--His very life for His church. Oh! what love is this! Love that could induce Him to lay His life down for His people! Let no one expect to be accepted at His table who does not sympathize deeply with Christ in this great love of His for His church.

3. Sympathy with Christ in His compassion for sinners. On this point we need to get before our minds the state of feeling in which Christ laid down His life for the lost and guilty. Into this feeling we must enter most fully if we would enjoy His presence and His smiles of love at His table.

In short you need to have a sympathy with the whole mind of Christ. Go back to the scenes of the last supper. There are His disciples. How intense the Savior's care and love for them! He would not leave them orphans--He could not part from them until He had promised them an abiding comforter--poured out His soul for them in prayer--giving them the largest promises, even assuring them that they might ask what they would in His name, and it would be given them.

Conceive too of the spirit with which He had all along anticipated the cross. Ready to sacrifice Himself--ready to be arrested, dragged like a lamb to the slaughter;--ready to be insulted, tortured, nailed to the tree--ready to endure anything--I mean not merely, anything short of death, but anything with death itself--any dorm of dying however full of agony. And all this for

sinners! Oh what an emptying of self! What a consecration to the good of the vile and the guilty! Was every love like this! With all this love we are to sympathize if we would come acceptable to His table.

Take still another view of this point. Suppose the disciples when they came together for the first time to this supper of their Lord, to have understood its design as well as they did afterwards. Then conceive how they must have felt. There sat the meek and lovely One, around whose feet they had so often gathered to hear His precious words; He is preparing to sacrifice Himself. It is as if a man were making ready his own winding sheet. He is thinking of a memorial by which His death for them shall be had in perpetual remembrance through their lives and throughout the lives of all that should believe on Him through their word down to the end of the world. Now if the disciples had well understood all this, with what emotions would they have gathered round that table! With emotions much the same should we now celebrate the supper He then instituted. If your souls, beloved, were thoroughly to enter into these sympathies, you would find yourselves drawn into most deep and blessed communion with your Savior at His table.

4. Another condition of acceptable communing in this ordinance is a deep sympathy with Christ in respect to the progress of His kingdom upon earth. One great and leading desire of this ordinance is to promote the progress of Christ's kingdom. It aims to quicken the faith, the zeal and the love of His people, and to testify before the ungodly to the great fact of the death of Jesus Christ for their salvation if they will come and receive it. We cannot therefore come acceptably unless we come in sympathy with Christ in this respect.

5. Every church must maintain wholesome discipline. If they neglect this they ought not to come to the Lord's table at all. They are guilty of greatly dishonoring Christ and His cause. How can it then be anything else than mockery for them to publish to the world their professions of honoring the Savior, as they do in coming to His table? If I as pastor should find that a church refused to maintain wholesome scriptural discipline, I should feel it my duty to refuse to administer to them this ordinance. I could not make myself accessory to their contempt of the Lord's authority and of the rules of His house.

6. Stumbling blocks must be removed. If any members of the church have

openly disgraced religion they must reform and put away the disgrace they have brought on the name of Jesus. Else how can they hope to meet His smiles at His table!

7. All difficulties between brethren should be amicably settled. The church ought to insist on this, before they come to the communion table. All hard feelings should be all means be allayed before brethren meet together at the Lord's table. How can they appear before their Lord with such feelings cherished towards one another! And do they think to secure the smiles of their Lord, coming themselves in such a spirit?

8. Self-examination is always an indispensable condition of coming acceptable. So Paul taught;--"But let a man examine himself and so eat of that bread and drink of that cup." This self-examination ought to be a most thorough scrutiny into one's own heart and life. We ought to know where we are and what our spiritual state is, before we come to the Lord's table to meet our Savior face to face. We ought to know whether we are prepared to come; we ought to know what blessings we need to seek from our Lord when we meet Him at His table.

9. It is always important to renew our covenant at these seasons of communion with Christ. I do not believe that Christians can come acceptable unless they do virtually renew their covenant with Christ on such occasions. It is eminently fit and proper at these seasons to review our past life--to see what sins we have committed--to repent of them; confess and forsake them and again solemnly renew our covenant to be the Lord's fully and forever. All this is so fit and proper that no Christian in the right frame of mind for acceptable participation can fail to do it. You sit around the table of your crucified Lord, and before you are the elements which bring to your mind the scenes of Calvary. You stand as it were by the side of the sacrificial Lamb, and as the Jews of old, so you now lay your hand on the head of the victim and "there confess your sins." How appropriate and solemn to confess one's sins over the broken body of Jesus Christ! What place can be like this for breaking one's heart for sin, and earnestly putting it forever away! Oh let us never come to this impressive scene without improving it for penitence and confession, and for solemn renewal of our covenant with our Savior!

10. Restitution should be made amply for all wrongs done, as far as it lies in

our power to make it. "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." These precepts of our Lord's applies pertinently to any act of worship, but preeminently to communion with Christ at His table. Its meaning none can question, for nothing can be plainer than His language--nothing more reasonable than its obvious meaning. If you have done your neighbor wrong, so that he has reason to have somewhat against you, stop where you are--go not forward a step in your professed worship of God while wrong toward your brother lies unretrieved--go and make this wrong right as far as you can; make all reasonable or possible reparation and the most ample confession; become reconciled to thy brother; then mayest thou appear before thy God acceptably--not otherwise.

How can anyone who has ever read this precept dare to come to the Lord's table until he has first made restitution for all known wrongs against his fellow beings?

Restitution should also be made to God. By this I do not mean to imply that we can remunerate God for injuries done Him; but I do mean that we can restore to His cause and service what we have wrongfully withdrawn or withheld. If you have in your hands of the Lord's wealth which of right ought to have gone into His treasury for the use of His poor, or of His laborers; or if, as the case may be, you have been squandering this wealth upon your taste or your passions as you have reason to know God would not have you, then you have wronged your Maker and robbed His cause; and it becomes you to make ample restitution before you venture to meet your Lord at His table.

So if you have backslidden from the Lord, and your heart has gone after other gods, what business can you have to come to the table of your Lord, except you can come in the spirit of most deep and humble repentance? How can you come acceptably, unless it be to re-consecrate your heart and all your powers to your dying Lord? In coming to the table of the Lord, you publicly profess to sympathize with Him; if this profession is mere mockery, can you hope to be accepted?

IV. The consequences of coming unworthily, next demand our consideration.

One of the results to be expected, one indeed which always follows an unacceptable coming is great spiritual blindness. This is true of all religious duties; performed in a wicked state of mind, they induce great spiritual blindness. But I have often thought that an unsuitable attendance upon the Lord's table must harden the heart beyond everything else. There are many in the churches who do this; who come to this table, conscious most fully that they are in no fit state of mind to come acceptably; but they feel that they must come--they fear being disciplined if they refuse to come; or at least, they fear the loss of their Christian reputation; hence they come, and consequently, become dreadfully hardened.

Do you meet with a professed Christian who is in deep and awful darkness, or whose conscience seems to be seared as with a hot iron? Search out his history, and you will find in most cases that he has allowed himself to come to the Lord's table in a careless, wicked state of mind, and having thus trifled with the most solemn and effective means of melting the heart, he is now hardened fearfully--perhaps so much so that no means or influences can ever reclaim and restore him. When one comes to the table in this wicked state of mind he is likely to go away more bewildered and hardened than ever. The curse of the Lord is upon him.

On the other hand, coming acceptable has the opposite effect. It quickens our spiritual sensibility--melts the soul in godly sorrow; and makes every grace thrive and grow like the cedars of Lebanon. Those that be planted thus in the courts of the Lord shall flourish in the house of our God.

The judgments of the Lord will follow the deliberate or reckless abuse of this ordinance. So the text plainly teaches. "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself."

There can be no doubt that in the primitive church, not merely spiritual but physical judgments befell those who abused this ordinance. For this cause said Paul, are many weak and sickly among you, and many asleep--doubtless in death. There is no reason to doubt the fact that God often sends judgments upon people in this world for their sins; and especially for the sin of perverting or disregarding this sacred ordinance.

Another danger of most fearful sort awaits those who abuse this ordinance. It is reprobation. They are in the greatest peril of being given up of God. When the

best means which the Lord can use to melt the heart prove unavailing, it only remains to give over the helpless reprobate to his fit doom. If the view of his crucified Lord, dying for his sins fails to move and melt his soul, there is little if any hope of his ever being brought to repentance. In the judgment day we shall find a great many professors at the left hand of the Judge--because of their hypocrisy at the table of their Lord, and of the judicial blindness and hardness of heart thus produced. Hence followed reprobation, and their place on the left hand. They may plead--"We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence and Thou hast taught in our streets;" but He shall say, I know you not whence ye are; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity.

REMARKS.

1. Satan tries often to keep weak believers away from this ordinance, and especially young converts. He makes them doubt whether they are real Christians, harasses their mind--accuses them of playing the hypocrite; makes them feel that it would be a horrible thing to come to the Lord's table; and perhaps ultimately succeeds in inducing them to forsake the table of the Lord and even prayer itself, and other religious duties. Now young converts and indeed all Christians ought to be on the alert that they be not caught in this snare. They should repel Satan by saying--I know I am in danger of being deceived; therefore I will flee to Christ now. Now if never before, will I repent of my sins, and take hold by faith of the offered gospel salvation. Now I will lay hold of the arm of the Lord for my help, crying, "Search, me O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." I know it is a solemn thing to come to the Lord's table, but Jesus invites me and I cannot stay away. I cannot forego the spiritual blessings which may be obtained there; there is no reason in the universe why I should. I will indeed be on my guard most diligently lest I come and partake unworthily, I will go to Jesus and confess my sins; my soul shall lie in the dust before Him; and if my brother has aught against me with any good reason, I will go and be reconciled to my brother before I come to that divine table of the Lord; but how can I be persuaded to stay away and starve--while I know there is bread enough and to spare in the banqueting house of love?

In this way, Christian brother, you may quite baffle Satan, and make his temptations a blessing and not a curse to your soul. If you will be really honest with your God and with your own soul, you shall have nothing to fear.

2. Satan often tries to embolden real hypocrites. The true convert he will try to harass with the fear of being a hypocrite; but with the real hypocrite he plays another game. He tells him to fear nothing. He helps such persons to come to the Lord's table with heedless self-confidence, as careless, as to any common meal. Horrible presumption! Perhaps they never really ask the question, "Am I prepared in heart to commune with Jesus Christ at His own table?" If their mind does glance at such a question it soon glances off again, and they do not give themselves solemnly to self-searching in the light of God's word, and with prayer for the Spirit to guide their minds deeply into the secret things of their own real character. Those who never examine themselves may know, if they will believe it, that they are deluded by Satan and may expect to lift up their eyes in hell in the awful agony of final, remediless disappointment.

3. Satan often plays a game with backsliders which is adapted to keep them forever in a backslidden state. He says to men--This is a means of grace--you must by all means go. But he is careful not to tell them they will need to prepare their hearts by solemn self-searching and deep repentance before the Lord. He keeps this idea quite out of sight--if he can. His plan is to make them trust in external means for their salvation. Prayer he tells them too is a means of grace; hence if they will pray in form--enough to keep conscience quiet--all will be well. Thus he keeps them away from real repentance--lures them along in their backslidden state, and puts their souls in infinite peril of final perdition.

4. Those who know themselves to be backsliders have no right to come to the Lord's table, unless they mean to return to the Lord when they come; for coming in any other way, they really play the hypocrite; and what right have they to do this?

5. This ordinance is often a great curse to the church. The best things perverted, work the greatest mischief. The more precious the institution, the more shocking and pernicious its perversion. The same is true of every doctrine of the Bible; the best and richest for practical benefit, become when perverted, the very worst. It is on this principle that no one can come under all the solemn and impressive influences of the Lord's table and resist with a cold, unmoved heart, and not be awfully hardened and fearfully cursed by that which Christ gave us for the choicest blessings.

6. This ordinance is peculiarly precious to the saints. Here they meet Christ under most affecting circumstances. It is as if they were to meet Him at His own

funeral or at His cross. What can be more precious! How do the most melting considerations cluster round the heart as you come to meet Jesus and remember His dying groans and His tender love for His people at His own table.

7. This ordinance must have been most affecting to Christ. Think of the circumstances under which He first instituted the ordinance. Beside Him sat the traitor; before Him lay outspread in full and distinct view that foul and cruel treason--the rush of the chief priests and of their armed men to seize Him--the mock trial--the insults--the scourging--the dying agonies--the being forsaken of God; but these were not the only objects of His deep solicitude. Around Him sat His eleven faithful ones, and His heart sympathized deeply with their coming trials and with their yet more remote labors, persecutions, and temptations in His service. He foresaw the need of giving them some memorial of His own death, for He knew that so long as they remembered this and saw it in all its proper relations, they would be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Hence He sets up this impressive memorial, and inscribes on it the sad yet glorious and heart sustaining fact of His own bloody death for the salvation of a world.

Yet again, let us consider how affecting is this memorial in its form, and in its natural associations. "Come," He says to His beloved ones, "come sit down with Me at My table. This bread betokens My body which I am about to give for the life of the world. This wine, which I now pour out foreshows the shedding of My own blood--indeed!--My blood, which is soon to be shed for you." Oh how He must have felt amid these scenes! And how must they have looked on and listened with mingled amazement, gratitude and love, as the great idea began to break into their mind that their Lord might ere long die for them; and as they saw in His eye and His tones that love unutterable was swelling in His heart and compassion yearning in His bosom. Viewing this transaction in all its bearings, what a scene! Did earth ever witness another such?

8. The celebration of the Lord's supper may be a most interesting scene to the Savior now; perhaps in many respects as interesting now as then. Why not?

When Christ sees a church in a suitable state to come acceptably, when He sees the humble, broken heart, and the uplifted eye of confidence, trusting in His word and atoning blood, think you not that His heart is affected with tenderest sympathy? It must be an interesting scene for the exalted Redeemer to see His church on earth still celebrating His death age after age, still breaking the symbols of His body and pouring out the emblem of His blood as if they could

not and would not forget the love and compassion of that wondrous death--as if they lived in and through the life begotten by that wondrous death!

Beloved, your risen Savior sees you eating of His symbolized body, and if your heart is in sympathy with your act, His eye regards it and His heart beats in sympathy with yours!

9. But on the other hand it must be exceedingly abhorrent to the mind of Christ to see His professed people come in a hard, unfeeling, unbelieving, ungodly state! To see them coming as it were to attend His funeral, without a tear, and without showing or having the least feeling adapted to such a scene! Oh what mockery of the dying Jesus is this! They come and stand before His cross--they can see His blood flow--they come and look into His open grave--but all, with hearts unaffected! Oh, how could they testify more strongly that they never loved this blessed, dying Savior! This I need not say must be utterly abhorrent to the heart of the Savior.

Brethren, are you prepared to come to the table of your Lord this afternoon? Have you such sympathy with Christ that you can come with broken hearts--can abase yourselves most spontaneously before your Savior--can pour out your tears of penitence at His feet, and then can trust and love and adore?

Come, brethren, for the voice of love invites us--come, but let none abuse the call.

[Back to Top](#)

Forfeiting Birth-Right Blessings

Lecture V

May 13, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Heb. 12:15-17: "Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled: Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of

meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

The transaction alluded to in this passage is one of the most affecting on the records of scripture. One of the main points in it was Esau's despising and selling his birthright.

In order to understand this, we shall need to revert a moment to the custom to which it alludes. The practice originated very early, was well known in the times of Abraham and Isaac, and even prevails still in some eastern countries, whereby the whole estate of the father or a double portion in it, for it assumed these two different forms, fell to the eldest son. With this was also connected a certain authority over the younger members of the family, often regarded as the authority of the father, transferred at his death to the eldest son.

But it is more to our purpose to notice that in pious families, certainly in the family of Abraham, a father's blessing, solemnly pronounced as he drew near the point of death, was one of the precious elements in the birthright of the favored son. Nor was this all. To Abraham and to his seed a blessed covenant had been given--a covenant which on certain conditions, pledged one class of temporal blessings--namely, the land of Canaan and a numerous posterity; and also another class of spiritual blessings--the Messiah in the line of his descendants, and through him blessings on all the nations of the earth. You may find this covenant expanded in Genesis 12, 14, 17, 22 chapters; and also in respect to its spiritual bearings, in Romans 4, and Galatians 3 and 4.

This covenant formed a precious legacy, descending from Abraham to Isaac and onward in the line of his descendants through distant generation. Yet let it be noticed that this legacy of blessings did not at first diffuse itself over all branches of these patriarchal families. Abraham had an Ishmael who had no inheritance in the things of this covenant. Isaac was the sole heir next after Abraham. And of his two sons it seemed to be well understood that only one could have the birthright and the blessing.

Now it can not be doubted that Esau understood all the important points involved in this legacy of promised blessings. He knew what his birthright included; he must have known the promises made and renewed so solemnly to his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac. He also doubtless understood the

tenor on which these promises were to descend to him in connection with his birthright. And yet the history shows us how he took a course which forfeited them all. Returning at one time from the hunting field, faint with fatigue and hunger, he said to Jacob--"Feed me I pray thee, with that red pottage." Jacob said, "Sell me this day thy birthright." Esau said, "Behold I am at the point to die, and what profit shall this birthright be to me?" And Jacob said, "Swear unto me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob."

Such is the simple record given us of the circumstances of this transaction. They serve to shew how little Esau valued the blessings which came down to him from his godly ancestors. The appropriate reflection to be made on reading the narrative is, not this--See how strong the temptation was, and how much to be pitied was the unfortunate Esau who stood at the point of death and bartered away an intangible and valueless ideality for what which was the very stay of his life; but rather this--"Thus Esau despised his birthright." There is Esau "that profane person, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright."

God set His seal to this act of Esau's. He took him at his word. Esau said--I sell it to Jacob. God confirmed the deed and it was henceforth Esau's no more. It passed from his hands forever. The Lord suffered another train of circumstances to transpire in which the solemn affirmation of the father transferred the birthright and the blessing to Jacob. There is no need at this time that I should fully detail all the circumstances--much less, that we should attempt to justify in all points the scheme of deception by which the mother effected this end.

It may however be not amiss to remark that even before the birth of these two sons, the Lord had clearly predicted that the law of primogeniture in their case should be reversed so that the elder should serve the younger. She might therefore have felt that as the time drew near when a father's blessing was to single out the favored son, it was important that the purpose of God in respect to the younger of the two should stand.

While we can not justify her measures, yet we may remark that God's purpose did stand. The aged father pronounced on Jacob the ever memorable blessing--"Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee." Gen. 27:28, 29. Scarcely had Jacob withdrawn when Esau came, announced himself, and

besought his father to arise and eat and bless him. Now the whole truth flashed upon the mind of Isaac. He had given away the blessing--to Jacob. It could not be revoked. He was conscious that the hand of God was on him in giving it to Jacob and he could not recall it. He reveals the facts to Esau--Jacob came--"I have eaten of his meat before thou camest, and have blessed him; yea and he shall be blessed." Sad news to Esau. Yet one more effort remains. He may perhaps get another blessing equally valuable for himself. He cries therefore "with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father--Bless me, even me also, O my father. Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice and wept." But he found no place of repentance--no possibility of changing his father's mind--though he sought it carefully with tears. The die is cast forever. He himself had sold his birthright, and God had confirmed his rash mad act, and given it to Jacob.

This is indeed one of the most affecting scenes on sacred record. It is peculiarly striking and solemn when we regard it as a kind of faint portraiture of that everlasting anguish and regret which will seize upon every lost sinner's heart when the truth shall ultimately flash upon him--my soul is lost--I have sold it for a mess of pottage, and it is lost forever.

Esau's sin consisted in despising this great blessing which belonged by birth to him. It is plain that he set no just value upon it. Its spiritual part he seems to have held in no estimation whatever. Suppose that he had been at the point to die of hunger; was it nothing to him to retain even then, his hold of Jehovah's gracious covenant? Was that a fit moment to despise his birthright and all its divinely promised blessings?

We may next observe that from this point, the law of primogeniture seems to have been annulled and never restored again in its full form and force as it existed before. When Jacob came to die, he called together all his sons and gave them all his blessing. They all alike seem to have become partakers of the promises. The birthright seemed to diffuse itself over the whole family. Together they became a nation of God's people, heirs in common of most of those blessings which came down to Isaac and to Jacob in the narrow line of the birthright.

It is much to our purpose to notice distinctly the fact that when the Jewish nation were set aside for their unbelief, a still wider diffusion of these promised blessings took place. The apostle Paul both announces and evinces the fact that

all who are Christ's are Abraham's seed and heirs with him of this great promise. All are equally with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, sons of the birthright, entitled to that covenant which pledges peculiar blessings to children on the ground of the faith and obedience of their parents. This is a point which we should by no means overlook. There is too much of precious promise in it, it would seem, to allow us to forget or disown it. If we were to do either, might it not be said of us that we have despised our birthright?

Recurring to our text, I observe that the transaction alluded to there, and indeed the whole history of the Bible, recognize the fact that this blessing may be forfeited. Here let me read some passages, showing that God couples children with their parents in both His promises and His threatenings. "And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul that thou mayest live." Deut. 30:6. "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-sources. One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." Isa. 44:3-5. "As for Me, this is My covenant with them, saith the Lord; My Spirit that is upon thee, and My words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and forever." Isa. 59:21. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Acts 2:38, 39. Observe here that this reveals the great law of the gospel dispensation. The gospel reign has now begun and its spirit and its principles are now beginning to be developed. Just here now we find the cheering announcement--"The promise, that is, of the Holy Ghost, is unto you and to your children."

Again, we find in Romans 4, that Paul distinctly argues this great point, to show that all believers inherit the very same spiritual covenant which God gave first to Abraham. It was given to him not of law but of faith; hence all who have this faith inherit it.

The same doctrine is held and argued in Galatians 3 and 4, it being there

maintained that "the blessing of Abraham comes on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith;" and the conclusion arrived at, being that "if ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Thus we see that God connects children with their parents in His promises of blessings.

But let us dwell now more distinctly on the fact so plainly involved in our text--that these blessings may be forfeited.

It is plain they may be forfeited by contempt. If either parents or children treat them as of no value, they are in infinite peril of forfeiting them altogether, and God may at once take the forfeiture at their hands. Such treatment on their part must be exceedingly provoking to God, and none need wonder that God should say--If you despise these blessings, you need not have them.

Again, these blessings may be forfeited by a delay to embrace them. There is a limit beyond which God cannot wait on either parents, or children. This very delay implies that the blessings are lightly esteemed. For this reason therefore God might well arise in His displeasure and shut the door of hope and mercy.

Another obvious reason lies in the very nature of the present scenes of probation. Life must have an end, and may end quickly.

Still again, the blessings of this covenant may be forfeited by ignorance or unbelief. If parents do not understand its provisions or do not believe its promises, they may so entirely fail of laying hold by faith of these blessings as to forfeit them utterly and forever.

Again, they may be forfeited and lost through presumption. Children may tempt God as Esau did, presuming that God will give the blessing of course, although they have despised and sold it. Such seems to have been the case of Esau. He must have known that these covenant blessings accompanied the birthright; and yet he acted as if he supposed that his having foolishly sold his birthright to Jacob could not be taken as a forfeit. He presumed either that Isaac did not know of that transaction, or that it would not prevent his bestowing the blessing on himself even if he did. But his presumption was only another sample of his folly.

So it is no doubt often the case that the children of pious parents tempt God and

forfeit all these blessings. They may have heard much of this covenant, and they rely on it for their own salvation, while they put off repentance and provoke God till he cuts them down in their sins and shuts the door against their salvation forever. We have on record in the Bible many cases of parents and children who did forfeit these blessings. In many ways has the Lord taught us that children will be greatly affected by the course pursued by their parents. Curses or blessings come on them according as their parents are faithless in God or reckless of fulfilling the conditions of the covenant on the one hand, or are faithful on the other in labors and in prayers for their salvation.

This principle is amply recognized in several passages, some of which I will now refer to as illustrations. In the second of the ten commandments, we read, "For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate Me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments." Thus in this solemn promulgation of Jehovah's will did He most emphatically recognize this principle that parents and children are most closely connected together, so that for the parent's sake good or ill shall come on their children. Yet let it be here observed that this does not imply that God punishes the child for its parent's sin. By no means. Through the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord most distinctly declares that He never does this.

But there is yet scope for visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children. A drunken father shall entail poverty, disease, and disgrace upon his offspring; yet shall not his offspring be at all punished for his sins. The punishment of individuals pertains to the next world and never to this. These providential circumstances which place our earthly trail in poverty or plenty--in sickness or in health--in disgrace or in honor--these are by no means our punishment in any proper sense. They may be evils; and in view of their final results they may not be. It may however well be an affliction to parents to be the guilty means of bringing disease, poverty and disgrace upon their children. Yet God has so connected parents and children together that such results naturally follow a parent's sins.

When the Lord condescended to show Moses His glory, "He passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the

guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation." Ex. 34:6, 7.

In Lev. 20:5, the Lord expresses one of His solemn threatenings against idol worship thus; "Then will I set my face against that man and against his family." In the case of Achan you all remember that God visited His fearful judgments on both the father and all his children.

These passages and cases I have alluded to, in order to show that parents often forfeit these covenant blessings for their children.

Both parents and children may so fatally forfeit this blessing that God will not return to renew the forfeited covenant, and reverse His decision. Isaac could not reverse what he had done in giving the blessing to Jacob. He was probably conscious that God had spoken through him in the blessing on Jacob, and now how could he of his own will reverse it? He could do no such thing. He seems to have been greatly astonished and amazed to find the blessing gone to Jacob, but he knew that God's hand was in it, and he dared not attempt a change. Yea, said he, "and he shall be blessed."

Parents may shut themselves out from these blessings. Of this we have a striking case in that generation of the Hebrew people which came out of Egypt under Moses. With an high hand and an out-stretched arm, Jehovah had led them forth; with water from the smitten rock, and bread from heaven, had He sustained them, and with His daily presence in the cloud and in the fire had He guided them, and now, brought to the very verge of Canaan, perhaps already presuming that their toils were all over, they lose all through their cruel and wicked unbelief. In the very moment perhaps of their highest anticipations the Lord crushed all their hopes, shut and barred the doors of the promised land upon them and doomed them to wander forty years with their children till the plains of that wide waste were whitened with their bones. None could enter Canaan till the unbelieving fathers were all numbered with the dead. "Ye shall know, said the Lord, My breach of promise." Ye shall know that though I promised to Moses that I would bring you into Canaan, yet I can not fulfil that promise to you who have forfeited it by your unbelief and your rebellion against Me. For good reasons God had sworn in His wrath that they should not enter into His rest; and no entreaties or measures of theirs could induce Him to reverse that awful oath.

In this transaction of Esau, there are many points of most solemn and affecting

interest. It teaches us this fact--that there is such a thing as sinning once too much. So did Esau. He reached a crisis--by one fatal deed he capped the climax of his iniquity--by one additional sin, he shut the door forever upon his own soul and cut off all hope of ever regaining the lost blessing. Mark well his case. In a fit of faintness from hunger and fatigue, he showed the real attitude of his heart in respect to this blessing. He had so little regard for it that he sold it for a mess of pottage. So of the Hebrew nation on the borders of Canaan. There is a last sin--a point in transgression beyond which mercy cannot go--at which justice interposes, and takes the sinner's case into His own hands.

The forfeiture of this on the part of either parents or children depends on the light they have. Their danger is critical and their guilt great in proportion to the knowledge they may have of the nature and value of the covenant and its promised blessings. In the case of Esau, we must suppose that he had light enough to enable him to appreciate the worth of his birthright. He could not but know how God had appeared over and over again to his godly grandfather, and to his father, giving and renewing those great and precious promises; he well enough knew that Abraham valued these promises infinitely more than all his earthly wealth; and yet with all this knowledge before his mind he sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. Well does a sacred writer call him, "that profane person," Esau. Forcible and pertinent is the remark of the original historian--"Thus Esau despised his birthright." No wonder that the Lord abhorred his conduct, and stamped his reckless disregard of these great blessings with the seal of His own indignation. Esau had too much light. His guilt was too great; his sin could not be forgiven. See also the Hebrew nation on the borders of Canaan. What had they seen? The uplifted hand of the Almighty ten times falling on oppressive Egypt, and finally overwhelming her armies in the depths of the Red Sea; that same Hand guiding themselves in love by fire and by cloud through the trackless desert, spreading for them a daily table there with angel's food; smiting Amalek before them when the hands of prayer were uplifted and upheld; rebukes from on high, chastening and scourging them for their idolatry, their murmurings and unbelief; all these things were fresh before their minds, for all had transpired before their eyes with the lapse of some two or three years; and yet with all this light before them, they dare to rebel against the Lord and will not believe His word nor trust His power to save. "So He swore in His wrath that they should never enter into His rest." What could have been more just than this?

Now if it be true that the Lord rejected them the more readily because they had

great light, then how important for us to enquire into our own responsibilities and dangers. Is not our light greater far than theirs? How critical then must be our condition? How imminent our peril of provoking the Lord to swear in His wrath that neither we nor our children shall ever enter into His rest.

Whenever either parents or children have forfeited the blessings of this covenant, the fact may be known by its closing up all access to the mercy seat in prayer. If the parents themselves are rejected as the Hebrew nation were on the borders of Canaan, the door of access is shut against themselves. They cannot pray acceptably for themselves. If their children have forfeited their birthright like Esau, then the parents cannot have a spirit of prayer for those children. This is plain, beyond question. It could not be of any avail for the rejected Hebrew nation to pray that God would let them go up into Canaan. They could not possibly have an acceptable spirit of prayer for this object, since God had sworn in His wrath that they should not enter. The Spirit would not help their infirmities, and make intercession in their hearts, to pray against the fearful oath of Jehovah. Neither in the other case could it be of any avail for Isaac to pray for profane Esau's pardon and the reversal of the sentence against him.

If you have observed with care and extensively, you have doubtless seen many cases illustrating this position. I have had occasion to observe many--so many that I cannot but regard this as a most striking mark of being rejected from God's covenant. If any of you have actually rejected this covenant, and God has taken you at your word, you will have no longer any spirit of prayer for blessings that are to come through that covenant; you will have no liberty of soul before God--no pleadings of the Spirit of the Lord within you--no strugglings and agonizings of the Holy Ghost within your heart for the souls of your children--no mighty help from the Lord, giving you power to believe and lay hold of the covenant and really close in upon the naked word of the Lord and say, "Lord, Thou hast spoken, now do as Thou hast said." I recollect the case of one backslider who had long been far away from God, and during this time his children had been growing up and hardening their hearts in sin. When he came to awake to his condition and see where he had been and what he had done, it was heart-rending to hear him exclaim, "I cannot pray for my children, I have ruined their souls forever, I can get no access to God in praying for them." Now this is no uncommon case. Parents break their covenant with God, and then He withdraws it and holds Himself no longer bound by its promises.

Again, where the children of pious parents treat their birthright with indifference, or disregard, as many do, and seem not to appreciate the blessing of being born of pious parents, they may expect the God of Abraham will give them up. In every age of the world God has recognized this principle, and has taken care to leave cases of fearful warning on record both in sacred and in all church history showing that His patience cannot be forever abused with impunity, and that He sometimes takes the reckless forfeiture of His covenant at the hands of the guilty, abandoned rebel.

On the other hand the Lord has always conferred blessings on faithful parents and faithful children. How often is it implied in the Bible that God felt Himself bound to confer great blessings on the Jews because of their connection with Abraham. The Psalmist touched this point when he said, "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember His commandments to do them." Ps. 103:17, 18.

In the same manner and by the same immutable laws of Jehovah's moral government will great curses come upon children and upon children's children for the backsliding and unfaithfulness of their parents.

Again, I remark that after parents have long violated this covenant by grievous backslidings, God sometimes renews it. He has promised yet to do this to the Jewish nation when they shall again return to Him. Thus He holds Himself ready to renew covenant with parents even after most bitter backslidings, and after their children are on the very verge of destruction. So wonderful is His long-suffering--so rich beyond expression is His mercy--so does He love to bring the families of His people into His covenant where He can bless them and show forth His faithfulness and His great lovingkindness.

When the Lord does this, it is always on the condition of repentance; it can never happen on any other condition. His people must return with brokenness of heart, and bitter tears, confessing and forsaking all their sins against Him. Then God for Christ's sake can forgive and can restore. They will have the evidence of this in a returning spirit of faith and prayer.

Now mark; perhaps I have spoken the experience of some parents here. You have some of you felt that you could not lay hold of this covenant--you could not grasp these promises by faith: the Lord did not write this covenant in your heart;

but on your repentance the Lord meets you with gracious pardon--writes anew His covenant on your very hearts, and gives you thus the inward witness of your acceptance in the bonds of that covenant. Then you felt that verily you had occasion to bless and magnify the name of the Lord.

REMARKS.

1. The birthright of God's children is of infinite value. The Lord promised to Abraham and to his posterity, not Canaan only or chiefly; but spiritual blessings, to children for their parents sake; and then brought all the Christian church up on to the same broad platform of promise, making them heirs by faith of the same covenant and of all its spiritual blessings. And what a covenant is this! How infinitely precious to the pious parent's heart! How glorious to God as well as blissful to man! Who can fully estimate its value? What if you might inherit the throne and crown of Britain, and then pass it down as a legacy to your children. Your eye would sparkle--your heart flutter at the tidings. What if you might inherit an estate worth a million. But how much more may you inherit in the promised mercies of this glorious covenant! Thrones and gold are only chaff in the comparison; here are substantial, everlasting realities.

2. Great multitudes in every age have broken this covenant and forfeited its blessings. Even in the family of Isaac there was one who forfeited these blessings and thus brought on himself not the blessings promised to Abraham, but the heaviest curses. Oh, how many wayward sons have sold their birthright as Esau did, and the Lord has shut them off from the blessings of His covenant. And how many professedly pious parents too--strange that they should not more rationally appreciate the priceless value of this covenant!

Suppose you inherit a throne--a crown; would you recklessly forfeit it? Would you not say--This belongs now to my children; let me keep it for them? Indeed you would be most earnest and watchful--you would prize it, and nothing could induce you to be remiss in preserving so rich a good and handing it down unsullied to your children.

3. It is amazing to see how little many children realize the value of these blessings. What! do you not understand, dear children, that great blessings are promised you for your pious parent's sake? Do you not know the value of this birthright? Hear David urge this plea--"Have mercy upon me, O God, and save the son of Thy handmaid."

4. Many parents have occasion for most bitter reflection upon their own folly and guilt in forfeiting this covenant. Said a father to me--"I have no confidence to pray for my children; they have gone from under my influence; I cannot even reach them with my prayers." If any of you my hearers, are in this state, the only thing you can do is to repent and plead with God to return in mercy and renew His covenant with you. Go humble yourself before Him; entreat Him not to take your forfeiture of the covenant at your hands and make it final and fatal.

And brethren, how pertinent are the words of Paul to this case; "Let us therefore fear lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." A promise being left us, beloved, O let us not come short!

It is possible, nay perhaps probable that there may be parents here who have already fallen short, and lost hold of this glorious covenant. Come ye who are professedly Christian parents--let me talk with you about this. How long since you entered into this covenant with God for your children? How old were you then? How many children have you thus dedicated to God? Where are they now? Where have they been? Through much prayer and faith and most diligent keeping of the covenant, have they received its promised blessings; or does their hard heart and wicked life bear testimony against you? O have you forsaken this covenant, and has the Lord forsaken you and your children? Like Eli of old, have you neglected to restrain them, and have they in consequence plunged into fearful hardness, or possibly, crime? If you have broken covenant, will you not seek the Lord now, if possibly He may renew it and give you a fresh hold upon its promised blessings? It may be that you have let the promise slip, and now can find no place for repentance though you seek it carefully with tears. Perhaps God seems to say to you--"They shall know My breach of promise!"--awful words!

One word to children. God has committed to you a great and sacred trust. Have you despised your birthright? Have you made light of these blessings and vilely cast them off? If so, the day will come when you will see your folly in bitter anguish. Like Esau you may wail out with a great and bitter cry--"O is there no forgiveness for me--ah is there none?"

I once had a friend whose death under the attendant circumstances was deeply and awfully affecting. He had a pious and praying mother--a careful mother, who had watched over his early years with Christian assiduity, and many tears. His father was a good man, and while for some months I boarded in the family, I could not but say, "This is a well-ordered and godly household." Rarely if ever

have I seen a better regulated Christian family, or more care taken in training children.

Some years afterwards I saw this son to whom I referred, in the great revival at Rochester. He had been from home some time and of course away from the influence of his parents. In this revival he acted through out like a fool. Vain, proud, giddy, at first he took the ground that he would not be so singular as to become a Christian alone, while none else were coming out for the Lord; but when hundreds began to gather round the Savior's feet, he changed his tone and would not repent then, because he said he would not disgrace himself by going with the rabble. Just so full of nonsense and mad folly were all his positions. He lived through the revival a hardened sinner.

Next came the fearful cholera and smote him among its first victims. It swept over his robust frame with terrible desolation, and almost in an hour he was on the bed of death. His godly father and praying mother rush to his bedside; there is no time for many words; the agonized son cries out, O, my father--can't you pray for your dying son? The father is speechless. Mother, can't you pray for me before I die? The mother can't pray. No, not even that mother. It seemed to them as if there was no audience before mercy's throne. They could not pray for that son. You may conceive of their deep, unutterable agony; O could you have witnessed the awful scene! A dying son of pious parents--who could not pray himself, and for whom even a pious father and mother can get no access to God in prayer! O could you only hear his last words of shrieking anguish--"what, father, mother, can't you pray for your dying son!"

The oath of the Almighty had passed, and the Lord saw fit to make him an awful monument to the whole city of His stern, His righteous, but inexorable Justice! O how all who heard it stood aghast, and how did it make the ears of all the people tingle! It was Jehovah's awful voice of warning!

Among these young men before me is there not an Esau? Have you not despised and sold your birthright--you, young man, whose pious father and mother have poured out their scalding tears for you like water, and their agonizing prayers as if they could not be denied; but you have presumed on mercy and kept on in sin; you have resisted the Spirit and insulted your Maker; O could you have seen that young man die, and could you have heard his last imploring wail--"O can't you pray for your dying son;" and could you have realized how the iron of despair entered his soul as he sunk in the chill arms of death and all the bitterness of

unutterable anguish filled the hearts of those who had prayed for him in his childhood, but might pray for him no more; O could you see, or only realize one scene of this sort, you might learn one of the lessons of fearful warning by which your Maker would admonish you not to trifle with the salvation of your soul. O! the folly of sinners--the folly of those children of pious parents who sell their birthright for less than a morsel of meat, sometimes even for poison. O! why will they forsake God, and slight His covenant? Why will they forfeit His mercies and provoke His everlasting frown?

Ye who are parents, have any of you broken your covenant with God for your children? Then come and bring along those children of the covenant, and let us all humble ourselves before the Lord, deeply repent of all our sins, and entreat His mercy, if peradventure He may be gracious to us and renew His covenant with us, and once more write it on our hearts.

[Back to Top](#)

Afflictions of the Righteous and the Wicked Contrasted

Lecture VI

June 24, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--2 Cor. 4:17: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Read also Psalm 73.

Few things are more interesting than to contemplate the contrast every where drawn in the Bible between the righteous and the wicked. No man can thoroughly study this contrast without being greatly affected by it. Throughout the Bible we find this contrast drawn in the strongest colors respecting their character, their afflictions, their joys, their entire earthly course, and their final destiny. It is my design in this discourse to notice some particulars.

I. The best saints are chastened.

II. I pass in the next place to remark that precisely the opposite in every

respect is said in the Bible of the sinner.

Our text from St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians speaks of the righteous. It affirms that their afflictions are light, are transient, and productive of augmented glory. We have another passage of similar import which asserts that "all things work together for good to them that love God."

The Bible throughout holds language directly opposite to this respecting the wicked.

But I am first to give a few particulars respecting the case of the righteous.

I. They have afflictions.

This is asserted and implied throughout the Bible. And the whole course of God's providence in every age teaches the same things. The best saints are chastened. Affliction is not excluded from their cup because of their piety. Their afflictions may be in themselves as painful--may be as frequent and as long protracted as those which befall the wicked.

The book of Job shows that formerly this fact was greatly misunderstood. In those times of comparative darkness, when the light of written revelation had scarcely begun to fall upon the nations, some men, even some good men, seemed not to have understood the meaning of the divine dispensation towards the righteous.

But I have several specific points of remark to make respecting the afflictions of the righteous.

1. They are light. Paul calls it--"Our light affliction." This, you will observe, is a term of comparison. We need therefore to inquire with what our afflictions are to be compared in order to be reasonably deemed light.

Obviously the afflictions of the righteous are light compared with what they know and feel that themselves deserve. This is one of the considerations which make their afflictions seem, in their own view, to be light.

Their afflictions are not said to be light compared with those of the wicked. But they are light and every real saint feels them to be so compared with what himself deserves.

Again, they are light compared with what Christ suffered in working out our salvation. Whenever we think of Christ's circumstances, apprehending in some measure his trials from being rejected of his people, from the unbelief and fickleness of his professed friends, from the wickedness and coming ruin of his nation, which he could neither remedy nor avert; from the malice of his murderers, and from his position as our sacrifice;--when, I say, we duly apprehend such points as these, we always see that all our own utmost afflictions are light compared with his. I have never yet seen a Christian who did not feel this when reminded of the sufferings endured by Christ in his earthly afflictions.

Again, these afflictions are light when compared with those that await the wicked. Compared with those, they are too small to admit of being estimated as any thing at all. They are less than the fine dust of the balance.

In the same view, these afflictions of the righteous are light compared with what they themselves must have suffered if Christ had not suffered in their stead, and if they should not by the discipline of suffering here be so purified that God can take them to heaven at death. It is well for all Christians to consider both these points;--namely: how the sufferings of Christ have saved them from the terrible necessity of ever lasting anguish, and also how the moral discipline of suffering here may perform a most important and indispensable agency in preparing the soul for exemption from all further suffering in a world of peace and joy. Then you will see how light your afflictions are compared with what they might have been, and indeed must have been if God had forborne to adopt the great remedial system.

2. I must pass to remark that these afflictions of the righteous are short. They are short compared with eternity; short compared with what we deserve that they should be; short compared with the measureless duration of the sufferings of the wicked. Let their duration be compared with any of these points, and you cannot fail to see that they are indeed but for a moment.

3. All these afflictions of the righteous are in respect to them means of grace. So the apostle implies. In his view they "work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." They do this only as they serve to prepare the soul for glory;--by no means because they merit a reward of glory. But in their disciplinary character and results, they work for the

Christian a weight of glory which infinitely exceeds all the weight of the afflictions themselves.

4. The perceived design and tendency of these afflictions rob them of their sting. When the people of God see this design and this tendency, they feel more like embracing and kissing the rod than like repelling it. Indeed it usually happens that they can testify after the scene of trial is past,--"It is good for me that I have been afflicted. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." And often, while passing through the very furnace, the conviction that the hand of their own Father is in it; that it is designed for their good, and if they will fall in with this kind design, it cannot fail to do them infinite good--these thoughts serve to sustain them so that not so much as the smell of fire is on them. Or to change the figure, these thoughts, dropped as an anodyne into the cup of their sorrows, transform what else had been gall and wormwood, to the sweetness of honey.

5. A consciousness of their own ill-desert serves to inspire patience and submission. Let the Christian only realize this, and he will cry out--all these afflictions are nothing compared to what I have deserved at the hand of God. I cannot murmur. All this is no suffering at all when seen in the light of my deservings.

6. The fact that they are so short makes them appear so light.

With almost universal application it may be said of the afflictions of the righteous--"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." A night of unbroken sorrow may appear long--but soon the morning comes in its joy, the night of anguish is forgotten. What Christian does not know this? Where is the Christian who has not had this written out in his own experience? Hence, under the heaviest pressure of affliction, he can still expostulate with his own despondencies--"Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me; hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him who is the health of my countenance and my God."

I can well recollect that before my own conversion I was deeply struck with this, that Christians were the only persons in the world who had any reason to be joyful. I could easily see that they had consolations which none others had. I saw that nothing could possibly befall them which could ultimately be

an evil. All things I saw must work good and nothing but good for them. Reading such passages as our text, showed me plainly that all was well for them, and that they alone, of all men on the earth had a legitimate right to be joyful.

The opposite I saw must be true in every instance in the case of the wicked. All these thoughts passed often through my mind while in my law office. Even then I could not help thinking intensely on these points, nor could I help seeing the force and the bearing of earthly afflictions to curse the wicked and to bless and not harm the righteous. In this state of my mind, I did not perhaps quite envy Christians their lot, but I felt that none but they had any reason to be cheerful. The sinner, I plainly saw, had no business to be cheerful. Nothing could benefit his condition and prospects but to howl and mourn in most hopeless anguish. Nothing but ill was on him; nothing but ill yet more awful was before him.

Nor in my case did those views result from a state of melancholy or depression of spirits. I never had any tendencies of that sort. These convictions were the result of sober and intense thought. I studied the great questions of the Christian religion intensely, and I could not fail of being deeply impressed with the mighty contrast between the state of the righteous even in this world, and that of the wicked.

My situation in regard to early religious instruction, was rather peculiar. I heard no preaching but the strongest form of Old Schoolism, and had to grope my way along through all its absurdities, and think out all my religious opinions in the very face of all the preaching I heard in my earliest years. This led me to think deeply and thoroughly upon the great points of the Christian life. Hence when I saw a sinner in his sins I could see nothing cheerful in his case. All was full of gloom. But a Christian--what if he does suffer now? All will soon be well. His sufferings are soon over. Who can help seeing this? It seems to me now--as it did then, quite impossible for any thinking man to avoid thinking on this subject, and if he thinks at all how can he fail of being struck with the immense contrast between the case of the righteous and that of the wicked?

7. The joys of the saints are only the beginning of heaven. The Bible does not represent them as being short, like their sorrows; but represents their joys as long and their grief as short. Their joys are enduring, deep, full,

fadeless; not light and fleeting as are those of the sinner.

II. I pass in the next place to remark that precisely the opposite in every respect is said in the Bible of the sinner.

To show this I will read you the 73d Psalm. I select this, not because it is more striking or more decisive than many other passages in the Bible on the same subject; but because it brings out more distinctly the very truths I wish to lay before you.

It appears that before the volume of written revelation was filled up, and before men had learned to interpret the providences of God, as now in the light of revelation we are enabled to do, some men were greatly perplexed with the course of divine providence towards the righteous and the wicked. Such seems to have been for a time the case with the writer of this 73d Psalm. "Truly," he says, "truly God is good to Israel;"--"truly"--as if the conviction had just now become fixed in his mind, and he had just learned this fact, so long obscured in darkness,--"truly God is good to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone, my steps had well-nigh slipped." What was the matter? He proceeds at once to tell us. "For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death; but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." He evidently speaks not of all wicked men, for some of them have trouble as other men have; but he speaks of the prosperous classes--of those who seem during much of their life to have all that heart can wish. "Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens; and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return thither; and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence." It is all in vain he says for me to have washed my hands from sin, and to have denied myself its pleasures, for I have been sorely plagued notwithstanding--more sorely even than most of these wicked men;--"for all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning." But at this point he checks himself;--it strikes his mind that to talk in this strain will be a

stumbling-block to God's people; it will throw them into the same state of perplexity and repining; and he sees instantly that this will not answer; what then shall I do, says he? "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me;" I was yet more painfully perplexed; I dared not speak out my feelings least I should offend the generation of God's children. And yet my heart was hot within me, and how could I refrain from speaking out the deep, burning perplexities of my soul? "It was too painful for me until I went into the sanctuary of God;" I knew not how to solve this mystery, that I should have so many troubles and the wicked so few--"until I went to the sanctuary, then I understood their end." "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in a moment; they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh, so O Lord, when thou awakest thou shalt despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee." I was stupid as a beast; why did I not understand before this that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and that their richest joys terminate almost in a twinkling, in everlasting desolation and anguish? "Nevertheless, I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory." "Thou shalt guide me"--what a blessing to have the infinitely wise God for a guide! "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish, thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works."

We see now that if sinners are joyful, the Bible represents their joy as only for a moment. I might quote passages almost without number to prove this. But there is no need that I should.

On the other hand, the Bible shows that when Christians are afflicted it is but for a moment, and that their afflictions are light also. O how light compared with the full lot of the wicked!

But what of the wicked man? Is he joyful? Yes, he has a feverish excitement and he calls it joy, but it cannot last; it vanishes away ere he has done quaffing off the mere foam of his pleasure-cup. Light too are all his joys--light as air; in their very nature they never can be solid and substantial; they are as the chaff which

the wind drives away. Sinner, you know there is nothing in them worthy of the name of joy. You know they are vain, false, fickle, unsatisfactory; the first breath of adversity scatters them all; disappointment has hidden her sting beneath their fairest flowers. You have known all this in your own sad experience, and yet you are loath to admit it, and more loath still to act as if it were true.

Again the sinner's joys are only the means of aggravating his future sorrows. Instead of being as in the case of the righteous an antepast of heaven, they are a prelude to hell. Every joy of the sinner in this world is a fruit of God's mercy, and every such mercy abused, will be prolific in wrath and torments in the world of retribution. God will visit for all those abused mercies.

Then, moreover, those joys of earth will be food for thought in that world of tormenting self-reflections. Conscious guilt for mercies abused will harrow up the soul of the lost sinner with unutterable pangs.

Yet again, every sinner knows that his good things are the opposite of what he deserves. The sweet consciousness of integrity and of deserving well at the hand of God, he never has, or can have. He knows that all in his case is ill-desert--desert of utter and unmingled sorrows.

Once more. In the hour of trial, how great the contrast between the afflictions of the wicked and those of the righteous! The wicked man under his afflictions can only say--if his eyes are open--These are only the beginnings of my sorrow. I have only just begun to drink the bitter cup, the dregs of which are to be my portion forever and ever.

Yes, the wicked must bear their sufferings in this life, comfortless and unsustained. No Christian's hope gladdens and cheers their heart. No solace can they have in the bitter hour. Faith in Christ is, with them, entirely out of the question; they can think of Christ only as the being whose blood they have trampled under foot--whose mediation for sinners they have set at naught; and now they can hear Him say only this--"Because I have called and ye refused, therefore when ye call I will not answer." It avails nothing to speak to them of Jesus. The name soothes not their aching bosoms; it only harrows up their souls with more bitter self-reproaches, and keener despair. No hope have they;--certainly no good hope through grace: for they have set all grace at naught.

Thus the very opposite things are true of their afflictions which are true in the

case of the righteous. While the afflictions of the righteous are light because of his buoyant, trusting, submissive, peaceful state of mind; the afflictions of the wicked are heavy because of his wicked state of mind. He has no power to resist and bear up under them.

Suppose an ungodly man is visited with bereavement. His property is torn away. Alas, it is his all; and what has he more? This was his God, and now it is gone, perhaps forever. It leaves him no good to enjoy. The Christian too may lose all his property in a twinkling; but then his Father in heaven is infinitely rich, and he need not fear lest he come to want. His great treasure remains untouched by the fires or the floods of earth. He can have a thousand angels to minister to his wants if he needs their aid, and his Father sees it best to send them.

Suppose the sinner is bereaved of some dear friend, a parent or a bosom companion, or a child of his strong and tender love. The blow comes down upon him with unmitigated weight. He has no Savior, no hope, no consolation--no being in the universe able to save, to whom he can flee.

These sorrows are heavy because they are enduring. They intermit only for a brief space and then another avalanche rolls over him again, crushing all his fondest hopes and spreading desolation all around him. And then the thought must flash across his mind--These are only the beginning of sorrows. I am bereaved here;--O how much more bereaved when every friend shall be torn away! Bereavement makes me wretched now--what shall I be hereafter?

There is another point of most solemn import. The wicked man's afflictions, instead of working for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, will only work in his case a far more exceeding and eternal weight of damnation. For all these afflictions are only appliances on the part of God to reclaim the sinner from sinning and bring him to Jesus for salvation. If he resists them all, they cannot fail to aggravate his final doom. Hence the more thorough and searching his trials, the greater his guilt, and the more heavy his final punishment. Hence we see that the more he suffers here--supposing him to resist the design of God to reclaim him by these trials, the more must he suffer hereafter as a punishment for his deeper guilt.

The reverse of this we know is true of the Christian as the more he suffers here the more he enjoys hereafter.

It is most striking to notice here that while all things joyful or sad work together for good to the Christian, all things, whether prosperous or adverse--joyous or afflictive, work together for ill to the sinner. The more he enjoys here, the more miserable he must be hereafter; and the more he suffers here, the more he must suffer hereafter. If there is in this an apparent paradox, it is still true, and you will instantly see its truth when you come to see the relation of the whole course of God's providence here towards the sinner, to this sinner's final doom. All God's providences are means of trial to the sinner, and if he abuses them all, and resists their influence, they cannot fail to work for him a deeper damnation.

Alas, the guilty course and the fearful end of the sinner! Instead of being able to say, with the Christian--welcome afflictions; welcome pains and trials and bereavements; welcome even the cross itself;--he can only say--Woe is me;--these heavy afflictions that make me weary of life now, are working for me a far more exceeding and eternal weight of damnation! Nothing for me here but bitterness, and a vain pursuit of hollow pleasures, all working for me a more dire damnation for my everlasting portion!

REMARKS.

1. If we would understand the Bible we must attain a position from which we shall see things as the inspired writers saw them. They estimated all things in the light of eternity. When they speak of earthly things, they compare them with eternity, and deem them long or short--valuable or valueless, as they are estimated in this scale of comparison. And why should they not? If we are to exist forever, there is surely no other rational way of estimating the value of whatever shall affect our entire well-being. Our happiness or misery in the next world is a part of the whole sum of our good or ill in existence as much as the portion which falls to us in this world.

Hence if earthly scenes and interests are brief and but for a moment compared with eternity, let them be called and deemed light and of small account. So the sacred writers seemed to regard them.

Many have fallen into serious errors in consequence of not understanding this. When the apostles speak of its being only a step to the day of judgment, some have supposed their real meaning to be that Christ's second advent was really just about to occur. But it is by no means certain that this was their real meaning. Minds so deeply impressed as theirs were, with the solemn realities of eternity

are wont to view eternal scenes as very near at hand. The intervention of earthly scenes and events between--events in which their mind takes no interest--is scarcely thought of.

Now we need to be in such a state of mind as theirs in order to understand their language. Then we shall estimate all earthly things in the near view of the solemn realities of the eternal world.

2. Afflictions are light or otherwise, very much according to the state of mind in which they are experienced. In one state, a mere trifle will appear heavy; in another state the same trial will seem scarce worth regarding. The mind sustained of God can sustain almost any thing God shall lay upon it; but when a man has all his own burdens to carry alone, and can scarcely bear the burden of his own wounded spirit and rebellious, repining heart, how can he bear the superadded weight of affliction?

3. It is often exceedingly interesting to contemplate the afflictions of the righteous. When we see the afflicted soul sustained triumphantly by grace, and consider also how these light afflictions must educe a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, we see it a most blessed thing to be afflicted. O it is a joyful scene. Their state of mind is such that they scarcely feel the pain of their afflictions. They know themselves to be blessed, and their souls sometimes exult in scenes of deep affliction with exceeding joy. They have so much of God in their souls;--God takes occasion by means of the affliction to make such peculiar manifestations of his glory and his goodness to their souls that they may well exult in the precious good of being afflicted.

You may have heard it said of one of the daughters of Pres. Edwards, that while a husband whom she tenderly loved lay a corpse in the house, her joy was so great that she sought some secret place to give it vent lest it should be misconstrued by those who could not appreciate the abounding consolations of the great joy with which God was pleased to fill her soul. Now what was this? How shall we account for it? But one rational account can be given. The Lord was pleased to make this affliction in her case a sort of conductor along which the electric fires of his own love and presence reached and filled her soul. She became so filled with the joys of the Spirit that she could not be sensible to the bitterness of grief.

Now another woman in a different state of mind would have hung over that

lifeless body--would have bathed it with her bitter tear; would have given way to inconsolable grief. Why? Because, in her state of mind, the consolations and joys of God are wanting.

Payson, you may recollect, said near the close of his life--"Since I have given up my will, I have never in a single instance been disappointed." You need only be in a state in which you have no will but God's--then all will be well with you. Form no purpose except on this condition--"If the Lord will, I shall do this or that." Let a man get into this permanent state of mind, and where is he? Where he never can be disappointed. However his plans may issue, all seems well to him, because he wishes nothing otherwise than God would have it, and God's ways can never be frustrated. As a man once said of the weather when asked what he thought the weather would be--"Just such as pleases me," said he. But how could he know this? What does this mean? The answer is easy. Said he, "It will be such weather as pleases God, I know, and whatever pleases God will perfectly please me." Thus, beloved, if you are only weaned thoroughly from your own wills, and molded into sweet submission to the will of God, every thing will go just right. However much the course of divine Providence may seem to frustrate your plans and threaten mischief to your interests, you can say, "This pleases my Heavenly Father, and therefore I know it is best, and it shall please me."

I very distinctly recollect attending a funeral in a case where a man had lost a most beloved wife by a sudden death. But O, there was such a smile on his countenance, a smile so calm, so resigned, so sweet, so like heaven--I never can forget it. Such a countenance as his;--it seemed to betoken any thing else but affliction. Why? His heart was with God.

But while this is all joyful and interesting; on the contrary all is agonizing when you come to see the wicked under affliction. Alas! they have no consolation. I once witnessed a funeral scene in New York. A most ungodly man died leaving two ungodly daughters fatherless. Their mother had died before, and they felt themselves thrown upon a blank world, orphans. They wept and wailed enough to move a heart of stone. Their tears and cries were agonizing. I felt unutterable anguish as I saw their forlorn, despairing grief. But I could do little else than stand and weep. I talked to them of Jesus, but they had no Jesus. This name, so dear to the Christian heart, had no charms to them. They did not know him. They had never learned to trust him;--they had never made him their friend. Alas! they

had no friend in the universe. Their father had gone to hell, and they were following on in the same path. O, it was enough to tear a man's heart all to pieces to witness such a scene! I could not help crying out, O, were they only Christians! O, if they only had Jesus for their friend!

But these are only the beginning of sorrows. These are only the first tastings of that bitter cup which to all eternity they must drink to its dregs. These are only the first drops of that awful, rising, gathering hail storm, about to overwhelm them in its wide wasting ruin. If you have ever seen the awful tornado, rolling up in its mountain masses of cloud and hail from the west, roaring, crashing, sweeping along;--now its first drops fall--it is coming, coming--even these first drops thrill through the quick pulse and the beating heart of the houseless, naked wanderer--ah how can he bear that rushing avalanche of storm!

To the sinner in this world--the few drops of affliction cut him down; he cannot stand before these few small drops;--how can he stand when God shall make bare his awful arm and clothe it with majesty to visit wrath upon the guilty according to their deeds? O sinner, how can thy heart endure, or thy hands be strong in the day when God shall deal with thee? The first drops crush you down; you cannot bear even the first small drop, but sink and wail out under even these;--what next? Next comes the solid hail--hear it roar. O that crash--as if it would tear the world in pieces! The first drops scattered in this world scald and scathe him--ah surely he never can endure in that dread day when the storms of Jehovah's wrath shall begin to beat forever on his guilty spirit!

When I have seen sinners under conviction, gnawing their very tongues literally as I have seen it--drawing blood, I have cried out in the inward anguish of my soul--If this is conviction, what is hell? O my soul, WHAT IS HELL? No hope;--no hope, no end, no escape;--O, if there were only some way of escape--or some end though after myriads of ages had rolled away in the agonies of the second death;--then it would not be all utter, hopeless despair. These thoughts of final relief might come as the elixir of life to bring at least a few drops of comfort; but no! hell has no hopes for its doomed ones;--it has no balm for the wounded spirits of its guilty, self-ruined victims. Every thought in every sinner's mind there, is only the fire and the gall of hell upon the dark malign spirits of that prison-house of despair!

Finally, brethren, let me say, it is exceedingly useful to us to contemplate this contrast between the earthly state of the righteous and of the wicked. Let

Christians do this often and thoroughly. I have found it exceedingly useful to me to do it. It quickens the deep sympathies of my heart for my dying fellowmen and calls forth gushing gratitude for the mercies of gospel salvation. It is sometimes an evil to dwell too long and too exclusively upon the Christian's hope and the Christian's heaven, and neglect to dwell upon the bitter doom of the wicked. O, we must not forget their awful state! Our business here is to pull them out of those fires. Then let our hearts feel their awful peril. Let us often follow out this striking, heart-affecting contrast between the righteous and the wicked. If ministers would often do this, carrying out this contrast in all its great and striking points, O how would both they and their churches travail in birth for souls, and be filled with unutterable emotions of benevolent solicitude for the souls of the perishing!

Brethren, do you satisfy yourselves with the dainties of the Christian life and live to eat rather than to labor and toil? Do you come up here to this sanctuary to regale yourselves with spiritual manna, and give no crumbs to those who must starve in the agonies of the second death? Do you lose sight of the sorrows of the wicked, and quite forget their case? Do you--can you forget their awful afflictions here and hereafter--so heavy, so enduring, so fearful? O! can you let these things pass from your minds, and live on as if all were well? Beloved, you must one day give account for souls--for souls saved or lost.

[Back to Top](#)

On Becoming Acquainted With God

Lecture VII

July 22, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Job 22:21: "Acquaint now thyself with Him and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee."

The speaker here addresses Job and exhorts him to become acquainted with God. The text therefore naturally leads us to enquire,

I. What is implied in being acquainted with God.

II. What are the conditions on which we may become thus acquainted.

III. What are its consequences.

I. What is implied in being acquainted with God.

The term acquaintance means something more than the common degree of knowledge of an individual's character. You often hear it remarked, "I cannot say that I am acquainted with him; I barely know him." Acquaintance, therefore, implies a more extensive and thorough knowledge.

The degree of our acquaintance with any individual will depend much upon our means of knowledge. Our means of knowing him may be only hearsay. This can never give us a real acquaintance with him. We might have a certain knowledge of some persons from reading their history. One might know much of Washington by reading all the published histories of him; but this would not be the kind of knowledge usually called acquaintance. It is plain that there is a much higher and more perfect kind of knowledge than this. A man who should only read a history of the battle of Waterloo would not get such a knowledge of it as one might by being in the scene itself. The latter might be in circumstances to know all about it.

We may also have some knowledge of others by their works. We may examine what they have done or have written. Thus we may know much of God from His works. His works of creation reveal Him; the course of His providence also; and the pages of His word. All these conspire to reveal to us God. But after all, none of these amount to as much as the text seems to imply in being acquainted with God.

We may also have knowledge of another's character arising from familiar, protracted, personal intercourse. If this comprise also a deep sympathy with his plans and purposes, it gives us the best possible opportunities for becoming thoroughly acquainted. And this is what is usually meant by acquaintance. When you ask me if I am acquainted with a particular individual, you want to know if I understand his character thoroughly. This is always understood to be the meaning of the language.

Thus it is often said--"I am too well acquainted with such a man to believe that he has done a mean action, or that he can do one." We can, any of us doubtless, say of some persons, "I am so well acquainted with him that I cannot easily believe anything bad of him;" and of others we could say--"I cannot believe anything good of them--certainly except on very strong evidence." Such is the result of real acquaintance.

So in the case alluded to in our text. The speaker assumes that Job knows something about God; but urges him to know more--very much more. He does not I think assume that Job is now a good man. He probably regarded him as self-deceived, and hence urges him to acquaint himself really with God.

II. What are the conditions of being thus acquainted with God?

The two first conditions that I shall name are always presupposed, and need no comment. They are

1. The requisite powers of intelligent, moral agency.
2. Light; that is the means of knowledge or instruction. But,
3. It is also an essential condition that we lay aside prejudice. Prejudice is pre-judgment, and such a pre-judgment as shuts out conflicting evidence. Now we shall never know God till we lay this aside. Indeed we never can depend on having a correct knowledge of any subject, or of any person's

character unless we lay aside all prejudice respecting that person or character, and hold our minds entirely open to all the truth which it may be possible for us to attain. Nothing can be more certain, nothing need be more obvious than this.

Many persons seem to overlook the fact that men are ever prejudiced against God. They could not possibly make a grater mistake than this. In fact, there is more prejudice against God than against all other beings in the universe. Men are so prejudiced against God that they will not form any right views of His character. I do not mean by this that their feelings are violently hostile against God, so that they are conscious of active hatred at all times; this is not necessary to the existence of prejudice, nor is this as some suppose implied in prejudice. It is rather a fruit of strong prejudice than a part of it, or a cause of it.

Prejudice, as already shown, is a shutting of the mind against evidence. It supposes the mind to be made up, or at least to be strongly inclined to a chosen opinion--that it does not lie open to conflicting light and evidence.

Now it is remarkable to see how strong this prejudice against God often becomes. Of course it demands a great knowledge of human nature and much sound philosophy to know how to subvert and remove this prejudice against God. I do not mean to imply that it can ever be removed without the Spirit of God; but since human means must be employed, it is essential that they be wisely chosen and applied.

The grand secret of ministerial usefulness lies in understanding these prejudices and in knowing how to subvert them. No man can hope to be useful in converting sinners without this skill. He can do nothing to purpose unless he assumes that this prejudice exists and sets himself to resist and subdue it.

All sinners have this prejudice against God; else they would at once learn His character and love it. There is no intrinsic difficulty in knowing God. He has manifested himself abundantly, and now it only remains that we open our eyes candidly, and throw open our hearts to embrace all that is good, and every sinner might become acquainted with God at once--to the everlasting peace and blessedness of his soul.

4. Another indispensable condition is that we give up all self-will on every subject.

Until one is prepared to give up all self-will on every subject, he certainly cannot become acquainted with God. How can he know God unless his heart comes into sympathy with God, and enters thoroughly and heartily into His character and plans? Now this sympathy of the soul with God can never exist till we give up our self-will on all points. For self-will is always hostile to God's will. God says to every one of His creatures--"Give me your heart," or which is the same thing, "Yield up your will to Mine." Self-will resists and rebels, and hence can have no sympathy with God; and consequently cannot really become acquainted with Him. Nothing can be real acquaintance with God which falls short of entering into His experience, and of tasting the deep joys of His benevolent heart. Plainly, for this purpose, self-will must be brought under.

5. We must be willing to know God as he is. Men generally overlook that fact that they are unwilling to know God as He is--a fact, too important surely to be overlooked! They are ready enough to form some conceptions of God; but in this they seek to form such as will please themselves--not such as are just and according to truth.

Just look at the idol gods which men have framed for themselves; some in the state of eternal inaction; some are monsters and patrons of vice; some are mean and all are wicked. Now are these the legitimate conceptions of God, framed by the enlightened human mind? Infinitely far from it. No man can read the records of idolatry without seeing that men have made themselves believe in just such gods as please themselves.

Or as another example of this truth, look at the god of the Universalists; have they come to the Bible to learn God as He is there revealed? So far is this from being true that they find many things in the Bible which they must construe and wrest from their obvious meaning to suit themselves, or they will say--"God is worse than the devil?" They come to the Bible, not to find its meaning, but to make it.

6. Another condition of becoming acquainted with God is a really honest desire to become acquainted with Him thoroughly.

Did you never see persons reluctant to become acquainted with each other? I opened a book a few days since and I was struck with the first remark I saw. I thought it remarkably just--"Never introduce persons to each other till you see that it will be agreeable to both parties to be introduced."

I have sometimes been introduced to persons who were any thing but pleased to be introduced to me. In various situations--perhaps when traveling, I have been introduced to wicked men who looked and seemed as if an electric stream was coursing up and down their bodies--they were so evidently troubled and uneasy in their condition.

Somewhat so of wicked men in relation to God. They do not like to be introduced to Him. They know too well that they have reason to be afraid of Him. If you knew you had injured a man, you would not wish to know any more about him than you could well help. You would not choose to come any nearer to him. Thus sinners know they do not wish to meet God and have near personal interviews with Him. They do not want to become personally acquainted with God.

Right over against this, we sometimes feel exceedingly anxious to become acquainted with particular individuals. I have heard of persons whom I would go to Europe to see, and should not shrink from the cost and toil of a voyage across the Atlantic for this purpose. I recollect especially that soon after my conversion there was one man whom I exceedingly desired to see and know. I wanted to lay open my whole heart to him and seek his counsel and aid in my religious course. My heart burned with desire to make his acquaintance.

Thus we must have an ardent, burning thirst for the knowledge of God, as a condition of attaining it. We must not be satisfied with an outward, distant knowledge of God; but must long to know Him as thoroughly as is possible for mortals in the flesh. When we come into this state we shall begin to know God indeed, and not before.

Another condition is the giving up of all selfishness and of the self-seeking spirit. This is most essential to success. All selfish ends must be abandoned. If we are bent on sustaining our own interests, we certainly cannot know God.

I have recently been very much struck with hearing an individual relate his own Christian experience. His case showed how truth seemed crowding its way into his mind, and how time after time its entrance was resisted and prevented by his selfishness. It seemed for a long time impossible for him to know God, and the reason was nothing else than this--selfishness was deeply rooted in his heart, and while there, the truth concerning God could get no admission. Sometimes, he came almost up to the very gate which, once opened, would introduce him to God; then his bounding heart would say, "Now I shall know God, and I shall be a great man--a distinguished Christian"--and lo, down he goes again--farther from God than ever. So time after time he was thrown all aback by such developments of selfishness and self-seeking.

Now it is a matter of the greatest importance especially for ministers, to philosophize justly on this subject, and to trace all events of this sort to their legitimate causes. The subject is deep and requires profound and searching investigation.

Selfishness takes on so many forms and is so subtle that many persons entirely fail to detect its workings. Hence, impeded by this fatal hindrance--they are never able to come to the knowledge of God.

Again, self-knowledge is indispensable. There is such a thing as self-penetration. This thing must exist in some good degree, or no man can know God thoroughly. Without possessing self-knowledge, one may set about to find God, but with all his searching he will fail because he does not know himself. He will be likely to suppose that his own heart is in a state acceptable to God and adapted to search out God, and yet in this be utterly mistaken. Hence he can get, at the utmost, only little fragments of divine knowledge.

I said that the mind must have a disposition to know God. This must be an intense disposition--else it will not overcome the obstacles. The Bible requires men to agonize for spiritual blessings--to search, as for hid treasures. The mind must set itself to seek God with a most intense and agonizing earnestness.

It would be easy to show that this is not an arbitrary fact, but is thoroughly philosophical.

It is also fully scriptural. God has said--"Then shall ye seek and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart." This is a state of mind well expressed by Paul when he said, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ."

Now everyone who would become acquainted with God must do thus. He must press on most earnestly after a full and perfect knowledge of God. The text enjoins upon us to get this knowledge of God. for nothing less than this intimate and special knowledge of God is meant by acquaintance. It is such a knowledge as will give peace of mind and that blessedness which is the birthright of God's children.

Another thing implied is confidence in God. Many suppose that if they have this confidence, they have already that acquaintance with God of which the text speaks. But this does not follow of course. Persons may have some degree of confidence in God for a long time without arriving at a thorough personal acquaintance with God. Confidence is an indispensable condition of this acquaintance, for many reasons. Unless men have confidence, they will not try God so as to become acquainted with Him. Having such confidence they get hold of some promise and try Him. Did you never do this? When oppressed with some want have you remembered that God has said--"Bring ye all the tithes into my store-house and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing." Now this is the way to know God.

Another condition of becoming thoroughly acquainted with God is attaining that experience which results from thorough confidence in God. The Lord had given us certain promises and the condition of their fulfilment is that we really believe them. If we do this, we shall experience their fulfilment. Let a man in circumstances of extreme trial throw himself upon the promise of God; he will find God faithful. Then he will learn something new and precious about God.

Very much of our trials and temptations here are designed to work out for us this experience of God's power, presence and willingness to bless. Thus we come to learn many things in God's character. For example, God has promised that on certain conditions He will reveal Himself to our souls. If we

fulfill the conditions He will fulfill the promise, and we shall learn by our experience that God hears prayer. Such knowledge is of immense value in bringing us to become acquainted with God.

Another condition is that we have confidence to pass through trials. Without this we shall surely fail under trial; we shall let go our confidence in God and learn nothing by our trials but our own weakness. Trials often work out the speedy ruin of men because they learn by them only to distrust God; they stagger through unbelief and fall sadly from their steadfastness; they shrink from meeting the conditions and then throw the blame on God for not fulfilling them. Perhaps they say--"I did trust in God, and I am overcome after all." But that is a lie. There can be no greater lie than that. The Bible shows that there never was and never can be such a case as a man's really trusting God and yet failing because God does not fulfill His word. With real faith, you might walk through the fiery furnace and not be singed in its fires. Those three holy men believed. "Our God," say they, "whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace; and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king." So if Daniel had lost his faith, the lions would have eaten him up before he had fallen to the bottom of their den. Daniel knew where he was, and in whom he had believed. He knew his danger well, and his refuge too. Hence when thrown into this den, he was calm as if he had been safely sitting in the royal palace.

But could his accusers stand where he stood and pass unscathed through such trials as his? No! They had no faith--no God for their refuge.

Another condition is that God should make special manifestations of Himself to the soul. God has promised thus to manifest Himself on certain conditions. By performing these conditions, we may obtain those manifestations; God will reveal Himself personally, and will show us great and wondrous thing of Himself. This is a most precious, blessed truth, and in view of it, we may well be exhorted to acquaint ourselves with God. Even Job in that dark dispensation without a letter of written revelation might be exhorted thus to acquaint himself with his Maker.

Still another condition is intimacy of communion with God. I may live for a long time in the same neighborhood or house with a man and yet never become acquainted with him. I may know his name and many things about him, and yet never become thoroughly acquainted with him. For real

acquaintance, it is essential that we have intimate communion. Some men may repel us from such communion however much we desire it; so that we cannot become really acquainted with them.

But God is always ready to hold communion with us. No fault, or reserve on His part can ever prevent our gaining acquaintance with Him. Men may shut us out of their company, or at least from their sympathies; but God has no such repulsiveness about Him. He is so meek and lowly that He is not above communing with a child even in the humblest condition possible on earth. Though He be the High and Lofty One that inhabits eternity, He yet condescends with infinite grace to dwell with the humble and contrite spirit. He knows nothing about the mere earthly distinction of the noble and the low; all are alike infinitely below Him. The only distinction recognized before Him is that between the proud and the humble. To the latter, He is ever open and most easy of access.

The thing now which we all need in order to become acquainted with God is an intimate personal communion. In order to know any person thoroughly we need to get into his heart. So you often express yourself. You say of a man, now I have got into his heart--now I really know him and feel myself acquainted with him. I see him through.

So with God. You need such an intimate communion with Him that you really enter into His deepest sympathies and know His real heart. Most blessed knowledge!

Having shown what is meant and what is implied in being acquainted with God, I come now to speak,

III. Of the consequences of our acquainting ourselves with God.

Under this head I can only give an outline of the principal points. I can do no more than to mention several blessings that will certainly accrue to those who acquaint themselves with God.

1. Peace of mind. Job was at this time in great trouble of mind. His three friends were anxious that God should pass before him in such a manner that he could not fail of apprehending God's true character. They justly supposed that peace of mind would be the natural result of his becoming truly acquainted with God.

Peace of mind always does and always must result from the harmonious and right action of all the powers of the mind. When we feel as God feels--live as He lives; and when our whole souls harmonize with His soul in the spirit and developments of benevolence, then we cannot possibly fail of having perfect peace of mind.

Peace of mind stands opposed to all anxiety, and must result from the mind's finding in God all that itself needs. Let all the demands of its being be entirely met, and it can ask no more. Let it be distinctly seen and realized that these demands of our being are met in God, and peace of mind must follow.

Now it is a most blessed truth that when the restless mind of man comes to be acquainted with God, it finds in Him everything it can need. Every want is fully and infinitely well supplied. When the mind realizes this, as it will when it comes to know God, it settles down into a state of calm repose in God which no restless anxieties can ever disturb.

One of the demands of our being is that others shall have the demands of their being met; in other words, that we shall have not our own wants only supplied, but shall know that the whole universe also have their wants supplied in God. In order to our perfect peace, we need to see that all other beings have in God all they can ask or wish; that no want can possibly exist which does not find its adequate supply in the great Father of all. Now as the soul comes to know God more and more, it sees with increasing clearness and certainty that God's goodness, wisdom, justice and power are just what they should be to secure the highest possible degree of happiness and blessedness to the whole sentient universe, so that if misery exists it must always be the creature's own fault.

When we come to understand this thoroughly and to see that God's providence is perfect and reaches to all events--marks the falling of the sparrow and counts the hairs on our head; when we see that God cannot fail of being infinitely faithful, kind and wise--that He cannot possibly mistake in anything whatever; when these truths become fully settled in our mind and we rest on them as upon changeless, eternal realities, then all is peace. It cannot be otherwise.

But this state of mind toward God never can exist until we get more

knowledge of Him than mere hearsay. We must have personal experience and personal acquaintance in respect to God.

Paul's words were full of meaning when he said--"I know in whom I have believed." Did you ever consider how much he meant in these words? Surely much more than many others would mean by the same language. It should be considered that Paul had been caught up to the third heavens--had heard unutterable things--had seen the Lord Jesus Christ Himself--had passed through many scenes of sore and various trials--and in all had enjoyed varied and manifold experience of God and of Christ.

Hence this language from him must have been full of meaning. "I know Him"--says he--"I know Him;" I have seen Him--I have had a long and precious experience of His lovingkindness and faithfulness; I know Him; and if all the devils in hell should tell me that Christ would not keep me, I know He would.

So we often see Christians who seem to know Christ so well that temptations seem to have lost their power upon their hearts. Let the temptation be ever so subtle, or so fierce, they do not slide or quake. They mildly say, I know Him whom I have believed and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day.

2. Another good accruing to those who acquaint themselves with God is that their faith becomes confirmed. As they become acquainted with God they find He bears acquaintance. The more they see of Him, the more their confidence in His character rises.

Now in order to be at peace and to stand evermore in the evil day, Christians need to have their faith confirmed. They need to be assured that Jehovah is their friend, and to have such an acquaintance with Him as shall make this truth a substantial reality.

So we sometimes come to have confidence in each other, when we become intimately acquainted, and this acquaintance reveals only substantial excellencies of character. When really worthy individuals are introduced to us, the more we become acquainted with them, the more we trust them. Of such we say--they bear acquaintance well. Of others we say the opposite--they do not bear acquaintance well. The more we know of them, the less we

trust them. The former class are fast friends. We can confide in them under all possible circumstances.

Now God is a being who bears acquaintance perfectly. The more we shall know of Him, the more clearly we shall see that in Him there is no frailty--no infirmity--no defect.

Now I am well aware that in all Christian communities this is admitted in theory, but I also know that it is not held in fact. It is one thing to admit it in theory, and quite another thing for the heart to rest in it as a living, abiding reality. It is quite another thing for the mind to become so acquainted with God so as to triumph in Him under all possible circumstances.

3. Another result is confirmed love. The Bible speaks of our "being root and grounded in love." There is a great deal of meaning in this expression. It develops most clearly the great truth that love is the basis of the Christian's character. In love it rests as its foundation, or to change the figure--in love it takes root and grows.

But of how few can this be said! The more I become acquainted with Christians, the more I am struck with their weakness in love. Their religion is not rooted and grounded in love. Many professed Christians are, to say the least, much of their time away from the spirit of love. There is a want of that universal love to God and man which gives to religion an unction, and makes it grateful both to God and man. If they had this unction of love at their first conversion, they seem to lose it and become legal. Then some of the forms of religious duty remain and some of the forms of humanity and human sympathy; but the spirit of genuine love is lacking. It is infinitely important to be rooted and grounded in love. The more you become acquainted with God, the more you will see that love is the only principle worthy of being regarded as the rule of life. This only is living like God, and this only is the spirit and life of real excellence.

4. Another result of becoming acquainted with God is a disposition to obey God in all our life; a disposition to conform the whole life to God's will. It is a great thing to obey God under all circumstances, and a great thing to have one's mind thoroughly settled in this supreme law of action.

This will result from becoming really acquainted with God. It will become

more and more easy and natural as the mind becomes more and more acquainted with God; for the mind becomes thus more and more confiding, and if it cannot see, it will still assume that God is and must be wise.

5. Another result of becoming acquainted with God is fruitfulness. The Bible represents that our Father is glorified when we bear much fruit. But multitudes of professed Christians are remarkable for nothing so much as for their barrenness in the fruits of piety. With them, it seems to be a perpetual drought. They seem like Mount Gilboa on which no dew or rain descend. Of course, no fruits are borne to the praise of God. Of earthly seasons some are fruitful and some are barren; but with these professed Christians, all seasons and months are alike barren. This must be ascribed to their want of personal acquaintance with God. It would not be possible for them to be acquainted with God, and yet be so barren.

6. Another result would be moral courage. Unbelief is always the secret of moral cowardice. Persons who have not much faith are forever stumbling on the point of obeying God. They dare not trust God to take care of them in the path of straight forward obedience. They dare not face public sentiment--as if they feared it would ruin them, despite of the promises of God in their behalf. They are afraid of the censures of the church or of the world, their faith in God being so weak, and their apprehensions of God being so dim that they practically fear man more than God. Hence they cringe, shuffle, dodge, evade, shrink away from self-denying duty, afraid to take a simple-minded honest course, and trust God to bear them safely, nay triumphantly through.

Faith always cures this state of mind. It strikes at once at its very root.

See what a remarkable illustration of this we have in the case of the apostles. Before the Spirit of God was shed down upon them, they were timid. Peter was afraid of a servant girl, and they all forsook their Master and fled before a small band of armed men. They had nothing more at best than the courage of children. They needed a mighty change, and God provided means to produce it.

Christ had told them it was necessary that He should go away and that He should send the Comforter to teach them the (divine) things of Christ. He did so. He went up Himself to heaven, and thence sent down the Comforter upon

them. Then, O how changed! How full of moral courage! At once they become moral heroes. No dangers can daunt them. The same men who quailed before power and authority but a few days before are now fearless. The awful Sanhedrim no longer inspires terror. "We ought," say they, "to obey God rather than men." "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye."

Now this is always the result of becoming acquainted with God. Where you see a professor of religion who is a moral coward, you see one who does not know much about God.

I have been struck with this in seeing the moral cowardice of many ministers. I think I have seen not a few ministers more afraid of the Presbytery than a Roman Catholic would be of the Pope. Such men I have seen whose first and last question pending a case of duty, is--what will my Presbytery think of me? O, how disgraceful--how dishonoring to the Christian name--that a minister of the gospel should think so! O, were they only once filled with the Spirit of God, it would put another soul within them. Before the apostles were filled with the Spirit they might have quailed before the Sanhedrim; but afterwards, the Sanhedrim--not they--were confounded. The Sanhedrim were confounded with the boldness of those unlearned men--fishermen and publicans of Galilee. O to be afraid of men--they are the last things in the universe to be afraid of! As if God were not infinitely greater and mightier than men! Surely those who quail before men rather than before God must be very far from any just acquaintance with Him.

7. Another result of knowing God will be great searching of heart.

I have often been struck to see how it happens that many persons under the influence of a false philosophy, have taken a false view of this subject. This is a point which it seems to me of great importance that we should understand correctly.

Take the case of Isaiah as given in chap. 6, when God made fresh and most vivid manifestations of His glory before him. He then came to know God more fully by far than ever before; and it searched him through and through. Suddenly he cries out, "Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips." Job also, when the Almighty came down to talk with him, cried out--"I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye

seeth Thee; therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Now all this class of passages have an important meaning. It is very important that we understand what they do teach and that we avoid ascribing to them a sense which does not belong to them.

In the case of Isaiah, we are not to suppose that he was sinning at the moment when God thus revealed Himself. He did not cry out--"Woe is me--I am a man of unclean lips"--because he was then in rebellion against God. It is by no means either natural or necessary to suppose this. The same may be said of the case of Job, and of all other cases of the same sort. This subject might be understood if persons would take pains to do so. Experience would teach us much, very much about it. How common a thing it is for Christians to stand perfectly confounded when some new views of God's law and character flash upon the soul. They then cry out--"I have seen an end of all perfection, for Thy commandment is exceeding broad."

What in such cases is the nature and what the results of this new revelation? Is it this, "I am now sinning; I see as I never did before that my present state is utterly wrong before God?" No; but the mind sees a vastness--a breadth in the law and in God's claims which it had not seen before and sees that more is implied than had been before supposed, in being obedient. And so it will be to all eternity. More and still more will be seen of the breadth and glory of the divine law and character.

Now in order to understand such a case as is that of Isaiah or of Job, we need to consider that we are always inclined to judge our past state and conduct by our present light. I have often in my own experience found that when drawn very near to God, I had such new and enlarged views of scripture passages that I felt sure I had never understood them before, It has really seemed sometimes as if I had never known God before. It was then perfectly natural if I judged all the past by my present views of God and of His law that I should cry out--all is rottenness. In such situations I have felt almost irresistibly impelled to do so.

In reference to this state of mind I often think of Mrs. Pres. Edwards. She represents herself as sometimes feeling such an attraction towards the divine character that it really seemed as if she should go right up, body and soul together. On such occasions she was wont to cry out--"All my past life is

rotteness." Yet this was not because she then saw that her present state of mind was entirely sinful, but she saw a higher standard than she had ever seen before, and comparing her past life with this new and enlarged standard she saw its utter deficiency. If in these states of holy attraction towards God she deemed herself to be actually sinning, the explanation of her mistake is doubtless this, that she estimated her past obligation by her present light.

On this point it should be well considered that our former life is not to be judged by our present light. To do so would be to subvert one of the great principles of God's moral government: viz: that guilt is always to be estimated by existing light--not by light attained afterwards but not possessed then; not by light enjoyed by other beings yet not by ourselves. Suppose we should go back to the times when all men and all ministers with the rest drank alcohol; and should judge the men of those times by our present light, we should inevitably condemn the whole church and all the good men of that day. On the same principle future generations may look back upon us and condemn us and all other good men who have lived since the times of the apostles; for their standard we hope and presume will be in some respects more elevated than ours, and their light greater on some moral questions. Consequently, if they may judge other men of other ages by their own light they will pass a most sweeping sentence of condemnation upon all past ages of the race. A principle which leads to such results must be radically false.

The nearer a man gets to God, the more clearly he sees that his past life is objectively wrong, although it may have been subjectively right. It seems important to make this distinction which I have now stated. An act may be said to be objectively wrong when it is wrong in itself considered, or in its relations to law; but the same act may be subjectively right, in reference to the state of mind of the subject or agent who puts forth the act--because with his light he did the best he could do, and his motives are acceptable in the sight of God. Acting according to the best light he has, his acts are subjectively right, and yet in view of the real spirit of the law, they are objectively wrong. Let this distinction be carefully made.

Now when a man becomes more enlightened by revelations from God than he has been, he will look back upon his past life and cry out--"What an infinite wretch I have been--how far my whole life falls short of meeting the spirit of God's pure and perfect law"--while perhaps with even all this

increased light he does not see that his former intentions were wrong. Subjectively considered, therefore, his heart was right before, but objectively considered, his conduct seems egregiously wrong.

8. Another result of knowing God will be great humiliation. As men become thoroughly acquainted with God, they will see more and more of His excellence, and of course will realize more and more deeply the infinite wrong of sin against such a God. Hence they will feel an irrepressible inclination to humble themselves before Him, and pour out their souls with great and bitter weeping at His feet. You are aware that such is the result among earthly friends. If you have wronged a good friend of yours, and if your growing acquaintance with him reveals more and more of his excellent qualities, you will see more and more of the cruel wrong of your conduct and will seek opportunities to humble yourself before him and pour out your full confessions as if you never could confess enough.

So with the soul before God. As you remember more and more your past sins, and see yet more of God's goodness, you will love to humble yourself more and more deeply at His feet.

In reading the life of Pres. Edwards, I have been struck with the recurrence of these scenes in his experience. Whenever he was drawn very near to God, his very soul seemed to burst forth in loud weeping and convulsive sobbing, pouring out his soul before God in the deepest humiliation. This was only the natural result of becoming more acquainted with God. In my own experience, I have found that when I have had new views of God I have felt that I must get down infinitely low before Him. Nothing less could satisfy the demands of my own mind.

This must be the natural result of seeing Christ in heaven. Did you never think how, when you get to heaven you will want to spend months in confessing, pouring out your soul in the deepest humiliation--as if you never could get low enough, or say enough to magnify His infinite grace, and strip yourself of all glory to give it all to Him? How can our eyes look on the pure and lovely Jesus without being filled with these self-abasing thoughts of ourselves and thoughts of honor and glory to Him?

9. Another result will be great wrestling with God. As we become acquainted with God, we shall become emboldened to ask of Him great

things. We shall then understand what it is to "come with boldness" to a mercy seat. We shall learn that God has a great heart, and is not displeased if we come and wrestle with Him with great and overpowering importunity.

When we have become thoroughly acquainted with God, the mind will fasten upon some great things for His kingdom--not for ourselves--and we shall feel that we are authorized, and invited to come with boldness and with wrestling importunity and say with Jacob--"I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me." We know it is Christ with whom we plead, and we feel that we may venture on the most urgent importunity. It is to us as if we were pleading before some long tried and proved earthly friend.

Again, there will result a great use of the promises of God.

To one who has no faith, the promises lie in the Bible as unused as if they were never made for use. They are in fact of no more avail to such a person than if they were made for angels and not at all applicable to sinning mortals. But as you become acquainted with God, you see that these promises are given to be used, and you feel that they are indeed your own.

Father Carpenter used often to cry out--"Lord, what are the promises good for, unless they are to be kept?" It was with him a living reality that God had given us these exceeding great and precious promises for our use, and that we should keep them bright as it were by constant use, and never let them get rusty. They were given us to live upon and to work upon, and if we mean to live or to work we must use them.

10. Another result will be great and constant sympathy with God in all His purposes and doings. As we know God more, we shall be charmed more and more with His plans and ways and shall feel ourselves more and more identified with all His interests. This will operate powerfully to transform us into His glorious image.

11. As another result, we may name, great transparency of character. There will be an openness of soul before God--a continual holding of the heart out for constant inspection, a longing to have God's own eye search us continually. "Let Thine eye search me"--we shall say--"show me all in me that is displeasing to Thee."

12. Finally, there will result a full assurance of faith and hope. This cannot

but result from becoming thoroughly and personally acquainted with God. Faith will become assurance; for as we come to know more of God, we shall see that He is infinitely worthy of being trusted and believed most perfectly. The assurance therefore is a natural result of our acquaintance with God.

So with hope. The expectation of promised good, like faith, must become strong and assured just in proportion as we thoroughly acquaint ourselves with God. There is no other valid foundation for assured faith and hope.

Whatever men may call these states of mind, and whatever relations they may suppose them to bear to sanctification or to consecration, it is quite certain that they can result only from becoming deeply and personally acquainted with God and from devoting the whole powers of the soul to Him. They naturally result from knowing God in the full and deep sense of personal acquaintance and they can have no other foundation.

REMARKS.

1. There is and can be no real comfort without acquaintance with God. The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest. They know not what it is to be free from cares and troubles, and how should they? Why should they not be restless, and tossed forever without solid peace for they have not found anything which can satisfy them, and what is to them more distressing still, they never can with all their searching unless they will seek it in God. Traverse the world up and down as they will, they never can find, away from God, the happiness and peace they need.

2. With this subject before you, you may see why the Holy Spirit is called "The Comforter." The name is pertinent because it is His office to reveal God to the mind, and thus comfort the hearts of His people. Who has not been struck to see how, when Jesus had ascended to heaven, the Spirit came and revealed a divine Jesus, taking of the things of Christ and showing to them His higher glories. Then they knew Christ as they had never known Him before.

So with all Christians who live in the Spirit. The Comforter brings real comfort to their souls--just what their souls need. Beloved, you know this by an experience which the world cannot give.

3. All other knowledge of God except this which the Holy Ghost reveals, only

agonizes the mind. It serves only to fill the mind with fear and dread; but never leads the soul to trust God as its own precious Father. It is most obvious that nothing but that which promotes faith and trust in God can ever afford real comfort.

4. The mass of Christians seem to know only just enough of God to keep them always worried and always in trouble. They know enough of God to understand His holiness and hatred of sin; enough to add pungency and power to the rebukes of their own consciences; but not enough to find through grace victory over their sins and abiding peace with God through Jesus Christ their Lord. Hence they seem in many respects to be even worse off than careless sinners who have almost no knowledge of God at all. For the latter, if they find no peace with God, do not find much disturbance of their dreams from that quarter, at least for a season.

5. A selfish mind cannot be properly acquainted with God. Experience seems to show that where selfishness takes on certain peculiar forms, it effectually precludes all right knowledge of God. Ambition and avarice seem to be its worst and most fatal forms. Ambition--O what a curse to the soul! If the ambitious man sets about seeking his own salvation, his aim is to make himself great or to enhance his reputation. Seeking it with such a motive, God will of course repel his proud heart away from His own mercy-seat. If the ambitious man seeks more piety--supposing him to be a Christian--still he is prone to let his ambition work in even here, and his object will be to gain distinction. Oh, how such a soul will be blighted by its own selfishness!

No better is the case of the avaricious man. His selfishness is wont to assume such power as utterly to exclude all right knowledge of God. See the case of Judas. He could attend the personal preaching of Christ for three years, and yet never have so much as the crust of his selfishness broken through. Alas, Judas was a thief and carried the bag. His heart was wholly in that bag, and the thought of making something for himself was ever present, and no matter how sacred his employment, nothing could be so sacred as to save it from being perverted by his sordid heart. If he had been building a meeting house, he would contrive if he could to make some speculation out of it. Ask such a man now to do something for the Institution here and he would try to make it turn in some way to his own personal advantage. Self, you may be sure, will somehow be cared for--else what good will his life do him? His reigning disposition is--"I might as well not live as

live and get no good to myself."

Now where these and similar forms of selfishness exist, it seems utterly impossible that men should become acquainted with God. The mighty currents of their heart drift them forever away from God and they cannot serve God and Mammon if they try ever so earnestly. If they would give up their selfishness--forsake their idol Mammon, they might then seek God and find Him when they should seek Him with all their heart.

6. Sinners are often ashamed to become acquainted with God. Men who would deem it their highest honor to be introduced to a President, are actually ashamed to be introduced to God. They would be ashamed to have it understood that they are His friends and value His acquaintance and friendship. O how they would fain cast contempt on the Infinite God! They know that no mortal man would bear such insults as they heap on Him. Is it strange that Christ should disown them in the awful day when He comes in all the glory of His Father and with His holy angels?

7. It really seems as if the great mass of professed Christians had no expectation of becoming acquainted with God. They seem not to consider that even in this world they may form as absolute an acquaintance with God as they can in heaven. They seem not to appreciate the value of those exceeding great and precious promises which assure us that the Spirit will reveal to us both Christ and the Father. All these rich provisions of the gospel for revealing the knowledge of God to man are to them as if they were not. Alas that they should know so little of their own mercies!

8. This is an infinitely dangerous state, and no professed Christian ought to rest in it one moment. Even if you are a real Christian your course is full of peril if you do not acquaint yourself with God. You will not trust Him; you cannot have the security which His presence and His friendship afford.

9. A sensual state of mind is infinitely perilous. It is so especially because it is utterly repugnant to your becoming acquainted with God. You cannot grow in anything good or great if you indulge in a sensual state of mind.

10. All who are really acquainted with God will have an earnest longing to see others made acquainted with Him. They know how blessed the knowledge is, and hence they cannot fail to desire that others too should know and enjoy this

blessedness.

Beloved, have you this proof that you know God? Does your soul long to see all others enlightened into all the riches of this divine knowledge?

11. Finally the text exhorts us to become acquainted with God now. How reasonable and cogent is this exhortation! It does seem to me that persons must be infatuated who can pursue other knowledge eagerly, and yet be remiss in seeking the knowledge of God. I cannot but wonder that the persons now before me who are conscious of being strangers to God, or at least destitute of an intimate acquaintance with God, do not at once resolve--"I will know God. I must search for this knowledge more than for hid treasures. I am ready to forego all other knowledge rather than fail of this. All other acquisitions of any sort whatever shall be held as of no account compared with this. O let my soul know God!"

Christian, have you this burning thirst for divine knowledge? Does your very soul cry out within you as if indeed nothing else could by any means satisfy you? Then you need not fear. God will reveal Himself to you in His richest glories.

[Back to Top](#)

God Manifesting Himself to Moses

Lecture VIII

August 5, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Ex. 33:12-23: "And Moses said unto the Lord, See, Thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people; and Thou hast not let me know whom Thou wilt send with me. Yet Thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in My sight. Now therefore, I pray Thee, if I have found grace in Thy sight, show me now Thy way, that I may know Thee, that I may find grace in Thy sight, and consider that this nation is Thy people. And He said, My presence shall go with

thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said to Him, If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight? Is it not in that Thou goest with us? So shall we be separated; I and Thy people from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken; for thou hast found grace in My sight, and I know thee by name. And he said, I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory. And He said, I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. And He said, thou canst not see My face; for there shall no man see Me and live. And the Lord said, behold, there is a place by Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock. And it shall come to pass, while My glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock; and will cover thee with My hand while I pass by; and I will take away My hand, and thou shalt see My back parts; but My face shall not be seen."

Text.--Ex. 34:1-8: "And the Lord said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first; and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest. And be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning unto Mount Sinai, and present thyself there to Me in the top of the mount. And no man shall come up with thee, neither let any man be seen throughout all the mount: neither let the flocks nor herds feed before that mount. And he hewed two tables of stone, like unto the first; and Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up unto Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tables of stone. And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped."

There are many passages of Bible history which are richly edifying, and which it is important for us to read often and ponder deeply. The passage now before us I have read often, and several times have preached upon it. Every successive

reading suggests new thoughts and develops new beauties; like a deep, rich mine of gold, the more it is wrought, the richer the ore it brings up.

God had called Moses to be a leader and instructor of His people in a great and mighty movement. Moses was to superintend and guide them from Egypt to Canaan. In the first verse of our passage Moses distinctly recognizes the fact that God had designated himself for this great work. "See, Thou sayest unto me, bring up this people."

But Moses very well understood that God had not called him to perform this work in his own strength, but designed to give him aid. It seems probable that Moses had often thought particularly of this point of having a helper, had often prayed over it and asked God whom he should have to help him in this great enterprise. He saw that the work before him was great; he had been in that vast, howling, desolate wilderness before, and he could appreciate somewhat before hand the labor and responsibility of leading through it a host of three millions of dependent men, women and children. Such a work he well knew surpassed all human power, and he therefore rejoiced to know that God would send him a helper. Accordingly in the next verse Moses makes this appeal; "Now therefore, I pray Thee, if I have found grace in Thy sight, show me now Thy way, that I may know Thee, that I may find grace in Thy sight; and consider that this nation is Thy people."

Observe here that this was after Moses had met with God several times. He had already received the law on Mt. Sinai from Jehovah's own hand, and had seen the great "I am" in the burning bush. Yet though he had known so much of God, he still felt that he needed to know very much more. He knew far too little of God to be fit for this great work of guiding His people through that trackless desert. Now therefore, he makes his call to this work and God's acceptance of him in this capacity an argument with God for revealing Himself yet more fully. Now, he says, inasmuch as Thou hast called me and I have found grace, now show me Thy way. Let me know more of Thee.

You cannot but be struck with the simple-heartedness of Moses in this conversation with God. He unbores his whole soul as a man would with his friend. He is deeply impressed with the importance of knowing more of God, and feels most deeply that without this knowledge he cannot persuade the people to encounter the perils of that great and fearful desert. He felt the pressure of his own responsibilities and turned confidently to God. Hence his simple-hearted

state of mind.

Opening his heart thus before the Lord, he reminds Him that although He had called him, yet He had not told him who should go with him. The Lord seems to admit the full force of this appeal. How wonderful! Here is the great Jehovah, condescending to talk with a mere mortal man like one of us. He speaks; then He listens to the reply. He hears the appeal and feels the full force of the considerations it presents.

Now mark the gracious answer. "My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest." Moses asks--Who shall go! The Lord replies--I will go with you Myself--My presence shall guide you--you need not fear. How full of kindness, love, and condescension, is this answer! If you want to know who shall go with you, let this suffice you--I will go with you Myself. I feel the force of your plea. I see all your necessities. I pledge you My presence.

How full of consolation to Moses, to be assured of Jehovah's glorious presence! How sweet the promise, "I will give thee rest."

Now listen to the beautiful answer of Moses, in which we have another exhibition of his great simplicity of character. He is so deeply sensible of his own deficiencies, that he knows and feels that he cannot go without God. "If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." He thus acknowledges most fully his entire dependence on God, and his perfect despair of success unless God be with him. What can be more striking than these developments of character, both on the part of Moses and of God! On the part of Moses, you see the most perfect simplicity and dependence; on the part of God, the most astonishing goodness and condescension.

But let us examine the course pursued by Moses yet more attentively. When God had given him the promise "My presence shall go with thee," why did he not drop the subject at once? Why go on to argue and urge the case yet further? The answer is to be found in his intensely anxious state of mind. He could not endure to think of going on without God. Without God's presence, he urges, "wherein shall it be known that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight?" Now plainly Moses had looked thoroughly through this subject. He did not say this without reflection. It was no hasty remark; nor was it made without good reason. Indeed, Moses was in an eminently collected and rational state of mind. He saw how infinitely necessary it was, for the good of Israel, and for the honor of

Jehovah, that this nation should stand out before all the nations of the earth as a distinct people. Hence he urges before the Lord--how can this be manifest unless Thou be with us? Can any thing else make it manifest? Can my saying so do it? No; God Himself must be with us, sustaining us amid all our trials, guiding us in all our ways, delivering us from all our foes, else we shall not be known as the people of God, and God Himself can get no honor from our bearing His name. How perfectly reasonable are these views of the case, and the state of Moses' mind resulting from these views!

We come now to the answer of God. "And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in My sight, and I know thee by name." The Lord seems to feel the full force of every word that Moses says. Indeed, no being in the world is so easily influenced by considerations of real importance as God is. I have always found that if I had good reasons to urge in prayer before God, I could certainly prevail with Him, for He is always reasonable. It is wonderful to see how the Lord suffers Himself to be carried by the least reason, presented even by a child. Yes, He seems to say, I know very well that your reasoning is all good, and I will surely act accordingly. So with Moses. God heard, and then did for him all that he could ask.

At this stage of the interview Moses ventured upon yet another great request. He had been drawing nearer and yet nearer to God during this whole conversation. How often in reading this narration have I seemed to be by his side, and to see God taking an attitude all along to encourage Moses to draw yet nearer and nearer. God promises to give him His gracious presence. He meets every request with His smiles and His assent. Moses therefore dares to take a position which probably no mortal had ever taken before. What is it? This--"I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory." But why should Moses make this request? Mark what had already passed. God had shown Himself gloriously on Sinai until the people trembled and did not dare to hear that awful voice anymore. Moses had come down from that awful mount, his face all blazing with the glory of this interview with God. So much of that awful majesty of the Lord of Hosts had Moses seen; yet now he ventures to draw yet nearer and nearer, and since God kindly permits him to approach, he ventures upon another request. Let me see yet more of Thy glory. Take that vail away and let me see Thy face and all Thy heart.

O what a request this must have been for a mortal man to make! But what reply

did the Lord make? Did He say--"Take care, Moses, take heed what you ask?" Let us see. "And He said, I will make all My goodness pass before thee and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee." O how ready--how infinitely condescending and gracious! I will make thee know My name; that is, my real character--for by God's name we are to understand His character, since all His names were originally significant, and each expressed some leading attribute of His character.

Thou canst not see My face, said He; thou canst not bear the view of My unvailed glories; no man can see Me in this perfect sense and live. The Lord grants him all He can give--all that Moses can bear. Moses was in a state of mind so disinterested and confiding that God could deny him nothing which was possible in his mortal state; nothing which could be essential or useful to his success in the great work before him.

Moses needs to have such an impression made on his mind as will carry him through all possible trials and toils. Hence the Lord engages to show him all he could bear. Accordingly He proceeds to say--"Behold there is a place by Me and thou shalt stand upon a rock, and while My glory passeth by, I will put thee in a cleft of the rock." In a cleft of the rock--where else should He put him? What other place so suitable? Christ is sometimes represented as a rock cleft for us, in which we may hide ourselves and be safe. So God places Moses in a cleft of a rock, and says, "I will cover thee with My hand while I pass by; and I will take away My hand and thou shalt see My back parts; but My face shall not be seen." The Lord seems to have felt the importance of giving Moses all he had asked. Nay rather, the Lord Himself had put it in Moses' heart to make these requests and had emboldened him to ask for things so great and precious. So God is wont to do with His children, and the fact should assure us that when our souls hunger and thirst after God, He will most certainly reveal Himself to us and show us the fulness of His glory.

It deserves special notice here that the answer given by God to Moses shows in what His glory really consists. Moses says, "I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory." The Lord answers--yes--"I will make all My goodness pass before thee." The glory of the Lord, then, consists in His goodness. It is not as some seem to suppose some dazzling splendor, some effulgence of light ineffable and overpowering--no such thing as this seems to have been thought of; but Jehovah's goodness--the intrinsic excellencies that compose His character--these

He would cause to pass before Moses, for these are His true glory. And these glories of His character were brought before Moses when, passing along, He proclaimed those glorious and most expressive names--"The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious; long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." Every word in this description is full of most emphatic meaning. O how does it reiterate and amplify the precious thought that God is love.

It should also be noticed particularly that Moses had been previously prepared for just such a revelation of God. He had been a long time on Mt. Sinai amid its thunderings and smoke, and amid all the fearful manifestations of Jehovah's terrible justice. The flaming law of God had been before his mind most vividly and could not have failed to make deep and solemn impressions. He was therefore now prepared to hear of grace and mercy. He could appreciate them. He could hear the joyful promulgation and not abuse it. No man is ever prepared to hear the gospel until he has heard the law. He must in the nature of the case appreciate the strict and righteous demands of law before he can appreciate the real value of gospel grace to sinners.

None of the Hebrew people except Moses seem to have gone through this preparatory process. They had not been thoroughly impressed with the awful majesty, purity and strictness of the holy law of God. Hence they could not appreciate these manifestations of His goodness and not another one of the whole nation was allowed to be present with Moses in this glorious interview with God.

It is important in this connection to notice the precise moral attitude in which Moses stood before the Lord. He was now commanded to prepare himself two new tablets of stone. The circumstances in which the two formerly prepared were broken, you will all remember. Moses had been with the Lord on the burning mount; had tarried long; at last returns and finds that the people had made a calf and were engaged in the grossest idolatry. His indignation was kindled; he dashed the stones to the ground and broke them to pieces. The Lord seems not to have rebuked Moses for this outburst of indignation; it appears to have been under the circumstances entirely proper and acceptable to God, as was also his subsequent conduct in calling on the Levites to take the sword and slay those of their brethren who were leading that horrible iniquity and would not

desist. In all this, the Lord seems to have fully accepted Moses.

Let us now pursue the thread of our history. Moses prepares the two tables of stone, and goes up early in the morning as the Lord had commanded him and lo, the Lord descends and meets him there. What an interview was this for a mortal man to hold with the great God! Think of the circumstances; the deep solitudes of that rugged, awful mount Sinai were the temples of Jehovah's presence; the heavens above were the canopy of that temple; there was God!

When Moses went up he had already received the promise that the Lord would meet him there. But the promise was not fulfilled immediately. At least one night intervened. What a night of anticipation--still, deep, solemn, anticipation that must have been!

Probably Moses had borne about as much as he well could for one day, and the Lord kindly deferred the more glorious interview until Moses should rise refreshed on the next morning. So the Lord often does when His people get very near Him. Christian, have not scenes like these occurred in your own experience? You have a precious interview with God as the day closes and the shades of evening gather round you. You retire for the night, and your very dreams seem full of heaven, and you feel assured that those hallowed interviews with God will be renewed in the morning. You lay down yourself to rest with the sweet sustaining conviction that the Lord will reveal Himself speedily again.

So to Moses. Early in the morning you see him brushing the early dew away, climbing that well known mountain, upon whose craggy summits he had seen God more than once before. If you might only have seen him; if your eye could only have followed him as he drew near and entered into audience with the great God! How impressive and solemn must the spectacle have been!

Moses was in a state of mind in which God's saints have been frequently. The utmost conceivable awe pervaded his whole soul, yet he was not afraid of God. He was ready to go into any solitary wild and meet God alone. Many would have been oppressed with a superstitious awe under such circumstances, and would have declined or at least have dreaded such an interview. But Moses had no such superstitious dread.

Probably no mortal man was ever called to meet God under circumstances which were calculated to make a deeper impression than these. Consider what Moses

desired and what his heart was now fixed on most earnestly. The renewing of the tables of the law was altogether an incidental thing. The chief thing was for God to show him His glory. He was fully aware that God was about to show such manifestations of Himself as human nature could scarce endure.

Let me ask you what you would think of such an interview with the great God? How would you like to be drawn into such near and glorious communion with the dread Jehovah? Suppose God should apprise you that you might enjoy such an interview with Himself as you retire from this place to your rooms. He gives you the promise. Would you be ready? Would your very heart leap up within you in the prospect and cry out--O let me know more of God and of His unsearchable glories? O, then, prepare your hearts. Put away everything sinful, everything earthly. Let your soul thirst after God, yea, after the living God. When you feel your need of it and ask it with such simplicity and faith as Moses had, you may rely on receiving it--to the joy and blessedness of your souls.

With Moses the solemn hour has come. The Lord passes by and proclaims His name--"Jehovah, Jehovah God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin." Observe that the previous interview of Moses with God had been at the giving of the law from Sinai, and it is remarkable that immediately after this, God should begin with proclaiming His name and should explain it by saying, "merciful and gracious," "long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth." Few except very spiritual persons would know how to understand this. But those who have had the law revealed to them as on Sinai's top can understand it well. No person ever really sees the law until it is revealed to him and he sees its pungent bearing upon his own case. So to Paul; when the commandment came he says, "sin revived and I died." But what is this? Had the commandment never come to Paul before? He had studied the law under the greatest doctors of his age; he had sat at the feet of Gamaliel; but yet he had not so understood the law as to have it cut him up root and branch and convict him powerfully of his own sins, until the moment when the commandment came to him.

Now when a man has had the law really given to him it comes in a sense very similar to that in which it came to Moses. If any of you have had the law thus revealed to your hearts and consciences, you can understand why Moses should cry out--"I do exceedingly fear and quake." You would see why the people

should stand afar off and dare not to approach the awful scene.

Now this revelation of law exceedingly well fitted Moses to receive the next revelation made at this interview. The giving of the law was first in order, as indeed it always must be, or the gospel of grace and mercy cannot be appreciated. This done, the revelation of mercy and grace may follow. This same God before whom all the people and even Moses trembled on Mt. Sinai, now revealed His name--"the Lord God, merciful and gracious." Mercy is a disposition to pardon. Grace is used in a wider sense--a disposition to bestow favor. The next thing is--"long-suffering," He can suffer and bear long with abuses and provocations. He is most forbearing towards those who offend Him.

"Abundant also in goodness;"--yes infinite in goodness and loving-kindness. Abundant moreover in truth;--faithful ever to His promises of love and mercy. O how precious are these revelations made to Moses.

To Moses we must presume these were not mere announcements. Moses felt the impression of every one of these things. I might announce these very words in your ears, and though they might fall distinctly on your ears, yet the impression of their meaning might utterly fail to reach your heart.

But not so when Jehovah Himself speaks. His words then reach the very heart. You have sometimes felt the thrilling impression of these truths, when every idea in them seemed to sink into your very soul. Just think how Moses must have felt, after all he had just seen of Jehovah's awful majesty on Sinai. O how these words must have gone down into his inmost mind! And not the words merely, but the ideas they represented--the very attributes of God must have stood right out and flashed their glorious truth before the very mind's eye of Moses. O what a scene of solemn impressions!

Perhaps I should say right here that we have no reason to suppose that all these things transpired in a moment, as some might at first thought imagine. Moses was full forty days and nights with God in this interview. A few other things were said during the whole scene, but this revelation of the name of God seems to have been the chief thing which transpired during this eventful period. It is therefore most rational to conclude that time enough was occupied to allow each thought to be fully expanded before the mind of Moses so as to make its deepest possible impression. Each feature of the divine character was doubtless developed distinctly; His mercy, His grace, His long-suffering, His abundant

goodness and truth, and the blending of each of these feature with His glorious justice. Everything was so revealed to the mind of Moses that it pervaded his entire mental being and set his very soul on fire. O how did he ponder, and muse on each point, and study the illustrations presented to his mind! We can imagine the solemn, awful, thrilling impression as he sat in silence for many days together, no human being present to divert his attention for one moment--alone with God forty days--neither taking nor needing food or drink during all this time, but absorbed in beholding face to face the glory of God, and thus being changed into the same image from glory to glory.

At length he comes down from that mount of glorious manifestation. No wonder his face shone with a lustre of which he was unconscious but which was too glorious for mortal eyes to behold. No wonder the vivid impressions that filled and fired his soul should throw their reflection forth in his countenance. It was as if an angel from Jehovah's upper temple had alighted in the camp of Israel. A vail must be drawn over his face, for what mortal eye could bear the sight!

God's abundant truthfulness formed one important feature in these developments. This was especially pertinent to the case and the wants of Moses. The thorough development of this feature formed the secret of his great faith ever after. The whole subsequent history of Moses develops a most remarkable degree of confidence in God. The thousand trying emergencies through which he passed rendered it indispensable that he should have such confidence. Here in this signal interview with God the foundation was laid for it.

"Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty;" that is will never justify the impenitent and self-righteous. God did not mean that He would not pardon the guilty sinner on his repentance. He only meant that He was not a corrupt judge who could be bribed to clear the guilty yet in his sins and impenitence. Moses needed to know this, that while God was most gracious and merciful towards the contrite, He should most assuredly punish the guilty and hardened sinner. No rebel could ever escape in his impenitence and rebellion.

"Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon the children's children unto the third and fourth generation." This clause needs to be explained. It has been sometimes supposed to mean that God sends children to hell for the sins of their parents. This cannot be the meaning. The declarations of God by Ezekiel affirm that only the soul that sinneth shall die, and that father and son

shall each die only for his own sins.

The declaration made here to Moses refers to the course of God's providence towards families and nations only in the present world, and to His course towards them for present discipline--not for eternal retribution.

The relations of parent and child almost inevitably involve these results. A dissolute father entails disease, poverty and degradation on his offspring. God allows, nay ordains it to be so, and this creates a strong inducement to each parent to lead such a life as shall entail blessings and not curses on his children. Yet these children are not rewarded with heaven or doomed to hell merely for their parent's deeds. The whole of the result is this--they have their own probation on earth, in which their future state of joy or woe must be decided according to their own deeds. But they shall have this probation in prosperity or adversity--amid influences adapted to bless or adapted to curse, according as their parents may have so lived before God as to leave them a legacy of good or of evil.

We often see this principle illustrated in the history of nations. Nations as such must of course receive their retribution in the present world--they having no existence as nations in any other state. Hence we often see that God holds a nation responsible for the sins of their fathers. It would be an illustration of this principle if God should do as I have thought He would do in retribution for the slavery which has so long existed in this nation. The English nation introduced slavery here; we have perpetuated it, and have done about as much to enhance its calamities as we could do. I have often thought that God will some day remove this evil in a way which will scourge both of these nations with most signal and exemplary judgments. Suppose the mighty power of England's arms should come down upon us and blood should flow over our southern plains till every spot where the tears and blood of the slave have fallen should be saturated with the blood of his oppressors--till the carnage of masters and drivers should fatten the cotton fields so long worn out by the bitter toil of the oppressed--and other groans should take the place of the long unnoticed and uncared for wailings of broken-hearted mothers and bereaved children.

In this the world might read a lesson about that awful Justice which visits the iniquities of fathers upon the children and upon children's children.

On the same principle we often see children involved in the guilt and consequent

sufferings of their parents. A most cogent motive is thus created to induce parents to obey God. You can easily see that it is most wise in God so to unite parents and children that the latter shall receive good or evil in the present world according to the voluntary course taken by their parents.

When God had made these revelations to Moses, naming these attributes distinctly and giving him time to dwell on each one until his whole soul was impressed with the truth, Moses prostrated himself before the Lord in most profound adoration. This was its first result on his mind. "He made haste and bowed his head toward the earth and worshipped."

Do you understand this feeling? Have you never found when God had revealed Himself to you that you have felt pressed to bow yourself in deep prostration of soul before the Lord?

Mark his next step. He has a request to make. He said, "If now I have found grace in Thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray Thee, go among us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Thine inheritance." Moses feels that it is time now to find how the Lord really feels towards the nation. It is a time to intercede in their behalf that God would pardon all their sin and make them forever His own inheritance.

The Lord replies--"Behold I will make a covenant, before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation; and all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the Lord; for it is a terrible thing that I will do with thee."

The history then narrates various precepts and closes with the descent of Moses, his face resplendent with the unutterable glory of this wonderful and most instructive scene.

REMARKS.

Whatever is written in the Bible is for our instruction. Much of the historical part is rich with the most practical instruction conceivable. All this may be said most truly of the passage we have been considering. It teaches,

1. That a personal acquaintance with God is indispensable to one who is to lead the people in reform. We must know God and have God preeminently with us, or we cannot lead on His people to higher degrees of holiness.

We may learn something of God by study and thought; but all this will fail us without special revelations from God. Some expect by the mere force of learning to prepare themselves for usefulness. They seem to take pains to get more learning rather than to get nearer God. They could not make a worse mistake. The learning is good, but the things God teaches when He draws the soul into deep personal communion with Himself are incomparably better.

Moses was before this a very learned man. He was skilled in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and their science was at this period pre-eminently rich. Education and learning there were indeed only that of heathen, yet God saw that this would be valuable to Moses, and therefore arranged it in His providence that Moses should be trained in the royal family with all the facilities for education that Egypt could afford. But he needed infinitely more than all this, and God drew him into His own school to impart it.

2. Every part of this history is replete with instruction to us. Mark for instance the peculiar features of character developed in Moses at this time. A careful study of these will reveal to us the conditions on which we may expect divine revelations to our own souls.

When I see a man deeply impressed with a sense of this dependence upon God, feeling that he cannot get along and bear his great responsibilities without God, I know such a man is being prepared for usefulness. God will meet him and reveal to him the great things of His own character. Let him only give himself wholly to the work and to the interests of God's cause, and then have confidence enough to lay hold of the Lord; such a soul never fails of being blessed.

3. Another thing peculiar in the case of Moses was his very clear apprehensions of what he needed to fit him for his work. This is immensely important. If a man lacks this just apprehension he will struggle on in the dark; and how long often and how fruitlessly! He does not know what he wants.

But read this history of Moses and you will see that he had a clear idea of his responsibilities and of the qualifications he needed to discharge them well. He knew that he needed a revelation from God to his own mind. He knew that he needed to apprehend all these great truths so that they should stand out before his mind as living realities.

4. When these attributes of God are clearly developed to the mind of anyone he

will have an entirely new view of the character of God. It will be so different from his former views as to make him doubt whether he really knew anything right of God before. The impressions will be such as he can never lose during all his future life.

5. Moses saw that he needed to have God reveal Himself to his mind. This is just what young men fitting for the gospel ministry need. Did you never see the difference in the manner in which two different individuals will speak of the attributes of God? One speaks mere words and they fall as if they were only wind. The words of the other come out of his heart and seem to fall like lead into the hearts of the people who hear him.

Here is a young man studying theology. He may become as wise as a man can become by merely human learning; but unless God reveal Himself all will be mere words. If you ask what such a man has been preaching, the answer will always be--nothing but words, words, mere words. This is the great difficulty with much of the preaching of this age--it is nothing but words.

Do you not think that when Moses came down from the mount, the people felt? The influence of Moses on them was not that of mere words. Have you never seen how the eyes of the hearer would stand out when one is speaking from the heart? Even so when the people heard Moses, they hung on his lips and stood tiptoe to catch his burning words and the glory of his unearthly countenance. If young men feel as Moses did--"O my God, send me not up without Thy presence"--they will seek that presence, and never rest without it. God calls you to the ministry; how can you go into it without His presence--until you have seen as Moses saw, His glory.

6. This whole history is most replete with instruction for us. If those arguments used were good in his mouth as reasons for God's revealing Himself to him, they are equally good for us. He pleaded God's call of him and acceptance of him for a great work, and said--Lord, since Thou hast called me, now make me fit for the labor. "I beseech Thee show me Thy glory." Young man, go and do likewise. If God calls you to lead His church up out of the wilderness, see to it that you insist before you set out that the Lord be with you and show you His glory. Nor is this truth applicable to young men destined for the ministry alone. Every Christian is a priest of God, and should in some sense preach the gospel. Every man needs grace to fill the station to which God calls him. And every Christian should seek this grace even as Moses sought the grace he needed.

7. The disinterestedness of Moses is worthy of all commendation. He never once thought of lifting himself up. Do you suppose he was continually saying in his mind--How people in future generations will honor me and reverence my name! No, not this--he is all swallowed up in another and a very different great idea; how shall this nation honor God? How may I do something to magnify His dread, His glorious name?

If we ever expect or hope to be great men, in mercy, don't let us aim at it. We shall pluck down ruin and disgrace on ourselves if we do; and as far as in us lies, on the cause of God also. I once knew a young man who had considerable trouble in getting license to preach. He was not thought to be very promising. This difficulty seemed to set all his ambition on fire. He declared--"I am determined to get to the head of the heap." Someone said to him--You never will by aiming at it. But he gave no heed to this warning, and set off on his career of attempted greatness. I don't know where he is now. Gone I suppose, sunk from public observation into that obscurity which alone forms a fitting place for unholy ambition. "He that exalteth himself shall be abased." So it must ever be. This is the law of Christ's house.

How remarkable that Moses seemed never to care for himself or for his family. On one occasion some persons began to prophesy, and some of his friends seem to have been jealous for his honor. But Moses felt no jealousy of this sort. "I would to God," said he, "that all the people were prophets." How noble! God could make Moses a great man without his making himself a great fool. Not so with some men, God cannot make them great without their making themselves fools.

8. All these features of the character of Moses should be distinctly studied. They are features of the character of Jesus Christ. Are you not in the habit of studying the character of those great men, such as Moses, Daniel, Job, Paul and John with the distinct design of drinking in their spirit and conforming your own to theirs? This is your true wisdom.

9. The urgency of Moses is well worthy of special notice. How strongly he insists upon God's giving him the blessing he asks for. On one occasion the Lord put his serious earnestness to the test most fully. The Lord said--Let me alone--go get thee down, for thy people have corrupted themselves; let Me alone that My wrath may wax hot against them and that I may consume them, and I will

make of thee a great nation." But no, Moses could not let the Lord alone. He seemed to seize right hold of His hand and insist that God should spare and forgive the guilty people. The Egyptians will hear of it and will say, "For mischief did He bring them out and to slay them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth. Then what wilt Thou do for Thy great name? I cannot let Thee go. What will become of Thy glory? Blot out my name, but blot not out the name of Thine Israel." Thus did Moses hold fast upon the hand of the Lord as it was uplifted to smite the nation. And what was the secret of his power with God? His disinterested love, and his zeal for Jehovah's name.

Let this be our example. Surely it is most worthy of all imitation. How noble to be thus swallowed up and filled with zeal for the glory of God.

10. The great faith of Moses constitutes another point worthy of distinct consideration. Where everybody else's faith would fail, that of Moses remains firm. Yet he had his sore trials. Once he cried out--"What shall I do, Lord, for this people are almost ready to stone me?" But remark that under this great trial he runs at once to God and hence is safe. So every man should do. If a man only has such faith as to run at once to the Lord, he cannot fail to get strength for all emergencies of trial.

11. His implicit obedience also was wonderful. He knew no law but the will of God. This spirit of universal obedience was one condition of those remarkable manifestations. He could not have had them without his obedient spirit.

When first appointed to his work, he felt great reluctance to go. He pled that he was slow of speech. But God overlooked the objection; Moses yielded and seems never afterwards to have shrunk from duty.

12. Moses seems always very careful to do all that God required of him, so that he could always have near access to God. It was very common before the Lord made any manifestations to the people, for Him to say--"Sanctify yourselves;"--ye are now unfit to meet Me. But Moses seems to have been always in a state of readiness to meet God and receive any manifestations. It is of infinite importance to maintain this state of sanctification--to abstain thoroughly from all iniquity and never fall into such a state of defilement as to feel your need of penitence, pardon, and cleansing before you can meet God.

I once knew a Christian who had been eminently a man of prayer--who had lived

for years so that he could pray daily with acceptance before God, and whose conversations and prayers had created quite an interest in the subject of the prayer of faith. Yet this man sadly declined from this state and the Lord at length recalled him in the following way. I had, said he in his diary, an intimate friend who was impenitent, and who in raising a building was suddenly crushed with a fatal blow. I rushed to him. The dying man begged me to pray for his soul. That is all, said he, that you can do for me; pray for my soul lest I sink at once into hell. But I could not pray if it had been to save my own life. I was away from God and I could not get near Him to pray a word. O my agony of soul was perfectly inexpressible. But that was the last hour of my quiet in such a state. I could not live so.

Moses could not get away from God. His circumstances demanded ceaseless watchfulness and permanent sanctification. Only once afterwards was he overcome and then by the sin of impatience. For this sin the Lord took him up on Mt. Nebo to let him view the land of promise and then die without ever going over. This was a sore affliction; yet for one sin the Lord sent it upon him; yea for one sin only. But this in Moses was a great sin. His light had been so great and the sin itself had been so public; God could not do less than to put His mark of intense displeasure upon it. So, beloved, must you keep your heart pure and your hands pure, if you would be always ready for communion with God, and if, having enjoyed these seasons of communion you would not fall under the marked displeasure of a jealous and holy God. But if you are content to live so that you must go and repent and cleanse yourself from present sin in order to be prepared to commune with God, of what use can you be to the world?

[Back to Top](#)

Coming to The Waters of Life

Lecture IX

September 2, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--John 7:37: "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink."

The feast spoken of here is the feast of tabernacles, of which we have a full account in Leviticus. It was one of the three great feasts observed annually by the Jewish people. Those who are learned in Jewish antiquities give us many interesting and important particulars respecting the mode of celebrating this great festival.

A tabernacle is simply a tent, and the institution might be called the feast of tents. Its object was to commemorate the forty years sojourning of the Hebrews in the wilderness when tents were their only dwellings. In observing it, the people gathered the boughs of trees and built themselves booths or tents in the streets or on the house-tops in which they sojourned during the eight days of the celebration.

The last day of the eight was deemed the great day, and on this day was observed one ceremony of special interests. Our text evidently alludes to it. The whole people moved in procession to the pool of Siloam and took thence a quantity of water in a golden vessel, carried it thus to the temple, and there poured it out before the Lord. The design of this was to represent the outpouring of the Spirit as taught abundantly by their prophets. It is a most remarkable fact that this great prophecy of the effusion of the Spirit in the times of the Messiah should have been universally understood by the Jews, and that the knowledge of the coming fact should have been kept fresh in their minds, by this ceremony engrafted upon the great festival of tabernacles. Jewish writers concur in stating that the ceremony of bearing and pouring out the water meant just this and was always so understood by the nation.

It was on this occasion that, as stated in our text, Jesus stood and cried, saying "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." It would seem that He was in the temple as the procession returned from the pool of Siloam, and that He seized upon that solemn, eventful moment to lift up His voice before all the people and call attention to Himself as the great Giver of that very blessing which they were foreshadowing so beautifully in the out-pouring of the waters of Siloam. Then and there did the Man of Sorrows stand out in the presence of the assembled nation and proclaim "If any man thirst, let him--not go to Siloam, but--come unto Me and drink." "He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." The historian here adds his

explanation of these words; "But this spake He of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive." Christ very well understood what was represented by the pouring out of the water and He knew that the Jews also understood it; hence His solemn annunciation at this time, calling attention to Himself as the giver of the Holy Spirit according to their well known prophecies. In discussing this subject, I shall show,

I. What is implied in the text by thirst;

II. What is implied in coming to Christ to drink;

III. What is the invitation--Come unto Me and drink.

I. What is implied in the text by thirst.

1. It is manifest that Christ has no reference to physical thirst for water, but to a state of mind--a state of intense desire, well illustrated by that natural desire for water which is called thirst. No doubt Christ alludes to that intense desire for communion with God which saints often have, and which is aptly expressed by the term, thirst.

Thus the Psalmist says--"My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" Indeed he often represents himself as thirsting and panting after God--even as the hart pants after the water brooks.

Now whatever the philosophy of the fact may be, every Christian knows it to be a fact that there is such a thing as an intense desire of mind, terminating upon God. The soul feels most intensely that nothing but the smiles and the manifested presence of God can meet and fill its desires.

You know that we are so correlated to the outward world that certain objects awaken intense desires for their attainment. There is that in our physical constitution which creates a demand for its appropriate gratification. A foundation is laid in our constitution for the desire which we call thirst, and the demand is for water.

Now it is very remarkable that there is a state of mind which corresponds to this state of the physical system. There is a thirst of the soul for God. The soul pants and longs after God with a singleness of desire and a burning intensity which nothing can appease but the attainment of its object. As the

thirsty man cries out for water and can be relieved by nothing else, so those who are spiritually thirsty cry out after God, and nothing else can by any means suffice to stay their irrepressible longings. When a man is famished with hunger he wants food, and nothing but food will satisfy him; you might spread his table with gold--his soul still cries out for bread; you might clothe his brow with pearls--but you cannot even thus quench his insatiate longings for sustenance: so when the soul thirsts after God, this demand of the inner being can be met only by the actual revelations of God to this mind. God has so correlated our inward being to Himself that the mind struggles and cries out after God and cannot possibly be satisfied with anything else. The words of God are beautiful and lovely in their place--the smiles of His common providence are precious; but the spiritual mind can never be content to take these in place of those inward smiles of Jehovah's presence and those testimonies of His love which He gives to His favored children.

Every Christian knows that the Bible abounds with expression of this intense thirsting after God. And all who have had any experience in the deep things of the divine life in the soul understand well what is meant by this language. It may sound like an unknown tongue to those who have no spiritual discernment. What, they will say--the mind pant after God! What does this mean? Is there really any such thing as this? Yes, I answer, there surely is just such a thing as this--just such a longing of soul for God as the man dying with thirst feels for water. When the inward life is thoroughly developed and the soul renewed into the divine image, it thirsts after God, and longs most intensely for the light of His face.

Now it cannot be doubted that Christ had this very state of mind in His eye, and meant to invite to Himself all those who had this longing after the knowledge and the favor of God. Most perfectly did He understand that it is not naturally possible for us to attain the highest state of blessedness on earth unless we draw and drink the living waters of life which He has promised, and which He alone can give.

I have said that this spiritual thirst is a certain state of mind. It may be defined thus--an intense desire for the fulness of a present salvation--a desire to realize in our own case what it is to be filled with all the fulness of God. In this state the mind pants after the fulness of a present enjoyment of God. This is the state which Christ had under His eye; a state in which the soul

longs and pants after the fulness of a present communion with God.

The state ultimately desired by the individual who thus longs after God may be expressed thus; a universal and entire cleansing of the mind from all that pollutes--in which all wanderings of thought in prayer are suppressed and controlled--the appetites are brought into subjection and kept there; and soul lives and moves and has its being as it were in an atmosphere of God and of purity.

This state of mind is well illustrated in the experience of a lady, a letter from whom I saw some years since in R----. A friend of mine there showed me a letter written many years since by his grandmother. In this she gives in detail the course of her experience, showing how her mind had been greatly stirred up on respect to her falling so often and so sadly into bondage to sin--in respect to wanderings of thought in prayer and those various things over which Christians so often mourn. She felt the bitterness of these things, and came to feel at length that she could not live in such a state of bondage any longer.

In reading the scriptures, moreover, she had noticed that the Apostles got above this state of mind and evidently lived in liberty and not in bondage. Pursuing this train of inquiry she lighted upon many of those promises in the Bible which may well be called "exceeding great and precious," and she believed them. She knew they were the word of the Lord, and she had long since settled it in her mind that God must be believed in all He said. Of course her next step was to take hold of these promises and cry to God in mighty prayer that He would fulfill them in her case. She did so. Her feelings became so intense that the strongest language of scripture expressive of thirsting, longing, panting after God, was none too strong to express her actual state of mind. So earnestly did her soul agonize for this blessing that she literally cried aloud after God, saying, "I cannot let Thee go unless Thou bless me"--I must absolute die in this room if Thou give me not this blessing which I so greatly need. O, she cried, I cannot live without it.

Now she came to realize that very state of mind of which the sacred writers spake. She knew what it is to have the soul thirst and long after God, yea, the living God. She thirsted for that water of life which Jesus had promised, and she rushed to His feet to lay hold there of a present salvation from sin. I need not say that such seeking is never in vain. Jesus Christ has said, "If any man

thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." "He that believeth on Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Such was the experience of this lady.

This hungering implies a right state of the will. The hungering itself is a state of the sensibility inasmuch as it is simply desire and feeling; but it results from the heart's being in a right state, and could not exist if the heart were in a wrong state. The thirst for spiritual blessings does not, as some seem to suppose, imply that the individual is in a sinful state, but that he is in a holy state comparatively;--yet is he striving to get higher and still nearer to God.

Again, this thirsting implies a self-loathing and disgust towards everything that stands in the way of the most intimate communion with God. Men find that the outward life is not so crucified but that it seems to come between the soul and God. There is something that prevents the soul from entering into that great, deep, calm communion with God, and the mind is in agony because it finds itself thus withheld from God. There is a waywardness of the physical propensities--an agitation and fluttering which I hardly know how to describe, but which most Christians understand but too well in their own experience; and when this develops itself, it comes directly in the way of entering into real and deep peace with God. It creates a sort of effervescing and agitation, not itself sinful perhaps, but excessively annoying and dangerous inasmuch as it often operates powerfully as temptation to sin. Many of you doubtless know what this is, and you also know perhaps how the soul is thrown into deep agony by means of this conflict with the flesh, and gives itself up to mighty energizings of prayer and faith that it may be delivered from this foe within and brought into a state of pure and perfect peace. This is one of the forms of thirsting for the waters of life.

Again, this thirst implies a great drawing of the Spirit of God. The soul is drawn out after God with a deep and powerful drawing, so that it truly yearns after God, and feels that nothing can begin to satisfy this craving desire of the soul with its Maker. It deserves special notice here that this often seems to the individual himself to be the very calling of the Spirit of God, as if he heard that voice and was conscious of being drawn upward towards the blessed God by some influence not self-originated. The spiritual christian recognizes this call at once as the voice of his Beloved.

Again, this thirsting for the water of life implies being heartily sick of sin and heartily sick of tampering with anything that can become an occasion of

sin and that embarrasses the soul and hinders its living in the closest communion with God. It implies a supreme desire to live wholly for God and an utter loathing of any form of life which falls short of this. How often in looking at this point have I thought of Paul's experience. "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." The Apostle here develops a state of mind which I fear but few enter into and thoroughly understand. I live, he says, yet not I; not I, the same Paul or Saul who once followed the flesh and lived afar from God--it is not the same I, that now lives, but it is Christ within me that now becomes my life. He knew what it was to have a new and spiritual life energizing through all his inmost soul.

Beloved, how many of you know what this means? Who of you have tasted in your own experience and know the blessedness of this divine life?

II. We are to enquire what is implied in coming to Christ to drink.

1. A belief in His real divinity; a belief that Christ is truly God. This cannot fail to be obvious to you upon a due examination of the text in its connection. For, what is the thing about which the Savior is here speaking? Nothing else surely but the gift of the Holy Ghost; and since the Holy Ghost is also divine--nothing else but the gift of our Savior's language; "this spake He of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive."

Coming to Christ then, according to this invitation is coming to one who can give God to the soul. Of course therefore none can come in faith unless he has confidence in the true divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Take another view of this. The object of this thirst of the soul is nothing other than God Himself. The soul as I have already said, when thirsting in the sense of the text, thirsts after God--after His presence--His love and His communion. Now then, while thirsting after God, can we come to Jesus to receive the blessing unless we believe Him to be truly divine? Can any being who is less than divine give us communion and peace with God? Can one who is not God Himself give God to our souls?

Again, mark the language of the text--"Come unto Me and drink." If any man thirst truly after God, let him come unto Me--I can quench his thirst, and

supply all his wants. How can we believe this unless we truly believe that Christ is God?

There is no escape from this course of argument. Some may seek to escape by maintaining that the thirst spoken of is not really a thirst after God. But surely every spiritual Christian knows that this is nothing else than a longing after God. What else is it? Does the soul thirst after a mortal man, or after an angel? Is it the favor of man or angel which awakens such intense desires and irrepressible thirstings? Nay verily; the Christian does not thus learn Christ. God and God alone is the supreme object of his thirst, and he comes to Jesus to be filled with God. How can he intelligently do this, unless he believes in His real divinity?

Again, this coming to Christ implies self-renunciation. None will ever come so long as they can find enough of good in themselves and without Christ to satisfy the demands of their own mind. This is most obvious. Their own vessel must be empty before they can rationally come to Christ to have it filled. None will ever come to Christ for these waters of life so long as he supposes he can get them by any efforts of his own. One's own righteousness must be utterly renounced and all one's own ways of being saved; else there will be no real coming to trust in Christ. Self must be utterly renounced.

Again, coming to Christ implies a reception of Him by faith as the promised Messiah, as our own Savior, Redeemer, and Mediator before God. There must be a personal appropriation of Christ by faith to one's self as ours in all those respects in which the divine gospel plan makes Him the Savior of lost men.

All this implies that the Spirit takes the things of Christ and shows them to us. We have no reason to suppose that any soul ever receives Christ as his own Savior except as the Spirit sets before that mind just views of its own need and of the perfect adaptation of Christ to supply that need.

Again, this coming to Christ implies some degree of expectation of receiving the blessing to be sought. It is naturally impossible to come to Christ without faith in His promises; and this faith you will readily see must imply some degree of expectation that if we come as we are invited to do, we shall receive.

III. What does this invitation imply?

As I have already said, it implies His divinity. On this I need not now enlarge.

Of course the invitation implies His entire ability to give the blessings needed. If He be really divine, none need to doubt His ability. If He promises to give, we ought not to doubt that He can.

Again, the invitation implies also His willingness to bestow upon us the spiritual good promised. The very promise itself most perfectly implies this.

The promise implies also that if we do come to Him to drink, we shall receive. When He invites, it is not to tantalize; it is not to raise expectation only to disappoint it again; it is not that He may send us away empty and confounded; no, but it is to induce us to come and enjoy the bliss of being blessed; and this of course implies the strongest, richest pledge that if we do come in honesty of heart and in humble faith we shall receive the promised blessings.

Again, we must get this blessing of Christ and of no one else. He doubtless intended to teach this most emphatically, that if anyone thirsted for the waters of life, that soul must come unto Him and to none other but to Him for those waters.

Mark how beautifully and impressively He taught this. See Him in front of that lofty temple and in the presence of that vast triumphant procession as they move slowly along. He waits till the priest has brought forward the golden vessel of water from Siloam's pool and poured it forth at the foot of the altar, He stands by in silence till the ceremony is completed, and then He lifts up His voice before the assembled nation and cries aloud, Ho, ho, all ye people of Israel, ho, all ye children of the promises and covenants of the Lord, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." With Me are the waters of real life. "He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

What an announcement is this! And with what mingled emotions was it received by those dense masses of human beings on whose ears it fell! Some of the Pharisees were man enough to murder Him on the very pavements of the temple; they would not have scrupled to shed His blood, so enraged were they at Him--but He meekly goes on in His Master's work, and perhaps through fear of the people they did not dare just now to lay their hands upon Him. "Many of the

people," it is beautifully added, "when they heard this saying, said, of a truth this is a Prophet." Some said one thing and some another, so there was a division among them. What a scene of prodigious excitement did this startling announcement make! Such a sort of excitement the gospel in these later days often produces where it is announced with demonstration of the Spirit and the power of God.

REMARKS.

1. Many persons have none of this thirst, for several reasons.

(1.) They have never suffered themselves to be thoroughly convinced of sin. I say, never suffered themselves, for mark me, they could not fail of being thus convinced if they would not resist the Holy Ghost. His Spirit would reprove them of their sin if they would not resist His reproof. But they do resist, and hence they never know the depth of their own guilt and vileness so as to be led to cry out after deliverance and to thirst after God.

(2.) Many know not this thirst and supply, because though they have had a conviction of sin, yet they have never believed and tasted so as to know the blessedness of receiving these waters of life. In fact men need to know God by having some degree of communion with Him before they will have their desires kindled intensely for more and deeper communion. The heart must first be submitted to God, and some experience be had of the rich blessedness of gospel peace and gospel love; than the soul will naturally thirst after God. But multitudes never have this thirst because they have not tasted of these waters.

(3.) I am often struck with the fact that many seem to know nothing of the meaning of such language as the Bible employs to express the longings of the soul after spiritual blessings. They confess that when they read such passages as the text, and many passages to which I have alluded in the Psalms of David, they really know nothing of this thirsting: these terms would express a far stronger desire than they have ever felt. It is astonishing to see how many there are who never know God--never have the soul cry out after a full and perfect salvation--never feel a longing, a quenchless, burning desire, just like a natural thirst, which nothing else can supply but the very thing desired. They do not understand how the mind gravitates towards God. They do not know what it is to have God become the natural food and drink

of the soul, so that nothing but God Himself can satisfy its demands. There is such a state in which nothing but God can satisfy the demands of the soul. If all the angels of heaven were given us it would not satisfy; if everything else besides God in the whole universe were laid at our feet, it would not suffice; it would not be the thing which the soul craves. This object of supreme desire is nothing else but God. O how the soul cries out after God, the infinite God, the perfect, the glorious, the ever-blessed God! There is a most beautiful and wonderful correlation established between God and the human soul which lays a foundation for this want, this demand of the soul for God as its only satisfying portion. Consequently when the soul comes into an upright state, and the inner voice of its spiritual nature is heard, that voice cries out after God and feels that the soul must live in God and that to depart from God is hell itself. The living in and with God and being sunk in Him, is the natural, the necessary and the eternal good of the soul.

In view of this great and glorious good, where and what is all that pertains to this outward life? It effervesces for a day--it bustles for a moment;--it is, and then it is no more; men may be fascinated by it for an hour: but when the soul comes to understand God, then nothing but God can suffice. Nothing else can meet its demands.

It is remarkable that this is the sum of all the blessings promised to the saints of God in the Bible. To Abraham God said--"Fear not--I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward." Mark this language. God does not say--I will give thee an exceeding great reward--but I am--I Myself am thy glorious reward. I give you Myself as thy portion.

So God often represents Himself as being the infinite good of the soul. The spiritual Christian can easily understand this.

On the other hand, some think of heaven as being some place which is itself blessed. They fancy its streets to be of gold--its rivers and flowers and fruits combine every thing that can regale the senses and charm the taste, and the place itself becomes in their view the heaven, and would be if there were no God there.

But all such views are false and delusive. Really it is the presence of God and nothing else that makes heaven blessed. There the mind is swallowed up and forever enfolded in God. There the glorious God becomes truly the

portion and the everlasting blessedness of every holy soul.

(4.) Many confound conviction of sin with this thirst for the waters of life. A state of conviction will truly precede it; but this thirst is entirely a different thing, and arises from the fact that the mind really knows and has entered into the enjoyment of God. You recollect how our Lord most beautifully represents His people as eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Now this must certainly denote a cordial reception of Christ by a living faith. And the previous hunger and thirst which are always implied in eating and drinking must in their spiritual acts imply much more than simply conviction of sin.

(5.) Many have not this thirst because they allow themselves to thirst for other things. The two are absolutely incompatible with each other. There is even among professors of religion a vast deal of thirsting after the outward life and its enjoyments. When this is indulged the inward thirst after God must cease.

2. It is a great blessing to have this inward thirst developed.

It is in itself a very great blessing to have the soul thus drawn out after God. The very desire is a heavenly state of mind, for you are conscious that your exercises are perfectly reasonable and that your affections are now taking hold of objects which are most perfectly worthy of an immortal mind.

And if the state of desire is blessed, how much more so is the fulfillment of it? O, to be filled even on earth with all the fullness of God! This is of all things below, most blissful!

3. When this has ceased in the mind, one can have no reason to hope that he is going to heaven. If the mind has become so apostate from God, there is no hope left. Why should God take that soul to heaven which has no longings for His presence?

4. Many persons stop short with this thirst because they have not faith to come to Christ. Do you see them come to Christ and plead--"Lord, didst not Thou say--if any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink, and now, Lord, I have come, expecting Thou wilt give me those blessed waters." Do you see this state of mind? No. They do not come to Christ believing absolutely that He will give them the blessings they need.

I can well recollect a scene in my own experience which is in point here. My soul was drawn out exceedingly for this blessing and I did not see why I did not attain it. My heart seemed full of prayer, echoing and echoing with pleadings and promises, till all at once the thought came across my mind--you do not believe you shall receive. I instantly thought of a dear friend of mind who would always anticipate my wants, who seemed to have the faculty always of foreseeing the things I needed, and who would be sure to supply them as if this was the chief pleasure of his existence. Then I asked myself--Do you as much expect Christ to supply your wants as you expect it of this earthly friend? I saw then that I did not. I saw the shameful unbelief of my state of mind, and I felt so rebuked and so perfectly ashamed that I could not help crying out--"O my blessed Jesus, I have not had so much faith and confidence in Thee as I have often had in a man!"

So, many are withered and blighted because you do not believe that God is drawing, but you are resisting. O, you do not believe. Jesus Himself comes near--yea very near;--He puts the cup into your very hand and says "drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved;" but alas, how many still will not believe.

O this fountain of life--what is it but the fountain of God bubbling up in your inward, spiritual being. Verily the blessing offered you is nothing less than the glorious God Himself; and now will you not believe? If any man will come believing, the voice divine says, I will give him of the waters of life freely.

[Back to Top](#)

The Blessedness of Enduring Temptation

Lecture X

September 30, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--James 1:12: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him."

This passage presents the subject of enduring temptation. In discussing it, I will enquire,

I. Into the nature of temptation.

II. Into its design.

III. Inquire what it is to endure temptation in the sense of the text.

IV. Show that thus to endure temptation is one condition of being saved.

I. The words tempt and temptation are synonymous with trial.

To tempt is to try; to subject one to trial. Now sin consists in self-seeking, self-indulgence. Whatever, therefore, tends to selfishness, and draws the mind to self-seeking, is temptation, and is more or less strong according as this tendency is more or less strong towards self-indulgence.

The Bible mentions three great sources of temptation--the world, the flesh and Satan. The outward world is so correlated to our susceptibilities as to excite them and thus beget a temptation to self-indulgence. The flesh with its appetites and passions clamor for gratification; and hence the flesh and the outward world become temptations. Satan also presents his temptations in every form which subtle malignity can devise.

But I need not enlarge on this point; you are familiar with it in all its details.

II. A few words should be said next of the design of these temptations.

These temptations which environ us on every side in our present state are by no means designed by God to do us harm, but altogether to do us good. In creating the external universe and in giving us outward senses that we may behold and enjoy it, He had but one great end in view, and that is our good. From the fact that we are susceptible to pleasure from these sources, we are not to infer that God's end in view was to harm us by these temptations. They are undoubtedly to be considered as parts of a great system of moral probation, in which they perform the functions of means to a great, wise and good end. Real evils may be incidental to their operation, yet important good is their ultimate result.

The very term trial, shows that these things are intended as a test of character.

God everywhere represents Himself as trying His people that He may test and develop the real state of their hearts.

Another end in view is that He may greatly search their hearts. We are prone to be exceedingly ignorant of ourselves. Were it not for trials, we should live and die in this ignorance. To prevent so deplorable a result, God permits temptations to assail us on every side and bring out all the deep things of our hearts. Just so a chemist would take any particular substance into his laboratory and test it in his crucible. He would try it by placing it in contact with other substances that act powerfully upon it and by this he ascertains its affinities and its real character. So God takes us into His great laboratory and applies the tests of spiritual chemistry to our hearts. Often we are not at all aware that we have any such affinities for earthly objects, until we are brought into close contact by temptation; then perhaps we find that we have strange susceptibilities about us which we had not known before.

Temptations are designed to empty us of our self-complacency. Peter was very self-complacent until he came into circumstances of great trial. It proved a great blessing to him to be thus tried. He thought much less of himself afterwards than before.

So it often happens. I know how often, perhaps in some hundred or thousand instances, I have seen men brought into circumstances which greatly abated their opinion of themselves. They had been very self-complacent--they had come to imagine that they had something very good in themselves. They cherished this notion with self-satisfaction; God saw their danger and permitted His fierce and strong temptations to try them until He had developed to their own view the unknown tendencies of their hearts and made them loathe themselves in their own sight as much as they had delighted in themselves before.

The real children of God may always expect such self-disclosures. As sure as God loves them and sets His heart on their salvation, so surely may they expect some form of trial that will cure them of self-complacency.

Again, trials serve to empty the heart of self-righteousness. By self-righteousness I mean that which originates in ourselves and not in Christ working in us to will and to do. That is always self-righteousness where one supposes that his obedience to God originates in himself, and he does not realize that there is no good inherent in himself whatever.

Lest I be misunderstood on this point, let me say that I do not mean to imply at all that we are passive in our obedience to the divine law. If I had supposed the mind passive in this obedience I could not have spoken of God's working in us "to will." An influence which leads us to will must of course terminate in our highest activity. It never can be exerted effectually and yet we remain passive. Nothing can be more active than an act of the will.

Further, my meaning is not that whatever good we do, does not really belong to us, and is not really our own doing, pertaining to our own actions and states of mind. This cannot be denied.

These explanations being made, let me say again, that if any Christian loses sight of this fact that he never does any good except as God works in him, he must soon learn it by the endurance of such trials as will compel him to see it.

Again, another design is to teach us our dependence of God; to hedge us in and shut us up to Christ and make us abide in Him. When temptations teach us our own weakness and certainty of falling unless we abide in Christ, we wax really strong in the Lord. Temptations are designed to develop, establish, and strengthen every form of virtue. This is made abundantly plain in the Bible.

III. What is it to endure temptations?

The original word is used for the trying of metals by fire and by such tests as are adapted to develop their real character, or to remove their impurities. That which abides the test and remains after the trial, might be said to have endured the temptation.

So of the moral trials of the Christian. To endure temptation is to stand the trial--to abide constant in the faith--to hold out and come forth only the more pure, as the precious metals when the searching fire has passed over them. It is to persevere, despite of all temptations to be inconstant in our allegiance to Christ.

IV. This endurance of temptation is a condition of being saved.

Temptation is always implied in a state of probation. There could be no such thing as a state of trial if it included no temptation. A person could not be tried or proved except in a state fitted for such a process and for such results.

Again, temptations are naturally incidental to our present state. They spring up

from our very constitution, and from the relations we sustain to the world we live in. Indeed we might say, they spring out of our moral being, and that no moral being can exist in circumstances where he can find sources of happiness without being exposed to have those very sources of happiness become temptations to selfishness. We have reason to believe that there is no world where moral being may not be thus tempted.

Certainly in this world, temptations are incidental to our very existence. Look at Adam and Eve. As long as they had bodily appetites they were in circumstances of temptation. Sometimes these temptations urged the will with great vehemence; at other times with less power, or not at all.

Now inasmuch as we all have these appetites and susceptibilities, temptation is naturally and necessarily incidental to our present state of existence. When the susceptibilities become strongly excited in any given direction, then temptation becomes in that degree powerful. The temptation urges us to forsake the guidance of God and of reason and give ourselves up to self-indulgence.

At this point, let us contemplate another great fact; viz. that holiness is naturally and necessarily a condition of our salvation. It is of all things most absurd to suppose that anyone can be saved without holiness. Of all human dreams and fantasies this is the most absurd. Strange that men who can think should entertain so flagrant a delusion.

I have often been struck with the absurdity of those who say that the doctrine of regeneration is a mystery and a humbug. So far is this from being true that it is naturally and forever impossible that one should ever be happy and be saved unless he comes into the state described in the Bible as the regenerate state, and made according to the Bible, a condition of salvation. When God declares--"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," He makes no arbitrary appointment. This is no capricious decree of the Almighty. It is one of the laws of our being that a selfish man must be born again, and be thereby changed from selfish to benevolent, or he never can be happy in God, or really happy anywhere or anyhow in the universe. He must be sanctified, that is saved from being a sinner, or he cannot be saved from the misery inherent in sinning, or from the punishment consequent upon it.

Again, regeneration and sanctification are not physical changes, capable of being wrought upon us by an exertion of God's physical omnipotence. It is sometimes

said--We know men must become holy, but God can work this thing in us. God can create in us the very state of mind which His law demands.

Now such persons need to consider that holiness is not some substance created in us, but is a voluntary conformity of heart and life to the law of God and to the laws of our own nature. It implies that we willingly and cheerfully consecrate ourselves to the very ends demanded in the law of God. This and nothing else but this, is true holiness.

The more I have thought of it the more I have been astonished that any class of men who ever think at all on moral subjects can ever tend towards infidelity. What! reject the religion of the Bible and then talk of salvation? The man knows not what he is talking about. He knows no more about the subject and no more understands what he says than the veriest maniac! For, what is salvation? What is eternal life? Only let the individual press the question--what is this thing about which I am talking? And he will see that he must become just what the Bible represents men as becoming before they can be saved. He will see that it is in the nature of the case impossible that any man should be saved from misery to happiness unless he be changed from selfishness to benevolence.

It is therefore no arbitrary or governmental ordination of God which sends the sinning rebel to hell; he only goes to his own place--the only fitting place for one of his character which the universe affords. He has passed through his state of trial and has come out not pure but vile; hence no place but one fitted for the vile and filled with the vile can at all befit him. Surrounding circumstances and divinely employed means and influences must actually secure our purity of heart here, or we cannot be saved hereafter. So both reason and scripture conspire to affirm.

REMARKS.

1. With this subject before us, we can see the real difference between those who are true saints and those who are not. The former are distinguished by enduring temptation; the latter by being overcome by it. All, both saints and sinners, are tried for the very purpose of developing character; in all cases it produces this very result; some endure the trial and some do not. The former of course are the real saints; the latter are deceived if they suppose themselves to be Christians. Temptation does not overcome the Christian; he overcomes it.

2. We see what constitutes the Christian warfare. It is made up of resisting temptation--of resisting and overcoming all those inducements to turn away from God and to seek one's own ends and gratification. This is the strife and the struggle in which the Christian is engaged.

3. All men whether saints or sinners are tried, and all either endure temptation, or are carried away by them. The sinner is continually carried away. He is conscious of no conflict and no warfare, because he makes no resistance. He knows no other law than self-gratification. If he resists the temptation to self-gratification in one form it is only that he may secure it in some other form. Whenever he desires self-gratification, he seeks it; and just for this reason he is a sinner.

The Christian is tried in the same manner, but he resists the temptation. He knows that it will not do to give himself up to seek after sensual or selfish indulgences.

4. Another remark is due here which may explain to impenitent men a thing they often wonder at as unaccountably strange. I can well recollect much of my own experience on this point before my conversion. I saw that Christians had trials of mind and many troubles and difficulties which I could not account for. I thought they of all persons ought to be happy, (for I was sure the wicked had no ground for being so.) I could not account for the fact which I often noticed that Christians seemed quite unhappy. I was quite observing of all the movements I saw among Christians, for I used to attend their prayer meetings and ponder all the developments of character I saw among them. For a long time I was at a loss to account for the fact that they seemed to have so much trouble and so little enjoyment. I rarely fell in with one of the rejoicing ones whose face would shine; this class were few in number then, and I rarely met with them. I can well remember one deacon who used to visit our office. Often however he seemed to be in an agony of soul; I could often hear him sigh, --could see his struggles of mind; --the tear would start in his eye, and the words falter on his tongue. I used to be searching after the causes of this. Why is it I would say that one who has so much reason to be joyful in God should seem so sad?

Perhaps some impenitent man who hears me has a pious wife, and sometimes surprises her in tears. Repelled perhaps by seeing tears, the cause of which he knows not, he may perchance peevishly exclaim--"I don't want such a wife--so often weeping and unhappy." You ought, my friend, to use a little philosophy

about this and try to understand it. Perhaps your own conduct may have caused those tears. The indifference you manifest to the welfare of your own soul may be agonizing your wife. She may love you too well and her Savior too well to see you at enmity against Him without feeling bitterly afflicted. Do not scorn those tears which your own folly and danger may have wrung out.

After my conversion I could see that I had often given Dea. H this trouble and anxiety which I had so frequently seen in his countenance. I saw that my folly and sin had caused him this deep grief. The fact is that if persons would consider they would often see the reason of this fact. The Christian has sore trials, and then instead of yielding as others to, he resists. Hence the struggle. Feeling a deep solicitude for the salvation of souls, when he sees their peril, his soul is troubled within him.

Instead therefore of wondering at these trials and seeing in them the evidence that they are wicked, we should rather deem it no strange thing and should see in them the evidence that such are righteous. The fact is that the Christian, standing in the midst of trials, is on battle ground. He is in a great strait, and if he might not take refuge in Christ, he would indeed be without hope.

Hence when you see Christians in the greatest agony and despondency, think not that they are not Christians, but rather be assured the more that they are. Those struggles are nothing else but a state of the sensibility and are not in themselves sin. They may rise to any degree of strength and yet not involve sin at all.

5. Sinners and false professors never learn the secret of standing by faith in Christ. Deceived professors sometimes seem to try; they talk as if they had some thought of making efforts, but alas, they seem to make no progress. In them are fulfilled the words of the apostle--"Ever learning, yet never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Some kinds of truth they may learn, but never this great truth, that through faith in Christ, they may gain the victory over all sin. They do not learn how to take refuge in Christ under circumstances of temptation. They do not apprehend the great and blessed truth--"Thou standest by faith." How great the secret and how vitally important! Nothing can be more so. If a Christian does not understand this, his resolutions are all air, mere wind--good for nothing at all. All false professors and sinners of every sort utterly fail to learn this great secret of so standing by faith in Christ that they can endure temptation. They have none of this element in their religion and of course their religion can avail them nothing.

6. Temptations are among the most powerful means of grace. They are often the most effective instrumentalities which the Lord employs to bring sinners to Christ. Often we see them the most powerful means used to break men off from self-dependence. They serve to show men their utter weakness in themselves for any moral good; and this lesson once thoroughly learned, the individual is prepared to take hold of real help and strength in Christ.

7. There is no escaping temptation in the present life. We may get grace for victories, but we need not look to grace for exemption from all conflict. The form of the conflict usually varies as saints make progress in the divine life. As they ascend higher in holiness, or rather as they go deeper into their own hearts, they must expect the form of the attack will change; but the same law of the Christian life will still prevail--war against sin--struggle against temptation.

8. Saints cannot but grow under temptations. It is just as natural as it is for the winds of heaven to strengthen the trees of the forest. You see a tree growing in the dense forest--it is tall and slender; it lifts its lofty head towards heaven and reels under the blasts of the storm; but there are so many other trees to help bear the pressure that no severe trial of strength comes upon any one. But let this tree take its growth in the open field and all alone; then see how it thrusts out its broad, bracing roots; see how rugged the form it assumes; see how the mighty thunder gusts break upon it and it only braces itself the more firmly to withstand;--so does the Christian under temptation. He grows up strong, fixed, steadfast. He is compelled to live in Christ all the time, and hence he cannot but learn to walk by faith and to stand in the evil day.

But place the Christian where he has little or no temptation, and he will come up slender, pale and faint-hearted. Not being in circumstances to develop his energies, they are not developed as under trials they might and would be.

The true doctrine on this point plainly is that trials afford us the means of gaining strength in the life of God. If then we trust by faith in Jesus for sustaining grace, we grow; if we fail to trust, we fall before the temptation and bring disaster of the worst sort on our own souls and on the cause of Jesus.

9. Christians are sometimes so troubled as not to be aware of their growth and hence they get greatly discouraged. How often have I seen this! There is a Christian;--how he is dashed along on the mountain surges--hurled from one

crested wave to another--how hard it is to keep his head above water; he does not know as he is making any progress at all towards the shore and haven of rest; but he is, and as you stand upon land you can see it though he does not see it at all.

So often in the case of saints. Those who look on rejoice to see them making great progress. We bless the Lord that we can see how these temptations are molding and fashioning them in the most lovely manner and imbuing their tempers with all the humility, the meekness and the sweetness of Christ.

See that Christian who has fallen into sore trials. His very countenance shows that he knows what sore temptations are and also what it is to have great consolations. The moral agencies that renovate character operate in his case with intense energy.

Some seem to think that a state of sanctification is beyond trial, and quite exempt from its struggles. This is one of the greatest mistakes. The saint never in this life gets so high that the Lord would not develop his graces yet a little more. The Christian is never too far advanced to be blessed by being carried along yet farther. You are never so far along that God may not have yet other blessings in store for you, to come through being tried yet more perhaps in the furnace of affliction.

Commonly when Christians have endured a scene of stern and fiery trial, they find it succeeded by one of great peace and rest. It is with them as with our Lord; --when Satan had gone, "lo, angels came and ministered unto Him."

Now some suppose that this peace in God is a state of sanctification. But perhaps it may not be. It may be only a temporary reward--a visit of some angel of mercy to refresh the weary soldier after a hard fought battle for the Lord, to prepare him for another scene of struggle.

Persons are sometimes thrown into trials when nothing is to be seen but the naked promise. All external circumstances may seem in the highest degree forbidding; and nothing remains but to trust the naked work of the Lord.

And sometimes we seem not even to have any explicit promise, but are thrown upon the general character of God. We are shut up to Him and can only say--"I know Him, and though He slay me, yet I will trust in Him." Job seems to have been in this condition; every earthly helper had failed him; perhaps he knew of no specific promise of the Lord on which he could rest; but he knew something

of God's general character, and knew therefore that he could trust Him everywhere and always.

This case of Job is indeed in many respects exceedingly interesting. If you could have seen him in the midst of his trials: property and children torn away; his wife become his tempter; Satan let loose upon him; his flesh full of fire and his bones of anguish; if you could have seen all this, you would have said, surely Job is the last man in the world to be benefited by affliction. This was indeed a fierce and terrible furnace through which to pass. Sometimes he frets, and sometimes almost slips; but still the Lord holds him up from falling; and probably there was no period in his whole life in which he grew so fast in the thorough knowledge of himself and of God--none in which he struck his roots down so deep and made them fast so firmly in the deep foundations of faith and trust, as then. If any suppose that Job was overcome in this trial they greatly mistake. Expressions did indeed escape him which showed that he was tried and almost beyond endurance, but his by no means proves that he was overcome. His constancy in God abides the trial, and by faith on the whole endures to the end.

You may have had an experience similar in some respects to this. You have been attacked by some vile, subtle, fierce temptation; your soul has been thrown into deep commotion; if any impenitent sinner had seen your struggles he would have been stumbled perhaps exceedingly and confounded; but through grace you conquered and you came out as gold seven times purified, prepared to testify with one of old--"It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

While all things work together for the good of the true saint, the very opposite of this is true of every sinner. All things work ill to him. He falls before every temptation, and of course every scene of trial only serves to develop more and more his ungodly lusts, or his unbelief and his settled alienation from God. Often you see such persons thrown into a fever of irritation against God. Secretly, perhaps sometimes openly, they repine and complain of the Almighty and fret against the course of His Providence. Every thing goes to develop their true character and strengthen all its bad points. This is all evil.

Let it also be remembered that it is only those that have a good hope that will endure temptation. Those whose hopes are false will not abide in the day of trial.

Hence those who fail and yield in the hour of temptation may see that they have no reason to hope. The features of their character are marks of the self-deceived

and not of the true believer.

But you say perhaps--"I can't tell--I don't know where I am." A young man came to me a few days since with this complaint--I don't know where I am; --I don't know what to think of myself. In fact I am so afraid of sinning against God that I hardly dare to eat or drink or sleep" Indeed, thought I, and where can you be? What is your state of mind, dear young man? So afraid of sinning that you scarcely dare to eat! So full of fear lest you displease God! Surely this shows for itself where you are. A heart so tenderly alive to the fear of displeasing God may be easily known.

Yet one cannot look at such a case as that of this young man without crying out--how cruel the devil is! And how mean, that he should love to torment a conscientious mind and throw him into a state in which he will scarcely dare to eat, drink, or sleep. What a devil he is!

When you see real Christians thrown into great temptations you will find that ultimately it will do them great good. Their graces will shine beautifully during the rest of their life, and God has said that when they die they shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away.

When, therefore you hear saints groaning, agonizing, trembling, be not afraid for them. The roots are striking deeper, and they will surely gain a firmer footing and will glorify God in the midst of the fires. You may see him enter his closet, looking sad, perhaps haggard, almost distracted; but anon he will come out, meekly saying--The Lord knoweth my way. The Lord knows the tears I shed. He has delivered me in six troubles and in seven and still I know that He will deliver me, and I will yet own and bless His name. O beloved, it is good to be afflicted, if only we have faith in God and so hold on upon His arms as to endure to the end. Then there remains for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

[Back to Top](#)

Quenching the Spirit

Lecture XI

October 13, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 Thess. 5:19: "Quench not the Spirit."

In discussing the subject presented in this text, I shall aim,

- I. To show how the Holy Spirit influences the mind;*
- II. To deduce some inferences from the known mode of the Spirit's operations;*
- III. Show what it is to quench the Spirit;*
- IV. Show how this may be done; and,*
- V. The consequences of quenching the Spirit.*

I. How does the Holy Spirit influence the human mind?

I answer, not by physical agency;--not by the interposition of direct physical power. The action of the will is not influenced thus, and cannot be. The very supposition is absurd. That physical agency should produce voluntary mental phenomena just as it does physical, is both absurd and at war with the very idea of free agency. That the same physical agency which moves a planet should move the human will is absurd.

But further; the Bible informs us that the Spirit influences the human mind by means of truth. The Spirit persuades men to act in view of truth, as we ourselves influence our fellow-men by truth presented to their minds. I do not mean that God presents truth to the mind in the same manner as we do. Of course his mode of doing it must differ from ours. We use the pen, the lips, the gesture; we use the language of words and the language of nature. God does not employ these means now; yet still he reaches the mind with truth. Sometimes his providence suggests it; and then his Spirit gives it efficiency, setting it home upon the heart with great power.

Sometimes the Lord makes use of preaching; indeed his ways are various.

But, whatever the mode, the object is always the same,--namely, to produce

voluntary action in conformity to his law.

Now, if the Bible were entirely silent on this subject, we should still know from the nature of mind and from the nature of those influences which only can move the human mind, that the Spirit must exert not physical but moral influences on the mind. Yet we are not now left to a merely metaphysical inference; we have the plain testimony of the Bible to the fact that the Spirit employs truth in converting and sanctifying men.

II. We next inquire what is implied in this fact, and what must be inferred from it?

God is physically omnipotent, and yet his moral influences exerted by the Spirit may be resisted. You will readily see that if the Spirit moved men by physical omnipotence, no mortal could possibly resist his influence. The Spirit's power would of course be irresistible--for who could withstand omnipotence?

But now we know it to be a fact that men can resist the Holy Ghost. For the nature of moral agency implies this and the Bible asserts it.

The nature of moral agency implies the voluntary action of one who can yield to motive and follow light or not as he pleases. Where this power does not exist, moral agency can not exist; and at whatever point this power ceases, there moral agency ceases also.

Hence if our action is that of moral agents, our moral freedom to do or not do must remain. It cannot be set aside or in any way overruled. If God should in any way set aside our voluntary agency, he would of necessity terminate at once our moral and responsible action. Suppose God should seize hold of a man's arm with physical omnipotence and forcibly use it in deeds of murder or of arson; who does not see that the moral, responsible agency of that man would be entirely superseded? Yet not more so than if, in an equally irresistible manner, God should seize the man's will and compel it to act as himself listed.

The very idea that moral influence can ever be irresistible originates in an entire mistake as to the nature of the will and of moral action. The will of man never can act otherwise than freely in view of truth and of the motives it presents for action. Increasing the amount of such influence has no sort of tendency to impair the freedom of the will. Under any possible vividness of truth perceived, or amount of motive present to the mind, the will has still the same changeless

power to yield or not yield--to act or refuse to act in accordance with this perceived truth.

Force and moral agency are terms of opposite meaning, They cannot both co-exist. The one effectually precludes the other. Hence to say that if God is physically omnipotent, he can and will force a moral agent in his moral action, is to talk stark nonsense.

This fact shows that any work of God carried on by moral and not by physical power not only can be resisted by man, but that man may be in very special danger of resisting it. If the Lord carries the work forward by means of revealed truth, there may be most imminent danger lest men will neglect to study and understand this truth, or lest, knowing, they shall refuse to obey it. Surely it is fearfully within the power of every man to shut out this truth from his consideration, and bar his heart against its influence.

III. We next inquire what it is to quench the Spirit.

We shall readily understand this when we come to see distinctly what the work of the Spirit is. We have already seen that it is to enlighten the mind into truth respecting God, ourselves, and our duty. For example, the Spirit enlightens the mind into the meaning and self-application of the Bible. It takes the things of Christ and shows them to us.

Now there is such a thing as refusing to receive this light. You can shut your eyes against it. You have the power to turn your eye entirely away and scarcely see it at all. You can utterly refuse to follow it when seen;--and in this case God ceases to hold up the truth before your mind.

Almost every one knows by personal experience that the Spirit has the power of shedding a marvelous light upon revealed truth, so that this truth shall stand before the mind in a new and most impressive form, and shall operate upon it with astonishing energy. But this light of the Spirit may be quenched.

Again there is, so to speak, a sort of heat, a warmth and vitality attending the truth when enforced by the Spirit. Thus we say if one has the Spirit of God his soul is warm; if he has not the Spirit, his heart is cold.

This vital heat produced by the Divine Spirit may be quenched. Let a man resist the Spirit, and he will certainly quench this vital energy which it exerts upon the

heart.

IV. We are next to notice some of the ways in which the Spirit may be quenched.

1. Men often quench the Spirit by directly resisting the truth he presents to their minds. Sometimes men set themselves deliberately to resist the truth, determined they will not yield to its power, at least for the present. In such cases it is wonderful to see how great the influence of the will is in resisting the truth. Indeed the will can always resist any moral considerations; for, as we have seen, there is no such thing as forcing the will to yield to truth.

In those cases wherein the truth presses strongly on the mind, there is presumptive evidence that the Spirit is present by his power. And it is in precisely these cases that men are especially prone to set themselves against the truth, and thus are in the utmost peril of quenching the Spirit. They hate the truth presented--it crosses their chosen path of indulgence--they feel vexed and harassed by its claims; they resist and quench the Spirit of the Lord.

You have doubtless often seen such cases, and if so, you have doubtless noticed this other remarkable fact of usual occurrence--that after a short struggle in resisting truth, the conflict is over, and that particular truth almost utterly ceases to affect the mind. The individual becomes hardened to its power--he seems quite able to overlook it and thrust it from his thoughts, or if this fails and the truth is thrown before his mind, yet he finds it comparatively easy to resist its claims. He felt greatly annoyed by that truth until he had quenched the Spirit; now he is annoyed by it no longer.

If you have seen cases of this sort you have doubtless seen how as the truth pressed upon their minds they became restive, sensitive--then perhaps angry--but still stubborn in resisting--until at length the conflict subsides; the truth makes no more impression, and is henceforth quite dead as to them; they apprehend it only with the greatest dimness, and care nothing about it.

And here let me ask--Have not some of you had this very experience? Have you not resisted some truth until it has ceased to affect your minds? If so, then you may conclude that you in that case quenched the Spirit of God.

2. The Spirit is often quenched by endeavoring to support error.

Men are sometimes foolish enough to attempt by argument to support a position which they have good reason to know is a false one. They argue it till they get committed; they indulge in a dishonest state of mind; thus they quench the Spirit, and are usually left to believe the very lie which they so unwisely attempted to advocate. Many such cases have I seen when men began to defend and maintain a position known to be false, and kept on till they quenched the Spirit of God--believed their own lie, and it is to be feared, will die under its delusions.

3. By uncharitable judgments.

Perhaps nothing more certainly quenches the Spirit than to impeach the motives of others and judge them uncharitably. It is so unlike God, and so hostile to the law of love, no wonder the Spirit of God is utterly averse to it, and turns away from those who indulge in it.

4. The Spirit is grieved by harsh and vituperative language. How often do persons grieve the Spirit of God by using such language toward those who differ from them. It is always safe to presume that persons who indulge such a temper have already grieved the Spirit of God utterly away,

5. The Spirit of God is quenched by a bad temper. When a bad temper and spirit are stirred up in individuals or in a community, who has not seen how suddenly a revival of religion ceases--the Spirit of God is put down and quenched; there is no more prevailing prayer and no more sinners are converted.

6. Often the Spirit is quenched by diverting the attention from the truth. Since the Spirit operates through the truth, it is most obvious that we must attend to this truth which the Spirit would keep before our minds. If we refuse to attend, as we always can if we choose to do so, we shall almost certainly quench the Holy Spirit.

7. We often quench the Spirit by indulging intemperate excitement on any subject. If the subject is foreign from practical, divine truth, strong excitement diverts attention from such truth and renders it almost impossible to feel its power. While the mind sees and feels keenly on the subject in which it is excited, it sees dimly and feels but coldly on the vital things of salvation. Hence the Spirit is quenched. But the intemperate

excitement may be on some topic really religious. Sometimes I have seen a burst--a real tornado of feeling in a revival; but in such cases, truth loses its hold on the minds of the people; they are too much excited to take sober views of the truth and of the moral duties it inculcates. Not all religious excitement however is to be condemned. By no means. There must be excitement enough to arouse the mind to serious thought--enough to give the truth edge and power; but it is always well to avoid that measure of excitement which throws the mind from its balance and renders its perceptions of truth obscure or fitful.

8. The Spirit is quenched by indulging prejudice. Whenever the mind is made up on any subject before it is thoroughly canvassed, that mind is shut against the truth and the Spirit is quenched. When there is great prejudice it seems impossible for the Spirit to act, and of course his influence is quenched. The mind is so committed that it resists, the first efforts of the Spirit.

Thus have thousands done. Thus thousands ruin their souls for eternity.

Therefore let every man keep his mind open to conviction and be sure to examine carefully all important questions, and especially all such as involve great questions of duty to God and man.

I am saying nothing now against being firm in maintaining your position after you thoroughly understand it and are sure it is the truth. But while pursuing your investigations, be sure you are really candid and yield your mind to all the reasonable evidence you can find.

9. The Spirit is often quenched by violating conscience. There are circumstances under which to violate conscience seems to quench the light of God in the soul forever. Perhaps you have seen cases of this sort where persons have had a very tender conscience on some subject, but all at once they come to have no conscience at all on that subject. I am aware that change of conduct sometimes results from change of views without any violation of conscience; but the case I speak of is where the conscience seems to be killed. All that remains of it seems hard as a stone.

I have sometimes thought the Spirit of God had much more to do with conscience than we usually suppose. The fact is undeniable that men

sometimes experience very great and sudden changes in the amount of sensibility of conscience which they feel on some subjects. How is this to be accounted for? Only by the supposition that the Spirit has power to arouse the conscience and make it pierce like an arrow; and then when men, notwithstanding the reproaches of conscience will sin, the Spirit is quenched; the conscience loses all its sensibility; an entire change takes place, and the man goes on to sin as if he never had any conscience to forbid it.

It sometimes happens that the mind is awakened just on the eve of committing some particular sin. Perhaps something seems to say to him--if you do this you will be forsaken of God. A strange presentiment forewarns him to desist. Now if he goes on, the whole mind receives a dreadful shock; the very eyes of the mind seem to be almost put out; the moral perceptions are strangely deranged and beclouded; a fatal violence is done to the conscience on that particular subject at least, and indeed the injury to the conscience seems to affect all departments of moral action. In such circumstances the Spirit of God seems to turn away and say--"I can do no more for you--I have warned you faithfully and can warn you no more."

All these results sometimes accrue from neglect of plainly revealed duty. Men shrink from known duty through fear of the opinions of others, or through dislike of some self-denial. In this crisis of trial the Spirit does not leave them in a state of doubt or inattention as to duty, but keeps the truth and the claims of God vividly before the mind. Then if men go on and commit the sin despite of the Spirit's warnings,--the soul is left in awful darkness--the light of the Spirit of God is quenched perhaps forever.

I know not in how many cases I have seen persons in great agony and even despair who had evidently quenched the Spirit in the manner just described. Many of you may know the case of a young man who has been here. He had a long trial on the question of preparing himself for the ministry. He balanced the question for a long time, the claims of God being clearly set before him;--but at last resisting the convictions of duty, he went off and got married, and turned away from the work to which God seemed to call him. Then the Spirit left him. For some few years he remained entirely hardened as to what he had done and as to any claims of God upon him, but finally his wife sickened and died. Then his eyes were opened; he saw what he had done. He sought the Lord, but sought in vain. No light returned to his darkened, desolate soul.

It no longer seemed his duty to prepare for the ministry; that call of God had ceased. His cup of wretchedness seemed to be filled to the brim. Often he spent whole nights in most intense agony, groaning, crying for mercy, or musing in anguish upon the dire despair that spread its universe of desolation all around him. I have often feared he would take his own life, so perfectly wretched was he under these reproaches of a guilty conscience and these thoughts of deep despair.

I might mention many other similar cases. Men refuse to do known duty, and this refusal does fatal violence to their own moral sense and to the Spirit of the Lord, and consequently there remains for them only a "certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation."

10. Persons often quench the Spirit by indulging their appetites and passions. You would be astonished if you were to know how often the Spirit is grieved by this means until a crisis is formed of such a nature that they seem to quench the light of God at once from their souls. Some persons indulge their appetite for food to the injury of their health, and though they know they are injuring themselves, and the Spirit of God remonstrates and presses them hard to desist from ruinous self-indulgence, yet they persist in their course--are given up of God, and henceforth their appetites lord it over them to the ruin of their spirituality and of their souls. The same may be true of any form of sensual indulgence.

11. The Spirit is often quenched by indulging in dishonesty. Men engaged in business will take little advantages in buying and selling. Sometimes they are powerfully convinced of the great selfishness of this, and see that this is by no means loving their neighbor as themselves. It may happen that a man, about to drive a good bargain will raise the question--is this right?--will balance it long in his mind--will say--"now this neighbor of mine needs this article very much, and will suffer if he does not get it; this will give me a grand chance to put on a price;--but then would this be doing as I would be done by?" He looks and thinks--he sees duty but finally decides in favor of his selfishness. Eternity alone will disclose the consequences of such a decision. When the Spirit of God has followed such persons a long time--has made them see their danger--has kept the truth before them, and finally, seizing the favorable moment, makes a last effort and this proves unavailing--the die is cast--thereafter all restraints are gone and the selfish

man abandoned of God, goes on worse and worse, to state's prison perhaps, and certainly to hell!

12. Often men quench the Spirit by casting off fear and restraining prayer. Indeed restraining prayer must always quench the Spirit. It is wonderful to see how naturally and earnestly the Spirit leads us to pray. If we were really led by the Spirit, we should be drawn many times a day to secret prayer, and should be continually lifting up our hearts in silent ejaculations whenever the mind unbends itself from other pressing occupations. The Spirit in the hearts of saints is pre-eminently a spirit of prayer, and of course to restrain prayer must always quench the Spirit.

Some of you, perhaps, have been in this very case. You have once had the spirit of prayer; now you have none of it: you had access to God--now you have it no longer; you have no more enjoyment in prayer--have no groaning and agonizing over the state of the church and of sinners. And if this spirit of prayer is gone where are you now? Alas, you have quenched the Spirit of God--you have put out his light and repelled his influences from your soul.

13. The Spirit is quenched by idle conversation. Few seem to be aware how wicked this is and how certainly it quenches the Holy Spirit. Christ said "that for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."

14. Men quench the Holy Ghost by a spirit of levity and trifling.

Again by indulging a peevish and fretful spirit.

Also by a spirit of indolence. Many indulge in this to such an extent as altogether to drive away the Holy Spirit.

Again by a spirit of procrastination, and by indulging them selves in making excuses for neglect of duty. This is a sure way to quench the Spirit of God in the soul.

15. It is to be feared that many have quenched the Spirit by resisting the doctrine and duty of sanctification.

This subject has been for a few years past extensively discussed; and the doctrine has also been extensively opposed. Several Ecclesiastical bodies have

taken ground against it, and sometimes it is to be feared that members have said and done what they would not by any means have said or done in their own closets or pulpits. Is it not also probable that many ministers and some laymen have been influenced by this very ecclesiastical action to oppose the doctrine--the fear of man thus becoming a snare to their souls? May it not also be the case that some have opposed the doctrine really because it raises a higher standard of personal holiness than they like--too high perhaps to permit them to hope as Christians, too high for their experience, and too high to suit their tastes and habits for future life?

Now who does not see that opposition to the doctrine and duty of Sanctification on any such grounds must certainly and fatally quench the Holy Spirit? No work can lie more near the heart of Jesus than the sanctification of his people. Hence nothing can so greatly grieve him as to see this work impeded--much more to see it opposed and frustrated.

A solemn and awful emphasis is given to these considerations when you contemplate the facts respecting the prevalent state of piety in very many churches throughout the land. You need not ask--are revivals enjoyed--are Christians prayerful, self-denying, alive in faith and in love to God and to man. You need not ask if the work of sanctifying the Church is moving on apace, and manifesting itself by abounding fruits of righteousness; the answer meets you before you can well frame the question.

Alas, that the Spirit should be quenched under the diffusion of the very truth which ought to sanctify the Church! What can save if gospel promise in all its fullness is so perverted or resisted as to quench the Spirit and thus serve only to harden the heart?

V. I am lastly to speak of the consequences of quenching the Holy Spirit.

1. Great darkness of mind. Abandoned of God, the mind sees truth so dimly that it makes no useful impression. Such persons read the Bible without interest or profit. It becomes to them a dead letter, and they generally lay it aside unless some controversy leads them to search it. They take no such spiritual interest in it as makes its perusal delightful.

Have not some of you been in this very state of mind? This is that darkness of nature which is common to men when the Spirit of God is withdrawn.

2. There usually results great coldness and stupidity in regard to religion generally. It leaves to the mind no such interest in spiritual things as men take in worldly things.

Persons often get into such a state that they are greatly interested in some worldly matters, but not in spiritual religion. Their souls are all awake while worldly things are the subject;--but suggest some spiritual subject, and their interest is gone at once. You can scarcely get them to attend a prayer meeting. They are in a worldly state of mind you may know, for if the Spirit of the Lord was with them, they would be more deeply interested in religious services than in anything else.

But now, mark them. Get up a political meeting, or a theatrical exhibition and their souls are all on fire; but go and appoint a prayer meeting or a meeting to promote a revival, and they are not there; or if there, they feel no interest in the object.

Such persons often seem not to know themselves. They perhaps think they attend to these worldly things only for the glory of God;--I will believe this when I see them interested in spiritual things as much.

When a man has quenched the Spirit of God his religion is all outside. His vital, heart-affecting interest in spiritual things is gone.

It is indeed true that a spiritual man will take some interest in worldly things because he regards them as a part of his duty to God, and to him they are spiritual things.

3. The mind falls very naturally into diverse errors in religion. The heart wanders from God, loses its hold on the truth, and perhaps the man insists that he now takes a much more liberal and enlightened view of the subject than before.

A short time since I had a conversation with a man who had given up the idea that the Old Testament was inspired--had given up the doctrine of the atonement, and indeed every distinctive doctrine of the Bible. He remarked to me--"I used to think as you do; but I have now come to take a more liberal and enlightened view of the subject."

Indeed! this a more liberal and enlightened view! So blinded as not to see

that Christ sanctioned the Old Testament as the oracles of God, and yet he flatters himself that he now takes a more liberal and enlightened view! There can be nothing stronger than Christ's affirmations respecting the inspiration of the Old Testament; and yet this man admits these affirmations to be true and yet denies the very thing they affirm! Most liberal and enlightened view truly!

How can you possibly account for such views except on the ground that for some reason the man has fallen into a strange, unnatural state of mind--a sort of mental fatuity in which moral truths are beclouded or distorted?

Everybody knows that there cannot be a greater absurdity than to admit the divine authority of the teachings of Christ and yet reject the Old Testament. The language of Christ affirms and implies the authority of the Old Testament in all those ways in which, on the supposition that the Old Testament is inspired, He might be expected to affirm and imply this fact.

The Old Testament does not indeed exhaust divine revelation; it left more things to be revealed. Christ taught much, but nothing more clearly than the divine authority of the Old Testament.

4. Quenching the Spirit often results in infidelity. What can account for such a case as that I have just mentioned, unless this--that God has left the mind to fall into very great darkness?

5. Another result is great hardness of heart. The mind becomes callous to all that class of truths which make it yielding and tender. The mobility of the heart under truth depends entirely upon its moral hardness. If very hard, truth makes no impression; if soft, then it is yielding as air, and moves quick to the touch of truth in any direction.

6. Another result is deep delusion in regard to their spiritual state. How remarkable that persons will claim to be Christians when they have rejected every distinctive doctrine of Christianity. Indeed, such persons do sometimes claim that by thus rejecting almost the whole of the Bible, and all its great scheme of salvation by an atonement, they have become real Christians. Now they have got the true light. Indeed!

How can such a delusion be accounted for except on the ground that the Spirit of God has abandoned the man to his own ways and left him to utter

and perfect delusion?

7. Persons in this state often justify themselves in most manifest wrong, because they put darkness for light and light for darkness. They entrench themselves in perfectly false principles, as if those principles were true and could amply justify their misdeeds.

REMARKS.

1. Persons often are not aware what is going on in their minds when they are quenching the Spirit of God. Duty is presented and pressed upon them, but they do not realize that this is really the work of the Spirit of God. They are not aware of the present voice of the Lord to their hearts, nor do they see that this solemn impression of the truth is nothing other than the effect of the Holy Ghost on their minds.

2. So when they come to take different views and to abandon their former opinions, they seem not conscious of the fact that God has departed from them. They flatter themselves that they have become very liberal and very much enlightened withal, and have only given up their former errors. Alas, they do not see that the light they now walk in is darkness--all sheer darkness! "Woe to them who put light for darkness and darkness for light!"

You see how to account for the spiritual state of some persons. Without the clue which this subject affords, you might be much misled. In the case just described, suppose that I had taken it for granted that this man was in truth taking a more rational and liberal view; I should have been misguided entirely.

3. I have good reason to know how persons become Unitarians and Universalists, having seen at least some hundreds of instances. It is not by becoming more and more men of prayer and real spirituality--not by getting nearer and nearer to God; they do not go on progressing in holiness, prayer, communion with God, until in their high attainments they reach a point where they deny the inspiration of the Bible, give up public prayer, the ordinances of the gospel, and probably secret prayer along with the rest. Those who give up these things are not led away while wrestling in prayer and while walking humbly and closely with God; no man ever got away from orthodox views while in this state of mind. But men first get away from God and quench his Spirit;--then embrace one error after another; truth falls out of the mind and we might

almost say truthfulness itself, or those qualities or moral attributes which capacitate the mind to discern and apprehend the truth; and then darkness becomes so universal and so deceptive that men suppose themselves to be wholly in the light,

4. Such a state of mind is most deplorable and often hopeless. What can be done when a man has grieved the Spirit of God away?

5. When an individual or a people have quenched the Spirit, they are in the utmost danger of being given up to some delusion that will bring them by a short route to destruction.

6. They take entirely false ground who maintain that if a religious movement is the work of God, it cannot be resisted. For example, I have often seen cases where persons would stop a revival, and then say--"It was not a real revival, for if it had been it would not have stopped."

Let a man adopt the opinion that he cannot stop the work of God in his own soul;--nothing can be more perilous. Let a people adopt the notion that revivals come and go without our agency and by the agency of God only, and it will bring perfect ruin on them. There never was a revival that could exist three days under such a delusion. The solemn truth is that the Spirit is most easily quenched. There is no moral work of his that can not be resisted.

7. An immense responsibility pertains to revivals. There is always fearful danger lest the Spirit should be resisted.

So when the Spirit is with an individual, there is the greatest danger lest something be said, ruinous to the soul.

Many persons here are in the greatest danger. The Spirit often labors with sinners here, and many have grieved away.

8. Many seem not to realize the nature of the Spirit's operations, the possibility always of resisting, and the great danger of quenching that light of God in the soul.

How many young men could I name here, once thoughtful, now stupid. Where are those young men who were so serious, and who attended the inquiry meeting so long in our last revival? Alas, have they quenched the Holy Spirit?

Is not this the case with you--young man; with you, young woman? Have not you quenched the Spirit until now your mind is darkened and your heart woefully hardened? How long ere the death-knell shall toll over you and your soul go down to hell? How long before you will lose your hold on all truth and the Spirit will have left you utterly?

But let me bring this appeal home to the hearts of those who have not yet utterly quenched the light of God in the soul. Do you find that truth still takes hold of your conscience--that God's word flashes on your mind--that heaven's light is not yet utterly extinguished, and there is still a quivering of conscience? You hear of a sudden death, like that of the young man the other day, and trembling seizes your soul, for you know that another blow may single out you. Then by all the mercies of God I beseech you take care what you do. Quench not the Holy Ghost, lest your sun go down in everlasting darkness. Just as you may have seen the sun set when it dipped into a dark, terrific, portentous thunder cloud. So a benighted sinner dies! Have you ever seen such a death? Dying, he seemed to sink into an awful cloud of fire and storm and darkness. The scene was fearful, like a sunsetting of storms, and gathering clouds, and rolling thunders, and forked lightnings. The clouds gather low in the west--the spirit of storm rides on the blast--belching thunders seem as if they would cleave the solid earth;--behind such a fearful cloud the sun drops, and all is darkness! So have I seen a sinner give up the ghost and drop into a world of storms, and howling tempests, and flashing fire.

O how unlike the setting sun of a mild summer evening. All nature seems to put on her sweetest smile as she bids the king of day adieu.

So dies the saint of God. There may be paleness on his lip and cold sweat on his brow, but there is beauty in that eye and glory in the soul. I think of a woman, just converted, when she was taken sick--brought down to the gates of death--yet was her soul full of heaven. Her voice was the music of angels; her countenance shone, her eye sparkled as if the forms of heavenly glory were embodied in her dying features. Nature at last sinks--the moment of death has come--she stretches out her dying hands and hails the waiting spirit-throng--"Glory to God!"--she cries--"I am coming!--I am coming!" Not going--observe--she did not say--"I am going,"--but "I am coming!"

But right over against this, look at the sinner dying. A frightful glare is on his countenance as if he saw ten thousand demons! As if the setting sun should go

down into an ocean of storms--to be lost in a world charged with tornadoes, storms, and death!

Young man, you will die just so if you quench the Spirit of God. Jesus Himself has said--"If ye will not believe, ye shall die in your sins." Beyond such a death, there is an awful hell.

[Back to Top](#)

Responsibility of Hearing the Gospel

Lecture XII

December 23, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Luke 8:18: "Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have."

These words follow almost immediately after the parable of the sower--a parable which was intended to represent the various classes of hearers and the diverse results of their different or opposite courses.

Immediately after recording that parable, Luke subjoins.

"No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed, but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light."

"For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither anything hid, that shall not be known and come abroad."

The idea of this seems to be that in the ultimate results of this state of probation, God will show who have improved their opportunities and who have not. These things, however secret now, shall be made manifest. All the workings and results of our present hearing or refusing to hear, shall in due season be spread out

before the universe.

Hence the solemn injunction--

"Take heed, therefore, how ye hear." How forcible, if it be indeed the case that all its consequences are to be revealed before the universe!

Luke adds also--

"Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have."

From this and the parallel passages we infer that whoever improves the instruction proffered him shall have grace needful to understand it. He shall also have more truth revealed to him. The providence, the word and the Spirit of God may perhaps all combine to fulfil this promise--more to him that improves what he has. So also will God take away from him who does not improve.

My remarks on the text will be confined chiefly to the first clause--"Take heed how ye hear." I shall, inquire;

I. What it is to take heed.

II. Why persons ought to take heed how they hear.

III. Show in several particulars how men ought to hear and must hear if they would ever profit by hearing.

I. What it is to take heed.

To take heed is to be wakeful, attentive, to be very considerate. It implies that we seriously ponder the word of the Lord and consider attentively its meaning and its application to ourselves.

II. Why is this injunction given? Why should we take heed how we hear?

You will observe that it respects especially the word of God. It does not require special attention to every thing which we can hear on all possible subjects and from any source whatever; no, it only requires us always to listen when God speaks; always to hear with the utmost attention what God may say.

Now the reasons of such a requirement are surely very plain.

1. Because it is God who speaks. We are to consider that it is really God who speaks to us through His word, and through the faithful and sound preaching of His gospel. He may employ human organs; He may use the language and the types or the living voice of man--yet it is still the voice of God, for it is His chosen mode of revealing Himself to mortal man.

And now how ought all men to listen to the word of God! With what profound and solemn attention!

And do any ask why we should thus listen when God speaks? I answer. Because He always has something important to say. Because He never speaks in vain. He is not an incessant talker--is not a trifler--never speaks unless to communicate truths of infinite moment for mortal man to hear and know.

How then ought men to hearken when the Infinite Jehovah speaks!

Suppose you were apprised of the fact that the Great God--the Infinite Maker of the Universe, had appointed the time and the place where He would audibly speak to mortal men--in language intelligible to them and of course on subjects of infinite concern to them. Would not you and would not every man living stand on tiptoe to hear every word that should go forth from the eternal God?

But what would you think if men should pay no attention? If the notice should not draw together even a respectably large congregation? What would you think if there were some who would not hear at all?

But again--God speaks to you--to you as if it were by name; as if He were to call out your name, and make His communications particularly to you. Suppose now it were known that God was about to address someone in this congregation by name--but no one knows who the individual is. How every heart would quiver with intense interest to know who it should be--each one anxious almost to agony and saying--Is it I? Will that majestic voice pronounce my name? And what will He say?

Now such a course would be striking--would be thrilling. It would doubtless startle some into wakefulness who are rarely wakeful under the ordinary

mode of divine communication. But yet God as really speaks now to mortal men as if He were to call out with audible voice their very names. And, my hearer, He just as really speaks now to you, as if He were to pronounce your very name before this whole assembly.

This is one of those great truths which you need to know and fully realize. When God speaks through His word, through His providence, or through His gospel preached by His servants, He really speaks to you.

Again, you should take heed because if you do not you will certainly misunderstand what the Lord says. You cannot understand without giving your attention, and surely you must know that if God speaks to you, He will say something which is vitally important for you to know.

It is well for you to consider the fact that multitudes fail to understand these messages of the Lord, and hence go on to the judgment under a fatal mistake. God spake to them; they gave no such heed as would secure a right understanding of His message, and hence they go to perdition.

Again, you should take heed how you hear because God speaks on subjects of infinite importance to your soul. Life and death hang on every word He utters. He speaks to tell you of salvation--to show you what you must do to secure everlasting life. And should a single young man or young woman in this house be indifferent?

Your salvation does and must depend on the manner of your hearing. If you hear so as not to understand, you can never be saved. The very things of which God speaks are the conditions on which you can be saved. How can you be saved if you fail to understand these conditions? These conditions you are yourself to fulfill; how then can you do them and be saved unless you understand what they are?

Again, not only is your own salvation depending on your hearing the truth of God attentively, but the salvation also of many others. Perhaps thousands of persons may be deeply and personally interested in your hearing as you should. You cannot neglect to hear as you ought without wronging your family, your friends, your posterity, your whole generation. All these will have reason to blame, yea, to reproach, and even to curse you if you do not hear as you ought.

Consider further that God is offering you eternal life. It is on this subject that He speaks to you, offering you life and threatening you with death if you will not attend and obey. When God is about to speak on such a subject, is it not fitting that He should introduce His communication with the solemn admonition--"Take heed how ye hear?"

Consider also that everything may depend upon your present hearing. Perhaps some of you are hearing the word of the Lord now for the last time. Death may lock up all your senses forever, ere you shall enter the sanctuary or open your Bible again.

Or it may be that though you should hear the word of the Lord a thousand times hereafter, yet God may withdraw His Spirit henceforward, never to bestow it any more upon you. There is the more reason to fear it in your case since you are now solemnly warned of your responsibility and of your danger. Your whole eternity therefore may now be suspended upon the manner of your hearing the word of God this day. Will you slight that solemn word and put in peril the salvation of your soul forever?

III. I am to show in some particulars how you ought to hear and must hear if you would ever be saved.

It is perfectly plain that you cannot possibly be saved only by means of understanding and obeying the word of God. There is only one possible way of being saved, and that is by becoming holy, since "without holiness, no man shall see the Lord." Nor can you become holy only as you obey the truth, nor can you obey the truth only as far as you understand it. Hence the immense importance of understanding and obeying the truth of the Lord.

If this is so, then certain other things follow and must be true.

1. You must hear with very deep and fixed attention when the word of God is spoken to you. You must give your mind up most deeply and thoroughly to understand and obey it.
2. You must hear with reverence and awe. Nothing is more displeasing to God than a state of levity of mind when He is speaking. You can readily understand this. If you were a father, think how you would feel if your children received your most solemn remarks or appeals to them with insulting levity.

3. You must hear with a most sincere desire to understand what God says. How many persons are there in this house who have never set yourselves with seriousness really to understand the Gospel as if you felt it to be a matter of infinite concernment to you? How many are there here who have never really pondered the plan of salvation--"I must understand the will of God concerning myself--I must know whether I am still held guilty and still doomed to hell, or whether I am pardoned?" Some of you perhaps have never said this honestly in all your life. Yet you have had the Bible in your hands; and you have heard sermons enough to have enlightened unto salvation a thousand heathen souls. Who of you have come to the house of God today with an intense desire to understand everything said to you? But how can you expect ever to understand these great things of salvation unless you give up your minds to this study in solemn earnestness?

I am often astonished to hear persons saying--"The Bible is a mysterious book; I don't understand it."

Have you ever studied it as you do your class books? Do you ever give your whole mind to understand it as you do to understand Euclid or Cicero?

Yet with what intense interest should you desire to understand it! Nothing in all the universe is so important to you as to understand this way of salvation. Your state of mind therefore by no means corresponds to your responsibilities, or to the subject you have to study; and how can you expect the Lord to bless you?

4. You must hear with candor, and be willing to know the worst of your case. Your heart must be really open to hear the whole truth.

Few persons have really come to understand how much importance is to be attached to this state of mind. Many seem not to be sensible of being prejudiced. Perhaps they have not even dreamed of being committed against the truth of God; but yet they are, full of committal--and most resolutely fixed in their false opinions. They are by no means candid.

I doubt whether a really candid man ever came to the reading of the Bible or to the hearing of the preached gospel, without being infinitely benefited by such hearing and reading. Now in revivals I have always noticed that however wicked and prejudiced men may have been yet if they could be

persuaded to lay aside their prejudice and be candid, they are at once enlightened and are usually converted. They did not know really that they were not candid; yet if they had used the least reflection they must have seen that they did not give up their whole mind honestly and search for truth. So much at least they must have known.

And how is it here in this matter? Are there not persons here who know they do not give up their minds to understand the truth--who know they have not heard the gospel this morning with any real desire to learn their duty that they may do it? I wish I could go round to every individual here, with this question--Did you come here this morning with an intense desire to open your whole heart to the truth, and to give yourself up to be carried by it just where the truth might carry you? Without so much candor and so much earnestness as this, how can you hope ever to be enlightened by the truth? How can you rationally expect ever to be converted?

5. The Bible represents it as important that you should hear with fear and trembling lest you fail to understand. Surely nothing can be more reasonable than this. How would you feel if you were actually to hear the voice of Jehovah proclaiming to you your duty, or your doom? Would you not tremble?

How did Israel hear at Sinai, when the awful voice of the Lord of Hosts shook the solid mountain, and smote every heart with fear and awe! O they felt then that they could not stand before that awful Lord God! How earnestly did they implore that they might not themselves hear that dread voice again, but that Moses might stand between themselves and the Lord and hear from Him and communicate to them?

And is it not most fit that you no less than they, should hear the word of God with fear and solemn awe?

6. You should hear with an intense desire to learn what the will of God is that you may do it whatever it may be. Now if you do not hear with a determination to obey, your hearing is only tempting God. It is an insult to God of the foulest stamp. Willing and ready to know your duty--but your heart fully set to disregard it however clearly known! What can be more horrid impiety than this!

7. You should hear with your heart set upon present obedience. You should not merely intend to do at some future time the duty you may learn today; but you should fully determine to do present known duty immediately.

Moreover your heart should be thoroughly set to do your duty fully--not partially; and perpetually,--not merely for the present hour.

8. You must also hear with penitence for past neglect. How many times have you heard in vain? And is it not fit that for this you should stand before God with a broken heart?

9. You must hear with implicit confidence in God. Else of what use can it be to you. The Bible says the Jews were not benefited by their hearing because it was not mixed with faith. So unless you really believe God, of what possible use can it be to you to listen to His word?

This reveals the secret why so many hear without any real profit. If they truly believed God, it would be of use to hear; but having no faith in God, all is to them as an idle tale. May it not be so with many of you?

But let us try to appreciate this subject. Imagine to yourself how you should listen if God should send an angel to speak to you, or should come to speak to you Himself. Suppose that I were now to take my seat, and that God should fill this house with His own voice. You would see no physical form but you would hear a voice, and know it to be the voice of the great God. How would awe and wakeful attention hold your mind in such dread moments! Oh, you would say--this is the great God! This is that Being in whose hand our breath is, and whom by our sins we have offended! O will He forgive us graciously for Christ's sake, or frown upon us in His righteous wrath?

Or again, suppose God speaks by an angel. The angel comes and takes his position before you. Suppose you were to see him come down from heaven in robes of dazzling light and glory; you see he holds in his hand a book and every page of it is luminous with unearthly radiance. He opens it, assuring you that God sends it to you to tell you the plan of salvation and show you what you must do to be saved. Suppose the angel opens that book and expounds to you its contents; would you not listen as for your very life? Would not the scene and its solemn responsibilities make an impression on

your mind which you could never forget? Aye, indeed, as if it were embossed on your very soul; there the living remembrance and impression of the truths he should explain to you would stand as if they were written with the point of a diamond.

But again, let us suppose, that an apostle should come or one of the prophets of yet more ancient time; suppose one of them to be sent from the other world and you were assured of the fact; would you not listen with amazing attention?

Or still again, suppose that God should send to you an inspired man, and you knew him to be inspired; would you not even then listen with wakeful, thrilling interest? Would you not yield your utmost attention to such messages from the living God?

But here you have the living oracles of Jehovah. Here they are in the language of men: and yet you know they come from God. Suppose it to be the fact that God has chosen to reveal Himself to you just in this way, rather than by making His own voice distinctly and awfully audible, or rather than by an angel radiant with glory--or rather than by sending from the other world a prophet or an apostle, or rather than by sending to you an inspired preacher; and the reason of His choice has been that He might put you on a more effective trial and see whether you would believe Him on such evidence as your reason tells you is adequate, and see moreover whether you will under such circumstances search for truth as for hid treasures. Suppose you understand the precise nature of your trial; ;you know that it turns very much upon the point whether you will hear the voice of God through His word and His preached gospel or not; now, knowing all this, will you give heed to the warning voice of God and listen to His truth? O how you would search this truth if you understood the results of the trial by which the Lord is now trying you to see if you will indeed obey His voice though it comes to you through the silent words of the book and the merely human voice of one who is a frail mortal, like yourselves!

REMARKS.

1. Many seem to pay as little attention to the word of God as if no such injunction were found in the bible. They act as if they had never thought of the solemn responsibility of hearing with serious attention to the word of the Lord. It

would seem from their conduct as if they were not aware that God had over and over again reminded them of this solemn responsibility.

Even among us, there are those who pay not half so much attention to a solemn message which God sends by one commissioned to preach His gospel as they would to a young man's commencement speech, or to the monthly declamations; not half so much as they would to a stump speech on politics!

How can this be? Do such persons at all consider the contempt they thus pour upon God? Would they treat their Governor or their President, as they do God? And do they know that this is that God in whose hand their breath is?

2. Men ought to know that all their hearing of the gospel, is either "a savor of life unto life, or a savor of death unto death." Do you realize this, dear hearer? Are you aware how much this hearing affects your moral state?

You might watch this point, and mark how your hearing of the gospel affects your moral state. You might doubtless notice how your heart becomes hardened by careless, inattentive hearing, and how declension steals on apace while you get no strength from the preached gospel.

Or on the other hand you might notice how your spiritual strength is renewed when your heart takes hold of the sermons you hear as the hungry man takes hold of suitable food set before him. By a figure at once fit and beautiful, does Paul say--"We are unto God a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish. To the one we are a savor of death unto death, to the other, a savor of life unto life." So to some of you, no doubt, the gospel preached is "death unto death"--accumulated guilt and damnation; while to others it is "life unto life," increasing knowledge and piety, and augmented glory.

3. We may see how it is that many become so exceedingly hardened. Such persons often seem not aware that they are becoming greatly hardened, or perhaps that they have become so already. They seem not sensible of the fact that the hearing of the gospel is altogether vain and worse than vain, and that they really hear so as to resist the truth and acquire the habit of being utterly insensible to its claims.

It may be so with some of you. You may have taken so little heed to what you hear that now it does you absolutely no good at all to hear a sermon or to read your bibles. You might hear or read, but the truth has utterly ceased to make any

impression.

If you have reached a state so hardened, you are in as bad a predicament as you need to be this side of hell.

4. How exceedingly mad persons are for taking credit to themselves for going to the house of God, when really they have no intention of "taking heed how they hear." They come with no desire whatever of obeying the word of God; indeed nothing is farther from their thoughts than this. They go to church only that they may have it to say they have been there. They go for the credit of going--because they do not like to incur the disgrace of not going.

Suppose your child should come to you each morning and say--Father, what do you want that I should do today? But having heard, he goes his way, and never thinks for a moment of doing the first thing you desire him to do. So he does day after day--hearing, but never doing, and withal congratulating himself for having done so nobly. O, indeed, who had done like him--every morning he came and asked his parent what he should do:--but never in one instance did he obey.

So that young man or woman in this assembly, may have gone a hundred times to hear what God, the Lord will say--but having heard and learned, they never in one instance have done it. So does the devil go to meeting;--the bible says he goes:--but does he hear and obey? Not he--and suppose he too should strut about and glory in his good deeds inasmuch as he goes to meeting! As well might he do this, as any of those careless hearers and proud formalists who glory in it that they do the same thing.

5. Every seventh day is a Sabbath. Every seven years of your life makes up one year of Sabbaths. Every Sabbath school child seven years old has therefore seen one year of Sabbaths. Each youth fourteen years old has spent two full years of Sabbaths--time enough to go half through college. Have those youths now fourteen years old, been learning of God and of His truth so that they can pass examination?

Another class have lived twenty one years. These have filled up three years of Sabbaths--time enough to have gone three fourths of the way through college. O think of your examination. Are you ready to meet it and to pass it honorably?

Others have lived twenty eight years--making four years of Sabbaths--time enough to go through college--time enough to get a college education in the

principal branches of literature and science.

Now suppose you had studied your Algebra and Latin as you have your bibles, and heard scientific lectures as you have sermons; how much science would you now have?

But let us come up among the fathers--the men of gray hairs; how many years of Sabbaths have you lived? Think of it; how many whole years made up of Sabbaths! O! have you taken heed? Have you studied the great things of the bible with the utmost diligence and intensity? What do you know of God's word? How many of its promises do you really understand?

6. How perfectly shocking and astounding is the manner in which many persons treat the word of God! Suppose an angel should visit this place--should really come down among yourselves with a message from the great God! He summons the people together, and the most of them come. But instead of attending with all your souls to what he may bring from God relating to your salvation, many of you are gazing about upon one another, and during the whole time he is speaking to you, you are thinking about anything and everything else except the very thing of which he is speaking, so that it would be hard to say which is the most stupid--the people that sit before him, or the seats they sit on. O, surely there is not another world in the universe where this would not be looked upon as perfect madness! What do they think of it in heaven? Suppose an angel should pass among those shining hosts and tell them how the messages of God are received in this world. And suppose he should speak of it in some such manner as this. It is common there for men to pay the least possible attention to the messengers whom God sends among them, and all this is natural enough too. O, you see the Lord is only telling them some things of little consequence about their salvation--that is all--you know all that is really nothing to them.

O tell me; what would they think of such an angel as this? What shuddering amazement would run through all their ranks to hear such words, in such a strain!

But if such a state of mind ought to seem strange and even horrid in heaven, how ought it to seem here among you?

7. There are some here as to whom I have little hope of making any impression on their minds. O how astonishing, I have often said to myself--how astonishing

that they should be always hearing, and only going still farther and farther away from God and from heaven! O how will they stand before God in the great day of trial!

Others hear with so much skepticism, it can do them no good. How surpassingly strange it is that men should be skeptical respecting the revealed word of God! Surely God has made the evidence in support of His bible clear enough to convince any unprejudiced mind.

8. In view of the solemn responsibilities of giving heed to the word of the Lord, I want to ask the listeners here today, how will you yourselves regard it when you come to your death bed? What are your anticipations now of that solemn hour and of its reflections? Do you now expect that then, your conscience will pronounce its approving "well done?"

And how will it be with you when you pass beyond that death bed scene to your final account before the great God? Are you ready for that dread account? If you were then to pass an examination as to your attainments in divine science, as some of the professors here examine their pupils in human science and literature, could you pass the examination? Are you quite clear that you have at least been diligent, so that you shall have no occasion to reproach yourself for culpable neglect?

9. It is infinitely important that you should make up your mind at once to hear God's truth as you know you should. Everything depends on your coming to this determination now, and saying--"I will at once and henceforth listen to God as for my life."

You who are professors of religion, how do you hear? Can you go before God now in your closets and say;--"Lord, I have heard Thy word as for my life--I have given up my whole soul to understand and to obey all Thy truth." Who of you can say this in the deep sincerity of your souls?

And what sinner in this house can say this? Who of you is prepared to say solemnly, "O Lord God Almighty, the great and heart-searching God, I have heard Thy words now these many days, and I have always listened with serious attention; my mother taught me about Thee my God, and my duty to Thee, and my young heart hailed the first knowledge of God with joyful welcome."

Who of you can say, "I have always been a prayerful student of the bible--I have

always obeyed its heaven-sent truth?" Must you not rather say, "I have been guilty--I am covered with shame--I have treated Thy word with contempt--I have turned away my ear and my heart from hearing Thy words; Thou hast risen morning by morning, and sent me line upon line and precept upon precept, but my heart has always been as an adamant stone; Alas, I am still in my sins, although Thou hast sent me Thy word and Thy Son--although Thou hast done all for me that could be done, yet am I still in my sins, condemned, and ready to sink down to hell."

Sinner, let me ask you here today, if this shall be your course any longer? Do you say No; by the grace of God it shall be so no longer--from this good hour, I give my being up to be influenced by the word of God? So do, dear hearer, and it shall be your life. By all the peril of a guilty soul in its sins, I beseech you, give up your heart now to most solemn and fixed attention to the word of the Lord your God.

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their

happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because

it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

End of the 1846 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1847
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Lectures I. & II. [All Things for Good to Those that Love God-- and
All Events Ruinous to the Sinner- No.'s 1 & 2](#)
- Lectures III. & IV. [Heart Condemnation, A Proof that God Also Condemns-- and
An Approving Heart, Confidence in Prayer- No.'s 1 & 2](#)
- Lectures V. & VI. & VII. [Conditions of Prevailing Prayer- No.'s 1 & 2 & 3](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

**All Things for Good to Those that Love God-- and All Events Ruinous to
the Sinner- No.'s 1 & 2**

Lectures I & II
January 6, 1847

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 8:28: "For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

In illustrating the subject presented in these words, I shall,

I. Show what the passage means.

II. Illustrate the manner in which this is accomplished.

III. Notice some particulars as illustrations of this truth.

IV. Show how we know this truth, as the text affirms that we do.

I. The most important question pertaining to our first topic of remark is, Does the text affirm a universal proposition?

1. The language of the text is universal. It affirms in an unqualified manner that all things work together for good to God's friends. Now it is a good rule of interpretation to understand scripture as it reads, that is, according to its most obvious sense,--unless the nature of the affirmation, or some circumstances pertaining to it seem urgently to demand a modification of this meaning. All sound-minded men follow this rule in interpreting both the Bible and all other books and documents.

2. There is nothing in the nature of the case to limit the meaning of this language. On this point especially there is ample room to enlarge very greatly--but my time will not permit.

3. There is nothing in the context which demands any limitation, but much on the contrary which favors the universal construction.

4. There is nothing anywhere in scripture that conflicts with this, understood as a universal truth. On the contrary the Bible throughout teaches us that every thing in the whole plan of God's universal government conspires to this result. All is adapted to befriend his people and to promote their highest good. God is evermore controlling all things for the good of his children. He is their great and good Father.

II. The manner in which this result is accomplished.

This point deserves special consideration, because there are many things, affecting true Christians, which in their present operation seem to work together for their evil and not for their good.

It would require many sermons to investigate this subject thoroughly. At present I can only sketch a few leading principles.

The highest well-being of moral agents depends upon their holiness. This is perfectly obvious. Their holiness, moreover, is conditioned upon knowledge. There can be no holiness in intelligent being without knowledge, and holiness can advance only as knowledge advances. In fact, holiness is nothing else but conformity of heart to knowledge, so that of course there must be knowledge or there could not be holiness. Hence knowledge is both the condition and measure of holiness.

Consequently every thing that is a means of knowledge is also a means of holiness. Whatever gives moral agents a knowledge of themselves will if they are holy in character increase their holiness, for they would cease to be holy if they did not use their knowledge to increase their holiness.

Now all events that occur are providential;--that is, they occur under the universal government of God, and occur as they do either because the hand of God controls and shapes them, or because his wisdom permits them to occur as they do, rather than interpose to prevent them. Hence all events reveal God. No event can possibly occur which shall not teach moral agents something concerning God, or themselves, or something useful that they need to know. These events also teach us very much that reveals our relations to God, and hence our duties towards him. And these are precisely the things that are requisite to augment the blessedness of intelligent moral agents.

These remarks apply especially to all those events that fall directly within the range of our present knowledge. But things not within our present knowledge are so related to things that are, as to have a remote bearing upon us, and hence will ultimately come to be known to us. It is probably not too much to presume that all events that ever did or ever shall occur in this world will ultimately be known to all the people of God, and hence will have an important bearing upon their holiness and highest well-being.

III. I am to specify some particulars which serve to illustrate the doctrine of

our text.

1. What we call mercies work out the good of those that love God. For if men love God, these mercies quicken their love and gratitude. Every real Christian knows this. It is a precious part of his daily experience.
2. What we call rebukes have also the same tendency to good. Though they may seem evil, yet are they really among the good things that flow to us from the hand of our great Father. They serve to increase our knowledge of God. They show us his faithfulness and assure us that his heart is thoroughly set upon correcting all in us that is wrong--and strengthening all that is right.

The rebukes of God's providence naturally serve to increase our virtue, and hence are often among the very best things God can give us.

3. Again, the crosses of saints work together for their good. Those very things that disappoint their plans, and frustrate their schemes are often among the indispensable things for their real and highest welfare. They are the means by which God breaks them off from their own ways and shows them that they must not have any ways of their own at all. While men are in a state in which they can be crossed, they of course need more discipline. You may recollect the remark made by Dr. Payson that since he had given up his own will and quite lost it so as to have no will of his own, he had not known a single disappointment. He was perfectly satisfied with every thing just as God arranged and ordered it, for he had no other will than God's. Now God is seeking to produce such a state of mind in his children that they will say--"I want only to do this or that according to the will of God. Nothing pleases me except what pleases Him. I want to learn His will before I have any special preference of my own. Then if His apparent will changes, I am perfectly pleased, for His will is always best."

Now this state of mind should extend to all events wherein the special will of God is not known by revelation. Hence crosses are exceedingly well calculated for doing good to God's people and are most kindly and wisely designed for this end. We are not to suppose that it is agreeable to our Father to perplex and distress us; but it is agreeable to Him to discipline and chasten us, because he knows that the results are so precious.

It often happens that persons come to see the truth of this in their own case. Then they say, "Now I see how well it has been for me to be disappointed, and how good and wise my Heavenly Father has been in doing it." When I have seen men eagerly set upon some earthly good, I have said to myself, "They need to be disappointed, and God will doubtless do it." I shall think it strange if He does not. If they are real Christians and God loves and cares for them as his children, He will surely bring them under discipline to break off their hold upon the world and save their souls.

4. Afflictions should doubtless be accounted among our good things. The Bible teaches this in many passages. One says, "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word." Another testifies-- "I know that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me." Afflictions therefore are not to be regarded as evidences of peculiarly great guilt in those who experience them. The case of Job seems to have been designed to teach us this lesson. They rather evince the special faithfulness of God. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth."

5. All those trials which we call temptations are to be accounted among these good things. They very often establish our virtue and greatly develop and strengthen our graces. For this manifestly they were intended. Hence the Apostle says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience."-- James 1:2-3.

6. The responsibilities which God throws upon His children are among the things that work for their good. We may perhaps be made to groan out under these things, and possibly stagger under their burden, yet shall they work out good at last. They are perhaps the very things that are needed to develop our powers. It may be that nothing less than these burdens would make us feel our need of God's daily support, and thus discipline us to daily dependence.

Moreover, some perhaps are naturally so sluggish that God could not save them if He should not lay upon them almost crushing responsibilities.

7. Our own infirmities work out our good. How often do we see this! Physical infirmities and frailties teach us our dependence upon God, and bring us to walk softly with Him and before Him. They often compel us to

exercise sobriety, temperance and self-control, and in this way often become our greatest blessings.

Paul had a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, sent to buffet him. What it was we are not told, but the result plainly shows that it was greatly useful to him.

Now all such things are in certain points of view greatly trying and painful, yet in other respects, they are exceedingly valuable. And when we shall ultimately come to see all their bearings, we shall see that Infinite Wisdom sent them, or at least permitted them, and then overrules them for our good.

8. Our very mistakes often work for our good. Said a pious man once who had fallen into a great error--"Now that is just like me" --that is just like me. I see it now. I might not have seen myself as I am, if that had not happened."

9. The same is doubtless true of the sins of those that love God. Peter's great sin in denying his Lord seems to have been greatly blessed--that is overruled so as to work out good to him. So with the sins of the children of God generally. Yet they have no excuse for themselves and are none the less guilty for committing them, because God is so good and wise as to counteract some of their evil tendencies and bring good out from them instead of unmingled evil.

10. The infirmities, mistakes and sins of others are among the things that work for our good. Who does not know how much we are benefited by witnessing the sins of others! No thanks indeed to them that their sins are a warning to us, nor can this circumstance lessen their guilt.

Also the afflictions of others often work out great good to us. The afflictions which we see others suffering may and often do have much the same beneficial result as if we endured them ourselves. So wonderfully has God framed the social economy of our nature and of society.

Finally, it is plain that all events that occur under the providence of God serve to promote the good of His people.

But we must hasten to enquire,

IV. How is it that we know this.

The Apostle says, "We know that all things work together for good to those that love God." Now we cannot suppose he meant to say merely that all inspired men know this. His meaning doubtless is that all Christians may know it. For,

(1.) Reason affirms that it must be so under the government of an infinitely wise and benevolent God. No one can take just views of the character of God without seeing that he must have had a plan for governing this world--must have foreseen all possible and actual results--and must have provided that nothing should occur in vain. That is, He must have determined to prevent the occurrence of all those events which He could not overrule for so much good as on the whole to justify Him in permitting their occurrence. These conclusions are either the direct affirmation of reason, or they are arrived at by the plainest inferences from its intuitions.

(2.) But it is a truth of revelation, and Christians may know it because the Bible teaches it. The Bible every where directly or indirectly teaches that God is overruling all events for the good of the righteous.

(3.) Experience and observation universally teach the same thing. Who does not know that all real Christians can say this. Looking over their past history, they can say-- "This and that--yea all these things, have been made, through divine mercy and wisdom, to work out my good and fit me for more usefulness here, or, at least for more glory hereafter." It is instructive to see how many of the saints of God can set up here their Ebenezer,. and testify-- "Hitherto has the Lord helped me!"

REMARKS.

1. We may blame ourselves for that which upon the whole we do not regret. For example, a man may commit a sin, and of course, he is guilty and inexcusable for this, and ought most surely to blame himself for committing it. His intention is all wrong and he is entirely to blame for it. Yet on the whole it may not be a matter of regret that the sin viewed as an event, occurred, because God has brought a vast amount of good from it.

As a full illustration of this point, take the sin of Satan in tempting Judas and the sin of Judas in yielding to the temptation to betray Christ. This transaction in both Satan and Judas was all evil and nothing else but evil; and was none the less

a sin and a great sin because the Lord overruled it for so much good. Yet this good result has been infinitely great. The event therefore is not to be regretted on the whole though Satan and Judas are none the less to be blamed because the wisdom and the love of God have brought so much good from their sins.

You will all recollect the view given in the Bible of the sin of Joseph's brethren in selling him into Egypt. "Be not grieved, said he, nor angry with yourselves that ye sent me hither, for God did send me before you to preserve life." They had sinned, but God had educed so much good from their sinful act, that it was now fit that they should rejoice in those manifestations of wisdom and love.

2. God may blame us and often does, when perhaps on the whole He does not see cause to regret the occurrence of the event. Doubtless God blamed both Judas and Satan, yet He does not regret on the whole that great event towards which their sin directly contributed. Referring to this event, Peter said, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and with wicked hands have crucified and slain." Their hands were none the less wicked for the good which the Lord brought forth as a result from their evil doing. And it surely may be that the event as a whole even, including the sins of Judas and of the wicked Jews, is not regretted by the Most High.

3. It does not follow from this that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good; or that God could not bring about a still greater good if all his creatures were perfectly obedient. It cannot be shown that in every instance where sin occurs, more good results than would have resulted if holiness had been in its stead. Indeed we cannot conceive of any higher blessedness to the created universe than universal holiness and its consequent happiness. Now if in every instance when sin occurs, holiness under the same circumstances had occurred, the result would of course be universal holiness, and a degree of blessedness, than which we can conceive of none higher. But it is not my intention now to enter at length into this often disputed subject.

I am aware that those who maintain that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good argue thus;--all holiness depends upon knowledge of God; many truths respecting the character of God could never have been revealed if sin had not occurred; hence sin is necessary to the greatest amount of holiness and consequently of real good.

This reasoning would have weight if the case were such that creatures could not

be holy without such knowledge of God as nothing can reveal but the occurrence of sin. But none can suppose that such can be the case of moral agents under the government of God. The argument therefore only shows that, sin having occurred, the Lord makes the wisest possible use of it--a fact which none can reasonably doubt. It altogether fails to prove that the state of the universe is better now than it would have been if all had persevered in holiness under the light they had.

But it is especially to my purpose to maintain that God's overruling all things for good to his people forms no apology or excuse for sin. No thanks to the guilty sinner that a God of infinite wisdom can and does manage to work good out of his intended evil. No thanks to him;--he is altogether evil and wicked. He does not use it for good himself, nor mean it for good, no more than the devil did in the case of Judas, or than Judas himself did. Suppose that Christ's death, and his death in precisely that manner, was the very best thing that could have occurred;--no thanks to Judas or Satan for that; they meant only evil, and all the resulting good must be ascribed to God alone.

Hence it does not follow that we should do evil that good may come. In fact, it is in the nature of the case impossible that a man should do evil for the sake of its resulting good. It is impossible that a man should sin for the sake of doing good thereby, and with this design. Suppose a man to say--let me sin on now for this is the way to do good! Pause a moment and ask--What is sin? Surely it is not doing anything with the design of bringing about good; no but, sin is mere selfishness--is always a trampling down of the greater good for the sake of a far less good for myself. Sin, therefore, never can have the greatest good for its object. Every act that has the greatest good for its design, object or motive, is holiness, not sin.

I am fully aware that the doctrine of my text has been greatly abused. Men have said, "Because sin results in good, therefore let us sin on, and leave it with God to bring out the good which he needs sin in order to educe." But this is an outrageous perversion of this precious truth. The fact that God can overrule sin for good affords not the least mitigation of the guilt of any sinner. Every sinner is just as guilty as if all sin tended to evil only and as if God had no power or disposition to bring any good out of it whatever.

4. It often happens that we are unable to see how the providence of God will result in our ultimate good. Events that affect us or our friends look utterly dark and we seem almost compelled to say with Jacob, "All these things are against

me." All this must be evil to me and mine, and cannot work out my good. But in such cases we are bound as believing children to dismiss the views which sight gives us, and fall back upon faith. We must now believe God, who says "All things shall work together for good to those that love me." Let all my children believe that and trust their own kind Father!

Now it is not wonderful that in a world like this, framed for a state of trial, events should often assume such an aspect as this. It results in the trial of our faith. And here apply those most pertinent and consoling words of Jesus Christ-- "What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." Howmuchsoever, then, the events of divine providence may make us smart, or throw us into perplexity,. still let us fall back upon the unfailing promise-- "All things shall work together for good to those that love God."

5. We see why we should give thanks for all things, and why every thing that occurs is, in reference to God and His agency in it, [a] matter of gratitude. We see why we should thank Him for every thing he brings about directly by his providence, and also for every thing He suffers to be done by moral agents, Himself not preventing them from doing it. We should thank God for not preventing the murderous deeds of Judas and of Satan; for He had wise and good ends in view in not preventing them. Under the circumstances, the Lord did the very best thing he could in permitting those wicked beings to go on, and consummate the murder of his own dear Son.

The same is true of every sin that occurs in the universe. So far as God has any thing to do with it, we thank Him, because He does all things well; always doing even in respect to sin the very best thing that under all the circumstances of the case, He can do. For this then, we thank Him. But for what sinners do, we cannot thank them, for they intend only evil. They are to be cursed--not thanked for their sins, and cursed none the less because God always overrules their sin to make it result in just as much incidental good as He can.

6. We see why it is that we are required to rejoice always. Why should not saints rejoice always in all that God is doing? Many of these things, I know, often seem for the present, not joyous but grievous, yet in their remote and ultimate bearings, they always work out great good, and the greatest good which under the circumstances God could effect. A man who is sick may need to resort to many unpleasant medicines; if maimed, he may need for his best good a painful surgical operations; and these things, though sad in many of their bearings, are

yet good in their ultimate results, and therefore it is cause of gratitude, when they are skilfully and successfully performed. So with many of the events of life. They come, unmingled with sorrow, but good in their ultimate result, and it would be a great mistake to estimate them only by their present evil, leaving out of view the greater resulting good.

7. It sometimes happens that persons are in this state; "I know," say they, "that 'all things work together for good to those that love God;' but I am thrown into such circumstances of perplexity and darkness that I cannot tell whether I am one of those who love God or not. The only emotions of which I am sensible are those of pain and agony. I am full of distress, and I can scarcely think of any thing else. Especially I cannot feel on any other subjects but my own trials and sufferings."

Now all such persons should look at the attitude of their will and not of their emotions. If they would do so, they would see through this mist, and their perplexities would no longer harass them.

How often have I seen individuals in great distress, under deep trials and perplexities; but strengthening themselves in the Lord their God, they came forth from those scenes of tempest as the sun breaks out from an ocean of storms, all the more glorious for the long and fearful hiding of his beams. So the tried and believing Christian comes forth from his sorest trials, having learned lessons concerning God unknown to him before. Now he sees that his trials are among the greatest blessings he ever received from the Lord.

8. What ever befalls the saints is to be rejoiced in. Trials may befall our friends,--perhaps our own children; but if we have evidence that they love God, we may rejoice in every thing that occurs to them. What if afflictions come--wave after wave; all things shall issue in their ultimate good;--this is as sure as the word and the government of the eternal God. Even if we should see such a case as that of Job--and none perhaps ever looked more dark--yet even in view of such a case we should rejoice; for we might know that in every similar case as in that, God prepares his afflicted child for a double blessing.

So also in the trial of Abraham's faith in the matter of offering up Isaac. In this case some things are developed, not often noticed--things pertinent to the case of some Christians at the present day. You recollect, God commanded him to go and take his own son and put him to death, and then offer him as a sacrifice on

an altar. What! Abraham might naturally have said, "what! God command me to kill my own son? The devil might do this--but how can it be that God should do it? Surely I never heard any thing like this in the ways of God before! This contradicts every thing I have ever seen or heard of the Lord Jehovah! He commands me to commit one of the most horrid crimes that ever can be committed. And then this is my son of promise, and God has said that out of him he would make a great nation."

Surely this was one of the most severe trials. It threw Abraham upon his naked faith. He had no resource but to fall back upon simple trust in the Lord, and say, God has spoken--even the wise, the good, the just God, and now let me trust his name! He can raise my Isaac from the dead if need be in order to fulfill his promise.

Thus he stood his ground, and passed this great and fearful trial. O, how useful and blessed were the results of this trial to Abraham, during all his future life and through all his glorious existence. How gloriously has this example of faith stood out before all the children of God from that day to this! How many have had their faith quickened, directed, edified, by this great example! And perhaps it is not too much to suppose that sooner or later all the angels of heaven will be blessed by the far-reaching influence of this example of trusting and obeying God.

It is a great mistake to overlook these future results of our trials. We ought ever to keep them full in our view. Doing so is indispensable in order to be able to rejoice continually in the Lord, and in all the events that occur under his all-pervading providence. If we fail to do so, how many things will disconcert us and make us stumble to the sore wounding of our peace with God and of our confidence in him.

In continuing this subject I shall show that the opposite to the doctrine of the text is true of the wicked; --all things shall work together for their evil.

LECTURE II.

January 20, 1847

ALL EVENTS RUINOUS TO THE SINNER--No. 2

Text.--Rom. 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them

that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

In my further discussion of this subject I shall attempt to show that all events conspire to ruin the obstinate and finally impenitent sinner.

This is not directly taught in the text, but is implied in it, and is abundantly taught us in the Bible.

It will be my object,

I. To show that this is and must be a universal truth.

II. To point out some particulars that will illustrate it.

III. To show that we really know this to be true, even as we know its opposite to be true of the people of God.

I. To show that this is and must be a universal truth.

It may be shown to be so in a great many ways. For example, thus: Moral obligation is conditioned upon knowledge and is always equal to knowledge. Whatever, therefore, increases knowledge increases guilt, if obligation is not complied with but the individual continues to resist the light and its claims.

One other point. Increasing guilt augments the sinner's ruin. The more guilty, the greater his punishment. Hence whatever augments his guilt conspires and conduces to aggravate his ruin.

It cannot be doubted a moment that all events that fall under the sinner's observation, or become known to him by any means whatever in this life, will increase his knowledge of God and of course his duty and obligation. All these will consequently conspire at once to augment his guilt and damnation.

All those events that remain unknown to the sinner during his present life may become known to him in the future life, and then may work out their legitimate results--increased knowledge--augmented guilt--more aggravated doom.

II. To point out some particulars that will illustrate it.

This whole point may be rendered more plain and practical by some detail of illustration.

All the gifts of providence conspire to work out the sinner's ruin.

1. Of these the first is the gift of existence. The existence which God gives the sinner is a blessing to him if he uses it aright, but a fearful curse to him if he abuses it. But he does abuse it in the worst possible manner so long as he lives in sin. Just so long, he devotes the existence which God gives him to rebellion against his Maker--and what can be a greater and fouler abuse of existence than this! Every moment of life spent in sin must therefore prove a curse to the sinner. It goes to aggravate his guilt and of course, his ruin.

And no sinner can avoid this fearful result, if he will persist in sinning. Exist he must--he cannot prevent it--cannot put an end to his existence--for death only changes its place and mode--does not bring it to an end. Live, then, each sinner must, and if he will go on in sin, he must go on augmenting his guilt and consequent ruin.

2. Reason is another gift of providence--a precious blessing if devoted to God--if used legitimately and faithfully according to its nature and design;--but if trampled down, abused, set at naught--if its demands for right and for God are all repelled and denied--how fearful the guilt which its possession and abuse involves!

In what respect do you differ from the lower orders of created beings? They have understanding; they have will;--but they lack reason;--this then is your pre-eminence above them. And will you abuse this and bring yourself quite down to a level with them in your conduct? How can you do so without awful, shameful, damning guilt?

3. Conscience is one of the functions of the reason. Did your conscience ever stand up and accuse you? Did it ever set your sins in order before your eyes and make you see and feel their perfect guilt? If so, then you know something of that deathless worm of your future cup;--you have had a little foretaste of the horrors of self-accusation and self-condemnation. O there is nothing in your existence so terrible as this! If you allow yourself to trample down this law of God developed in your reason, you will arouse against your own soul a fearful power within your own bosom that you can never resist or appease! It will be heard--that dreadful tone of self-accusing--self-reproach;--what can ever allay the pungency and anguish of its

tortures!

4. Next look at what are most commonly intended by the gifts and bounties of providence--the things on which you are wont to lay much stress. Suppose you have health and wealth, friends and education;--what are they? Are they working together for your good--your real, highest, eternal good? This turns entirely on the question whether they lead you to repentance, gratitude and love to God, or whether they only yield you the pleasures of sin for a season, augment your mercies, your ingratitude, your guilt and consequent damnation. You may call these things good, and if you would use them in serving God and let them lead your heart to Him in love and gratitude and sweet obedience, they would be truly a good to you; but if you remain a sinner, you are of course the greater sinner for having received and abused these greater mercies, and they can only work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of damnation. You suffer the Lord to load you down with his blessings here, and then abuse them so that they shall become only as mill-stones about your neck in the lake that burneth with fire forever. You know it must be so, and cannot be otherwise.

So it will be with all those things by which you amuse yourself and seek to augment your enjoyment in sin. You count yourself most happy if you can secure things;--but Oh! your final disappointment when you shall see how they are converted into curses to your soul! These very amusements may have diverted your attention from saving your soul. They may have fanned and fed the fires of unhallowed passion--they may have made you ten fold more the child of hell than otherwise you could have been, and thus they may have exceedingly augmented your final ruin.

5. Again, what you deem your good fortune results in the same augmentation of guilt and damnation. You deem yourself most fortunate if you can secure earthly good;--but O! how do these things--abused--work out your deeper damnation! How they help to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath! Your Father sent that good fortune to turn your eye toward his kind hand--to touch your heart with gratitude, and lead you to repentance;--you abuse and pervert every thing, and swell the fearful measure of your awful doom!

Let the wicked go on his way according to his heart's desire, filling his cup with earthly joy, and finding all things prosper in his hand;--yet saith the

word of Jehovah--"Say ye to the wicked, it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him."

6. Yet again, the trials and the curses that fall to the sinner's lot shall all have the same result. You complain of these things as if they worked out only evil and as if God designed them for no other end; but in this you altogether fail to comprehend the gracious designs of your Heavenly Father. He sends you earthly good to melt your heart and you abuse it and wax more hard in sin;--then why should he not change his hand and at least make trial, of possibly reverses and disappointments will not bring you to reflection; or to see whether He cannot tear you away from your idols and make you search for the living God. He does so; but all is of no avail; you only fret and complain. Not so do Christians. If God sends them mercies they are grateful;--if chastisements, they are submissive. But how different is it with you! If God sends you mercies, you are thankless. You sit every day at the table which your Heavenly Father spreads and loads down for you; but you can do it each day with a heart as cold as a stone. It seems to be entirely out of the question for you to think of recognizing your Father's hand, or your own augmented obligation to serve and please him.

If on the other hand He sends afflictions upon you, you complain and harden, not humble, yourself under his chastising hand. O, you ought to understand that these trials are a part of the discipline with which God seeks to subdue your soul to his scepter. And you ought to know that if his efforts fail, it is all evil to you, utterly and infinitely evil. Oh, indeed! if all the resources of infinite power, wisdom and love fail to change you, what can be more desperate than your case or more guilty than your heart?

7. Your whole life of impenitence is filled up with such results. Does the Lord take away your friend? Then you repine; you feel that there never was a case so aggravated as yours, and you will not bow under the hand that chastises you. How unlike the Christians who when smitten looks up to his own Father's hand, and bows beneath it; smiles, loves, trusts, adores. But not so do you accept the punishment of your iniquity. Every effort the Lord makes to reclaim you renders you only more hardened, more guilty, more fitted for destruction.

8. It is indeed grievous beyond expression to see how these things work and what results are produced by all the varied discipline which the Lord

employs to save your soul. It is painful to see that all these efforts only serve to harden your heart, until the Lord is forced to say of you as in Isaiah 1 of the ancient Jews;--"Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores." The original in this passage seems to convey the idea that they had been chastised till from the crown of the head to the soles of the feet there was no longer a sound spot where another blow could be inflicted. The resources of chastisement were exhausted, and still no good result followed. So it sometimes happens that a parent will chastise his child until he has no hope that mere chastisement can do any good. This seems to be the state of mind which the Lord expresses respecting the Jews. And He often has occasion for this state of feeling towards impenitent sinners. He watches all round their path, searches out all the avenues of their heart; tries now mercies and then afflictions, and follows up the alternations perhaps year after year through a long life--but all in vain. Ah, worse,--often infinitely worse than in vain, for it only serves to augment the sinner's fearful guilt and final condemnation. Strange that sinners do not see that this is true and in the nature of the case must be. Strange you do not see that sickness, losses, judgments of every kind are designed to subdue your refractory spirit, and of course if they only serve to make you the more refractory, the result can be nothing less than a fearful aggravation of your guilt and ruin.

Thus all your sins, instead of being overruled for your good, serve only to heap up a mountain load of guilt, and swell the miseries of your doom.

9. Again, the deeds of others, good, or bad, only enhance your guilt. I beg of you to look a moment at this fact. You live among professed Christians. If they are faithful to God and to your soul, and adorn the gospel by their life, this only hardens your heart, for you resist all the influences of their entreaties, prayers, tears and godly life. On the other hand, if they dishonor the gospel, you take offence--you stumble over them, and become the more bold and hardened in your sins.

Now you know it would not be thus in either case with Christians. If they fell in with truly pious brethren, their hearts would be refreshed and their piety quickened; if with bad professors, the result would be to quicken them to

pray, to revive their own love for Zion and their sympathy for the cause of Jesus Christ.

So also, if Christians are persecuted, it only works good to them, teaching them forbearance and forgiveness of injuries; training them to love their enemies and bless those that curse them.

Far otherwise with you, sinner. In fact, you never know what it is to be benefited by any conduct, good or bad, of your fellow-beings. All works only evil to you. Indeed, every thing works out evil and only evil to you. The law of God--the gospel of God--the smiles of providence or its frowns; all possible conduct of your fellow-men and all possible varieties in the course of the Lord towards you--rain or sunshine--storm or calm--prosperity or adversity--each and all serve only the one dreadful end with you--that of augmenting your guilt, and of course your final doom of misery.

Dreadful consideration! that your character should be such that all possible events work evil and evil only to your soul! If you had a full and a just view of your case as it is, you might truly say--"Whatever happens is all evil to me. Whatever the times are--times of revival, times of plenty, or times of famine--all is evil to me; times of health, or times of pestilence--all is alike, evil to me. All conspire to fill up the measure of my guilt and aggravate my eternal doom."

Often in looking at this have I felt as if I should sink--the view is so saddening, so awful; sinners seem so stubborn and so refractory, and it is so obvious and sure that every thing that occurs to the sinner must work evil and evil only to his guilty soul.

10. Again, all those providential circumstances that befall others, result alike in evil, to the sinner. If his neighbors are sick, or if they are well, this sinner will abuse the warning voice of God through his providence. Perhaps the sinner thinks that such things as these are not going to affect his own case, but they surely will, and inevitably must. They are the voice of God to him, and he must hear or refuse. Continuing in sin, he does the latter, and of course augments his own guilt and damnation.

11. It matters not how these events may affect your neighbor, whether for good or for evil; they are in either case evil and only evil to you. The same

event may work good to another; yet shall it be only evil to you. That funeral we attended this morning when a dead child of God was laid in the grave of the saints; they may have touched your sympathies, and you may have been moved to pity over so early a death, but you might much more reasonably pity yourself. When I see sinners at a funeral, I know they are often saying to themselves-- "I am glad that I am not there in the place of the dead;" and yet it may be better far that you should die now than that you should be spared any longer, Beyond all question it is better for you to die and be laid in the grave in the place of the first death that occurs rather than that you should live longer to make every death you hear of, only an augmented curse to yourself. O, how horrible is this!

12. So also to live in a land of Bibles and Sabbaths and enjoy instruction and choice influences enough to make you an Angel of light:--and yet abusing and perverting them all, you convert them into the worst form of curses. All the means God uses to save you are working evil to you. God means them for good, but you pervert them into evil. God would bless you, but you will curse yourself by the very means He uses for blessing you. He would fain make all the events of his providence work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, but despite of the endeavors of infinite love, you persist in working out of all these things your own deeper damnation.

III. We know it to be true that all things work out evil to the sinner.

1. Though the text does not affirm this, yet the Bible does, and so does reason, and experience and observation. It is a truth that every man's reason must affirm. Every man knows that the occurring events of God's providence increase his knowledge of God and hence his obligation to love and obey him. Of course with this increase of light comes also increasing guilt in resisting its claims, and in the train of increasing guilt comes augmented ruin.

2. Now every sinner must know all this to be true. There is not a sinner in this house whose reason does not affirm each step in this process of argumentation to be true, and true as to himself.

3. This leads me to say that every man's own experience will testify that until he turns from sin by real repentance, all the course of divine

providence serves only to harden his heart. He knows that the longer he resist and the more light he has to oppose, the more hardened he becomes.

4. So all our observation of others testifies. We see the sinner growing old in his sins--resisting one call of God after another, breaking through every restraint, setting at naught the repeated warnings of divine providence;--and we always see such a sinner waxing fearfully hard of heart against God and the voice of his own conscience. I have often been shocked to see how fearfully hardened sinners sometimes become by resisting a long succession of means and influences adapted to bring them to repentance.

5. The truth we have been illustrating is evinced also by ample testimony from the word of God. The Bible seems every where to assume that all things do and shall work evil to the sinner who will not repent. Being "often reprov'd and still hardening his neck, he shall be suddenly destroyed and that without remedy."

REMARKS.

1. I remarked in my sermon this morning that Christians sometimes blame themselves for things the occurrence of which upon the whole they do not regret; so wondrously will God overrule those evil deeds of theirs for great good. Thus God will not leave them to bitter and eternal regret over the consequences of their failures or their sins, though they must forever condemn their own sins and blame themselves for sinning. It is one of the great mercies of the Lord towards them that He does not leave them under the pang of everlasting regret in view of unmingled evil resulting from their misdeeds.

But sinners are left to the double anguish of everlasting self-blame, and eternal regret over the utterly ruinous results to themselves of all their sins. Every event of their lives has been sin and only sin, and all have worked out the legitimate results of sinning, all evil to them and evil only and continually. Since they would not repent and would not open their hearts to the healing and restoring influences of God's providence and Spirit, the Lord could not counteract the natural tendency of sin on their heart to augment its moral hardness and consequently their own eternal ruin.

2. Sinners have never any good reason to rejoice as respects their own prospects. In fact, remaining in sin, they have nothing in which they can reasonably rejoice.

Those very events of their lives in which they are most apt to rejoice will probably be those which above all others will fill them with anguish hereafter. Those very seasons of prosperity in which you rejoice most now may be your bitterest grounds for regret and sorrow when you shall come to see all their legitimate results upon your character and doom. So long then as you continue in sin, so long you have absolutely nothing to rejoice in. The more you rejoice and deem yourselves prosperous and happy in earthly good, the more will these very things pierce and sting your soul through all your future existence.

3. Others have no good reason to rejoice in any thing that befalls you, so long as you remain in an impenitent sinner. The only valuable hope they can have is that it may lead you to repentance. This failing, all will work for evil and only evil to the sinner.

It often happens that parents rejoice in events that befall their ungodly children. They rejoice perhaps to see them well settled in life, or peculiarly fortunate in business. But none of these things are ever looked upon on their true light except through the medium of the great truth we are now considering. Whatever leaves them still in their sins works fearful ruin to their souls, and the more joy it seems to bring, the more fearful will be its power to curse and embitter all their future being.

4. While it is true that no event, however grievous in itself, can befall a Christian which should make us grieve for him, it is equally true that no event can befall the sinner in which we are not compelled to grieve for its results upon him. Nothing can happen to him that will not fearfully curse him, if he still persists in sin. It may be ever so well adapted for his improvement, for his best good, for his happiness;--yet shall he pervert it all to the greatest of evils to his soul.

See that young man about going to college. It might prove a blessing to him, but it will prove to him only a curse. It will increase his knowledge, and thus augment his guilt. It will give him greater pre-eminence and influence; but if he improves this for greater sin and mischief, it will curse him at the last with tenfold destruction.

Another has married him a wife--beautiful, accomplished, pious;--so much the worse for him. It only serves to swell the sum of his guilt and ruin. He may live in a land of Sabbaths, and in the midst of revivals;--so much the worse; he may have pious, praying parents;--so much the worse.

5. Sinners need not stumble at the trials of the people of God. No more or greater trials shall befall the Christian than are indispensable as means to work out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. The truth is, God's people need these trials. They must be carried through many a fiery ordeal. What then? Let them rejoice, for all shall work out their good. Let them be sick;--it shall do them good. Let them lose their property;--it shall be for their good. Let their friends die;--all shall augment their good. Every Christian may say--whatever befalls me, the Lord will cause it to result in my greater good. Let a mighty wave dash over him, lifting high its crest and sweeping him along with torrent power--it does him good. Let another come with mighty force--it does him good. Another still;--all is good. There he stands amid those mountain-waves, happy in his God, for he believes that all shall work out good to his soul. This is only the discipline his Father sends him, and why should it not cheer his soul to think how all shall work out his eternal good.

Right over against this, every thing is occasion of grief and dismay to the sinner, no matter how joyous his soul in its approach. Whatever befalls me, he must say if he sees rightly--all is evil to me. Be it storm or sunshine; whether I lie down in peace, or take my bed of pain and languishing, all is prospectively evil to my soul!

How awful this condition! But it is even so; and the intelligence of every being in the universe affirms that these results are all right and as they should be.

6. All events to all eternity will make the impassable gulf between saints and sinners only the more deep and broad. The fact is, these two classes are oppositely affected by all the providences of God, and doubtless will be so, by all that shall occur to them throughout eternity. God has so constituted the human mind that in its selfish state, all right events shall work out only evil; while in its renewed state all shall work out good. Difference of character lays the foundation for this wide contrast in the result. Only the sinner himself is ultimately to blame that all things work evil to him. If he will do evil, then shall all things be converted into evil in their results to him.

7. It is infinite folly for man to estimate events only according to their present and most obvious bearings and relations. The result of this course is and always must be that men will constantly and fatally deceive themselves. If every sinner in this house could see all the final results of the events that are transpiring now, he would stand amazed and transfixed with horror. What! he would say--is

untold anguish and horror coming out of this cup of my earthly joy? Oh, if sinners could clearly see these things, they would not so often bless themselves for their good fortune.

8. The arrangements of providence in respect to both saints and sinners are made with a design to illustrate the character of God. All the events of this life and all that occur throughout eternity also, will all serve to illustrate the perfections of Jehovah. Not to have arranged all things for this end would have been a great mistake--but God never makes such mistakes. A wise and glorious end in view characterized all he does.

9. It is the perverse course of the sinner and nothing else but this that makes the providences of God work out evil to him. Sinners are wont to pity themselves, and say, alas for me, for God has made my lot such that all things work only evil to me! Let all sinners know that the fault is wholly and only their own, and that God has made the best possible arrangements for their good. It is only their perversion that makes the best things become to them the worst.

And sinners cannot help knowing this. After all their complaining and fault-finding, they know that they have no plea to make against God. You know, sinners, that it is all your own fault that every day is not a blessing to you--that every sun-rising and sun-setting does not come fraught with mercies to your soul. You know that you might place yourself in such an attitude towards God that all his providences should work out your real and highest good. You are now an enemy of God; but you know you may at once become his friend. I can make the appeal to every sinner's own conscience. You know that if you would not harden your own heart, all the events of divine providence would result in your good. They would bring admonitions that you would give heed to with the greatest profit to your soul, and would throw you into scenes of discipline which could not fail to prove a blessing to you. Only yield your heart to the providences, the truth, and the Spirit of God, and you would become a child of God, and all things would work your good.

I can well remember how it seemed to me before my conversion. I then saw most clearly that all was good to the Christian;--if he was sick, all was well to him;--or if in health, it was a real blessing. If he lives, it was to enjoy the friendship of God;--if he died it was to enter upon his eternal reward. Being himself a friend of God, evil could no sooner befall him than it could befall his great friend, Jehovah. Nothing could be an evil to him, for if he were ever so

much afflicted, it would only make him the more self-denying, meek, patient, heavenly.

But right over against this--the opposite in every respect, is the case of the self-hardening sinner. He puts on an air of self-confidence and enjoyment;--he would fain make you think that sinners are the only happy men on earth. He dances along his way for a brief season, but it is on slippery places;--and suddenly his feet slide--and he is in hell! So transient is all the bliss that sin and Satan give. It is only a lure to endless woe.

If sinners only appreciated their real condition, they could not rest in sin one moment. All their levity would appear infinitely shocking to themselves. I recollect to have seen several cases in which sinners were in such a state of mind that they could not rejoice in any possible event. There is one lady among you who could tell you a great deal about this state of mind--a state of darkness, despair and anguish, in which every thing was clearly seen to be evil and only evil, and all things however apparently prosperous were working out evil and nothing else to her soul and her eternal state. If the sun shone sweetly, all was gloom, for that God who smiled through those sunbeams was her enemy. Each storm only reminded her of Jehovah's wrath against the sinner. If friends loved her and sympathized with her, all was evil;--she had no friends above, and deserved none here below. So of every thing that could occur. All was evil, undiluted, unassuaged.

But when her soul came into the light and glory of the gospel, and found peace and joy in God, the whole scene was at once perfectly changed. Her husband has told me that he never knew her to fret or repine since that blessed hour. I asked her once what was the secret of her remarkable equanimity. She replied--"Once I escaped from the jaws of hell; from the dark iron castle of Giant Despair. Ever since I have looked upon myself as a miracle of grace, and I cannot regard any of the little troubles of life as anything to be compared with those indescribable agonies. I am often amazed to see how small a thing can disturb the equanimity of saints, or raise the mirth of sinner."

If sinners are going to continue in their sins, they may as well bid farewell at once to all peace and joy; and welcome anguish and black despair to their souls. Let them say at once--All things are evil and nothing but evil to me. Let them give themselves up to universal mourning, no matter how soon, or how utterly. "Hail everlasting horrors, hail!"

But there is only one way of escape--open yet a moment longer. Turn to God; yield your whole soul to him; accept his Son your Savior, and his service as your choice for life;--then you are a child of God and his foe no longer. Then all things are yours--and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. You are welcomed at once to the bosom of that glorious family above, and the possession of the riches and joys of heaven is all your own.

But if you remain in your sins, as from present appearances you are likely to do, all events and all agencies possible will work out your destruction. Every step you take brings you nearer the vortex of that awful whirlpool--the great Maelstrom of perdition. "Your steps take hold of hell."

[Back to Top](#)

**Heart Condemnation, A Proof that God Also Condemns-- and
An Approving Heart, Confidence in Prayer- No.'s 1 & 2**

Lectures III & IV

February 17, 1847

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 John 3:20: "For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things."

Our text suggests as our leading subject of investigation, the CONDITION OF OUR ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD. It implies that if our heart condemn us, God will much more condemn us, being greater than our heart, and knowing all our evil things, a part only of which are distinctly noticed and remembered by ourselves.

In discussing this subject, I shall,

I. To avoid mistakes, show what is not implied in our heart's condemning us;

II. What is implied in our heart's condemning us;

III. Show what is not implied in the last clause of the text; "God is greater than our hearts and knoweth all things."

IV. What is implied in this language.

I. It is obvious that the term "heart" as here used is synonymous with conscience.

1. The term is not used as it is frequently elsewhere in the Bible in passages where moral character is predicated of it, in which cases it plain means the will, that is, the voluntary and moral power. In our text it evidently means, the conscience, that power or faculty which approves or condemns our own moral acts and states of mind.

2. In reference to conscience it seems important to remark that it is not a mere feeling of any kind. Persons not unfrequently confound remorse, or a feeling of pungent sorrow, with conscience; and hence if they feel no remorse, no painful self-accusation, they say and really think that they have no conscience in reference to those points. Thus they quite overlook the fact that conscience may really condemn, and yet they may care so little for its condemnation that it shall occasion no painful emotions, no agony of feeling.

In fact such persons are in a great mistake, for they entirely misapprehend the true nature of conscience. Conscience is not a function of the sensibility as they seem to suppose, but of the reason. Its province is to apprehend intuitively the relations of right and wrong; and not directly to create either pain or pleasure. It is indeed true that in every well balanced and unperverted mind, pain and pleasure do accompany the decisions of conscience; pain its condemnation and pleasure its approval. Yet these are only secondary and not primary results of its action. The mind may come into such a state that no pain shall follow the most deliberate and aggravated violation of conscience.

3. This fact, it should be well considered, by no means proves that the individual has no conscience on those subjects, nor that his conscience does not disapprove his actions. So far as I have observed this mistake is very common, and certainly, wherever it exists, is very injurious and often fatal. It ought to be well understood that conscience does often condemn although no painful feelings of remorse ensue, because the man is so hardened that

his sensibility is in a state of torpor. In this state he may imagine that his conscience approves, or at least does not condemn him;--a mistake of most dangerous nature.

Again, a condemning conscience does not necessarily imply that state of mind commonly called conviction of sin. The difference between the two turns mainly upon the greater degree of thought, reflection, and consideration which belongs to the latter. Conscience may condemn us without our reflecting upon the nature of our conduct and deliberately comparing it with God's revealed law. But conviction is thoughtful. A convicted state implies that the individual is thinking and has thought upon his own guilt; that he turns the subject over and over in his mind and compares it with the demands of God's righteous law. Herein lies an important distinction between a state of real conviction for sin, and a state in which there exists only the tacit condemnation of conscience.

Indeed it seems to be the fact that in a great majority of cases, when the conscience condemns a man he is not conscious at the time of thinking deliberately on the subject. His reason tacitly assumes that he is wrong, without his being conscious at the time of making such an assumption;--that is, he does not think at all of the assumption, and consequently is unconscious that he makes it; but that he really does make such an assumption may be evident in various ways; for example, he may condemn another for doing what he does himself, and this would show that he knows the rule and knows that his violation of it is wrong. He notices this wrong in others but does not notice it in himself; and yet the reason all the time silently assumes and knows that the course he is taking is wrong.

As an illustration of this; a man may be selfish; his conscience may silently assume that he is wrong, and so certain may he be at the bottom of his mind that he is wrong that if he should be told and should know with certainty that he should die in five minutes, he would discover in a moment that he is not prepared to die, but is in his sins, and is altogether wrong in his moral state before God.

4. Every person will see that this is the process of the mind in respect to conscience if he will notice the operations of his own. Let him also consider how often a person may know himself to be wrong without being distinctly conscious that he knows it. Every one should make the difference between

knowing an act or state of his own to be wrong, and being conscious of the fact that he knows it.

5. Hence we see that our conscience may condemn us when we are not conscious of its condemning sentence. We fail of being thus conscious, however, not because its decisions are in their nature occult, not appearing at all upon the field of consciousness;--but because we feel so little interest in its decisions as not to notice them when they are made.

II. If our conscience condemns us, we shall not have the present evidence of pleasing God. The sweet consciousness that we are accepted of God will be wanting.

1. On this point it is important to distinguish between being sure we do not please God, and not being sure that we do. The clear, present evidence of pleasing God is lacking in both of these states; though in the latter the individual may not be conscious that his state does displease God. But even he lacks the present consciousness of pleasing God--the clear testimony of his conscience approving his own state.

Again, it of course implies being conscious of not having the decided approval of conscience. Persons are often in a state in which they feel no approval of conscience, and are not sensible of any disapproval.

Again, our heart's condemning us implies a perhaps unnoticed assumption that all is not right between the soul and God. This is often assumed, as has been said, without the mind's taking notice enough of it to fasten the truth thoroughly on the mind.

For example, suppose a man is suddenly arrested by the prospect of death just before him. It may be that this prospect will waken up his mind to see that his heart is by no means right with God. All previous decisions of his conscience to this effect have been unnoticed; now all suddenly they start forth upon the field of distinct consciousness and the man sees and knows with the clearness of mid-day brightness that his soul is utterly condemned before God. He might have known the same thing before, but he did not care enough to notice the affirmations of his own conscience.

2. Careless sinners often live in such a way that they think they are in the main prepared to die; but let them for once see that they certainly shall die,

and their view of their case may be suddenly and utterly changed. Before this, they may have seemed to be in a certain sense honest: but let them come to this last, decisive test--to this really honest hour, and a new aspect may come over their former apparent honesty.

Suppose I sit down to converse with a man, and say to him--Friend, are you prepared to die? I think so, he says, indeed I suppose so. He seems honest perhaps. Now let him be seized with a fit--not affecting his reason, and let him know that in a few hours he must die. He wails out in agony of soul--"O my God, have mercy on me, for I am utterly unprepared to die."

3. Now what does this change in his views on this point reveal? Plainly this--that all along he had not been prepared to die, and that his conscience had condemned him; but he did not come to its light--did not listen to its condemning voice.

Hence we see that it is of the greatest importance that men should get at the deepest convictions of their conscience--those inner convictions that will spring out upon the field of most distinct and vivid consciousness in the honest hour of approaching death. Let all living men be awake to this danger lest they fatally deceive themselves by taking up the mere floating thoughts of a careless hour as the testimony of their conscience to their real state before God.

Again, persons often attempt to pray, and the conviction comes over their mind that they can get no access to God. They find it impossible to expect that God will hear them. They know they shall not have the blessing they ask for. They have not by any means the same confidence of obtaining the blessing as I should have of getting a dollar if any honest man had promised it. Suppose I had promised a student here a dollar if he would call on me for it. I tell him to come to my study at such a time and that I have the money ready for him; would he not expect it? Would he have any doubt? Would he find it impossible to have faith that he should realize his money on fulfilling the conditions?

4. Now what is the reason men will not believe God? If you will get at this, you will learn something of the utmost importance to you to know. But to learn it you must let your enquires go down into the bottom of your heart. There you will find the conviction that you are not in a state of acceptance

with God.

Have not many of you, brethren and sisters, had such an experience as this;-- You have gone to the Lord in prayer to ask for things that you really needed; but your inward frame, your state of heart is such and your life too that you know you cannot honestly expect he will hear you. You go to the throne of grace and kneel down for prayer--but you dare not, and cannot expect he will answer you. You may indeed sometimes go so carelessly as not to be aware sufficiently to consider your own state, and look at all after the probability of being heard, you find you have none at all, for the reason that your own heart condemns you altogether as not being right with God.

Again, when our conscience condemns us in any one thing, God does not accept us in any thing. It is impossible that our heart should be wrong in one thing and right on another at the same time. If conscience condemns in one thing, it does really for the time being in every thing. It condemns us as not right before God, and shows conclusively that we are radically wrong. For the word of God has definitely decided that "whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." This cannot mean less than that he who offends in one point shows himself to have the spirit of disobedience, and shows that of course that law must utterly condemn his moral state of mind. The decisions of conscience harmonize with this.

5. Some persons are prone to regard this as a hard saying, and are sorely averse to admitting its truth. They know that conscience condemns them in some particular things, for they feel a stinging remorse in view of them; but since they feel no such remorse in reference to other things, they suppose that in the latter their conscience is clear. But if they have good reasons to feel remorse for some things, they may know that if they were to go down to the bottom and see the real state of their hearts, they would find themselves condemned universally.

Again, if our conscience condemns us, we may know that in the deepest conviction of our own minds we are not honest before God. A man may not see, on the broad face of his own consciousness, that he is dishonest; but if his conscience does not really condemn him in one thing he may rest assured that he has no well-grounded confidence of being really honest before God. Let the inner voice of his own conscience be heard, and it will tell him so.

Again, conscience condemns us when, though we do not see any thing outward that is wrong; yet we are not conscious of being inwardly right with God. We may think ourselves very right indeed in our external morality, and yet we may know very well that we are not right in regard to zeal, faith and love--not right in our state of mind towards our enemies--not right in our sympathy with Christ for the salvation of a dying world.

6. Now when our conscience really condemns us in one of these latter things, we may know that all is not right; indeed we may know that nothing is really right as seen and estimated by a holy God.

It is remarkable how often men think they are right in some things though they know they are wrong in many other things at the same time. For example, a merchant may think that in his trade he is right, and has a right heart altogether. He thinks he is honest, accommodating, and perfectly honorable in his business transactions. Yet he knows that he does not feel for the souls of his customers--does not love their souls, and really seek for their best spiritual good. Oh, he is little aware how much he wrongs his neighbor by not having this love for his soul, and by consequently withholding all proper care and effort for his spiritual good. he might far better, if the thing were possible, save his neighbor's soul, and yet rob him at his counter of every dollar of his money, then give him all his just coppers, but withhold from him all just sympathy, care and effort for his soul's salvation.

Yet how often does such a merchant say--I have a conscience void of offence in my business affairs; I deal in perfect honesty with all men, and no man ever accuses me of wrong;--and yet you know you have not a clear conscience in respect to their souls; you know you do not love them and pray for them, and honestly labor to bring them to real salvation.

Just so in all the common relations of life. I have mentioned the case of the merchant only to illustrate the principle; not because it applied in his case only, or in his care more frequently than in any other. The mechanic who works for other men in his appropriate business does his work well and according to contract and expectation;--now, he says, he has a conscience void of offence. But has he indeed? Has he? Has he done all his duty to the man's soul? Has he done even any part of this branch of his duty? Will his conscience rise up and say, Well done? Will you say--I have done my work well, and what have I more to do? So much, and so far is in itself right; but is

this all? Have you no other responsibilities?

Besides, even that you did not do from love to his soul; nor from regard to the just demands of your conscience, or of your God. How very far then are you from having answered the proper demands of an enlightened conscience!

But I must pass to speak,

III. Of what is not implied in the last clause of the text; "God is greater than our hearts and knoweth all things."

1. It does not imply that God of course justifies us if we justify ourselves. This cannot be implied, for if it were, then must God justify some of the most wicked men on earth.
2. Nor again is it implied that God condemns us, if we really live up to and according to all the light we have. It would militate against every feature in the character of God to suppose this to be the case.

IV. We are to state, lastly, what is implied in this clause of our text.

1. It implies that God often sees wrong in us when we do not notice it ourselves. "God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." We know but little in the sense of being conscious of our knowledges, and may fail to notice many of the evil things in our spirit, temper, heart and life; but God knows them all; and hence may condemn where we do not.
2. It is also implied that if we are not clear that we are right, God does not accept us. If we see good reason apparently to doubt, we have great reason to presume that God sees abundant reasons to condemn. How can God believe that we are right, if we do not believe it ourselves?

Again, if in anything, we can see that we are not right, God sees that we are right in nothing, but are for the time being wrong in everything. He sees that we are not conformed to his will heartily in anything. This seems to follow conclusively from the remarks we have made and the points we have adduced already.

REMARKS.

1. Many see that they are wrong in some things, and yet upon the whole imagine

that they are acceptable before God. They notice the fact that conscience does condemn them, but they flatter themselves that these particular things are exceptions to their general conduct.

This is a very common case, yet nothing can be more dangerous, or more delusive. It is throughout and utterly a deep delusion. You are entirely deceived if you think you are right in the main, while in any particular thing whatever, you know that you indulge in transgression. There can be no such thing. It is impossible there should be a right state of heart as to obedience to God while you can allow yourself in some particular form of sin.

2. Some will not admit the conviction of being themselves wholly wrong, although they know themselves to be wrong in some things. The longer I live and hear persons converse the more I am satisfied that many would yield up their hopes at once if they would only admit that they are in truth wholly wrong, and that this must be the case because they do in fact indulge themselves in some things which their conscience condemns. Indeed there can be as I think no doubt that their hope rests not on the conviction that they honestly seek to do God's will in all things, but on the belief that they mean to do right in some things, while they know they do not in fact obey, and honestly seek to obey in all things. Their hope rests on a little supposed good; while in fact some admitted evil ought to banish their hopes forever. And yet they hold on to their hopes as if their salvation depended not on faith in Christ, but on faith in their old hope. Often are they to be seen indulging in that evasive state of mind in which the conviction is struggling to come forth that all is wrong with them, but they resist it and will not give it scope for even a fair examination.

Some who are now in this state of mind were once really converted. Once they knew what it is to have that peace of God which passes all understanding. They lay down at night absorbed in the love of God, and awoke in the morning to renew his praises. Then they knew the prevalence of prayer; but now they have lost their power with the Lord. They may not know clearly the point where they departed from the Lord, but the fact of grievous backsliding is most obvious, to all but themselves. They are so blind and have so much deep spiritual apathy that they do not perceive how far and how fearfully they have fallen! They think, or at least seem to think that all is fair and about right with them, although they see very plainly that if they make religious visits, or pray, they have no power with either God or man. Yet they will not ascribe this lack of power to the fact that

they are really fallen from being right with God. Such persons should read the epistles sent to the seven churches of Asia. They should study those epistles thoroughly and with much prayer, and mark the traits of character which distinguished those of them that were sorely backslidden. Then they should also observe the counsel given by our Lord to those who had forsaken him and were puffed up with pride. Mark how he shows them that they are really poor and wretched, blind and naked.

3. Others have the conviction pretty thoroughly lodged in their minds that they are wrong, but they hide it as much as they can from both themselves and their neighbors. I have known wives who would for years conceal from their pious husbands the fact that they knew they were not Christians. Sometimes they will continue in this state till their souls are wrung with such unutterable anguish that they are compelled to come out and break down in humiliating confessions.

I once knew a most striking case in the city of New York. A deacon from another church came to our meeting. For a long time, he had been anxious about himself, full of apprehension that he was not right, and yet so proud that he would not make his fears about himself known to others. His wife was an active and ardent-souled Christian. Inasmuch as he had sought for years to maintain in her view a fair reputation for piety, and withal thought much of her good opinion, he could not endure that she should know his present conviction. So dreadfully did this matter agitate his mind and so fearfully did his pride of heart rise up that as he afterwards told us, he was often tempted to take her life to save himself the mortification of disclosing his real character to her eye. At length he came one evening to our meeting and left at its close under horrible convictions, his soul writhing in agony. All the way home his wife continued talking to him about the sermon, delighted herself with such searching truth. He came home, all the way making up his mind that when he reached home, he would at least take his horsewhip and flog his wife! He entered the house, walked the room; was just stepping up to reach his whip for the purpose when his heart smote him so horribly that his hand fell; he dropped on his knees; confessed his horrible purpose; opened all the rottenness of his heart; cast himself at her feet and told her what a hypocrite he had been; and in short utterly broke down and became a new man in Christ Jesus.

How can such persons ever get into the kingdom of heaven with such satanic pride?

4. It sometimes happens that such persons are too proud to confess their sins freely even to God. Before Him, even, they will say; "If I am wrong, I pray to be forgiven"--whereas if they were truly honest, they would say--"O Lord, I know I am altogether wrong." But they will not even confess to God; how much less to their neighbors!

5. Many are so taken up with looking at their own outward conduct that they do not look narrowly into their own hearts. They seem to suppose that if the outward man is all right, the inner man is right of course.

Now, brethren, suppose conscience be questioned respecting your real state of heart. I do not ask whether you live in outward, open sin; I do not ask whether your conduct tramples on civil law, or on the external proprieties of a Christian life; I presume it does not; but let us come and call for an examination of the inner man. Let us call up conscience to the bar, and say--Conscience, are you satisfied with the state of that heart? Are you satisfied that God is as much loved, adored, believed in, and served as he should be? Are you satisfied that all is right towards God? And still further, are you satisfied that this mind is in a right state towards all the brethren? Is there real, genuine, warm-hearted brotherly love? How have you found the facts to be touching this point?

And now before I close, I have one request to make. It is that when you retire from this place, you would go by yourself and solemnly, honestly, question your conscience. Make the questioning patient and thorough. Say, "O my conscience, are you satisfied with my state before God? Can you approve it, in view of the light I have had, or could have had, of God's holy law and hence of my duty?"

I beseech you to do this without fail. I beg you to do it for my sake,--and for your own sake. Honestly push the question at the tribunal of conscience--"Is my heart right before God?" I will not ask you to look for those loathsome evidences of sin that appear so often among the ungodly. For the present at least, you may leave those points out of the account, and ask for the state of your heart as it stand before the great and holy God! And if when conscience is thus catechised respecting your heart, it condemns you, how much more will God condemn you?

Do you want to know whether you are justified before God? How easy from the point where we now are is it to answer this question. For if your conscience does not justify you, how much less can God?

But if on the other hand, your conscience, in all points approves, then we need to ask, Is your conscience enlightened, honestly dealt with, and does it speak with a firm yet modest tone?

But these points would anticipate the remarks I am to make in the afternoon in speaking upon the two verses next following our text this morning, and of course I shall defer them to that occasion.

LECTURE IV.

March 3, 1847

AN APPROVING HEART, CONFIDENCE IN PRAYER--No. 2

Text.--1 John 3:21, 22: "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight."

In resuming and pursuing this subject, I shall,

I. Show that if our heart does not condemn us, we have and cannot but have confidence toward God that He accepts us;

II. That if we have confidence that our heart does not condemn us, we shall also have confidence that God will grant us what we ask;

III. Show why this is so, and why we know it to be so.

I. If our heart really does not condemn us, it is because we are conscious of being conformed to all the light we have, and of doing the whole will of God as far as we know it.

1. While in this state it is impossible that with right views of God's character, we should conceive of him as condemning us. Our intelligence instantly rejects the supposition that he does or can condemn us, that is for our present state. We may be most deeply conscious that we have done wrong heretofore, and we may feel ourselves to be most guilty for this, and may be sure that God disapproves those past sins of ours, and would condemn us for them even now, if the pardoning blood of Christ had not intervened. But where pardon for past sins has been sought and found

through redeeming blood, "there is therefore no more condemnation" for the past. And in reference to the present, the obvious truth is that if our conscience fully approves of our state, and we are conscious of having acted according to the best light we have, it contradicts all our just ideas of God to suppose that He condemns us. He is a father, and he cannot but smile on his obedient and trusting children.

2. Indeed, ourselves being in this state of mind, it is impossible for us not to suppose that God is well pleased with our present state. We cannot conceive of Him as being otherwise than pleased; for if he were displeased with a state of sincere and full obedience, he would act contrary to his own character; he would cease to be benevolent, holy, and just. We cannot therefore conceive of him as refusing to accept us when we are conscious of obeying his will so far as we know it. Suppose the case of a soul appearing before God, fully conscious of seeking with all the heart to please God. In this case the soul must see that this is such a state as must please God.

3. Let us turn this subject over till we get it fully before our minds. For what is it that our conscience rightly condemns us? Plainly for not obeying God according to the best light we have. Suppose now we turn about and fully obey the dictates of conscience. Then its voice approves and ceases to condemn. Now all just views of the Deity require us to consider the voice of conscience in both cases as only the echo of his own. The God who condemns all disobedience must of necessity approve of obedience, and to conceive of him as disapproving our present state would be in the conviction of our own minds to condemn him.

4. It is therefore by no means presumption in us to assume that God accepts those who are conscious of really seeking supremely to please and obey him.

Again let it be noted that in this state with an approving conscience, we should have no self-righteousness. A man in this state would at this very moment ascribe all his obedience to the grace of God. From his inmost soul he would say--"By the grace of God, I am what I am;" and nothing could be farther from his heart than to take praise or glory to himself for anything good. Yet I have sometimes been exceedingly astonished to hear men and even ministers of the gospel speak with surprise and incredulity of such a state as our text presupposes--a state in which a man's conscience universally

approves of his moral state. But why be incredulous about such a state? Or why deem it a self-righteous and sinful state! A man in this state is as far as can be from ascribing glory to himself. No state can be farther from self-righteousness. So far is this from being a self-righteous state, that the fact is, every other state but this is self-righteous, and this alone is exempt from that sin. Mark how the man in this state ascribes all to the grace of God. The apostle Paul when in this state of conscious uprightness most heartily ascribes all to grace. "I laboured," says he, "more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God that is in me."

5. But, observe that while the Apostle was in that state, it was impossible that he should conceive of God as displeased with his state. Paul might greatly and justly condemn himself for his past life, and might feel assured that God disapproved and had condemned Saul, the proud persecutor, though he had since pardoned Saul, the praying penitent. But the moral state of Paul the believer, of Paul, the untiring labourer for Christ--of Paul whose whole heart and life divine grace has now moulded into its own image--this moral state Paul's conscience approves, and his views of God compel him to believe that God approves.

So of the Apostle John. Hear what he says "Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." But here rises up a man to rebuke the apostle. What! he says, did you not know that your heart is corrupt, that you never can know all its latent wickedness, that you ought never to be so presumptuous as to suppose that you "do those things that please God?" Did you not know that no mere man does ever, even by any grace received in this life, really "keep the commandments of God so as to do those things that are pleasing in his sight?" No, says John, I did not know that. "What," rejoins his reprover, "not know that sin is mixed with all you do, and that the least sin is displeasing to God!" Indeed, replies John, I knew I was sincerely trying to please God, and verily supposed I did please him and did keep his commandments, and that it was entirely proper to say so--all to the praise of upholding, sanctifying grace.

Again, when a man prays disinterestedly, and with a heart in full and deep sympathy with God, he may and should have confidence that God hears him. When he can say in all honesty before the Lord--"Now, Lord, thou knowest

that through the grace of thy Spirit my soul is set on doing good to men for thy glory; I am grieved for the dishonour done to Thee, so that rivers of water run down my eyes, because men keep not thy law," then he cannot but know that his prayers are acceptable to God.

6. Indeed no one, having right views of God's character, can come to him in prayer in a disinterested state of mind, and feel otherwise than that God accepts such a state of mind. Now since our heart cannot condemn us when we are in a disinterested state of mind, but must condemn any other state, it follows that if our heart does not condemn us, we shall have, and cannot but have confidence that God hears our prayers and accepts our state as pleasing in his sight.

Again, when we are conscious of sympathizing with God himself, we may know that God will answer our prayers. There never was a prayer made in this state of sympathy with God, which he failed to answer. God cannot fail to answer such a prayer without denying himself. The soul, being in sympathy with God, feels as God feels; so that for God to deny its prayers, is to deny his own feelings, and refuse to do the very thing he himself desires. Since God cannot do this, he cannot fail of hearing the prayer that is in sympathy with his own heart.

7. In the state we are now considering, the Christian is conscious of praying in the Spirit, and therefore must know that his prayer is accepted before God. I say, he is conscious of this fact. Do not some of you know this? Ye who thus live and walk with God, do you not know that the Spirit of God helps your infirmities and makes intercession for you according to the will of God? Are you not very conscious of these intercessions made for you, and in your very soul as it were, with groanings that cannot be uttered? Your heart within pants and cries out after God, and is lifted up continually before him as spontaneously as it is when your heart sings, pouring out its deep outgoings of praise. You know how sometimes your heart sings, though your lips move not and you utter no sound;--yet your heart is full of music, making melody to the Lord. Even so, your soul is sometimes in the mood of spontaneous prayer, and pours out its deep-felt supplications into the ears of the Lord of Hosts just as naturally as you breathe. The silent and ceaseless echoing of your heart is, Thy kingdom come--Thy kingdom come; and although you may not utter these words, and perhaps not any

words at all, yet these words are a fair expression of the overflowing desires of your heart.

And this deep praying of the heart goes on while the Christian is still pursuing the common vocations of life. The man perhaps is behind the counter, or in his workshop driving his plane, but his heart is communing or interceding with God. You may see him behind his plow--but his heart is deeply engrossed with his Maker;--he follows on, and only now and then, starts up from the intense working of his mind and finds that his land is almost finished. The student has his book open to his lesson; but his deep musings upon God, or the irrepressible longings of his soul in prayer consume his mental energies, and his eye floats unconsciously over the unnoticed page. God fills his thoughts. He is more conscious of this deep communion with God than he is of the external world. The team he is driving or the book he professes to study is by no means so really and so vividly a matter of conscious recognition to him as is his communion of soul with his God.

In this state the soul is fully conscious of being perfectly submissive to God. Whether he uses these words or not, his heart would always say--"Not my will, O Lord, but thine be done." Hence he knows that God will grant the blessing he asks if he can do so without a greater evil to his kingdom than the resulting good of bestowing it. We cannot but know that the Lord delights to answer the prayers of a submissive child of his own.

Again, when the conscience sweetly and humbly approves, it seems impossible that we should feel so ashamed and confounded before God as to think that he cannot hear our prayer. The fact is, it is only those whose heart condemns them who come before God ashamed and confounded, and who cannot expect God to answer their prayers. These persons cannot expect to feel otherwise than confounded, until the sting of conscious guilt is taken away by repentance and faith in a Redeemer's blood.

Yet again, the soul in this state is not afraid to come with humble boldness to the throne, as God invites him to do, for he recognizes God as a real and most gracious father, and sees in Jesus a most compassionate, and condescending high Priest. Of course he can look upon God only as being always ready to receive and welcome himself to his presence.

Nor is this a self-righteous state of mind. O, how often have I been amazed and agonized to hear it so represented! But how strange is this! Because you are conscious of being entirely honest before God, therefore it is maintained that you are self-righteous! You ascribe every good thing in yourself most heartily to divine grace, but yet you are (so some say) very self-righteous notwithstanding! How long will it take some people to learn what real self-righteousness is? Surely it does not consist in being full of the love and Spirit of God; nor does humility consist in being actually so full of sin and self-condemnation that you cannot feel otherwise than ashamed and confounded before both God and man.

II. We are next to consider this position, namely, that if our heart does not condemn us, we may have confidence that we shall receive the things we ask.

1. This must be so, because it is his Spirit working in us that excites these prayers. God himself prepares the heart to pray;--the Spirit of Christ leads this Christian to the throne of grace and keeps him there; then presents the objects of prayer, enkindles desire, draws the soul into deep sympathy with God; and now--all this being wrought by the grace and Spirit of God, will He not answer these prayers? Indeed He will. How can He ever fail to answer them?

2. It is a remarkable fact that all real prayer seems to be summed up in the Lord's prayer, and especially in those two most comprehensive petitions--"Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The mind in a praying frame runs right into these two petitions, and seems to centre here continually. Many other and various things may be specified; but they are all only parts and branches of this one great blessing--Let God's kingdom come, and bear sway on earth as it does in heaven. This is the sum of all true prayer.

Now let it be observed that God desires this result infinitely more than we do. When therefore, we desire it too, we are in harmony with the heart of God, and He cannot deny us. The blessing we crave is the very thing which of all others He most delights to bestow.

3. Yet let it be noted here that God may not answer every prayer according to its letter; but He surely will according to its spirit. The real spirit is

evermore this--"Thy kingdom come--thy will be done;" and this, God will assuredly answer, because he has so abundantly promised to do this very thing in answer to prayer.

III. Why will God certainly answer such a prayer, and how can we know that He will?

1. The text affirms that "whatsoever we ask we receive of him because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." Now we might perhaps understand this to assign our obedience as the reason of God's giving the blessing sought in prayer. But if we should, we should greatly err. The fundamental reason always of God's bestowing blessings is his goodness--his love. Let this be never forgotten. All good flows down from the great fountain of infinite goodness. Our obedience is only the condition of God's bestowing it--never the fundamental reason or ground of its bestowment. It is very common for us in rather loose and popular language to speak of a condition as being a cause or fundamental reason. But on a point like the present, we ought to use language with more precision. The true meaning on this point undoubtedly is that obedience is the condition. This being fulfilled on our part, the Lord can let his infinite benevolence flow out upon us without restraint. Obedience takes away the obstacle;--then the mighty gushings of divine love break forth. Obedience removes the obstacles;--never merits, or draws down the blessing.

2. If God were to give blessings upon any other condition, it would deceive multitudes, either respecting ourselves or himself. If he were to answer our prayers, we being in a wrong state of mind, it would deceive others very probably; for if they did not know us well, they would presume that we were in a right state, and might be led to consider those things in us right which are in fact wrong.

Or, if they knew that we were wrong, and yet knew that God answered our prayers, what must they think of God? They could not avoid the conclusion that He patronizes wrong doing, and lifts up the smiles of his love upon iniquity;--and how grievous must be the influence of such conclusions!

It should be borne in mind that God has a character to maintain. His reputation is a good to himself, and he must maintain it as an indispensable means of sustaining his moral government over other creatures. It could not

be benevolent for Him to take a course which would peril his own reputation as a holy God and as a patron and friend of holiness and not of sin.

3. God is well pleased when we remove the obstacles out of the way of his benevolence. He is infinitely good, and lives to do good and for no other purpose--for no other end whatever except to pour forth blessings upon his creatures wherever He can without peril to the well-being of other creatures under his care and love. He exists for ever in a state of entire consecration to this end. Such benevolence as this is infinitely right in God, and nothing less than this could be right for him.

Now, if it is his delight and his life to do good, how greatly must he rejoice when we remove all obstacles out of the way! How does his heart exult when another and yet another opportunity is afforded him of pouring out blessings in large and rich measure. Think of it, sinner, for it applies to you! Marvellous as you may think it, and most strange as it may seem--judged of by human rules and human examples, yet of God it cannot fail of being always true that He delights supremely in doing you good, and only waits till you remove the obstacles;--then would his vast love break forth and pour its ocean tides of mercy and of grace all around about you. Go and bow before your injured Sovereign in deep submission and real penitence, with faith also in Jesus for pardon, and thus put this matter to a trial! See if you do not find that his mercies are high above the heavens! See if anything is too great for his love to do for you!

And let each Christian make a similar proof of this amazing love. Place yourself where mercy can reach you without violating the glorious principles of Jehovah's moral government; and then wait and see if you do not experience the most overwhelming demonstrations of his love! How greatly does your Father above delight to pour out his mighty tides of blessings! O, He is never so well pleased as when he finds the channel open and free for these great currents of blessings to flow forth upon his dear people!

A day or two since I received a letter from the man in whose behalf you will recollect that I requested your prayers at a late church prayer meeting. This letter was full of precious interest. The writer has long been a stranger to the blessedness of the gospel; but now he writes me--"I am sure you are praying for me, for within a week I have experienced a peace of mind that is new to me."

I mention this now as another proof of the wonderful readiness of our Father in heaven to hear and answer prayer. O what love is this! To what shall I compare it, and how shall I give you any adequate view of its amazing fullness and strength? Think of a vast body of water, pent up and suspended high above our heads, pressing and pressing at every crevice to find an outlet where it may gush forth. Suppose the bottom of the vast Pacific should heave and pour its ocean tides over all the continents of the earth. This might illustrate the vast overflowings of the love of God; how grace and love are mounting up far and infinitely above all the mountains of your sins. Yes, let the deep, broad Pacific ocean be elevated on high and there pent up, and then conceive of its pressure. How it would force its way and pour out its gushing floods wherever the least channel might be opened! And you would not need to fear that your little wants would drain it dry! O, No! you would understand how there might be enough and to spare,--how it might be said--"Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it;" how the promises might read--"Bring ye all the tithes into my store house, and prove me now herewith, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out blessings till there be not room enough to receive them." The great oceans of divine love are never drained dry. Let Christians but bring in their tithes and make ready their vessels to receive, and then, having fulfilled the conditions, they may "stand still and see the salvation of God." O how those mountain floods of mercy run over and pour themselves all abroad till every capacity of the soul is filled! O how your little vessels will run over and run over--as in the case of the prophet when the widow's vessels were all full and he cried out--O hasten, hasten--"is there not another vessel?" Still the oil flows on--is there not another vessel? No more, she says; all are full; then and only then was the flowing oil stayed. How often have I thought of this in seasons of great revival, when Christians really get into a praying frame, and God seems to give them everything they ask for; until at length the prophet cries out--Is there not yet another vessel? O bring more vessels, more vessels yet, for still the oil is flowing and still runs over;--but ah, the church has reached the limit of her expectation--she has provided no more vessels;--and the heavenly current is stayed. Infinite love can bless no more; for faith is lacking to prepare for, and receive it.

REMARKS.

1. Many persons, being told that God answers prayer for Christ's sake, overlook the condition of obedience. They have so loose an idea of prayer and of our relations to God in it and of his relations to us and to his moral government, that they think they may be disobedient and yet prevail through Christ. How little do they understand the whole subject! Surely they must have quite neglected to study their Bible to learn the truth about prayer. They might very easily have found it there declared, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination." "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord." "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." All this surely teaches us that if there be the least sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear my prayer. Nothing short of entire obedience for the time being is the condition of acceptance with God. There must be a sincere and honest heart--else how can you look up with humble confidence and say--My Father; else how can you use the name of Jesus, as your prevailing Mediator;--and else, how can God smile upon you before all the eyes of angels and of pure saints above!

When men come before God with their idols set up in their hearts, and the stumbling-block of their iniquity before their face, the Lord says, "Should I be inquired of at all by them?" Read and see. (Ezekiel 14:3-5) The Lord commissions his prophet to declare unto all such:--"I, the Lord, will answer him that cometh thus, according to the multitude of his idols." Such prayers God will answer by sending not a divine fullness, but a wasting leanness; not grace and mercy and peace, but barrenness and cursings and death.

Do not some of you know what this is? You have found in your own experience that the more you pray, the harder your heart is. And what do you suppose the reason of this can be? Plainly there can be no other reason for it than this;--you come up with the stumbling-block of your iniquity before your face, and God answers you according--not to his great mercies, but to the multitude of your idols.

Should you not take heed how you pray?

2. Persons never need hesitate because of their past sins, to approach God with the fullest confidence. If they now repent, and are conscious of fully and honestly returning to God with all their heart, they have no reason to fear being repulsed from the footstool of mercy.

I have sometimes heard persons express great astonishment when God heard and

answered their prayers, after they had been very great and vile sinners. But such astonishment indicates but little knowledge of the matchless grace and loving kindness of our God. Look at Saul of Tarsus. Once a bitter and mad persecutor, proud in his vain Pharisaism;--but now repenting, returning, and forgiven--mark, what power he has with God in prayer. In fact, after penitence, God pardons so fully that, as his word declares--he remembers their iniquities no more. Then the Lord places the pardoned soul on a footing where he can prevail with God as truly and as well as any angel in heaven can! So far as the Bible gives us light on this subject, we must conclude that all this is true. And why? Not because the pardoned Christian is more righteous than an angel; but because he is equally accepted with the purest angel, and has besides the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ,--all made available to him when he uses this all-prevalent name. Oh, there is a world of meaning in this so-little-thought-of arrangement for prayer in Jesus' name. The value of Christ's merits is all at your disposal. If Jesus Christ could obtain any blessing at the court of heaven, you may obtain the same by asking in his name--it being supposed of course that you fulfil the conditions of acceptable prayer. If you come and pray in the spirit of Christ; his Spirit making intercession with your spirit, and your faith taking hold of his all-meritorious name, you may have his intercessions before the throne in your behalf, and whatever Christ can obtain there, He will obtain for you. "Ask, therefore, now"--so Christ Himself invites and promises--"ask and receive, that your joy may be full."

O, what a vantage ground is this upon which God has placed Christians! O what a foundation on which to stand and plead with most prevailing power! How wonderful! First, God bestows pardon, takes away the sting of death; restores peace of conscience and joy in believing; then gives the benefit of Christ's intercession; and then invites Christians to ask what they will! O, how mighty! how prevalent might every Christian become in prayer! Doubtless we may say that a church living with God, and fully meeting the conditions of acceptable prayer might have more power with God than so many angels. And shall we hear professed Christians talk of having no power with God! Alas, alas! Surely such surely know not their blessed birthright. They have not yet begun to know the gospel of the Son of God!

3. Many continue the forms of prayer when they are living in sin, and do not try to reform, and even have no sincere desire to reform. All such persons should know that they grievously provoke the Lord to answer their prayers with fearful

judgments.

4. It is only those that live and walk with God whose prayers are of any avail to themselves, to the church, or to the world. Only those whose conscience does not condemn them, and who live in a state of conscious acceptance with God. They can pray. According to our text they receive whatever they ask because they keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight.

5. When those who have been the greatest sinners will turn to God, they may prevail as really as if they had never sinned at all. When God forgives through the blood of Jesus, it is real forgiveness and the pardoned penitent is welcomed as a child to the bosom of infinite love. For Jesus' sake God receives him without the least danger of its being inferred that Himself cares not for sin. Oh, He told the Universe once for all how utterly he hated sin. He made this point known when he caused his well-beloved Son to bear our sins in his own body on the tree, and it pleased the Father to bruise him and hide his face from even the Son of his love. O, what a beautiful, glorious thing this gospel system is! In it God has made such manifestations of his regard for his law that now He has nothing to fear in showing favour to any and every sinner who believes in Christ. If this believing sinner will also put away his sin--if he will only say--In the name of the Lord I put them all away--all--now--forever; let him do this with all his heart, and God will not fear to embrace him as a son;--this penitent need fear nothing so long as he hides himself in the open cleft of this blessed Rock of Ages.

Look at the case of the prodigal son. Famished, ragged, poor, ready to perish, he remembers his father's house and the plenty that abounds there; he comes to himself and hence looks upon things once more according to their reality. Now he says--"In my father's house there is bread enough and to spare, but here I am perishing with hunger." But why is he ready to perish with hunger? Ah, he ran away from a bountiful and kind father, and spent all his substance in riotous living. But he comes to himself. There, see him drawing near his father's mansion--once his own dear home;--see;--the father rushes to embrace him; he hastens to make this penitent son most welcome to his home and to his heart. So God makes haste to show that he is not afraid to make the vilest sinner welcome if he only comes back a penitent and rests on the name of Jesus. O what a welcome is this!

Follow on that beautiful illustration of it which the Saviour has given us. Bring forth the best robe. Invite together all our friends and neighbours. Prepare the

music. Spread the table, and kill the fatted calf. It is fit that we should make merry and be glad. Lead forward this long-lost son and put on him my best robe. Let there be joy throughout my house over my returned and penitent son.

And what does all this show? One thing--that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God, and joy in the very heart of God himself over one sinner that repenteth. O, I wonder sinners will not come home to their Father in heaven!

6. Sinner, if you will come back to the Lord, you may not only prevail for yourself, but for your associates and friends. I was once in a revival where a large company of young men banded themselves together under a mutual pledge that they would not be converted. Father Nash was with me in that revival season, and on one occasion while the young men alluded too were all present, he made a declaration which startled me, and almost shocked himself. Yet, as he said afterward, he dared not take it back, for he did not know how he came to say it, and perhaps the hand of God might be in it. "Young men," said he, "God will break your ranks within one week, or he will send some of you to hell."

It was an awful time. We feared that possibly it might not prove to be so, and that then the result would be exceeding bad upon the minds of that already hardened band. But it was spoken, and we could only cry unto God.

Time rolled along. About two or three days after this declaration was made, the leader of this band called to see me, all broken down and as mellow as he could be. As soon as he saw me, he cried out, "What shall I do?" "What are you thinking about?" said I. "About my wicked companions," said he, "all of them in the way to hell." "Do you pray for them?" I asked. "Oh, yes," said he, "I cannot help praying for them every moment." "Well, then," said I, "there is one thing more; go to them and entreat them in Christ's name to be reconciled to God." He darted out of my room and began this work in earnest. Suffice it to say, that before the week was closed almost all of that band of young men were converted.

And now let me say to the impenitent sinners in this assembly, If others do not labour to promote a revival, begin at once and do it yourself. Learn from such a case as I have just stated, what you can do. Don't you think you could do something of the greatest value to souls if you would seriously try? Who is there here--let me see--what young man or young woman is there here now impenitent,--do not you believe that if you would repent yourself, you might

then go and pray and labour and secure the conversion of others, perhaps many others of your companions?

Sinners are usually disposed to throw all the responsibility of this labour and prayer upon Christians. I throw it back upon you. Do right yourselves and then you can pray. Do right, and then none can labour with more effect than yourselves in this great work of bringing back wandering prodigals to their father's house.

Christian hearer, is it not a dreadful thing for you to be in a state in which you cannot prevail with God? Let us look around;--how is it with you? Can you prevail with God; and you--and you? Who are they and how many are there in such a state that their prayers avail nothing, and who know before they pray and while they are praying that they are in no fit state to offer prevailing prayer? One of the brethren, you recollect said to us at a recent church meeting, "I have lost my power to prevail with God. I know I am not ready for this work." How many others are there, still in the same awful condition?

O how many have we here who are the salt of the earth, whose prayers and redeeming influence save the community from becoming perfectly putrid with moral corruption? I hope they will be found alive and at work in this trying hour. O we must have your prayers for the impenitent--for the anxious--for backsliders;--or if you cannot pray--at least come together and confess your sins;--tell your brethren and sisters you cannot pray and beg of them to pray for you that you may be brought back to the light and the peace and the penitence of real salvation.

[Back to Top](#)

Conditions of Prevailing Prayer- No.'s 1 & 2 & 3

Lectures V & VI & VII

May 26, 1847

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 7:7, 8: "Ask, and it shall be given you."

Text.--James 4:3: "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, to consume it upon your lusts."

These passages are chosen as the foundation of several discourses which I design to preach on the condition of prevailing prayer.

Before entering directly upon the consideration of those conditions, however, I deem it important to make several remarks upon the general subject of prayer and of answers to prayer. These will occupy our attention on the present occasion.

1. The Bible most unequivocally asserts that all that is properly called prayer is heard and answered. "Every one that asketh," that is, in the scriptural sense of the term, "receiveth, and he that seeketh, findeth." This declaration is perfectly explicit and to the point.

2. Prayer is not always answered according to the letter, but often only according to the spirit.

This is a very important distinction. It can be made plain by an example taken from scripture. Paul informs us that he was afflicted with a thorn in the flesh. He has not told us precisely what this was. He calls it his "temptation that was in the flesh," and evidently implies that it was a snare and a trouble to him, and a thing which might naturally injure his influence as an apostle. For this latter reason, probably, he was led to "beseech the Lord thrice that it might depart from him." This prayer was obviously acceptable to God, and was graciously answered--answered, however, you will observe, not in the letter of it, but only in its spirit. The letter of the prayer specified the removal of this thorn in the flesh; and in this view of his prayer it was not answered. The spirit of the prayer was doubtless that his influence might not be injured, and that his "temptation" from this evil thing, whatever it was, might not overpower him and draw him into sin. Thus far, and in these respects, his prayer was answered. The Lord assured him, saying, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." This was a real answer to Paul's prayer, although it did not follow the particular way of doing it that Paul had named in his prayer. Paul had asked that certain desired results might be secured to him in a particular manner. The results sought constituted the spirit of the prayer; the specified manner

constituted the letter. The Lord secured to him the results, and perhaps even more fully than Paul expected or specifically asked; but He did it, not in Paul's specified way, but in his own.

So it often happens when we pray. The ways of the Lord are so much wiser than our own, that he kindly and most benevolently declines to follow our way, and takes his own. The great end, however, which we seek, if our prayer is acceptable to Him, He will certainly secure, perhaps more perfectly in his own way than he could in ours.

If, therefore, we suppose that prayer must always be answered according to the letter, we shall find ourselves greatly mistaken. But the spirit of acceptable prayer God will always answer. If the letter and the spirit of prayer were in any case identical, the Lord would answer both; when they are not identical, he may answer only according to its spirit.

3. No person can be saved unless in such a state of mind as to offer acceptable prayer. No man can be justified before God at all, unless in such a state of mind as would be accepted in prayer. This is so plain as to need no proof--so plain as to preclude all doubt.

4. Many things are really answers to prayer which are not recognized as such by the suppliant, nor by observers.

This you will see may very easily happen in cases where the spirit and the letter of prayer are diverse from each other. An observer, of course, is not likely to notice any thing but the letter of another's prayer. Consequently, if his prayer is answered only in the spirit of it, and not in the letter at all, he will fail to recognize the answer. And the same thing may occur in respect to the suppliant himself. Unless he notices particularly the inner state of his own mind, he may not get definitely before his eye the real thing which constitutes the spirit of his own prayer. If his attention is chiefly turned towards the letter of it, he may receive an answer to its spirit, and may not notice it as a real answer to his prayer.

The acceptable prayer of any Christian may be quite a different thing from what others suppose it to be, and sometimes different from what himself supposes. In such cases, the answer will often fail to be recognized as an answer. Hence it is of vital importance that we should ourselves understand the real spirit of our

own prayer.

All this applies yet more frequently in respect to others than to the suppliant himself. Usually they see only the letter of a prayer and not the spirit. Hence if the latter is answered and not the former, they will naturally suppose that the prayer is not answered, when really it is answered and in the best possible way. Skeptics often stand by tauntingly, and cry out, "You Christians are always praying; but your prayers are never answered." Yet God may be really answering their prayer in the spirit of it, and in the most effectual and glorious manner. I think I could name many instances in which, while skeptics were triumphing as if God did not hear prayer, He was really hearing it in regard to the true spirit of it, and in such a way as most signally to glorify Himself.

5. Much that is called prayer is not answered in any sense whatever, and is not real prayer. Much that goes under the name of prayer is offered merely for the form of it, with neither care nor expectation to be answered. Those who pray thus will not watch to see whether their prayers are answered in any sense whatever.

For example, there are some who pray as a matter of cold duty--only because they must, and not because they feel their need of some specific blessing. Hence their prayer is nothing but a form. Their heart is not set upon any particular object. They only care to do what they call a duty; they do not care with anxious heart for any object they may specify in their prayers. Hence the thing they really care for, is not the thing they pray for. In words they pray for this thing; in heart for quite another thing. And the evidence of this is in the fact that they never look after the thing they pray for in words. If they prayed in heart for any thing, they would certainly look to see whether the blessing asked for is given.

Suppose a man had petitioned for some appointment to office, and had sent on his application to the President or to the appointing power. Probably his heart is greatly set on attaining it. If so you will see him watching the mail for the reply to his communication. Every day you may see him at the office ready to seize his letter at the earliest possible moment. But if on the other hand, he applied only for form's sake; and cares nothing about the office, or does not at all expect it, you will see him about other business or pleasure, which he does care for.

The latter case rarely occurs in human affairs, but in religious things nothing is more common. Multitudes are engaged from time to time in what they call

praying; their object being often only to appease their consciences--not to obtain any desired blessing. Of course the quiet of their conscience is the only thing they really seek by prayer, and it would be absurd in them to look after any other answer than this. They are not wont to be guilty of this absurdity.

Of course those who pray thus are not disappointed if they are not heard. It would be so in case of petitions addressed to men; it is so naturally when petitions are addressed to God.

A real Christian sometimes asks in the letter of prayer for what he finds God cannot give. In such a case he can be satisfied only with the consideration that God always exercises his own infinite wisdom and his not less infinite love. One great thing that lay nearest his heart if he was in the true spirit of prayer will be granted, namely, that God may be honored in the exercise of his own wisdom and love. This God will surely do. So far forth, therefore, the spirit of his prayer will be granted.

It deserves special notice that those who pray as a matter of form only, and with no heart set upon the blessing named in the prayer, never enquire for the reasons why they are not answered. Their minds are entirely at ease on this point, because they feel no solicitude about the answer at all. They did not pray for the sake of an answer. Hence they will never trouble themselves to enquire why the answer to the words of their prayer fails of being given.

How many of you who hear me, may see in this the real reason why you so rarely look after any answer to your prayers; or the reason why you care so little about it, if your mind should chance to advert to it at all?

Again, when our petitions are not answered either in letter or in their spirit, it is because we have not fulfilled the revealed conditions of acceptable prayer. Many persons seem to overlook the fact that there are conditions of acceptable prayer revealed in the Bible. But this is a fact by far too important to be ever wisely overlooked. It surely becomes every Christian to know not only that there are conditions, but also what they are.

Let us, then, fully understand that if our prayers are not answered, it is because we have failed of fulfilling the revealed conditions. This must be the reason why our prayers are not answered, for God has assured us in his word that all real prayer is always answered.

Nothing can be more important than that we should thoroughly understand the conditions of prevailing prayer. If we fail thus to understand them, we shall very probably fail to fulfill them, and of course fail to offer prevailing prayer. Alas, how ruinous a failure must this be to any soul!

There are those, I am aware, who do not expect to influence God by their prayers; they expect to produce effects upon themselves only. They hope by means of prayer to bring themselves to a better state of mind, and this is all they expect to gain by means of prayer.

To all such I have two things to say:

(1.) It may be that an individual not in a right state of mind may be benefited by giving himself to prayer. If the prayer is offered with sincerity and solemnity--with a real feeling of want, as it is sometimes in the case of a convicted sinner, it may have a very happy effect upon his own state of mind. When such a man gives himself up to confession and supplication, and spreads out his case before the Lord, it is usually a most important step towards his real conversion. It helps to bring the character and claims of God distinctly before his mind, and has a natural tendency to make his own soul realize more deeply its guilt, its need of pardon, and its duty of submission and of faith in Christ.

But if any person should suppose that a case of this sort involves all that is included in prevailing prayer, he mistakes greatly. In prevailing prayer, a child of God comes before him with real faith in his promises and asks for things agreeable to his will, assured of being heard according to the true intent of the promises; and thus coming to God he prevails with him, and really influences God to do what otherwise he would not do by any means. That is, prayer truly secures from God the bestowment of the blessing sought. Nothing less than this corresponds either with the promises of scripture, or with its recorded facts in respect to the answers made to prevailing prayer.

(2.) God is unchangeably in the attitude of answering prayer. This is true for the same reason that He is unchangeably in the attitude of being complacent in holiness whenever he sees it. The reason in both cases, lies in his infinitely benevolent nature. Because he is infinitely good, therefore and for no other reason is it that He is evermore in the attitude of answering suitable prayer,

and of being complacent towards all real holiness. As in the latter case, whenever a moral change takes place in a sinner of such a nature that God can love him, his infinite love gushes forth instantaneously and without bounds; so in the former case, as soon as any suppliant places himself in such an attitude that God can wisely answer his prayer, then instantly the ear of Jehovah inclines to his petition, and the answer is freely given.

To illustrate this point, suppose that for a season some obstacle interposes to obstruct the sunbeams from the rosebush at your door; it fades and it looks sickly. But take away the obstacle, and instantly the sunbeams fall in their reviving power upon the rose. So sin casts its dark shadow upon the soul, and obstructs the sunbeams of Jehovah's smiles. But take away the obstacle--the sin--and the smiles fall in of course, and in their full blaze on that penitent and morally changed heart. The sun of Jehovah's face shines always; shines in its own nature; and its beams fall on all objects which are not cast into some deep shade by interposing sin and unbelief. On all objects not thus shaded, its glorious beams forever fall in all their sweetness and beauty.

Hence all real prayer moves God, not merely by benefiting the suppliant through its reflex action, but really and in fact inducing Him to grant the blessing sought. The notion that the whole benefit of prayer is its reflex influence upon the suppliant, and not the obtaining of any blessing asked for, is both vain and preposterous. You might as well suppose that all the good you get by removing obstacles that cut off the sunbeams, is the physical exercise attending the effort. You might as well deny that the sunbeams will actually reach every object as soon as you take away that which throws them into the shade.

God does truly hear and answer prayer, even as an earthly parent hears the petition of a dutiful child, and shapes his course to meet the petition. To deny this involves the denial of the very nature of God. It is equivalent to denying that God is benevolent. It seems most obviously to deny that God fulfills his promises; for nothing can be more plain than the fact that God promises to be influenced by prayer so as to bestow blessings to the suppliant which are given to none others, and on no other condition. If God is pure and good, then it must needs follow that--the obstacle of sin being removed in the case of a fallen being--the divine love must flow out towards him as it did not and could not before. God remains forever the same, just as the sun forever shines; and then his love meets every object that lies open to his beams, just as the sun's rays cheer

every thing not shaded by positive obstructions.

Again, God may hear the mere cry of distress and speedily send help. He "hears the young ravens when they cry," and the young lion too when they roar and seek their meat from God. The storm-tossed mariners also, "at their wit's end, cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distress." His benevolence leads him to do all this, wherever he can without detriment to the interests of his government. Yet this case seems not to come under the promises made to believing prayer. These cases of distress often occur in the experience of wicked men. Yet sometimes God seems obviously to hear their cry. He has wise reasons for doing so; probably often his object is to open their eyes to see their own Father, and to touch their hearts with a sense of their ingratitude in their rebellion against such a God.

But be the reason what it may, the fact cannot be disputed. Cases not unfrequently occur, in which persons not pious are afflicted by the dangerous illness of near friends or relatives, and lift their imploring cry of distress to the Lord and He hears them. It is even said in scripture that Christ heard the prayer of devils when they "besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country," and said, "send us into the swine, that we may enter into them."

Manifestly the Lord often hears this kind of prayer, whenever no special reason exists for refusing to hear it. Yet this is far from being that peculiar kind of prayer to which the special promises of hearing and answering prayer are made.

It is however both interesting and instructive to see how often the Lord does hear even such prayer as these cries of distress. When the cattle moan in the fields because there is no water, and because the grass is withered, there is One on high who listens to their moans. Why should he not? Has he not a compassionate heart? Does not his ear bend under the quick impulse of spontaneous affection, when any of his creatures cry unto him as to their Father, and when no great moral considerations forbid his showing favor?

It is striking to see how much the parental character of the great Jehovah is developed in the course of his providence by his hearing this kind of prayer. A great multitude of facts are exhibited both in the Bible and in history, which set this subject in a strong light. I once knew a wicked man who under deep affliction from the dangerous illness of his child, set himself to pray that God would spare and restore the dear one; and God appeared to answer his prayer in

a most remarkable manner.

Those of you who have read the "Bank of Faith," know that Mr. Huntington, before his conversion, in many instances seemed to experience the same kind of signal answers to his prayers. Another anecdote was told me the past winter which I should relate more freely if it were not somewhat amusing and laughable as well as instructive. A wicked man who had perhaps never prayed since he was a child, was out with a hunting party, on the confines of Iowa, hunting wild buffalo. Mounted on trained horses, lasso in hand, they came up to a herd of buffalo, and this man encountered a fierce buffalo bull. The animal rushed upon him, and at his first push unhorsed him; but quick as thought in his fall, the man seized his own horse's neck, swung upon the under side of the neck, and there held on in the utmost peril of his life; his horse being at full gallop, pursued by a ferocious wild bull. To break his hold and fall, was almost certain death, and he was every moment in the utmost danger of falling under the flying feet of his rushing horse. In this predicament he bethought himself of prayer; but the only words he could think of, were,

"Now I lay me down to sleep,

I pray the Lord my soul to keep."

Perhaps he had never heard much other prayer than this. This lay embalmed among the recollections of his childhood days. Yet even this prayer the Lord in his infinite mercy seemed to hear and answer by rescuing the man unhurt from this perilous condition. The case affords us a striking exemplification not only of the fact that God hears the cry of mere distress, sometimes even when made by wicked men, but also of another fact, namely, that the spirit of a prayer may be a very different thing from its letter. In this case, the letter and the spirit had no very close resemblance. The spirit of the prayer was for deliverance from imminent peril. This the Lord seems to have heard.

But it should be continually borne in mind, that these are not the prayers which God has pledged himself by promise to hear and answer. The latter are evermore the believing prayers of his own children.

Our great enquiry now has respect to this class of prayers, namely, those which God has solemnly promised to answer. Attached to the promises made respecting this class of prayers are certain conditions. These being fulfilled, God holds

himself bound to answer the prayer according to the letter and spirit both, if they both correspond; or if they do not correspond, then He will answer according to the spirit of the prayer. This is evermore the meaning of his promise. His promise to answer prayer on certain conditions is a pledge at least to meet it in its true spirit, and do or give what the spirit of the prayer implies.

It now becomes us to enquire most diligently and most earnestly for the conditions of prevailing prayer. This point I shall enter upon in my next discourse.

LECTURE VI.

June 9, 1847

CONDITIONS OF PREVAILING PRAYER--No. 2

Text.--Matt. 7:7, 8: "Ask, and it shall be given you."

Text.--James 4:3: "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, to consume it upon your lusts."

I will commence the present discourse by briefly recapitulating the prefatory remarks which I made in my first sermon on this subject. I then observed,

1. That all real prayer is heard and answered.
2. Prayer is not always answered according to the letter of it, but often only according to its spirit. As an instance of this, I spoke of the striking case recorded respecting Paul's thorn in the flesh.
3. None can be saved who are not in a state of mind to prevail in prayer.
4. Many things are really answers to prayer which are not recognized by the suppliant as such nor by those who witness the prayer, the blessing bestowed, or the thing done in connection with it.
5. Much that is called prayer is not really prayer at all.
6. Many neither care nor expect to be heard, and therefore do not watch to see whether their prayers are answered. They pray merely as a duty; their heart being set on doing the duty and appeasing their consciences, and not on obtaining the blessing nominally asked for.

7. Nor do such persons feel disappointed if they fail of obtaining what they profess to ask for in prayer.

8. They do not trouble themselves to enquire why they are not answered. If they can only discharge their duty and appease their consciences, they have their desire.

9. Failure to obtain the blessing sought is always because the revealed conditions are not fulfilled.

10. Nothing is more important for us than to attend to, and understand the revealed conditions of prevailing prayer.

11. God may answer the mere cry of distress when benevolence does not forbid it. He often does hear the sailor in the storm--the young ravens in their hunger; but this is a very different thing from that prayer which God has pledged himself by promise to hear and answer on the fulfilment of certain conditions.

This Brings Us To A Consideration Of The Conditions Of Prevailing Prayer.

1. The first condition is, a state of mind in which you would offer the Lord's prayer sincerely and acceptably.

Christ at their request taught his disciples how to pray. In doing so, He gave them an epitome of the appropriate subjects of prayer, and also threw a most important light upon the spirit with which all prayer should be offered. This form is exceedingly comprehensive. Every word is full of meaning. It would seem very obvious however that our Lord did not intend here to specify all the particular things we may pray for, but only to group together some of the great heads of subjects which are appropriate to be sought of God in prayer, and also to show us with what temper and spirit we should come before the Lord.

This is evidently not designed as a mere form, to be used always and without variation. It cannot be that Christ intended we should evermore use these words in prayer and no other words; for he never again used these precise words himself--so far as we know from the sacred record--but did often use other and very different words, as the scriptures abundantly testify.

But this form answers a most admirable purpose if we understand it to be given

us to teach us these two most important things, namely, what sort of blessings we may pray for, and in what spirit we should pray for them.

Most surely, then, we cannot hope to pray acceptably unless we can offer this prayer in its real spirit--our own hearts deeply sympathizing with the spirit of this prayer. If we cannot pray the Lord's prayer sincerely, we cannot offer any acceptable prayer at all.

Hence it becomes us to examine carefully the words of this recorded form of prayer. Yet, be it remembered, it is not these words, as mere words, that God regards, or that we should value. Words themselves, apart from their meaning, and from their meaning as used by us, would neither please nor displease God.--He looks on the heart.

Let us now refer to the Lord's prayer, and to the connection in which it stands.

"When ye pray," says our Lord, "use not vain repetitions as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking."

Yet be it well considered, the precept, "Use not vain repetitions," should by no means be construed to discourage the utmost perseverance and fervency of spirit in prayer. The passage does not forbid our renewing our requests from great earnestness of spirit. Our Lord himself did this in the garden, repeating his supplication "in the same words." Vain repetitions are what is forbidden; not repetitions which gush from a burdened spirit.

This form of prayer invites us, first of all to address the great God as "Our Father who art in heaven." This authorizes us to come as children and address the Most High, feeling that he is a Father to us.

The first petition follows--"Hallowed be thy name." What is the exact idea of this language? To hallow is to sanctify; to deem and render sacred.

There is a passage in Peter's Epistle which may throw light on this.

He says, "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." The meaning seems plainly to be this;--Set apart the Lord God in your hearts as the only true object of supreme, eternal adoration, worship, and praise. Place Him alone on the throne of your hearts. Let Him be the only hallowed object there.

So here in the first petition of the Lord's Prayer, we pray that both ourselves and all intelligent beings may in this sense hallow the name of the Lord God and sanctify Him in their hearts. Our prayer is--Let all adore thee--the infinite Father--as the only object of universal adoration, praise, worship, and love.

This prayer hence implies:

- (1.) A desire that this hallowing of Jehovah's name should be universal.
- (2.) A willingness to concur heartily ourselves in this sentiment. Our own hearts are in deep sympathy with it. Our inmost souls cry out--Let God be honoured, adored, loved, worshipped and revered by all on earth and all in heaven. Of course, praying in this spirit, we shall have the highest reverence for God.--Beginning our prayer thus, it will so far be acceptable to God. Without such reverence for Jehovah's name, no prayer can possibly be acceptable. All irreverent praying is mockery, most abhorrent to the pure and exalted Jehovah.

The second petition--"Thy kingdom come." What does this language imply?

- (1.) A desire that God's kingdom should be set up in the world and all men become holy. The will is set upon this as the highest and most to be desired of all objects whatever. It becomes the supreme desire of the soul, and all other things sink into comparative insignificance before it. The mind and the judgment approve and delight in the kingdom of God as in itself infinitely excellent, and then the will harmonizes most perfectly with this decision of intelligence.

Let it be well observed here that our Lord in giving this form of prayer, assumes throughout that we shall use all this language with most profound sincerity. If any man were to use these words and reject their spirit from his heart, his prayer would be an utter abomination before God. Whoever would pray at all, should consider that God looks on the heart, and is a holy God.

- (2.) It is implied in this petition that the suppliant does what he can to establish this kingdom. He is actually doing all he can to promote this great end for which he prays. Else he fails entirely of evincing his sincerity. For nothing can be more sure than that every man who prays

sincerely for the coming of Jehovah's kingdom, truly desires and wills that it may come; and if so, he will neglect no means in his power to promote and hasten its coming. Hence every man who sincerely offers this petition will lay himself out to promote the object. He will seek by every means to make the truth of God universally prevalent and triumphant.

(3.) I might also say that the sincere offering of this petition implies a resistance of everything inconsistent with the coming of this kingdom. This you cannot fail to understand.

We now pass to the next petition--"Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven."

This petition implies that we desire to have God's will done, and that this desire is supreme.

It implies also a delight in having the will of God done by all his creatures, and a corresponding sorrow whenever it fails of being done by any intelligent being.

There is also implied a state of the will in harmony with this desire. A man whose will is averse to having his own desires granted is insincere, even although his desires are real. Such a man is not honest and consistent with himself.

In general I remark respecting this petition that if it be offered sincerely, the following things must be true:

(1.) The suppliant is willing that God should require all He does, and as He does. His heart will acquiesce both in the things required and in the manner in which God requires them. It would indeed be strange that a man should pray sincerely that God's will might be done, and yet not be willing himself that God should give law, or carry his will into effect. Such inconsistencies never can happen where the heart is truly sincere and honest before God. No, never. The honest hearted suppliant is as willing that God's will should be done as the saints in heaven are. He delights in having it done, more than in all riches--more than in his highest earthly joy.

(2.) When a man offers this petition sincerely, it is implied that he is really doing, himself, all the known will of God. For if he is acting contrary to his actual knowledge of God's will, it is most certain that he is not sincere in praying that God's will may be done. If he sincerely desires and is willing that God's will should be done, why does he not do it himself?

(3.) It implies a willingness that God should use his own discretion in the affairs of the universe, and just as really and fully in this world as in heaven itself. You all admit that in heaven God exercises a holy sovereignty. I do not mean by this, an arbitrary unreasonable sovereignty, but I mean a control of all things according to his own infinite wisdom and love--exercising evermore his own discretion, and depending on the counsel of none but himself. Thus God reigns in heaven.

You also see that in heaven, all created beings exercise the most perfect submission, and confidence in God. They all allow him to carry out his own plans framed in wisdom and love, and they even rejoice with exceeding joy that He does. It is their highest blessedness.

Such is the state of feeling towards God universally in heaven.

And such it should be on earth. The man who offers this petition sincerely must approximate very closely to the state of mind which obtains in heaven.

He will rejoice that God appoints all things as He pleases, and that all beings should be, and do, and suffer as God ordains. If man has not such confidence in God as to be willing that he should control all events respecting his own family, his friends, all his interests, in short, for time and eternity, then certainly his heart is not submissive to God, and it is hypocrisy for him to pray that God's will may be done on earth as in heaven. It must be hypocrisy in him because his own heart rebels against the sentiment of his own words.

This petition, offered honestly implies nothing less than universal, unqualified submission to God. The heart really submits, and delights in its submission.

No thought is so truly pleasing as that of having God's will done

evermore. A sincere offering of this prayer or indeed of any prayer whatever involves the fullest possible submission of all events for time and for eternity to the hands of God. All real prayer puts God on the throne of the universe, and the suppliant low before Him at his footstool.

(4.) The offering of this petition sincerely, implies conformity of life to this state of the will. You will readily see that this must be the case, because the will governs the outward life by a law of necessity. The action of this law must be universal so long as man remains a voluntary moral agent. So long therefore the ultimate purpose of the will must control the outward life.

Hence the man who offers this prayer acceptably must live as he prays; must live according to his own prayers. It would be a strange and most unaccountable thing indeed if the heart should be in a state to offer this prayer sincerely and yet should act itself out in the life directly contrary to its own expressed and supreme preference and purpose.

Such a case is impossible. The very supposition involves the absurdity of assuming that a man's supreme preference shall not control his outward life.

In saying this, however, I do not deny that a man's state of mind may change, so as to differ the next hour from what it is this. He may be in a state one hour to offer this prayer acceptably, and the next hour may act in a manner right over against his prayer.

But if in this latter hour you could know the state of his will, you would find that it is not such that he can pray acceptably--"Thy will be done." No, his will is so changed as to conform to what you see in his outward life.

Hence a man's state of heart may be to some extent known from his external actions. You may at least know that his heart does not sincerely offer this prayer if his life does not conform to the known will of God.

We pass to the next petition--"Give us this day our daily bread."

It is plain that this implies dependence on God for all the favors and mercies we either possess or need.

The petition is remarkably comprehensive. It names only bread, and only the bread for "this day;" yet none can doubt that it was designed to include also our water and our needful clothing--whatever we really need for our highest health, and usefulness, and enjoyment on earth. For all these we look to God.

Our Saviour doubtless meant to give us in general the subjects of prayer, showing us for what things it is proper for us to pray; and also the spirit with which we should pray. These are plainly the two great points which he aimed chiefly to illustrate in this remarkable form of prayer.

Whoever offers this petition sincerely is in a state of mind to recognize and gratefully acknowledge the providence of God. He sees the hand of God in all the circumstances that affect his earthly state. The rain and the sunshine--the winds and the frosts, he sees coming, all of them, from the hand of his own Father. Hence he looks up in the spirit of a child--saying, "Give me this day my daily bread."

But there are those who philosophize and speculate themselves entirely out of this filial dependence on God. They arrive at such ideas of the magnitude of the universe that it becomes in their view too great for God to govern by a minute attention to particular events. Hence they see no God, other than an unknowing Nature in the ordinary processes of vegetation, or in the laws that control animal life. A certain indefinable but unintelligent power which they call Nature, does it all. Hence they do not expect God to hear their prayers, or notice their wants. Nature will move on in its own determined channel whether they pray or restrain prayer.

Now men who hold such opinions cannot pray the Lord's prayer without the most glaring hypocrisy. How can they offer this prayer and mean anything by it, if they truly believe that everything is nailed down to a fixed chain of events in which no regard is had or can be had to the prayers or wants of man?

Surely, nothing is more plain than that this prayer recognizes most fully the universal providence of that same infinite Father who gives us the promises and who invites us to plead them for obtaining all the blessings we can ever need.

It practically recognizes God as Ruler over all.

What if a man should offer this prayer, but should add to it an appendix of this sort--"Lord, although we ask of thee our daily bread, yet Thou knowest we do not believe Thou hast anything at all to do with giving us each day our daily bread; for we believe Thou art too high and Thy universe too large to admit of our supposing that Thou canst attend to so small a matter as supplying our daily food. We believe that Thou art so unchangeable, and the laws of nature are so fixed that no regard can possibly be had to our prayers or our wants."

Now would this style of prayer correspond with the petitions given us by Christ, or with their obvious spirit?

Plainly this prayer dictated by our Lord for us, implies a state of heart that leans upon God for everything--for even the most minute things that can possibly affect our happiness or be to us objects of desire. The mind looks up to the great God, expecting from Him, and from Him alone, every good and perfect gift. For everything we need, our eye turns naturally and spontaneously towards our great Father.

And this is a daily dependence. The state of mind which it implies is habitual.

We must pass now to the next petition, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

In this immediate connection, the Saviour says, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." The word trespasses, therefore doubtless explains what is meant by debts in the Lord's prayer. Luke, in reciting this Lord's prayer, has it--"Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us." These various forms of expression serve to make the meaning quite plain. It may often happen that in such a world as this, some of my fellow men may wrong or at least offend me--in some such way as I wrong and displease God. In such cases this petition of the Lord's prayer implies that I forgive those who injure me, even as I pray to be forgiven myself.

The phraseology in Matthew makes the fact that we forgive others either the measure, or the condition of our being forgiven; while as given by Luke, it

seems to be at least a condition if not a ground or reason of the request for personal forgiveness. The former reads--"Forgive us as we forgive," &c. and the latter;-- "Forgive us, for we also forgive every one indebted to us."

Now on this petition I remark,

(1.) It cannot possibly imply that God will forgive us our sins while we are still committing them. Suppose one should use this form of petition;-- "Lord, forgive me for having injured Thee as Thou knowest that I do most freely forgive all men who injure me;" while yet it is perfectly apparent to the man himself and to everybody else that he is still injuring and abusing God as much as ever. Would not such a course be equivalent to saying, "Lord, I am very careful, Thou seest, not to injure my fellow men, and I freely forgive their wrongs against me; but I care not how much I abuse and wrong Thee!" This would be horrible! Yet this horrible prayer is virtually invoked whenever men ask of God forgiveness with the spirit of sin and rebellion in their hearts.

(2.) This petition never reads thus; "Forgive us our sins and enable us to forgive others also." This would be a most abominable prayer to offer to God; certainly if it be understood to imply that we cannot forgive others unless we are specially enabled to do so by power given us in answer to prayer; and worse still, if this inability to forgive is imputed to God as its Author.

However the phraseology be explained, and whatever it be understood to imply, it is common enough in the mouths of men; but nowhere found in the book of God.

(3.) Christ, on the other hand, says;--Forgive us as we forgive others. We have often injured, abused, and wronged Thee. Our fellow men have also often injured us, but Thou knowest we have freely forgiven them. Now, therefore, forgive us as Thou seest we have forgiven others. If Thou seest that we do forgive others, then do Thou indeed forgive us and not otherwise. We cannot ask to be ourselves forgiven on any other condition.

(4.) Many seem to consider themselves quite pious if they can put up with it when they are injured or slighted; if they can possibly control

themselves so as not to break out into a passion. If, however, they are really wronged, they imagine they do well to be angry. O, to be sure! somebody has really wronged them, and shall they not resent it and study how to get revenge, or at least, redress? But mark; the Apostle Peter says, "If when ye do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." "For even hereunto were ye called," as if all Christians had received a special call to this holy example. O how would such an example rebuke the spirit of the world!

(5.) It is one remarkable condition of being answered in prayer that we suffer ourselves to harbour no ill-will to any human being. We must forgive all that wrong us, and forgive them too from the heart. God as really requires us to love our enemies as to love our friends,--as really requires us to forgive others as to ask forgiveness for ourselves. Do we always bear this in mind? Are you, beloved, always careful to see to it that your state of mind towards all who may possibly have wronged you is one of real forgiveness, and do you never think of coming to God in prayer until you are sure you have a forgiving spirit yourself?

Plainly, this is one of the ways in which we may test our fitness of heart to prevail with God in prayer. "When thou standest, praying, forgive, if thou hast ought against any." Think not to gain audience before God unless thou dost most fully and heartily forgive all who may be thought to have wronged thee.

Sometimes persons of a peculiar temperament lay up grudges against others. They have enemies against whom they not only speak evil, but know not how to speak well. Now such persons who harbor such grudges in their hearts, can no more prevail with God in prayer than the devil can. God would as soon hear the devil pray and answer his prayers as hear and answer them. They need not think to be heard;--not they!

How many times have I had occasion to rebuke this unforgiving spirit! Often while in a place laboring to promote a revival, I have seen the workings of this jealous, unforgiving spirit, and I have felt like saying, Take these things hence! Why do you get up a prayer-meeting and think to pray to God when you know that you hate your brother; and know moreover that I know you do? Away with it! Let such professed Christians repent, break down, get into the dust at the feet of God, and

men too, before they think to pray acceptably! Until they do thus repent all their prayers are only a "smoke in the nose" before God.

Our next petition is-- "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

And what is implied in this?

A fear and dread of sin;--a watchfulness against temptation; an anxious solicitude lest by any means we should be overcome and fall into sin. On this point Christ often warned his disciples, and not them only, but what He said unto them, He said unto all,--"Watch."

A man not afraid of sin and temptation cannot present this petition in a manner acceptable to God.

You will observe, moreover, that this petition does not by any means imply that God leads men into temptation in order to make them sin, so that we must needs implore of Him not to lead us thus, lest He should do it. No, that is not implied at all; but the spirit of the petition is this;--O Lord, Thou knowest how weak I am, and how prone to sin; therefore let thy providence guard and keep me that I may not indulge in anything whatever that may prove to me a temptation to sin. Deliver us from all iniquity--from all the stratagems of the devil. Throw around us all thy precious guardianship, that we may be kept from sinning against Thee.

How needful this protection, and how fit that we should pray for it without ceasing!

This form of prayer concludes--"For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, amen."

Here is an acknowledgment of the universal government of God. The suppliant recognizes his supremacy and rejoices in it.

Thus it is when the mind is in the attitude of prevailing prayer. It is most perfectly natural then for us to regard the character, attributes, and kingdom of God as infinitely sacred and glorious.

How perfectly spontaneous is this feeling in the heart of all who really pray, "I ask all this because Thou art a powerful, universal, and holy Sovereign.--

Thou art the infinite Source of all blessings. Unto Thee, therefore, do I look for all needed good either for myself or my fellow beings!"

How deeply does the praying heart realize and rejoice in the universal supremacy of the great Jehovah! All power, and glory, and dominion are thine, and thine only, for ever and ever, amen and amen. Let my whole soul re-echo, amen. Let the power and the glory be the Lord's alone for evermore. Let my soul for ever feel and utter this sentiment with its deepest and most fervent emphasis. Let God reign supreme and adored through all earth and all heaven, henceforth and for ever.

REMARKS.

1. The state of mind involved in this prayer must be connected with a holy life. Most manifestly it can never co-exist with a sinning life. If you allow yourself in sin, you certainly cannot have access to God in prayer. You cannot enter into the spirit of the Lord's prayer and appropriately utter its petitions.

2. The appropriate offering of this prayer involves a corresponding sensibility--a state of feeling in harmony with it. The mind of the suppliant must sympathize with the spirit of this form of prayer. Otherwise he does, by no means, make this prayer his own.

3. It is nothing better than mockery to use the Lord's prayer as a mere form. So multitudes do use it, especially when public worship is conducted by the use of forms of prayer. Often you may hear this form of prayer repeated over and over in such a way as seems to testify that the mind takes no cognizance of the sentiments which the words should express. The chattering of a parrot could scarcely be more senseless and void of impression on the speaker's mind. How shocking to hear the Lord's prayer chattered over thus! Instead of spreading out before God what they really need, they run over the words of this form, and perhaps of some other set forms, as if the utterance of the right words served to constitute acceptable prayer!

If they had gone into the streets and cursed and swore by the hour, every man of them would be horribly shocked, and would feel that now assuredly the curse of Jehovah would fall upon them. But in their senseless chattering of this form of prayer by the hour together, they as truly blaspheme God as if they had taken his name in vain in any other way.

Men may mock God in pretending to pray, as truly as in cursing and swearing. God looks on the heart and He estimates nothing as real prayer into which the heart does not enter. And for many reasons it must be peculiarly provoking to God to have the forms of prayer gone through with and no heart of prayer attend them.

Prayer is a privilege too sacred to be trifled with. The pernicious effects of trifling with prayer are certainly not less than the evils of any other form of profanity. Hence God must abhor all public desecration of this solemn exercise.

Now, brethren, in closing my remarks on this one great condition of prevailing prayer, let me beseech you never to suppose that you pray acceptably unless your heart sympathizes deeply with the sentiments expressed in the Lord's prayer. Your state of mind must be such that these words will most aptly express it. Your heart must run into the very words, and into all the sentiments of this form of prayer. Our Saviour meant here to teach us how to pray; and here you may come and learn how. Here you may see a map of the things to pray for, and a picture of the spirit in which acceptable prayer is offered.

LECTURE VII.

July 21, 1847

CONDITIONS OF PREVAILING PRAYER--No. 3

Text.--Matt. 7:7, 8: "Ask, and it shall be given you."

Text.--James 4:3: "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, to consume it upon your lusts."

In a former discourse on this text, I mentioned, among other conditions of prevailing prayer, that confession should be made to those whom our sins have injured, and also to God. It is most plain that all sins should be confessed to God, that we may obtain forgiveness and be reconciled to him; else how can we have communion of soul with him? And who can for a moment doubt that our confessions should not omit those of our fellow beings whom we have injured?

2. In the next place I remark that restitution should be made to God and to man.

To man we should make restitution in the sense of undoing as far as possible the wrong we have done, and repairing and making good all the evil. If we have impeached character wrongfully, we must recall and undo it. If we have injured another even by mistake, we are bound, if the mistake come to our knowledge, to set it right,--else we are criminal in allowing it to remain uncorrected. If the injury done by us to our neighbor affect his property, we must make restitution.

But I wish to call your attention more especially to the restitution which we are to make to God. And in respect to this, I do not mean to imply that we can make good our wrongs against God in the sense of really restoring that which we have withheld or taken away; but we can render to him whatever yet remains. The time yet to be given us we can devote to him, although the past has gone beyond recall. Our talents and influence and wealth, yet to be used, we may freely and fully use for God; and manifestly, so much as this, God and reason require of us, and it were vain for us to hope to be accepted in prayer unless we seriously intend to render all the future to God.

Let us look more closely into this subject. How many of you have been robbing God,--robbing him for a long time, and on a large scale? Let us see.

(1.) We all belong to God. We are his property in the highest possible sense. He brought us into being, gave us all we have, and made us all we are; so that He is our rightful owner in a far higher sense than that in which any man can own any thing whatever.

(2.) All we have and are, therefore, is due to God. If we withhold it, we are just so far forth guilty of robbing God. And all this robbery from God, we are unquestionably bound, as far as possible, to make up.

(3.) Do any of you still question whether men ever do truly rob God? Examine this point thoroughly. If any of you were to slip into a merchant's store and filch money from his drawer; you could not deny that the act is theft. You take, criminally, from your fellow-man what belongs to him and does not at all belong to yourself. Now can it be denied that, whenever by sin you withhold from God what is due to him, you as really rob God as any one can steal from a merchant's drawer? God owns all men and all their services in a far higher sense than that in which any merchant owns the money in his drawer. God rightfully claims the use of all your talents, wealth, and time for himself--for his own glory and the good of his creatures. Just so far,

therefore, as you use yourselves for yourselves, you as really rob God as if you appropriated to yourself any thing that belongs of right to your neighbor.

(4.) Stealing differs from robbery chiefly in this: the former is done secretly;-the latter by violence, in spite of resistance, or, as the case may be, of remonstrance. If you go secretly, without the knowledge of the owner, and take what is his, you steal; if you take aught of his openly--by force--against his known will, you rob. These two crimes differ not essentially in spirit; either is considered a serious trespass upon the rights of a fellow-man. Robbery has usually this aggravation; viz. that it puts the owner in fear. But the case may be such that the owner may do all he wisely can to prevent being robbed, and yet you may rob him without exciting alarm and causing him the additional evil of fear. Even in this case, there might still be the essential ingredient of robbery; forcibly taking from another what is his and not yours.

(5.) Now how is it that we sin against God? The true answer is, we tear ourselves away from his service. We wrest our hearts by a species of moral violence away from the claims he lays upon us. He says--Ye shall serve me, and no other God but me. This is his first and great command; and verily, none can be greater than this. No claim can be stronger than God's upon us.

Still, it evermore leaves our will free, so that we can rebel and wrest ourselves away from the service of God, if we will do so. And what is this but real robbery?

Suppose it were possible for me to own a man. I know we all deny the possibility of this, our relations to each other as men being what they are; but for illustration it may be supposed that I have created a man and hence own him in as full a sense as God owns us all. Still he remains a free agent,--yet solemnly bound to serve me continually. But despite of my claims on him and of all I can wisely do to retain him in my service, he runs away; tears himself from my service. Is not this real robbery? Robbery too of a most absolute kind? He owed me every thing; he leaves me nothing.

So the sinner robs God. Availing himself of his free agency, he tears himself away from God, despite of all his rightful owner can do to enlist his affections, enforce his own claims, and retain his willing allegiance. This is robbery. It is not done secretly, like stealing, but openly, before the sun; and

violently too, as in the case of real robbery. It is done despite of all God can wisely do to prevent it.

(6.) Hence all sin is robbery. It can never be any thing less than wresting from God what is rightfully his. It is therefore by no figure of speech that God calls this act robbery. Will a man rob God? "Yet ye have robbed me, even this whole nation." Sin is never any thing less than this,--a moral agent owned by the highest possible title, yet tearing himself away from his rightful owner, despite of all persuasions and of all claims.

(7.) Hence, if any man would prevail with God, he must bring back himself and all that remains not yet squandered and destroyed. Yes, let him come back saying--Here I am, Lord; I have played the fool and have erred exceedingly, I am ashamed that I have used up so much of thy time,--have consumed in sin so much of that strength of mind and body which is thine;--ashamed that I have employed these hands and this tongue and all these members of my body in serving myself and Satan, and have wrested them away from thy service: Lord, I have done most wickedly and meanly; thou seest that I am ashamed of myself, and I feel that I have wronged thee beyond expression.

So you should come before God. See that thief, coming back to confess and make restitution. Does he not feel a deep sense of shame and guilt? Now unless you are willing to come back and humbly confess and freely restore to God the full use of all that yet remains, how can you hope to be accepted?

(8.) You may well be thankful that God does not require of you that you restore all you have wrested from him and guiltily squandered; all your wasted time and health perhaps, and influence;--if He were to demand this, it would at once render your acceptance before him, and your salvation too, impossible. It would be forever impossible, on such a condition, that you should prevail in prayer.

Blessed be God, He does not demand this. He is willing to forgive all the past--but remember, only on the condition that you bring back all the rest--all that yet remains to be used of yourself and of the powers God has given or may yet give you.

So much as this God must require as a condition; and why should He not?

Suppose you have robbed a man of all you can possibly get away from him; and you know that the facts are all known to him. Yet you come before him without a confession or a blush and ask him to receive you to his confidence and friendship. He turns upon you--Are not you the man who robbed me? You come to me as if you have never wronged me, and as if you had done nothing to forfeit my confidence and favor; do you come and ask my friendship again? Monstrous!

Now would it be strange if God were, in a similar case, to repel an unhumbled sinner in the same way? Can the sinner who comes back to God with no heart to make any restitution, or any consecration of himself to God, expect to be accepted? Nothing can be more unreasonable.

(9.) It is indeed nothing less than infinite goodness that God can forgive trespasses so great, so enormous as ours have been;--O what a spectacle of loving-kindness is this! Suppose a man had stolen from you ten thousand pounds, and having squandered it all, should be thrown in his rags and beggary at your door. There you see him wasted and wan, hungry and filthy, penniless and wretched; and your heart is touched with compassion. You freely forgive all. You take him up; you weep over his miseries; you wash him, clothe him, and make him welcome to your house and to all the comforts you can bestow upon him. How would all the world admire your conduct as generous and noble in the very highest degree!

But O, the loving-kindness of God in welcoming to his bosom the penitent, returning sinner! How it must look in the eyes of angels! They see the prodigal returning, and hear him welcomed openly to the bosom of Jehovah's family. They see him coming along, wan, haggard, guilty, ashamed, in tattered and filthy robes, and downcast mien--nothing attractive in his appearance; he does not look as if he ever was a son, so terribly has sin defaced the lineaments of sonship; but he comes, and they witness the scene that follows. The Father spies him from afar, and rushes forth to meet him. He owns him as a son; falls upon his neck, pours out tears of gladness at his return, orders the best robe and the fatted calf, and fills his mansion with all the testimonies of rejoicing.

Angels see this--and O, with what emotions of wonder and delight! What a spectacle must this be to the whole universe--to see God coming forth thus to meet the returning penitent! To see that He not only comes forth to take

notice of him, but to answer his requests and enter into such communion with him, and such relations, that this once apostate sinner may now ask what he will and it shall be done unto him.

I have sometimes thought that if I had been present when Joseph made himself known to his brethren, I should have been utterly overwhelmed. I can never read the account of that scene without weeping.

I might say the same of the story of the prodigal son. Who can read it without tears of sympathy? O, to have seen it with one's own eyes--to have been there, to have seen the son approaching, pale and trembling;--the father rushing forth to meet him with such irrepressible tenderness and compassion;--such a spectacle would be too much to endure!

(10.) And now let me ask--What if the intelligent universe might see the great God receiving to his bosom a returning, penitent sinner. O, what an interest must such a scene create throughout all heaven! But just such scenes are transpiring in heaven continually. We are definitely told there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents. Surely all heaven must be one perpetual glow of excitement--such manifestations are ever going forward there of infinite compassion towards sinners returning from their evil ways.

Yet be it evermore remembered,--no sinner can find a welcome before the face of God unless he returns most deeply penitent. Ah! you do not know God at all if you suppose He can receive you without the most thorough penitence and the most ample restitution. You must bring back all that remains unwasted and unsquandered. You must look it all over most carefully and honestly, and say--Here, Lord, is the pitiful remnant--the small amount left: all the rest I have basely and most unprofitably wasted and used up in my course of sin and rebellion. Thou seest how much I have squandered, and how very little is left to be devoted now to thy service. O! what an unprofitable servant I have been; and how miserably unprofitable have I made myself for all the rest of my life.

It were well for every hearer to go minutely into this subject. Estimate and see how many years of your life have gone, never to be recalled. Some of these young people have more years remaining, according to the common laws of life, than we who are farther advanced in years. Yet even you have

sad occasion to say--Alas, how many of the best years of my life are thrown away, yes, worse than thrown into the sea; for in fact they have been given to the service of the devil. How many suits of clothing worn out in the ways of sin and the work of Satan. How many tons of provisions--food for man, provided under the bounty of a gracious Providence--have I used up in my career of rebellion against my Maker and Father! O, if it were all now to rise up before me and enter with me into judgment--if each day's daily bread, used up in sin, were to appear in testimony against me; what a scene must the solemn reckoning be!

Let each sinner look this ground all over, and think of the position he must occupy before an abused yet most gracious God, and then say--How can you expect to prevail with God if you do not bring back with a most penitent and devoted heart, all that remains yet to you of years and of strength for God.

How much more, if more be possible, is this true of those who are advanced in years. How fearfully have we wasted our substance and our days in vain! How then shall we hope to conciliate the favor of God and prevail with him in prayer, unless we bring back all that remains to us, and consecrate it a whole offering to the Lord our God?

3. We must pass now to another condition of prevailing prayer; namely, that we be reconciled to our brother.

On this subject you will at once recollect the explicit instructions of our Lord; "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

This passage states very distinctly one important condition of acceptable prayer, and shows that all men are not at all times in a fit state to pray. They may be in a state in which they have no right to pray at all. If they were to come before the Lord's altar in this state, He would bid them suspend their offering of prayer, go back at once, and be reconciled to their brother.

(1.) It is important for men to understand that they should approach God in prayer only when they have a right to pray. Others seem entirely to misconceive the relations of prayer to God and to themselves, and think that their prayers are a great favor to God. They seem to suppose that they lay the

Lord under great obligations to themselves by their prayers, and if they have made many prayers, and long, they think it quite hard if the Lord does not acknowledge his obligation to them, and grant them a speedy answer. Indeed, they seem almost ready to fall into a quarrel with God if He does not answer their prayers.

I knew one man who on one occasion prayed all night. Morning came, but no answer from God. For this he was so angry with God, that he was tempted to cut his own throat. Indeed, so excited were his feelings and so sharp was this temptation, that he threw away his knife the better to resist it. This shows how absurdly men feel and think on this subject.

Suppose you owed a man a thousand dollars, and should take it into your head to discharge the debt by begging him to release and forgive it. You renew your prayer every time you see him, and if he is at any distance you send him a begging letter by every mail. Now inasmuch as you have done your part as you suppose, you fall into a passion if he won't do his and freely relinquish your debt. Would not this be on your part sufficiently absurd, sufficiently ridiculous and wrong?

So with the sinner and God. Many seem to suppose that God ought to forgive. They will have it that He is under obligation to them to pardon and put away from his sight all their sins the moment they choose to say.

(2.) Now God has indeed promised on certain conditions to forgive; and the conditions being fulfilled, he certainly will fulfil his promise; yet never because it is claimed as a matter of justice or right. His promises all pertain to an economy of mercy and not of strict justice.

When men pray aright, God will hear and answer; but if they pray as a mere duty, or pray to make it a demand on the score of justice, they fundamentally mistake the very idea of prayer.

But I must return to the point under consideration.

4. Sometimes we have no right to pray.

"When thou bringest thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift, and go, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." The meaning of this precept seems to

be plain. If you are conscious of having wronged your brother, go at once and undo that wrong. If you know that he has any good reason for having aught against you, go and remove that reason as far as lies in your power to do so. Else how can you come before God to ask favors of Him?

Here it is important to understand certain cases which though they may seem, yet do not really come under the spirit of this rule. Another man may suppose himself to have been injured by me, yet I may be entirely conscientious in feeling that I have done no otherwise than right towards him, and still I may be utterly unable to remove from his mind the impression that I have wronged him. In this case, I am by no means cut off from the privilege of prayer.

Thus it often happens when I preach against backsliders that they feel exceedingly hurt and think I have wronged them unpardonably; whereas I may have been only honest and faithful to my Master and to their own souls. In such a case I am not to be debarred the privileges of prayer in consequence of their feelings towards me. It were indeed most absurd that this should shut me away from the mercy-seat. If I am conscious of having done no wrong, the Lord will draw me near to himself. In such a case as this I can make no confession of wrong-doing.

But the case contemplated by our Lord is one which I know I have done wrong to my neighbor. Knowing this, I have no right to come before God to pray until I have made restitution and satisfaction.

(1.) Sometimes professors of religion have come to me and asked, Why are we not heard and answered? We pray a great deal, yet the Lord does not answer our prayers.

Indeed, I have asked them--Do you not recollect many times when in the act of prayer you have been reminded of having injured a brother, and yet you did not go to him and make restitution, or even confession? Yes, many have said; I can recollect such cases; but I passed them over, and did not trouble myself with them, I do not know that I thought much about the necessity of making confession and restitution, at all events I know I soon forgot those thoughts of having wronged my neighbor.

(2.) You did, indeed; but God did not forget. He remembered your dishonesty and your neglect, or perhaps contempt of one of his plainly taught conditions

of acceptable prayer, and he could not hear you. Until you had gone and become reconciled to your brother, what have you to do with praying? Your God says to you--Why do you come here before me to lie to my very face, pretending to be honest and upright towards your fellow-beings, when you know you have wronged them, and have never made confession and restitution?

In my labors as an Evangelist, I have sometimes fallen into a community who were most of them in this horrible state. Perhaps they had sent for me to come among them saying that they were all ready and ripe for a revival, and thus constrained me to go. On coming among them I have found the very opposite to be the fact. I would preach to the impenitent; many would be convicted; and awful solemnity would prevail; but no conversions. Then I would turn to the church and beg them to pray, and soon the fact would come out that they had no fellowship with each other and no mutual confidence; almost every brother and sister had hard feelings towards each other; many knew they had wronged their brethren and had never made confession or restitution; some had not even spoken kindly to one another for months; in short it was a state of real war; and how could the Dove of Peace abide there? And how could a righteous God hear their prayers? He could do no such thing till they repented in dust and ashes, and put away these abominable iniquities from before his face.

(3.) It often happens that professors of religion are exceedingly careless in respect to the conditions of prevailing prayer. What! Christian men and women in such a state that they will not speak to each other! In such relations to each other that they are ready to injure one another in the worst way--ready to mangle and rend each other's characters! Away with it! It is an offence to God! It is an utter abomination in his sight! He loathes the prayers and the professed worship of such men, as he loathes idolatry itself.

Now although cases as outrageous as those I have described, do not occur very frequently, yet many cases do occur which involve substantially the same principle. In respect to all such, let it be known that God is infinitely honest, and so long as he is so, he will not hold communion and fellowship with one who is dishonest. He expects us to be honest and truthful, willing ever to obey him, and ever anxious to meet all the conditions of acceptable prayer. Until this is the case with us, He cannot and will not hear us, however much and long we pray. Why

should he? "Thou requirest truth in the inward parts," said the Psalmist of his God, as if fully aware that entire sincerity of heart, and of course uprightness of life towards others, is an unalterable condition of acceptance before God. It is amazing to see how much insincerity there often is among professed Christians, both in their mutual relations to each other, and also in the relations to God.

5. Again, we ought always to have an honest and good reason for praying and for asking for the specific things we pray for.

(1.) It should be remembered that God is infinitely reasonable, and therefore does nothing without a reason. Therefore in all prayer you should always have a reason or reasons that will commend themselves to God as a valid ground for his hearing and answering your prayers.

You can have a rational confidence that God will hear you only when you know what your reasons are for praying and have good grounds to suppose they are such as will commend themselves to an infinitely wise and righteous God.

Beloved, are you in the habit of giving your attention sufficiently to this point? When you pray, do you ask for your own reasons? Do you enquire; Now have I such reasons for this prayer as God can sympathize with--such as I can suppose will have weight with his mind?

Surely this is an all-important enquiry. God will not hear us unless He sees that we have such reasons as will satisfy his own infinite intelligence--such reasons that He can wisely act in view of them;--such that He will not be ashamed to have the universe know that on such grounds He answered our prayers. They must be such that he will not be ashamed of them himself. For we should evermore consider that all God's doings are one day to be perfectly known. It will yet be known why he answered every acceptable prayer, and why he refused to answer each one that was not acceptable.

Hence if we are to offer prayer, or to do any thing else in which we expect God to sympathize with us, we ought to have good and sufficient reasons for what we ask or do.

(2.) You can not help seeing this at your first glance at the subject. Your prayer must not be selfish but benevolent--else how can God hear it? Will he lend himself to patronize and befriend your selfishness?

Suppose a man asks for the Holy Spirit to guide him in any work; or suppose he ask for that Spirit to sanctify himself or his friends. Let him be always able to give a good reason for what he asks. Is his ultimate reason a selfish one--for example, that he may become more distinguished in the world, or may prosecute some favorite scheme for himself and his own glory or his own selfish good? Let him know that the Lord has no sympathy with such reasons for prayer.

Thus a child comes before its parent, and says, Do give me this or that favor. Your reason, my child, says the parent;--give me your reason; what do you want it for?

So God says to us, his children;--your reason, my child; what is your reason? You ask, it may be, for an education; why do you want an education? You say, Lord furnish me the means to pay my tuition bills and by board bills and my clothing bills, for I want to get an education. Your reason, my child, the Lord will answer; your reason; for what end to you want to get an education? You must be able to give a good reason. If you want these things you ask for, only that you may consume them upon your lusts; if your object be to climb up to some higher post among men, or to get your living with less toil, or with more respectability, small ground have you to expect that the Lord will sympathize with any such reasons. But if your reasons be good: if they are such that God will not be ashamed to recognize them as his own reasons for acting, then you will find him infinitely ready to hear and to answer. O, he will bow his ear with infinite grace and compassion.

(3.) Your hope of success in prayer therefore should not lie in the amount, but in the quality of your prayers. If you have been in the habit of praying without regard to the reasons why you ask, you have probably been in the habit of mocking God. Unless you have an errand when you come before the Lord, it is mocking to come and ask for any thing. There should always be something which you need. Now, therefore, ask yourself,--Why do I want this thing which I ask of God? Do I need it? For what end do I need it?

A woman of my acquaintance was praying for the conversion of an impenitent husband. She said, "It would be so much more pleasant for me to have him go to meeting with me, and to have him think and feel as I do." When she was asked--Is your heart broken because your husband abuses God, because he dishonors Jesus Christ, she replied, she never had thought

of that--never; her husband had troubled and grieved her, she knew; but she had not once thought of his having abused and provoked the great and holy God.

How infinitely different must that woman's state of mind become before the Lord can hear and answer her prayer! Can she expect an answer so long as she takes only a selfish view of the case? No, never until she can say, O my God, my heart is full of bleeding and grief because my husband dishonors thee; my soul is in agony because he scorns the dying blood and the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

So when parents urge their requests for the salvation of their children, let them know that if they sympathize with God, he will sympathize with them. If they are chiefly distressed because their children do not love and serve their own God and Savior, the Lord will most assuredly enter into the deep sympathies of their hearts, and will delight to answer their requests. So of the wife when she prays for her husband, so universally when friend prays for friend. The great God seems to say evermore--"If you sympathize with me, I sympathize with you." He is a being of infinite sympathies, and never can fail to reciprocate the holy feelings of his creatures. Let the humblest subject in his universe feel sincere regard for the honor and glory of God and the well being of his kingdom, and how suddenly is it reciprocated by the Infinite Father of all! Let one of all the myriads of his creatures in earth or heaven be zealous for God, then assuredly will God be zealous for him, and will find means to fulfil his promise,--"Them that honor me I will honor." But if you will not feel for him and will not take his part, it is vain for you to ask or expect that he will feel for you and take your part.

(4.) It is indeed a blessed consideration that when we go out of ourselves and merge our interest in the interests of God and of his kingdom, then he gathers himself all round about us, throws his banner of love over us, and draws our hearts into inexpressible nearness of communion with himself. Then the Eternal God becomes our own God, and underneath us are his almighty arms. Then whoever should "touch us, would touch the apple of his eye." There can be no love more watchful, more strong, more tender, than that borne by the God of infinite love towards his affectionate, trustful children. He would move heaven and earth if need be, to hear prayer offered in such a spirit.

O for a heart to immerse and bathe ourselves, as it were, in the sympathies of Jehovah--to yield up really our whole hearts to him, until our deepest and most perfect emotions should gush and flow out only in perfect harmony with his will, and we should be swallowed up in God, knowing no will but his, and no feelings but in sympathy with his. Then wave after wave of blessings would roll over us, and God would delight to let the universe see how intensely he is pleased with such a spirit in his creatures. O then you would need only put yourself in an attitude to be blessed and you could not fail of receiving all you could ask that could be really a good to your soul and to God's kingdom. Almost before you should call, He would answer and while you were yet speaking he would hear. Opening wide your soul in large expectation and strong faith before God, you might take a large blessing, even "until there should not be room enough to receive it."

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own

gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology*

(LECTURE III).

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE XXXIV).

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE XXXVIII).

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE LV).

End of the 1847 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1848
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Lecture I. [Refuges of Lies](#)
Lecture II. [The Spirit Not Striving Always](#)
Lecture III. [The Excuses of Sinners Condemn God](#)
Lecture IV. [Conditions of Being Saved](#)
Lecture V. [Substitution](#)
Lecture VI. [Pride of Heart Deceives](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Refuges of Lies

Lecture I

September 27, 1848

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Isa. 28:17: "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place."

If we would understand this passage, it is important that we should consider the context attentively. This will show what class of people are referred to in the text, and what position they are supposed to occupy.

"Whom shall He teach knowledge? and whom shall He make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, and precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: for with stammering lips and another tongue will He speak to His people. To whom He said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. But the word of the Lord was unto them, precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken. Wherefore hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, we have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place."

The class of persons spoken of here enjoyed great religious privileges. The word of the Lord came to them, "precept upon precept," and they had most abundant means of knowing its revealed truths and enjoined duties. But they did not love these truths and would not do these duties. Consequently, restive under the unwelcome pressure of truth upon their consciences, they sought relief under some refuge of lies. It will be my present object to notice some of the many refuges of lies to which men are wont to resort when their consciences are ill at ease.

1. A selfish religion. This is one of the most common delusions among men. In this case selfishness, instead of seeking worldly good alone, elevates its aim and seeks heaven. Selfishness is usually distinguished for its grasping some earthly good, in a spirit of reckless disregard alike of others' rights and interests, and of the known will of God. But it is not the character of the good it seeks which makes it selfishness; but rather the spirit with which the good is sought.

Thus in the case of the selfish religionist, his general end is the same now as ever--personal happiness; and the spirit in which he seeks it is the same as ever--a spirit that seeks and cares for nothing but its own individual good; but the means by which he pursues his end are changed, for now he resorts to religion as his means, while heretofore he has been content to seek it from the world, with no semblance of religion in his course. Now while his ultimate end remains the same, no change of the means for attaining it can change the man's moral character, or the moral quality of his conduct. In this case now contemplated, the individual aims at securing an interest for himself as really and as exclusively as ever. While he was careless about religion, he sought this selfish good from the world; now he seeks it from religion: before he sought to press his fellow men and every earthly agency into his service; now he seeks to make the Almighty God his infinite servant, and to dragoon the gospel into an instrumentality for securing his own eternal interests. This form of delusion is, as I have said, exceedingly common.

It is also very subtle, often so subtle that the deluded man is not at all aware that he has not in fact the very religion of the Bible. He might indeed see the truth if he would be faithful and honest, for it would stand out most plain and palpable to the eye of honest scrutiny. Whoever will may know as to himself whether all his religion is or is not selfish; whether or not all his seeking of heaven is a merely selfish seeking.

2. Another refuge of lies exists in a religion of impulse.

This also is a selfish religion, but of a different form from the preceding, and it manifests itself in a different way. The man of this kind of religion is governed by his sensibility, or in other words, by his feelings, and not by the law of God as revealed to his intelligence. He thinks himself very religious because he has so much feeling. He supposes himself to be very sincere, for

he is conscious of having much feeling and many strong desires, and of being exercised by these feelings and desires. And as he assumes this to be religion, he infers that he has real religion, and has it in an unusual degree.

This also is a very subtle form of delusion. For it is intrinsically right that the sensibility should be affected by religious truth. That it should be, will always appear fitting and proper to the human mind. But the mistake lies in making religion consist in this, and in making this the whole of religion; whereas nothing is more demonstrable than that religion must essentially consist in the will's allegiance to truth as revealed from God to man and apprehended by his intelligence. But more of this anon. This type of delusion is subtle because the subject of it is entirely conscious of having great feeling, and of being governed by it also. If he had no feeling, or if he had but little, he would suspect himself of being deceived as to his own piety; but having much feeling, as he very well knows, he feels quite sure of possessing most extraordinary and praiseworthy piety.

Now it should be considered that true religion carries with it deep feelings; but deep feelings may exist without religion; for true religion consists in the mind's being influenced by the intelligence and not by the sensibility. Deep feeling is in the Christian's mind, but it does not govern there. True and well-instructed Christians know that the impulses of the sensibility, however strong, are not religion. They regard these impulses as accompanying, but not as constituting real piety. They know that these feelings are the natural result of certain views presented to the mind, and hence they see at once the mistake of regarding them as in themselves either the evidence or the measure of piety.

I have often been struck with developments of this delusion in seasons of revival. Persons of naturally strong feelings will often seem to act like real Christians. They do indeed feel strongly, and for a season they are governed by these feelings. But these states and exercises do not involve the action of the will, in subservience to the demands of the intelligence, and hence in regard to their moral nature they are passive and not active, and therefore not virtuous. And yet these persons in revival appear not only religious but eminently so. But these impulses soon subside--their excitements cool off; they become no less excited on other subjects, and then they show to everyone what spirit they have. Being creatures of feeling and sensibility,

they follow the current of public feeling and the popular mind as sure as the straw floats down the rippling flood. Who has not seen persons of this stamp in every community? You may always expect them to be powerfully moved in every great revival, but they will just as certainly be moved by anything else that appeals strongly to their sensibility. Indeed they are constitutionally excitable and easily moved, and have not learned the solemn duty of being governed by the will and the intelligence, but float along in the uniform practice of being governed by their feelings.

Now I am not speaking against having feeling on religious subjects, but against being governed by it. I urge that it is wrong to seek supremely to gratify these feelings, irrespective of the claims of the intelligence. This is my position.

No subject more deeply interests the sensibility than religion. None with more power breaks up the fountains of the great deep of human feeling than this. Hence persons who make their excited feelings the whole of their religion, may luxuriate in their exercise and float along upon their current, deceiving and being deceived till they die. How fatally subtle oftentimes is this delusion!

3. Another refuge of lies consists in a religion of opinion--or mere orthodoxy.

It might be supposed that in this place there would be very little danger of this form of delusion. But there is danger even among us. Some even here hold in theory the doctrine of sanctification, think much of it, glory in defending it and make it a great thing, and yet seem to be very far from embracing the doctrine in the love of it, and from imbibing the spirit of it into their hearts. Now it matters not how good or how true your orthodoxy may be; if it is only opinion and theory in your head and not love and obedience in your heart, it is nothing better than sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

4. Sectarian religion is another form of delusion.

But can this be found among us? Do we not all belong to one church? Can it be that we need to have sectarianism preached against here? Many even among us I fear, are in this sin who are not themselves aware of it. I fear that some who defend Oberlin, do it on sectarian grounds and in a sectarian spirit.

To be sure they are not sticklish for baptism, or election, or any of the common points of sectarian controversy; but they are most zealous for Oberlin, and often may be really more zealous to make men friends of Oberlin than to make them friends of Christ.

This is a most insidious delusion, wherever it may develop itself. It is perilous out of Oberlin, and no less perilous in Oberlin. And its danger does not turn upon the question whether the points contended for are true or false. It is dangerous to contend for the best truth ever revealed from God, if your zeal for it is a selfish zeal, and if you judge yourself a Christian because you have it.

5. Another delusion to be considered, is really a form of self-righteousness. It often manifests itself in this way. Men put external right-doing in the place of real benevolence of heart. They mean to do right towards their fellow men, but confine themselves to executive acts and overlook that in which real moral character inheres. They quite overlook the heart, and seem to forget that if there be not true love to God in all they do, nothing can be right at all. Suppose a man seeks to be honest in his business; is this all that God requires? Do we need to be told that nothing can be right even in our commercial business unless done for God, unless the motive be to glorify God--unless the great end be to honor God and do good to men? And yet a man will talk about being honest in his business, as if he might have this virtue, though he has no regard for God and no religion whatever at heart. He looks upon his own moral conduct very complacently. If a man comes into his store to trade he means to deal fairly with him. He estimates the cost of his articles--add a fair profit--takes no advantage by deceiving either as to quality or quantity. Very well; so he thinks. But suppose a man should pursue this honest course his life long; is this the whole of doing right? Is it in fact even the beginning of it? Must we not go farther back and ask--for what end is all this honesty? What does this honest man really aim at? Is it his aim to glorify God, or to benefit himself? Is all this a real love to man because God requires such love, or is it a wise and far-sighted seeking of his own personal advantages?

Said an individual very sick and apparently near death, "I have always been honest in all my dealings with men; in all this I have nothing to reproach myself with; but O, as far as my God is concerned, all is dark--I have done

nothing right to my God."

Now there is embodied here one of the most common forms of delusion--one of the most common and also the most perfectly fatal. It overlooks the fact that unless the mind be consecrated to God, there can be no real honesty at all; that unless a man treat his fellow men right for God, in view of the claims of God, and as obedience to God, it is no right doing at all. For how does God require you to treat your brother man? Does He ask only that you would not cheat him in business? Does God ask nothing more than this? Does not the law of God require that you should love your neighbor as yourself? And is it not also implied that you are to love him as one of God's created children, and in the spirit as to yourself of a dutiful and affectionate son towards God? Your love to him must therefore be that of a dutiful brother in the great family of God--a brother whom God, your Father, requires you to love as yourself.

Hence the man who thinks his duty all done towards his fellow man if he has simply forborne to cheat him, is egregiously deceived. Doing duty to God is indispensable for really doing duty to man. If anyone has loved his brother man right, then has he also loved his Father, God; for there can be nothing right in this matter which does not most fully and heartily recognize this great and blessed family relation. Loving man must be done as duty to God--from love to God, and with a distinct recognition of God as the common Father of both myself and my brother.

Thus, really to love man right implies loving God also. And on the other hand a proper love to God implies loving man also. You can not be in a benevolent state of mind towards God, without being also in a benevolent state towards His creatures. The very nature of religion and love implies that if we love God we shall also love His offspring. We cannot keep the first great command without keeping the second also.

It is remarkable that you may often detect the real state of your heart towards God by observing closely your state towards man; and so on the other hand you may learn your true position towards man by noticing your position towards God. For nothing can be more certain and invariable than this law of mind, namely, that if it be really in a benevolent state, its benevolence will be exercised towards both God and man, and indeed towards all known sentient beings.

Hence when a man on his death-bed says--"I have done all my duty towards man, but alas! all is wrong in regard to my duties to God," he certainly deceives himself. There can not be such a state as that which he supposes his to be. For he certainly has not done his duty towards man if his heart has at the same time been alien and apostate from God.

6. Another refuge of lies consists in an Antinomian religion. In this, men rest in a faith which is not sanctifying. They have abandoned the idea of being saved by works, and have fallen back upon faith, but yet it is upon a faith that fails to sanctify--a faith which does not lead them to consecrate their all to God. This is an Antinomian faith--the very same of which the apostle James said, "Show me thy faith without thy works, (if thou canst) and I will show thee my faith by my works." An Antinomian faith can never bear this test; for by the very supposition it begets no good works at all.

A sister in the Church once said in a prayer meeting, "I used to dwell much upon faith, but had little regard for works. My mind was constantly ranging upon faith, faith, but it was a faith which never led me to duty--it only kept me waiting, and--idle."

Now this is a most dangerous delusion. This resting in a faith which acts only as an opiate; which gives no stimulus at all to the soul towards either love, or the labor which love begets; this must be a gross and most fatal delusion. You will see at a glance that this is not that Bible faith which worketh by love, and which in the ancient worthies "wrought righteousness, obtained promises, quenched the violence of fire, made the weak strong, and put to flight the armies of the aliens." O this do-nothing religion, which professes to live upon Christ, but does nothing that Christ commands--this is not the religion of our ancient Bible! It is the same which our Lord portrays only to condemn it; one in which men cry, "Lord, Lord," but do not the things which He says. What can be a more fatal delusion than this?

7. Universalism is another refuge of lies. This system varies in some of its minor points, but in one great leading feature it remains ever the same--it always denies the justice of endless punishment. However much the advocates of Universalism may differ from each other in the less important points, they all agree that all men will ultimately be saved; that sin does not deserve an endless punishment; and that it would therefore be unjust in God

to inflict it.

Hence, whatever modification this system may put on, it will practically make sin out to be a mere trifle. For example, they will tell you that men are fully punished for all their sin as they go along--that the evil necessarily incidental to sinning in this life is all the punishment it deserves. The slight compunction of conscience, more or less, that wicked men feel for sin, together with possibly some providential evils, is all that God can justly inflict upon them as a punishment!

Think of this! Look at it! What sort of religion is this? To say that all the punishment which sin deserves is a little compunction of conscience, and perhaps some providential trials in this life!--a little trouble which some men have as they go along in consequence of sinning! I want to know if this is not blaspheming God in the worst possible manner! It lifts up its brazen front before heaven and tells God--"Thou great Jehovah--sin against Thee is a small matter--Thy laws are a mean affair--if I trample on them and roll them in the dust, and grind my heel upon them, what is that to Thee? Who art Thou that Thou shouldst take in hand to punish such things in Thy creatures with any positive inflictions of suffering? Dost Thou not know that the sinner's troubles in this life are full as much punishment as his sin deserves?"

Now see in this what Universalism is. See how it spits at God! Hear it proclaim, "Who art Thou that sin against Thee should be a thing of any account?"

And what is this but an attempt to dethrone Jehovah? It would fain make sin the merest trifle in the universe. And shall not the hail sweep away this refuge of lies? If it does not, then God will have forgotten to sustain His own honor and His own glorious throne.

But you say that you don't deserve any other punishment than the natural compunctions of your conscience, and the attendant troubles of sinning in this life!

Indeed! all the time receiving good from the hand of God, cradled from your birth in His very arms--fed from His own table--every want supplied from His exhaustless bounty--and yet, though you scorn to remember God with gratitude, and though you trample His law in the dust, yet you don't deserve

any other punishment for your sin than you get from your conscience and from providence, as you go along! O what outrageous abuse of God! And what a shameless perversion of human reason! I know not how to express the indignation I feel at such insults offered to God. O, to think how they are contemning their own most gracious Father! He is fattening them on the bounties of His providence, and yet they deserve, they say, no punishment for sin--no hell after death! What a ridiculous delusion is this! Was there ever a more striking proof afforded of the degree to which sin can stultify the human intelligence!

This doctrine of Universalism of course rejects salvation by Christ. Its advocates may sometimes talk about being saved by Christ; but they mean nothing by it, for they hold that men are punished all they deserve in this world as they go along. Of course if punished all they deserve in this world they are not pardoned at all. But salvation by Christ is pardon; if it mean anything it must include the idea of forgiveness, or pardon, so that the sinner saved by Christ is not punished, but pardoned. But Universalism punishes the sinner all he deserves, and yet pardons him too! It makes him suffer the full and utmost penalty of God's law, and at the same time saves him by Christ., so that he shall be pardoned, and not punished at all! What superb nonsense is this!

And again, what curious ideas of law and government are these which make the penalty of sin only the slight evils endured here from an uneasy conscience, and from a disciplinary providence. Here, in this world, is the sinner's hell--here, where sinners are in the main happy in all their sins, and yet are suffering the full penalty of God's law! Ah, what notions of God's law must Universalists have!

This system strangely confounds justice with mercy. It punishes men to chasten and reform them, and this strange process is identical with forgiveness! Inflicting the penalty of law on principles of strict justice is with them the same thing as forgiveness and mercy! For here, in this world, on every sinner, precisely this development takes place--God punishes him all he deserves, in His justice; and yet pardons him most freely through Christ, in His mercy! Surely this is mixing up and confounding together justice and mercy--very much as if men had no just idea of either.

Again, Universalists confound the benevolence of God with mere good

nature. God is in their view so good-natured that He will make no discrimination as to character. O He loves all men most comprehensively and altogether alike! So pure good-natured is He!

The favorite term with them to designate their opponents is "partialists," assuming that it would be partial in God to save one and not another. This can appear plausible only to the most short-sighted intelligence. For, consider--Is a ruler impartial who treats the righteous and the wicked alike? Is this impartiality? Can justice treat men of opposite character and opposite merits, just alike? There is the case of Abraham's prayer for Sodom, "O Lord," he says, "wilt Thou destroy the righteous with the wicked?" Would that be right? That the righteous should be treated as the wicked are--"be this far from Thee, O Lord!" "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Now here, with the best good sense and reason, Abraham assumes that God would be partial and unjust if He were to treat the righteous and the wicked all alike, and he pleads as if he felt most sure that the Judge of all the earth would do no such thing. Abraham was no Universalist.

Impartiality implies dealing with men according to their deserts. Therefore if God saves all men, be they righteous or wicked, He cannot be impartial, but must be partial.

Again, persons who hold this delusion must count Paul a madman. Hear him: "I say the truth in Christ; I lie not; my conscience bears me witness that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart for my brethren;" and why?

He tells us, moreover, that in one city, "by the space of three years he ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears."

But why is all this? If Paul really believed that all men will certainly be saved, what is he warning them against? And why those tears, and that continual heaviness and agony of spirit? Is he warning them to flee from the wrath to come? O no--no; but he trembles lest they should not all become Universalists. He finds that some of them are skeptical upon this doctrine, and hence are afraid of being finally lost, and he cannot endure that their minds should be disturbed by such fears for the few days of the mortal life. O he is in the greatest agony lest he shall not convert all his Jewish brethren

and all the Gentiles of Ephesus to the belief of universal salvation!! He is in dreadful agony of soul lest they should be troubled with fears of being lost! Alas, lest they should never become Universalists! And this is the Universalist's version of the character of the great apostle of the Gentiles!

But what does Paul say of himself? Does he tell us that in his view of the matter, Christ saves all? Aye, he says, that for himself, "he becomes all things to all men if by any means he might save some." And this is the extent of his Universalism!

Again, this doctrine represents Christ as either full of deceit or void of sense. Hear its explanation of Christ's words: Christ says, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Now look at the exposition put on this language by the Universalists. "Hell," he says, "means nothing but the grave. There is no other hell but the grave." Of course he makes Jesus Christ say this in the passage just cited--"Fear not the assassin or the executioner, who can only kill you; but I will forewarn you whom you should fear: fear him," who after you are dead can throw your soul and body into--the grave--aye, yes, fear the sexton!! Ah, consider--he has power to bury you after you are dead--I say unto you, fear him! Now if Universalism makes no other hell but the grave, then Universalism makes Christ either a consummately deceitful man, or a man sadly deficient of intellect!

I might pursue the follies and absurdities of this delusion much farther; but time forbids, and I must therefore forbear.

REMARKS.

1. These delusions are only refuges to which people betake themselves to evade the claims of God. Who does not know this? Do men resort to these refuges for any other purpose? Does any man resort to Universalism in order to make himself more holy? Does he incline towards that doctrine because he thirsts after holiness, and longs to make himself and others more like God? Whoever say an instance of this kind?

So of all these forms of delusion. They are refuges, and nothing else. They are got up to screen the soul from the pressure of obligation to do duty, or to avert the dreaded displeasure and wrath of God against sin.

2. A hail storm is one of the most striking emblems of the wrath of God against sin, which is ever seen in this world. Have you ever seen one? Its roar is dreadful. Rolling up its dark, heavy mass of cloud, it moves along in grand and awful majesty, as if the very ocean had burst from its bed and broken over its bounds, and were ready in an instant to dash its mountain torrents over us. I have not seen a hail storm for these many years without being reminded of this passage of Isaiah: "The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place." How full of terror and sublimity is this image of Jehovah's wrath! The roaring, rushing storm of all-destructive hail! It is as if the chariots of God were coming--coming with fire and storm and terrific indignation to overwhelm the guilty sinner in ruin under the out-burstings of His wrath.

Mark also how we are taught by varied figures, that the Lord will hunt out and destroy the fleeing, hiding sinner in the day of His enkindled anger. If the sinner has built up a refuge of lies, walling it in and supporting it with toil and care, the hail shall sweep it all away. If he betakes himself to caverns or to holes of the earth, "the waters shall overflow the hiding-place"--shall search him out and engulf him in ruin even there. What the wind and storm cannot batter down the overflowing waters will search out and sweep with remorseless ruin. For him who stands up against God there shall be no escape--no remedy--no hiding-place forever!

And now let me ask--Where are your hiding-places? Are you seeking to construct them with lies, and under falsehood to hide yourselves? Or are you standing firmly and calmly on the rock of eternal truth? Seek not to avoid the point of this question. Meet it, I pray you, in candor and honesty; for the sinner's refuge is in God alone.

Before I was myself a Christian, a man once said to me, "If Universalism is true, we are all safe; if false, all who rest on it for salvation are lost. I think it will be well to be on the safe side."

True enough, thought I, the view of the Universalist, if false, is an infinite mistake; it forfeits everything. Why then should I try to be a Universalist? Besides, if the doctrine be true, it cannot make me any better. Looking round on all the Universalists I knew, I asked myself, are they really holy men? Are they made any better men by their belief in this system? Are they made more holy by its influence? I could not even pretend that they were. Of course I must infer that

the system had nothing of real value to commend it.

But aside entirely from this, I do not believe that there are many men who are able to believe in Universalism. They may be able to deceive themselves so far as to hope that the system will prove true--just as many professors of religion cannot believe themselves to be Christians, but they can gather evidence perhaps to hope that they may be. But let them be summoned to die in one hour, and they would be in utter consternation! Perhaps they do not know that they are deceived, but they are very far from knowing that they are not. They content themselves to slide along, and put over their anxieties and cares about the certainty of the matter to some unknown future.

So the Universalist has no such assurance as would make him calm in death. I well recollect the case of Dr. B., who loved to converse with me before my conversion about his favorite doctrine of universal salvation. On one occasion our conversation took a very serious turn without our being aware of it. I asked him, "Doctor, are you satisfied with Universalism as a system of religious faith?" "No," said he, "I must confess, I am not. I told Elder J. the other day (his own Universalist preacher) that I really had so many doubts that I could get no peace from the doctrine; and he told me it was just so with himself, he could get no peace of mind in the doctrine, and he did not believe that any one else could."

For myself, this shocked me beyond measure. What, indeed! a professedly gospel minister preaching what does not convince himself of its truth--what he does not believe himself!--what gives him no peace of mind! Horrible!! This put an end forever to all my desire to be a Universalist. I had no longer any desire to hide myself under such a refuge of lies.

[Back to Top](#)

The Spirit Not Striving Always

Lecture II

October 11, 1848

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Gen. 6:3: "And the Lord said--my Spirit shall not always strive with man."

In speaking from this text, I shall pursue the following outline of thought, and attempt to show,

I. What is implied in the assertion, My Spirit shall not always strive with man;

II. What is not intended by the Spirit's striving;

III. What is intended by it;

IV. How it may be known when the Spirit strives with an individual;

V. What is intended by his not striving always;

VI. Why He will not always strive; and

VII. Some consequences of his ceasing to strive with men.

I. What is implied in the assertion--"My Spirit shall not always strive with man?"

1. It is implied in this assertion, that the Spirit does sometimes strive with men. It is nonsense to affirm that He will not strive always, if the fact of his striving sometimes be not implied. Beyond all question the text assumes the doctrine that God by his Spirit does strive sometimes with sinning men.

2. It is also implied that men resist the Spirit. For there can be no strife unless there be resistance. If sinners always yielded at once to the teachings and guidance of the Spirit, there could be no "striving" on the part of the Spirit, in the sense here implied, and it would be altogether improper to use the language here employed. In fact, the language of our text implies long-continued resistance--so long continued that God declares that the struggle shall not be kept up on his part forever.

I am well aware that sinners are prone to think that they do not resist God. They often think that they really want the Spirit of God to be with them, and to strive with them. What, indeed! Think of this! If a sinner really wanted the Spirit of God to convert or to lead him, how could he resist the Spirit? But in

fact he does resist the Spirit. What Stephen affirmed of the Jews of his time, is true in general of all sinners--"Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost." For if there were no resistance on the sinner's part, there could be no striving on the part of the Spirit. So that it is a mere absurdity that a sinner in a state of mind to resist the Spirit should yet sincerely desire to be led into truth and duty by the Spirit. But sinners are sometimes so deceived about themselves as to suppose that they want God to strive with them, while really they are resisting all He is doing, and are ready to resist all He will do. So blinded to their own true characters, are sinners.

II. But we must notice secondly, what is not intended by the Spirit's striving.

Here the main thing to be observed is that it is not any form of physical struggling, or effort whatever. It is not any force applied to our bodies. It does not attempt to urge us literally along toward God or heaven. This is not to be thought of at all.

III. What then is the striving of the Spirit?

I answer, it is an energy of God, applied to the mind of man, setting truth before his mind, debating, reasoning, convincing, and persuading. The sinner resists God's claims, cavils and argues against them; and then God by His Spirit meets the sinner and debates with him, somewhat as two men might debate and argue with each other. You are not however to understand that the Holy Ghost does this with an audible voice, to the human ear, but He speaks to the mind and to the heart. The inner ear of the soul can hear its whispers.

Our Saviour taught that when the Comforter should come, He would "reprove the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment." (John 16:7-11.) The term here rendered "reprove" refers in its proper sense to judicial proceedings. When the judge has heard all the testimony and the arguments of counsel, he sums up the whole case and lays it before the jury, bringing out all the strong points and making them bear with all their condensed and accumulated power, upon the condemnation of the criminal. This is reproofing him in the original and legitimate sense of the word used here by our Saviour. Thus the Holy Ghost reproves the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. Thus does the Spirit convince or convict the sinner by testimony, by argument, by arraying all the strong points of the case against him under circumstances of affecting solemnity and power.

IV. How may it be known when the Spirit of God strives with an individual.

1. Not by direct perception of his agency, through any of your physical senses; for his presence is not manifested to these organs. Not directly by our consciousness; for the only proper subjects of consciousness are the acts and states of our own minds. But we know the presence and agency of the Spirit by his works. The results He produces are the legitimate proofs of his presence. Thus a person under the Spirit's influence, finds his attention arrested to the great concerns of his soul. The solemn questions of duty and responsibility to God are continually intruding themselves upon his mind. If he is a student over his lesson, his mind is drawn away continually ere he is aware, to think of God and of the judgment to come. He turns his attention back to his books, but soon it is off again. How can he neglect these matters of infinite moment to his future well-being?

So with men of every calling; the Spirit of God turns the mind, and draws it to God and the concerns of the soul. When such results take place, you may know that the Spirit of God is the cause. For who does not know that this drawing and inclining of the mind toward God is by no means natural to the human heart? When it does occur therefore, we may know that the special agency of God is in it.

Again, when a man finds himself convinced of sin, he may know that this is the Spirit's work. Now it is one thing to know one's self to be a sinner, and quite another to feel a realizing sense of it, and to have the truth take hold mightily of the deepest sensibilities of the soul. The latter sometimes takes place. You may see the man's countenance fallen, his eye downcast, his whole aspect is as if he had disgraced himself by some foul crime, or as if he had suddenly lost all the friends he ever had. I have often met with impenitent sinners who looked condemned, as if conscious guilt had taken hold of their inmost soul. They would not be aware that they were revealing in their countenances the deep workings of their hearts, but the observing eye could not help seeing it. I have also seen the same among back slidden professors,--resulting from the same cause--the Spirit of God reproving them of sin.

2. Sometimes this conviction is of a general and sometimes of a more special nature. It may enforce only the general impression--"I am all wrong--I am utterly odious and hateful to God--my whole heart is a sink of

abomination in His sight;" or in other cases it may seize upon some particular form of sin, and hold it up before the sinner's mind, and make him see his infinite odiousness before God for this sin. It may be a sin he has never thought of before, or he may have deemed it a very light matter; but now, through the Spirit, it shall rise up before his mind in such features of ugliness and loathsomeness, that he will abhor himself. He sees sin in a perfectly new light. Many things are sins now, which he never deemed sins before.

Again, the Spirit not only convinces of the fact that such and such things are sins, but convicts the mind of the great guilt and ill-desert of sin. The sinner is made to feel that his sin deserves the direst damnation.

The case of an infidel of my acquaintance may serve to illustrate this. He had lived in succession with two pious wives; had read almost every book then extant on the inspiration of the Scriptures--had disputed, and caviled, and often thought himself to have triumphed over believers in the Bible, and in fact he was the most subtle infidel I ever saw. It was remarkable that in connection with his infidelity he had no just views of sin. He had indeed heard much about some dreadful depravity which had come down in the current of human blood from Adam, and was itself a physical thing; but as usual he had no oppressive consciousness of guilt for having his share of this original taint. His mind consequently was quite easy in respect to the guilt of his own sin.

But at length a change came over him, and his eyes were opened to see the horrible enormity of his guilt. I saw him one day so borne down with sin and shame that he could not look up. He bowed his head upon his knees, covered his face, and groaned in agony. In this state I left him and went to the prayer-meeting. Ere long he came into the meeting as he never came before. As he left the meeting he said to his wife--"You have long known me as a strong-hearted infidel; but my infidelity is all gone. I cannot tell you what has become of it--it all seems to me as the merest nonsense--I cannot conceive how I could ever have believed and defended it. I seem to myself like a man called to view some glorious and beautiful structure, in order to pass his judgment upon it; but who presumes to judge and condemn it after having caught only a dim glimpse of one obscure corner. Just so have I done in condemning the glorious Bible and the glorious government of God."

Now the secret of all this change in his mind towards the Bible lay in the change of his views as to his own sin. Before, he had not been convicted of sin at all; now he sees it in some of its true light, and really feels that he deserves the deepest hell. Of course he now sees the pertinence and beauty and glory of the gospel system. He is now in a position in which he can see clearly one of the strongest proofs of the truth of the Bible--namely, its perfect adaptation to meet the wants of a sinning race.

3. It is remarkable to see what power there is in conviction for sin to break up and annihilate the delusions of error. For instance, no man can once thoroughly see his own sin, and remain an Universalist, and deem it unjust for God to send him to hell. When I hear a man talking in defence of Universalism, I know he does not understand anything about sin. He has not begun to see his own guilt in its true light. It is the blindest of all mental infatuations to think that the little inconveniences of this life are all that sin deserves. Let a man once see his own guilt, and he will be amazed to think that he ever held such a notion. The Spirit of God, pouring light upon the sinner's mind, will soon use up Universalism.

I once labored in a village in the State of New York where Universalism prevailed extensively. The leading man among them had a sick wife who sympathized with him in sentiment. She being near death, I called to see her, and endeavored to expose the utter fallacy of her delusion. After I had left, her husband returned, and his wife, her eyes being now opened, cried out to him as he entered--"O my dear husband, you are in the way to hell--your Universalism will ruin your soul forever!" He was greatly enraged, and learning that I had been talking with her, his rage was kindled against me. "Where is he now?" said he. "Gone to the meeting," was the reply. "I'll go there and shoot him," he cried; and seizing his loaded pistol, as I was informed, he started off. When he came in I was preaching, I think, from the text--"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" I knew at the time nothing about his purpose--nothing about his pistol. He listened awhile--and then all at once, in the midst of the meeting he fell back on his seat, and cried out--"O, I am sinking to hell;-- O, God, have mercy on me." Away went his Universalism in a twinkling; he sees his sin, and now he is sinking to hell. This change in him was not my work, for I could produce no such effects as these. I was indeed trying to show from my text what sinners deserve; but the Spirit of God and nothing less, could set

home conviction of sin after this sort.

Again, another fruit of the Spirit is developed in the case of those persons who are conscious of great hardness and insensibility. It not unfrequently happens that men suppose themselves to be Christians because they have so much sensibility on religious subjects. To undeceive them, the Spirit directs their attention to some truth that dries up all their sensibility, and leaves their hopes stranded on the sea-beach. Now they are in great agony. "The more I hear," say they, "the less I feel. I was never in the world so far from being convicted of sin. I shall certainly go to hell. I have not a particle of feeling. I cannot feel if I die."

4. Now the explanation of this singular state is usually this: The Spirit of God sees their danger--sees them deceiving themselves by relying on their feelings, and therefore brings some truths before their minds which array the opposition of their hearts against God and dry up the fountains of their sensibility. Then they see how perfectly callous their hearts are toward God. This is the work of the Spirit.

Again, the Spirit convicts the soul of the guilt of unbelief. Sinners are very apt to suppose that they do believe the gospel. They confound faith with a merely intellectual assent, and so blind themselves as to suppose that they believe God in the sense of gospel faith.

5. But let the Spirit once reveal their own hearts to them and they will see that they do not believe in God as they believe in their fellow men, and that instead of having confidence in God and resting on his words of promise as they do on men's promises, they do not rest on God at all, but are full of anxiety lest God should fail to fulfill his own words. They see that instead of being child-like and trustful, they are full of trouble, and solicitude, and in fact of unbelief. And they see also, that this is a horribly guilty state of heart. They see the guilt of not resting in his promises--the horrible guilt of not believing with the heart every word God ever uttered.

Now this change is the work of the Spirit. Our Saviour mentions it as one of the effects wrought by the Spirit, that He shall "reprove the world of sin, because they believe not on me." And in fact we find that this is one of the characteristic works of the Spirit. In conversing recently with a man who has been for many years a professor of religion, but living in the seventh chapter

to the Romans, he remarked--"I have been thinking of this truth, that God cares for me and loves me, and has through Jesus Christ offered me eternal life; and now I deserve to be damned if I do not believe." Stretching out his pale hand, he said with great energy, "I ought to go to hell if I will not believe." Now all this is the work of the Spirit--this making a man see the guilt and hell-desert of unbelief--this making a sinner see that every thing else is only straw compared with the eternal rock of God's truth.

Again, the Spirit makes men see the danger of dying in their sins. Said a young man, "I am afraid to go to sleep at night, lest I should awake in hell." Sinners often know what this feeling is. I recollect having this thought once impressed upon my mind, and so much agonized was I, that I almost thought myself to be dying on the spot! O, I can never express the terror and the agony of my soul in that hour! Sinner, if you have these feelings, it is a solemn time with you.

6. Moreover, the Spirit makes sinners feel the danger of being given up of God. Often does it happen that sinners, convicted by the Spirit, are made to feel that if they are not given up already, they are in the most imminent peril of it, and must rush for the gate of life now or never. They see that they have so sinned and have done so much to provoke God to give them over, that their last hope of being accepted is fast dying away. Sinners, have any of you ever felt thus? Have you ever trembled in your very soul lest you should be given over to a reprobate mind before another Sabbath, or perhaps before another morning? If so, you may ascribe this to the Spirit of God.

7. Yet further; the Spirit often convicts sinners of the great blindness of their minds. It seems to them that their minds are full of solid darkness, as it were a darkness that may be felt.

Now this is really the natural state of the sinner; but he is not sensible of it until enlightened by the Spirit of God. When thus enlightened, he begins to appreciate his own exceeding great blindness. He now becomes aware that the Bible is a sealed book to him--for he finds that though he reads it, its meaning is involved in impenetrable darkness.

Have not some of you been conscious of such an experience as this? Have you not read the Bible with the distressing consciousness that your mind was

by no means suitably affected by its truth--indeed, with the conviction that you did not get hold of its truth to any good purpose at all? Thus are men enlightened by the Spirit to see the real state of their case.

Again, the Spirit shows sinners their total alienation from God. I have seen sinners so strongly convicted of this, that they would say right out; "I know that I have not the least disposition to return to God--I am conscious that I don't care whether I have any religion or not."

Often have I seen professed Christians in this state, conscious that their hearts are utterly alienated from God and from all sympathy with his character or government. Their deep backslidings, or their utter want of all religion, has been so revealed to their minds by the Spirit, as to become a matter of most distinct and impressive consciousness.

8. Sinners thus made to see themselves by the Spirit, often find that when they pour out their words before God for prayer, their heart won't go. I once said to a sinner, "Come, now, give up your heart to God." "I will," said he; but in a moment he broke out--"My heart won't go." Have not some of you been compelled to say the same, "My heart won't go?" Then you know by experience one of the fruits of the Spirit's convicting power.

When the Spirit of God is not with men, they can dole out their long prayers before God and never think or seem to care how prayerless their hearts are all the time, and how utterly far from God. But when the Spirit sheds his light on the soul, the sinner sees how black a hypocrite he is. Oh, then he cannot pray so smoothly, so loosely, so self-complacently.

Again, the Spirit of God often convinces men that they are ashamed of Christ, and that in truth they do not wish for religion. It sometimes happens that sinners do not feel ashamed of being thought seriously disposed, until they come to be convicted. Such was the case with myself. I bought my first Bible as a law-book, and laid it by the side of my Blackstone. I studied it as I would any other law-book, my sole object being to find in it the great principles of law. Then I never once thought of being ashamed of reading it. I read it as freely and as openly as I read any other book. But as soon as I became awakened to the concerns of my soul, I put my Bible out of sight. If it were lying on my table when persons came into my office, I was careful to throw a newspaper over it. Ere long, however, the conviction that I was

ashamed of God and of his word came over me with overwhelming force, and served to show me the horrible state of my mind toward God. And I suppose that the general course of my experience is by no means uncommon among impenitent sinners.

9. The Spirit also convicts men of worldly-mindedness. Sinners are always in this state of mind; but are often not fully aware of the fact until the Spirit of God makes them see it. I have often seen men pushing their worldly projects most intensely, but when addressed on the subject they would say, "I don't care much about the world; I am pursuing this business just now chiefly because I want to be doing something;" but when the Spirit shows them their own hearts, they are in agony lest they should never be able to break away from the dreadful power of the world upon their souls. Now they see that they have been the veriest slaves on earth--slaves to the passion for worldly good.

Again, the Holy Spirit often makes such a personal application of the truth as to fasten the impression that the preacher is personal and intends to describe the case and character of him who is the subject of his influence. The individual thus convinced of sin may think that the preacher has in some way come to a knowledge of his character, and intends to describe it. That the preacher means him, and is preaching to him. He wonders who has told the preacher so much about him. All this often takes place when the preacher perhaps does not know that such an one is in the assembly, and is altogether ignorant of his history. Thus the Holy Spirit who knows his heart and his entire history becomes very personal in the application of truth.

10. Have any of you this experience? Has it at present or at any other time appeared to you as if the preacher meant you, and that he was describing your case? Then the Spirit of the living God is upon you. I have often seen individuals drop their heads under preaching almost as if they were shot through. They were perhaps unable to look up again during the whole service. Afterwards I have often heard that they thought I meant them, and that others thought so too and perhaps imagined that many eyes were turned on them, and that therefore they did not look up, when in fact neither myself nor any one in the congregation, in all probability, so much as thought of them.

Thus a bow drawn at a venture often lodges an arrow between the joints of

the sinner's coat of mail. Sinner, is it so with you?

Again, the Holy Spirit often convinces sinners of the enmity of their hearts against God. Most impenitent sinners, and perhaps all deceived professors, unless convinced to the contrary by the Holy Spirit, imagine that they are on the whole friendly to God. They are far from believing that this carnal mind is enmity against God. They think they do not hate, but on the contrary, that they love God. Now this delusion must be torn away or they must be lost. To do this, the Spirit so orders it that some truths are presented which develop their real enmity against God. The moralist who has been the almost Christian, or the deceived professor, begins to cavil, to find fault, finally to rail; to oppose the preaching and the meetings and the measures and the men. The man perhaps who has a pious wife and who has thought himself and has been thought by her to be almost a Christian, begins by caviling at the truth, finds fault with the measures, and with the manners; then refuses to go to meeting, and finally forbids his wife and family going, and not infrequently his enmity of heart will boil over in a horrible manner. He perhaps has no thought that this boiling up of hell within him is occasioned by the Holy Spirit revealing to him the true state of his heart. His Christian friends also may mistake his case and be ready to conclude that something is wrong in the matter or manners or measures of the preacher that is doing this man a great injury. But beware what you say or do. In many such cases which have come under my own observation, it has turned out that the Holy Spirit was at work in those hearts, revealing to them their real enmity against God. This He does by presenting those truths in that manner and under those circumstances that produce these results. He pushes this process until He compels the soul to see that it is filled with enmity to God, and to what is right; that yet it is not man, but God to whom he is opposed; that it is not error, but truth; not the manner, but the matter; not the measures, but the God of truth which it hates.

11. The Spirit, moreover, often convicts sinners powerfully of the deceitfulness of their own hearts. Sometimes this conviction becomes really appalling. They see they have been deluding themselves in matters too plain to justify any mistake, and too momentous to admit of any apology for willful blindness. They are confounded with what they see in themselves.

12. The Spirit also not infrequently strips the sinner of his excuses, and

shows him clearly their great folly and absurdity. I recollect this was one of the first things in my experience in the process of conviction. I lost all confidence in any of my excuses, for I found them to be so foolish and futile that I could not endure them. This was my state of mind before I had ever heard of the work of the Spirit, or knew at all how to judge whether my own mind was under its influence or not. I found that whereas I had been very strong in my excuses and objections, I was now utterly weak, and it seemed to me that any child could overthrow me. In fact I did not need to be overthrown by anybody, for my excuses and cavils had sunk to nothing of themselves, and I was deeply ashamed of them. I had effectually worked myself out of all their mazes, so that they could bewilder me no longer. I have since seen multitudes in the same condition--weak as to their excuses--their old defensive armor all torn off, and their hearts laid naked to the shafts of God's truth.

Now, sinners, have any of you known what this is--to have all your excuses and apologies failing you--to feel that you have no courage and no defensible reasons for pushing forward in a course of sin? If so, then you know what it is to be under the convicting power of the Spirit.

13. The Spirit convicts men of the folly of seeking salvation in any other way than through Christ alone. Often, without being aware of it, a sinner will be really seeking salvation in some other way than through Christ, and he will be looking to his good deeds--to his own prayers, or the prayers of some Christian friends; but if the Spirit ever saves him, he will tear away these delusive schemes and show him the utter vanity of every other way than through Christ alone. The Spirit will show him that there is but this one way in which it is naturally possible for a sinner to be saved, and that all attempts toward any other way are forever vain and worse than worthless. All self-righteousness must be rejected entirely, and Christ be sought alone.

Have you ever been made to see this? You who are professed Christians, is this your experience?

Again, the Spirit convinces men of the great folly and madness of clinging to an unsanctifying hope. The Bible teaches that every one who has the genuine gospel hope purifies himself, even as Christ is pure. In this passage, the apostle John plainly means to affirm a universal proposition. He states a

universal characteristic of the Christian hope. Whoever has a Christian hope should ask--Do I purify myself even as Christ is pure? If not, then mine is not the true gospel hope.

But yet thousands of professed Christians have a most inefficient hope. What is it? Does it really lead them to purify themselves as Christ is pure? Nothing like it. It is not a hope that they shall see Christ as He is, and be forever with Him, and altogether like Him too; but it is mainly a hope that they shall escape hell, and go as an alternative to some unknown heaven.

Such professed Christians can not but know that their experience lacks the witness of their own consciences that they are living for God and bearing His image. If such are ever saved, they must first be convinced of the folly of a hope that leaves them unsanctified.

Ye professors of religion who have lived a worldly life so long, are you not ashamed of your hope? Have you not good reason to be ashamed of a hope that has no more power than yours has had? Are there not many in this house who in the honesty of their hearts must say, "Either there is no power in the gospel, or I don't know anything about it?" For the gospel affirms as a universal fact of all those who are not under the law but under grace, "sin shall not have dominion over you." Now will you go before God and say, "Lord, thou hast said, 'Sin shall not have dominion over you;' but, Lord, that is all false, for I believe the gospel and am under grace, but sin still has dominion over me!" No doubt in this case there is a mistake somewhere; and it becomes you to ask solemnly, Shall I charge this mistake and falsehood upon God, or shall I admit that it must be in myself alone?

The apostle Paul has said, "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Is it so to you?

He has also said, "Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Do you know this by your own experience? He adds also that we "rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

Is all this in accordance with your experience, professed Christian? Is it true that your hope makes not ashamed? Does it produce such glorious fruits unto holiness as are here described? If you were to try your experience by the word of the living God, and open your heart to be searched by the Spirit, would not you be convinced that you do not embrace the gospel in reality?

Again, the Spirit convinces men that all their goodness is selfish; and that self is the end of all their efforts, of all their prayers and religious exercises. I once spent a little time in the family of a man who was a leading member in a Presbyterian Church. He said to me, "What should you think of a man who is praying for the Spirit every day, but does not get the blessing?" I answered, "I should presume that he is praying selfishly." "But suppose," replied he, "that he is praying for the sake of promoting his own happiness?" "He may be purely selfish in that," I replied; "the devil might do as much, and would perhaps do just the same if he supposed he could make himself happier by it." I then cited the prayer of David: "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me: restore unto me the joys of thy salvation: then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee." This seemed to be new doctrine to him, and he turned away--as I found afterwards, in great anger and trouble. In the first gush of feeling he prayed that God would cut him down and send him to hell, lest he should have to confess his sin and shame before all the people. He saw that in fact his past religion had been all selfish--but the dread of confessing this was at first appalling. He saw however the possibility of mistake, that his hopes had been all delusive, and that he had been working his self-deceived course fast down toward the depths of hell.

14. Finally, it is the Spirit's work to make self-deceived men feel that they are now having their last call from the Spirit. When this impression is made, let it by all means be heeded. It is God's own voice to the soul. Out of a great multitude of cases under my observation, in which God has distinctly made sinners feel that the present was their last call, I do not recollect one in which it did not prove to be so. This is of a truth a solemn moment to the sinner, and ought to make the warning voice of God ring in his ear like the forewarning knell of the second death.

V. What is intended by the Spirit's not striving always?

The meaning I take to be, not that he will at some period withdraw from among

mankind, but that He will withdraw from the individual in question, or perhaps as in the text from a whole generation of sinners. In its general application now, the principle seems to be that the Spirit will not follow the sinner onward down to his grave--that there will be a limit to his efforts in the case of each sinner, and that this limit is perhaps ordinarily reached a longer or a shorter time before death. At some uncertain, awful point he will reach and pass it; and it therefore becomes every sinner to understand his peril of grieving the Spirit forever away.

VI. We, are next to inquire, WHY God's Spirit will not strive always.

I answer, not because God is not compassionate, forbearing, slow to anger and great in mercy;--not because He gets out of patience and acts unreasonably--by no means; nothing of this at all. But the reasons are

1. Because longer striving will do the sinner no good. For by the very laws of mind, conversion must be effected through the influence of truth. But it is a known law of mind that truth once and again resisted, loses its power upon the mind that resists it. Every successive instance of resistance weakens its power. If the truth does not take hold with energy when fresh, it is not likely to do so ever after. Hence when the Spirit reveals truth to the sinner, and he hardens himself against it, and resists the Spirit, there remains little hope for him. We may expect God to give him up for lost. So the Bible teaches.
2. If again we ask, Why does God cease to strive with sinners? The answer may be, Because to strive longer not only does the sinner no good, but positive evil. For guilt is graduated by light. The more light the greater guilt. Hence more light revealed by the Spirit and longer striving might serve only to augment the sinner's guilt, and of course his final woe. It is better then for the sinner himself, after all hope of his repentance is gone, that the Spirit should leave him, than that his efforts should be prolonged in vain, to no other result than to increase the sinner's light and guilt, and consequently his endless curse. It is in this case a real mercy to the sinner, that God should withdraw His Spirit and let him alone.
3. Because sinners sin willfully when they resist the Holy Ghost. It is the very work of the Spirit to throw light before their minds. Of course in resisting the Spirit they must sin against light. Hence their dreadful guilt.

We are often greatly shocked with the bold and daring sins of men who may not after all have much illumination of the Spirit, and of course comparatively little guilt. But when God's ministers come to the souls of men with His messages of truth, and men despise or neglect them; when God's providence also enforces His truth, and still men resist, they are greatly guilty. How much more so when God comes by His Spirit, and they resist God under the blazing light of His Spirit's illuminations! How infinitely aggravated is their guilt now!

4. Again, their resistance tempts the forbearance of God. Never do sinners so grievously tempt the forbearance of God as when they resist His Spirit. You may see this developed in the Jews of Stephen's time. "Ye stiff-necked," said he, "and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did so do ye." He had been following down the track of their national history, and running fearlessly across their Jewish prejudices, laboring in the deep sincerity and faithfulness of his soul, to set before them their guilt in persecuting and murdering the Son of God. And what do they do? Enraged at these rebukes, they gnashed on him with their teeth--they set upon him with the spirit of demons, and stoned him to death, although they saw the very glory of God beaming in his eye and on his countenance as if it had been an angel's. And did not this fearful deed of theirs seal up their damnation? Read the history of their nation and see. They had tempted God to the last limit of His forbearance; and now what remained for them but swift and awful judgments? The wrath of God arose against them, and there was no remedy. Their resistance of the Holy Ghost pressed the forbearance of God till it could bear no more.

It is a solemn truth that sinners tempt God's forbearance most dangerously when they resist His Spirit. Think how long some of you have resisted the Holy Spirit. The claims of God have been presented and pressed again and again, but you have as often put them away. You have said unto God, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." And now have you not the utmost reason to expect that God will take you at your word?

5. There is a point beyond which forbearance is no virtue. This is and must be true in all governments. No government could possibly be maintained which should push the indulgence of a spirit of forbearance toward the guilty beyond all limits. There must be a point beyond which God cannot

go without peril to His government; and over this point we may be assured He will never pass.

Suppose we should as often see old, gray-headed sinners converted as youthful sinners, and this should be the general course of things. Would not this work ruin to God's government--ruin even to sinners themselves? Would not sinners take encouragement from this, and hold on in their sins till their lusts were worn out, and till they themselves should rot down in their corruptions? They would say, "We shall be just as likely to be converted in our old age, putrid with long-indulged lusts, and rank with the unchecked growth of every abomination of the heart of man, as if we were to turn to God in the freshness of our youth;--so let us have the pleasures of sin first, and the unwelcomeness of religion when the world can give us no more to enjoy."

But God means to have men converted young if at all, and one reason for this is that He intends to convert the world, and therefore must have laborers trained up for the work in the morning of life. If He were to make no discrimination between the young and the aged, converting from each class alike, or chiefly from the aged, the means for converting the world must utterly fail, and in fact on such a scheme the result would be that no sinners at all would be converted. There is therefore a necessity for the general fact that sinners must submit to God in early life.

VII. Consequences of the Spirit's ceasing to strive with men.

1. One consequence will be a confirmed hardness of heart. It is inevitable that the heart will become much more hardened, and the will more fully set to do evil.
2. Another consequence will be a confirmed opposition to religion. This will be wont to manifest itself in dislike to every thing on the subject, often with great impatience and peevishness when pressed to attend to the subject seriously. Perhaps they will refuse to have anything said to themselves personally, so settled is their opposition to God and his claims.

You may also expect to see them opposed to revivals and to gospel ministers, and pre-eminently to those ministers who are most faithful to their souls. All those means of promoting revivals which are adapted to rouse the

conscience, will be peculiarly odious to their hearts. Usually such persons become sour in their dispositions, misanthropic, haters of all Christians, delighting if they dare to retail slander and abuse against those whose piety annoys and disturbs their stupid repose in sin.

3. Another consequence of being forsaken of the Spirit is, that men will betake themselves to some refuge of lies, and will settle down in some form of fatal error. I have often thought it almost impossible for men to embrace fatal error heartily, unless first forsaken by the Spirit of God. From observation of numerous cases, I believe this to be the case with the great majority of Universalists. They are described by Paul. "They receive not the love of the truth that they may be saved, and for this cause God sends them strong delusion that they should believe a lie." They hate the truth--are more than willing to be deceived--are restive when pressed with gospel claims, and therefore are ready to grasp at any form of delusion which sets aside these claims and boldly asserts--"Ye shall not surely die." It has long been an impression on my mind that this is the usual course of feeling and thought which leads to Universalism. There may be exceptions; but the mass go into this delusion from the starting point of being abandoned by the Spirit. Thus abandoned, they become cross and misanthropic--they hate all Christians, and all those truths that God and his people love. This could not be the case if they had the love of God in their hearts. It could not well be the case if they were enlightened and restrained by the present agency of the divine Spirit.

Again, generally those who are left of God, come to have a seared conscience. They are distinguished by great insensibility of mind. They are of choice blind and hardened in respect to the nature and guilt of sin. Although their intelligence affirms that sin is wrong, yet they do not feel it, or care for it. They can know the truth and yet be reckless of its application to their own hearts and lives. God has left them, and of course the natural tendencies of a depraved heart are developed without restraint.

Again, this class of sinners will inevitably wax worse and worse. They become loose in habits--lax in their observance of the Sabbath--slide backwards in regard to temperance and all kindred moral subjects;--slip into some of the many forms of sin and perhaps vice and crime; if they have been conscientious against the use of tobacco, they relinquish their

conscientiousness and throw a loose rein on their lusts; in short, they are wont to wax worse and worse in every branch of morals, and often become so changed that you would hardly recognize them. It will be no strange thing if they become profane swearers--steal a little and anon a good deal; and if God does not restrain them, they go down by a short and steep descent to the depths of hell.

4. Another consequence of being abandoned by the Spirit will be certain damnation. There can be no mistake about this. It is just as certain as if they were already there.

This state is not always attended with apathy of feeling. There may be at times a most intense excitement of the sensibility. The Bible describes the case of some who "sin willfully after they have received a knowledge of the truth, and there remains for them only a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation." Some persons of this description I have seen, and such agony and such wretchedness I pray God I may never see again. I have seen them, the very pictures of despair and horror. Their eyes fully open to see their ruined state--exclaiming, "I know I am abandoned of God forever--I have sinned away my day of hope and mercy, and I know I never shall repent--I have no heart to repent, although I know that I must, or be damned;" such language as this they utter with a settled, positive tone, and an air of agony and despair which is enough to break a heart of stone.

5. Another consequence often is that Christians find themselves unable to pray in faith for such sinners. There are some in almost every community for whom Christians cannot pray. It is I believe common for many Christians without being aware of each other's state, to have a similar experience. For example, several Christians are praying in secret for some one individual, and with considerable freedom up to a certain moment, and then they find that they can pray for him no longer. They chance to meet together, and one says--"I have been praying a long time with great interest for that certain impenitent sinner, but at a particular time I found myself all shut up; I could not get hold of the Lord again for him, and never have been able to since." Says another, and another--"I have felt just so myself. I did not know that any one else felt as I have, but you have described my case precisely."

Now if you will go to that sinner, he will tell you a story which will develop

the whole case, and show that he came at that eventful moment to some fatal determination, grieved the Spirit, and was abandoned of God. The Spirit ceased to strive with him, and consequently ceased to elicit prayer in his behalf in the hearts of God's people.

6. Finally when God has ceased to strive with sinners, no means whatever, employed for the purpose, can be effectual for their salvation. If you, sinner, have passed that dreadful point, you will no more be profited by my preaching though I were to preach to you five thousand sermons; nay, you could not be profited though an angel should come and preach to you, or even Christ himself. All would be only in vain. You are left of God to fill up the measure of your iniquities.

REMARKS.

1. Christians may understand how to account for the fact already noticed, that there are some for whom they can not pray. Even while they are walking with God, and trying to pray for particular individuals, they may find themselves utterly unable to do so; and this may be the explanation. I would not however in such a case take it for granted that all is right with myself, for perhaps it is not; but if I have the best evidence that all is right between myself and God, then I must infer that God has forsaken that sinner and does not wish me to pray any longer for him.

2. Sinners should be aware that light and guilt keep pace with each other. They are augmented and lessened together. Hence the solemn responsibility of being under the light and the strivings of the Spirit.

While enlightened and pressed to duty by the Spirit, sinners are under the most solemn circumstances that can ever occur in their whole lives. Indeed no period of the sinner's existence through its eternal duration can be so momentous as this. Yes, sinner, while the Spirit of God is pleading and striving with you, angels appreciate the solemnity of the hour--they know that the destiny of your soul is being decided for eternity. What an object of infinite interest! An immortal mind on the pivot of its eternal destiny--God debating and persuading--he resisting, and the struggle about to be broken off as hopeless forever. Suppose sinner, you could set yourself aside and could look on and be a spectator of such a scene. Were you ever in a court of justice when the question of life and death was about to be decided? The witnesses have all been heard--the counsel have been heard--

it is announced that the jury are ready to deliver their verdict. Now pause and mark the scene. Note the anxiety depicted in every countenance and how eagerly and yet with what awful solemnity they wait for the decision about to be made; and with good reason--for a question of momentous interest is to be decided. But if this question, involving only the temporal life, is so momentous, how much more so is the sinner's case when the life of the soul for eternity is pending!! O how solemn while the question still pends--while the Spirit still strives, and still the sinner resists, and none can tell how soon the last moment of the Spirit's striving may come!

This ought to be the most solemn world in the universe. In other worlds, the destinies of the souls are already fixed. It is so in hell. All there is fixed and changeless forever. It is a solemn thing indeed for a sinner to go to hell, but the most solemn point in the whole duration of his existence is that one in which the decision is made.

O what a world is this! Throughout all its years and centuries we can not see one moment on whose tender point there hangs not a balancing of the question of eternal life or eternal death! And is this a place to trifle?--this a place to be mad and foolish and vain? Ah, no! it were more reasonable to trifle in any other world than in this. The awful destinies of the soul are being determined here. Heaven sees it and hell too, and all are filled with solicitude, swelling almost to agony;--but you who are the subjects of all this anxiety--you can trifle and play the fool and dance on the brink of everlasting woe. The Psalmist says--

"I heard the wretch profanely boast,

Till at thy frown he fell;

His honors in a dream were lost,

And he awoke in hell."

God represents the sinner as on a slippery steep, his feet just sliding--on the very verge of an awful chasm--God holding him up a short moment, and he trifling away even this short moment in mad folly. All hearts in heaven and in hell are beating and throbbing with intense emotion: but he can be reckless! O what madness!

If sinners duly estimated this danger of resisting the Spirit, they would be more

afraid of it than of anything else whatever. They would deem no other dangers worthy of a moment's thought or care compared with this.

Again, it is a very common thing for sinners to grieve away the Spirit long before death. So I believe, although some, I am aware, are greatly opposed to this doctrine. Do you doubt it? Think of almost the whole Jewish nation in the time of the Saviour, given up to unbelief and reprobacy--abandoned of the Spirit of God; yet they sinned against far less light and of course with much less guilt than sinners now do. If God could give them up then, why may He not do so with sinners now? If He could give up the whole population of the world in Noah's time when he alone stood forth a preacher of righteousness, why may He not give up individual sinners now who are incomparably more guilty than they, because they have sinned against greater light than had ever shone then? O it is infinitely cruel to sinners themselves to conceal from them this truth. Let them know that they are in peril of grieving away the Spirit beyond recall, long before they die. This truth ought to be proclaimed over all the earth. Let its echo ring out through every valley and over every mountain-top, the world around. Let every living sinner hear it and take the timely warning!

Again, we see why so few aged sinners are converted. The fact is striking and unquestionable. Take the age of sixty, and count the number converted past that age. You will find it small indeed. Few and scattered are they, like beacons on mountain-tops, just barely enough to prevent the aged from utter despair of ever being converted. I am aware that infidels seize upon this fact to extort from it a cavil against religion, saying, "How does it happen that the aged and wise, whose minds are developed by thought and experience, and who have passed by the period of warm youthful passion, never embrace the gospel?" They would fain have it, that none but children and women become religious, and that this is to be accounted for on the ground that the Christian religion rests on its appeal to the sensibilities, and not to the intelligence. But infidels make a most egregious mistake in this inference of theirs. The fact under consideration should be referred to an entirely different class of causes. The aged are converted but rarely, because they have grieved away the Spirit--have become entangled in the mazes of some loved and soul-ruinous delusion, and hardened in sin past the moral possibility of being converted. Indeed, it would be unwise on the part of God to convert many sinners in old age;--it would be too great a temptation for human nature to bear. At all the earlier periods of life, sinners would be looking forward to old age as the time for conversion.

I have already said what I wish here to repeat--that it is an awfully interesting moment when God's Spirit strives with sinners. I have reason to know that the Spirit is striving with some of you. Even within the past week your attention has been solemnly arrested, and God has been calling upon you to repent. And now are you aware that while God is calling, you must listen--that when He speaks, you should pause and give Him your attention? Does God call you away from your lesson, and are you replying--O, I must, I must get my lesson? Ah, your lesson! and what is your first and chief lesson? "Prepare to meet thy God." But you say, "O the bell will toll in a few minutes, and I have not got my lesson!!" Yes, sinner, soon the great bell will toll--unseen spirits will seize hold of the bell-rope and toll the dread death-knell of eternity, echoing the summons--come to judgment;--and the bell will toll, toll, TOLL! and where sinner, will you be then! Are you prepared? Have you got that one great lesson--"Prepare to meet thy God?"

In the long elapsing ages of your lost doom, you will be asked, how and why you came into this place of torment; and you will have to answer--"Oh, I was getting my lesson there in Oberlin when God came by his Spirit, and I could not stop to hear his call! So I exchanged my soul for my lesson! O what a fool was I!!"

Let me ask the people of God, should you not be awake in such an hour as this? How many sinners during the past week have besought you to pray for their perishing souls? And have you no heart to pray? How full of critical interest and peril are these passing moments? Did you ever see the magnetic needle of the compass vacillate, quiver, quiver, and finally settle down fixed to its position? So with the sinner's destiny today.

Sinners, think of your destiny, as being now about to assume its fixed position. Soon you will decide it forever and forever!

Do you say, let me first go to my room, and there I will give myself up to God? No, sinner, no! go not away hence in your sin; for now is your accepted time--now--today, after so long a time--now is the only hour of promise--now is perhaps the last hour of the Spirit's presence and grace to your soul!

[Back to Top](#)

The Excuses of Sinners Condemn God

Lecture III

October 25, 1848

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Job 40:8: "Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?"

Although in the main, Job had spoken correctly of God, yet in his great anguish and perturbation under his sore trials, he had said some things which were hasty and abusive. For these the Lord rebuked him. This rebuke is contained in our context:

"Moreover the Lord answered Job, and said--Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct Him? He that reproveth God, let him answer it.

"Then Job answered the Lord, and said--Behold I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea twice, but I will proceed no further.

"Then answered the Lord unto Job out of the whirlwind, and said,--Gird up thy loins now like a man; I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?"--Job 40:1-8

It is not, however, my object to discuss the original purpose and connection of these words, but rather to consider their present application to the case of sinners. In pursuing this object, I shall

I. Show that every excuse for sin condemns god.

II. Consider some of these excuses in detail.

III. Show that excuse for sin adds insult to injury.

I. Every excuse for sin condemns God. This will be apparent if we consider,

1. That nothing can be sin for which there is a justifiable excuse.

This is entirely self-evident. It therefore needs neither elucidation nor proof.

2. If God condemns that for which there is a good excuse, He must be wrong. This also is self-evident. If God condemns what we have good reason for doing, no intelligence in the universe can justify Him.

3. But God does condemn all sin. He condemns it utterly, and will not allow the least apology or excuse for it. Hence, either there is no apology for it, or God is wrong.

4. Consequently, every excuse for sin charges blame upon God, and virtually accuses Him of tyranny. Whoever pleads an excuse for sin, therefore, charges God with blame.

II. We will consider some of these excuses, and see whether the principles I have laid down are not just and true.

1. INABILITY. No excuse is more common. It is echoed and re-echoed over every Christian land, and handed down age after age, never to be forgotten. With unblushing face it is proclaimed that men can not do what God requires of them.

Let us examine this and see what it amounts to. God, it is said, requires what men cannot do. And does He know that men cannot, do it? Most certainly. Then He has no apology for requiring it, and the requisition is most unreasonable. Human reason can never justify it. It is a natural impossibility.

But again, upon what penalty does God require what man cannot do? The threatened penalty is eternal death! Yes, eternal death, according to the views of those who plead inability as an excuse. God requires me on pain of eternal death to do that which He knows I cannot do. Truly this condemns God in the worst sense. You might just as well charge God outright with being an infinite tyrant.

Moreover, it is not for us to say whether on these conditions we shall or shall not charge God with infinite tyranny, for we cannot help it. The law of our reason demands it.

Hence, those who plant themselves upon these grounds charge God with infinite tyranny. Perhaps, sinner, you little think when you urge the excuse of

inability, that you are really arraigning God on the charge of infinite tyranny. And you, Christian, who make this dogma of inability a part of your "orthodox" creed, may have little noticed its blasphemous bearings against the character of God; but your failure to notice it alters not the fact. The black charge is involved in the very doctrine of inability, and cannot be explained out of it.

I have intimated that this charge is blasphemous against God--and most truly. Far be it from God to do any such thing! Shall God require natural impossibilities, and denounce eternal death upon men for not doing what they have no natural power to do? Never! Yet good men and bad men agree together to charge God with doing this very thing, and doing it not once or twice only, but uniformly, through all ages, with all the race, from the beginning to the end of time! Horrible! Nothing in all the government of God ever so insulted and abused Jehovah! Nothing was ever more blasphemous and false! God says, "his commandments are not grievous;" but you, by this excuse of inability, proclaim that God's words are false. You declare that His commands are not only grievous, but are even naturally impossible! Hark! what does the Lord Jesus say? "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." And do you deny this? Do you rise up in the very face of His words and say--"Lord, thy yoke is so hard that no man can possibly endure it; thy burden is so heavy that no man can ever bear it?" Is not this gainsaying and blaspheming Him who can not lie?

But you take the ground that no man can obey the law of God. As the Presbyterian Confession of Faith has it, "No man is able, either by himself, or by any grace received in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God; but doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed." Observe, this affirms not only that no man is naturally able to keep God's commands, but also that no man is able to do it "by any grace received in this life;" thus making this declaration a libel on the gospel, as well as a palpable misrepresentation of the law, of its Author, and of man's relations to both. It is only moderate language to call this assertion from the Confession of Faith a libel. If there is a lie, either in hell or out of hell, this is a lie, or God is an infinite tyrant. If reason be allowed to speak at all, it is impossible for her to say less or otherwise than thus. And has not God constituted the reason of man for the very purpose of taking cognizance of the rectitude of all his ways?

Let God be true though every man be proved a liar! In the present case, the remarkable fact that no man can appease his own conscience and satisfy himself that he is truly unable to keep the law, shows that man lies, not God.

2. A second excuse which sinners make is want of time.

Suppose I tell one of my sons--"Go, do this or that duty, on pain of being whipped to death." He replies, "Father, I can't possibly do it, for I have not time. I must be doing that other business which you told me to do; and besides, if I had nothing else to do, I could not possibly do this new business in the time you allow." Now if this statement be the truth, and I knew it when I gave him the command, then I am a tyrant. There is no evading this charge. My conduct toward my son is downright tyranny.

So if God really requires of you what you have not time to do, He is infinitely to blame. For He surely knows how little time you have, and it is undeniable that He enforces His requisitions with most terrific penalties. What! is God so reckless of justice, so regardless of the well-being of His creatures, that He can sport with red-hot thunder-bolts, and burl them, despite of justice and right, among His unfortunate creatures? Never! NEVER! This is not true; it is only the false assumption which the sinner makes when he pleads as his excuse, that he has not time to do what God demands of him.

Let me ask you, sinner, how much time will it take you to do the first great duty which God requires--namely, give Him your heart? How long will this take? How long need you be in making up your mind to serve and love God? Do you not know that this, when done, will be done in one moment of time? And how long need you be in persuading yourself to do it?

Your meaning may be this: Lord, it takes me so long to make up my mind to serve thee, it seems as if I never should get time enough for this; even the whole of life seems almost too short for me to bring my mind to this unwelcome decision. Is this your meaning, sinner?

But let us look on all sides of the subject. Suppose I say to my son--"Do this now, my son;" and he replies, "I can't, father, for I must do that other thing you told me to do." Does God do so? No. God only requires the duty of each moment in its time. This is all. He only asks us to use faithfully just all the

power He has given us--nothing more. He only requires that we do the best we can. When He prescribes the amount of love which will please Him, He does not say--Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with the powers of an angel--with the burning heart of a seraph--no, but only "with all thy heart"--this is all. An infinitely ridiculous plea is this of the sinner's, that he can not do as well as he can--cannot love God with all his own heart, and soul and mind, and strength. Thou shalt do the best that thou art able to do, says God to the sinner. Ah, says the sinner, I am not able to do that. Oh, what stupid nonsense!

You charge that God is unreasonable. The truth is, God is the most reasonable of all beings. He asks only that we should use each moment for Him, in labour or in rest, whichever is most for His glory. He only requires that with the time, talents and strength which He has given us, we should do all we can to serve Him.

Says that mother--"How can I be religious? I have to take care of all my children." Indeed! and can't you get time to serve God? What does God require of you? That you should forsake and neglect your children? No indeed; He asks you to take care of your children--good care of them; and do it all for God. He says to you--those are my children; and He puts them into your hands, saying--take care of them for me, and I will give thee wages. And now will it require more time to take care of your children for God, than to take care of them for yourself? O, but you say, I cannot be religious, for I must be up in the morning and get my breakfast. And how much longer will it take you to get your breakfast ready to please God, than to do the same to please yourself? How much longer time must you have to do your duties religiously, than to do them selfishly?

What then do you mean by this plea? The fact is, all these excuses show that the excuser is mad--not insane, but mad. For what does God require so great that you should be unable to do it for want of time? Only this, that you should do all for God. Persons who make this plea seem to have entirely overlooked the real nature of religion, and of the requisitions that God makes of them. So it is with the plea of inability. The sinner says, "I am unable." Unable to do what? Just what you can do; for God never requires anything beyond this. Unless, therefore, you assume that God requires of you more than you can do, your plea is false, and even ridiculous. If, on the other hand,

you do not assume this, then your plea, if true, would not show God to be unjust.

But I was saying that in this plea of having no time to be religious, men entirely overlook or pervert the true idea of religion. The farmer pleads--"I can't be religious; I can't serve God--I must sow my wheat." Well, sow your wheat; but do it for the Lord. O but you have so much to do! Then do it all for the Lord. Another can't be religious for he must get his lesson. Well, get your lesson, but get it for the Lord, and this will be religious. The man who should neglect to sow his wheat or neglect to get his lessons because he wants to be religious, is crazy. He perverts the plainest things in the worst way. If you are to be religious, you must be industrious. The farmer must sow his wheat, and the student must get his lesson. An idle man can no more be religious than the devil can be. This notion that men can't be religious, because they have some business to do, is the merest nonsense. It utterly overlooks the great truth that God never forbids our doing the appropriate business of life, but only requires that we shall do all for Himself. If God did require us to serve Him in such a way as would compel us to neglect the practical duties of life, it would be truly a hard case. But now the whole truth is, that He requires us to do precisely these duties, and do them all honestly and faithfully for Him, and in the best possible manner. Let the farmer take care of his farm, and see that he does it well, and above all, do it for God. It is God's farm, and the heart of every farmer is God's heart, therefore let the farm be tilled for God, and the heart be devoted to Him alone.

3. Men plead a sinful nature for their excuse. And pray, what is this sinful nature? Do you mean by it that every faculty and even the very essence of your constitution were poisoned and made sinful in Adam, and came down in this polluted state by inheritance to you? Do you mean that you were so born in sin that the substance of your being is all saturated with it, and so that all the faculties of your constitution are themselves sin? Do you believe this?

I admit if this were true, it would make out a hard case. A hard case indeed! Until the laws of my reason are changed, it would compel me to speak out openly and say--Lord, this is a hard case, that thou shouldst make my nature itself a sinner, and then charge the guilt of its sin upon me! I could not help saying this; the deep echoings of my inner being would proclaim it without

ceasing, and the breaking of ten thousand thunderbolts over my head would not deter me from thinking and saying so. The reason God has given me would forever affirm it.

But the dogma is an utter absurdity. For, pray, what is sin? God answers--"transgression of law." And now you hold that your nature is itself a breach of the law of God--nay, that it has always been a breach of God's law, from Adam to the day of your birth; you hold that the current of this sin came down in the veins and blood of your race--and who made it so? Who created the veins and blood of man? From whose hand sprang this physical constitution and this mental constitution? Was man his own creator? Did sin do a part of the work in creating your physical and your mental constitution? Do you believe any such thing? No; you ascribe your nature and its original faculties to God, and upon Him, therefore, you charge the guilty authorship of your "sinful nature."

But how strange a thing is this! If man is in fault for his sinful nature, why not condemn man for having blue or black eyes? The fact is, sin never can consist in having a nature, nor in what nature is; but only and alone in the bad use which we make of our nature. This is all. Our Maker will never find fault with us for what He has Himself done or made; certainly not. He will not condemn us, if we will only make a right use of our powers--of our intellect, our sensibility, and our will. He never holds us responsible for our original nature. If you will observe, you will find that God has given no law prescribing what sort of nature and constitutional powers we should have. He has given no law on these points, the transgression of which, if given, might somewhat resemble the definition of sin. But now since there is no law about nature, nature cannot be a transgression.

Here let me say that if God were to make a law prescribing what nature or constitution a man must have, it could not possibly be otherwise than unjust and absurd, for the reason that man's nature is not a proper subject for legislation, precept, and penalty, inasmuch as it lies entirely without the pale of voluntary action, or of any action of man at all. And yet thousands of men have held the dogma that sin consists in great part in having a sinful nature. Yes, through long ages of past history, grave theologians have gravely taught this monstrous dogma; it has resounded from pulpits, and has been stereotyped for the press, and men have seemed to be never weary of

glorifying this dogma as the surest test of sound orthodoxy! Orthodoxy!! There never was a more infamous libel on Jehovah! It would be hard to name another dogma which more violently outrages common sense. It is nonsense-absurd and utter NONSENSE! I would to God that it were not even worse than nonsense! Think what mischief it has wrought! Think how it has scandalized the law, the government, and the character of God! Think how it has filled the mouths of sinners with excuses from the day of its birth to this hour

Now I do not mean to imply that the men who have held this dogma have intelligently insulted God with it. I do not imply that they have been aware of the impious and even blasphemous bearings of this dogma upon Jehovah;--I am happy to think that some at least have done all this mischief ignorantly. But the blunder and the mischief have been none the less for the honest ignorance in which they were done.

4. Sinners, in self-excuse, say they are willing to be Christians. They are willing, they say, to be sanctified. O yes, they are very willing; but there is some great difficulty lying further back or something else--perhaps they do not know just where--but it is somewhere, and it will not let them become Christians.

Now the fact is, if we are really willing, there is nothing more which we can do. Willing is all we have to do morally in the case, and all we can do. But the plea, as in the sinner's mouth, maintains that God requires of us what is naturally impossible. It assumes that God requires of us something more than right willing; and this, be it what it may, is of course, to us, an impossibility. If I will to move my muscles, and no motion follows, I have done all I can do; there is a difficulty beyond my reach, and I am in no blame for its existence, or for its impediment. Just so, if I were to will to serve God, and absolutely no effect should follow, I have done my utmost, and God never can demand anything more. In fact, to will is the very thing which God does require. "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted." Do tell me, parent, if you had told your child to do anything, and you saw him exerting himself to the utmost, would you ask any thing more? If you should see a parent demanding and enforcing of a child more than he could possibly do, however willing, would you not denounce that parent as a tyrant? Certainly you would. The slave-driver, even, is not wont to beat his slave, if he sees him

willing to do all he can.

This plea is utterly false, for no sinner is willing to be any better than he actually is. If the will is right, all is right; and universally the state of the will is the measure of one's moral character. Those men, therefore who plead that they are willing to be Christians while yet they remain in their sins, talk mere nonsense.

5. Sinners say they are waiting God's time. A lady in Philadelphia had been in great distress of mind for many years. On calling to see her, I asked, "What does God require of you? What is your case?" "Oh," said she, "God waited on me a long time before I began to seek Him at all, and now I must wait for Him as long as He did for me. So my minister tells me. You see, therefore, that I am waiting in great distress for God to receive me."

Now what is the real meaning of this? It comes to this;--God urges me to duty, but is not ready for me to do it; He tells me to come to the Gospel feast, and I am ready; but He is not ready to let me in.

Now does not this throw all the blame upon God? Could any thing do so more completely than this does? The sinner says--"I am ready, and willing, and waiting; but God is not yet ready for me to stop sinning. His hour has not yet come."

When I first began to preach, I found this notion almost universal. Often after pressing men to duty, I have been accosted;--"What, you throw all the blame upon the sinner!" "Yes, indeed I do," would be my reply. An old lady once met me after preaching and broke out, "What! you set men to getting religion themselves! You tell them to repent themselves? You don't mean so, do you?" "Indeed I do," said I. She had been teaching for many years that the sinner's chief duty is to await God's time.

6. Sinners plead in excuse, that their circumstances are very peculiar. I know my duty well enough, but my circumstances are so peculiar. And does not God understand your circumstances? Nay, has not His providence been concerned in making them what they are? If so, then you are throwing blame upon God. You say--"O Lord, thou art a hard master, for thou hast never made any allowance for my circumstances."

But how much, sinner, do you really mean in making this plea? Do you mean

that your circumstances are so peculiar, that God ought to excuse you from becoming religious, at least for the present? If you do not mean as much as this, why do you make your circumstances your excuse at all? If you do mean this, then you are just as much mistaken as you can be. For God requires you, despite of your circumstances, to abandon your sin. If now your circumstances are so peculiar that you cannot serve God in them, you must abandon them or lose your soul. If they are such as admit of your serving God in them, then do so at once.

But you say--"I can't get out of my circumstances." I reply, you can;--you can get out of the wickedness of them; for if it is necessary in order to serve God, you can change them; and if not, you can repent and serve God in them.

7. The sinner's next excuse is that his temperament is peculiar. "Oh," he says, "I am very nervous;" or "my temperament is very sluggish; I seem to have no sensibility." Now what does God require? Does He require of you another or a different sensibility from your own? Or does He require only that you should use what you have according to the law of love?

But such is the style of a multitude of excuses. One has too little excitement; another, too much; so neither can possibly repent and serve God! A woman came to me, and pleaded that she was naturally too excitable, and dared not trust herself; and therefore could not repent. Another has the opposite trouble--too sluggish--scarce ever sheds a tear--and therefore could make nothing out of religion if he should try. But does God require you to shed more tears than you are naturally able to shed? Or does He only require that you should serve Him? Certainly this is all. Serve Him with the very powers He has given you. Let your nerves be ever so excitable, come and lay those quivering sensibilities over into the hands of God--pour out that sensibility into the heart of God! This is all that He requires. I know how to sympathize with that woman, for I know much about a burning sensibility; but does God require feeling and excitement? Or only a perfect consecration of all our powers to Himself?

8. But, says another, my health is so poor that I can't go to meeting, and therefore can't be religious.

Well, what does God require? Does He require that you should go to all the meetings, by evening or by day, whether you have the requisite health for it

or not? Infinitely far from it. If you are not able to go to meeting, yet you can give God your heart. If you can not go in bad weather, be assured that God is infinitely the most reasonable being that ever existed. He makes all due allowance for every circumstance. Does He not know all your weakness? Indeed He does. And do you suppose that He comes into your sick-room and denounces you for not being able to go to meeting, or for not attempting when unable, and for not doing all in your sickness that you might do in health? No, not He; but He comes into your sick-room as a Father. He comes to pour out the deepest compassions of His heart in pity and in love; and why should you not respond to his loving-kindness? He comes to you and says--"Give me your heart, my child." And now you reply--"I have no heart." Then He has nothing to ask of you--He thought you had; and thought, too, that He had done enough to draw your heart in love and gratitude to Himself. He asks--"What can you find in all my dealings with you that is grievous? If nothing, why do you bring forward pleas in excuse for sin that accuse and condemn God?"

9. Another excuse is in this form, "My heart is so hard, that I can not feel." This is very common, both among professors and non-professors. In reality it is only another form of the plea of inability. In fact, all the sinner's excuses amount only to this--"I am unable"--"I can't do what God requires." If the plea of a hard heart is any excuse at all, it must be on the ground of real inability.

But what is hardness of heart? Do you mean that you have so great apathy of the sensibility that you can not get up any emotion? Or, do you mean that you have no power to will or to act right? Now on this point, it should be considered that the emotions are altogether involuntary. They go and come according to circumstances, and therefore are never required by the law of God, and are not, properly speaking, either religion itself, or any part of it. Hence, if by a hard heart you mean a dull sensibility, you mean what has no concern with the subject. God asks you to yield your will, and consecrate your affections to Himself, and He asks this, whether you have any feeling or not.

Real hardness of heart in the Bible use of the phrase, means stubbornness of will. So in the child, a hard heart means a will set in fixed stubbornness against doing its parent's bidding. The child may have in connection with

this, either much or little emotion. His sensibilities may be acute and thoroughly aroused, or they may be dormant; and yet the stubborn will may be there in either case.

Now the hardness of heart of which God complains in the sinner is precisely of this sort. The sinner cleaves to his self-indulgence, and will not relinquish it, and then complains of hardness of heart. What would you think of a child, who, when required to do a most reasonable thing, should say,--My heart is so hard, I can't yield." "O," he says, "my will is so set to have my own way that I cannot possibly yield to my father's authority."

This complaint is extremely common. Many a sinner makes it, who has been often warned, often prayed with and wept over, who has been the subject of many convictions. And does he really mean by this plea that he finds his will so obstinate that he can not make up his mind to yield to God's claims? Does he mean this, and does he intend really to publish his own shame? Suppose you go to the devils in hell, and press on them the claims of God, and they should reply, "O, my heart is so hard, I can't"--What would be their meaning? Only this--I am so obstinate--my will is so set in sin, that I can not for a moment indulge the thought of repentance. This would be their meaning, and if the sinner tells the truth of himself, and uses language correctly, he must mean the same. But oh, how does he add insult to injury by this declaration! Suppose a child should plead this--I can not find it in my heart to love my father and my mother; my heart is so hard towards them, I never can love them; I can feel pleasure only in abusing them, and trampling down their authority;--what a plea is this? Does not this heap insult upon wrong? Or suppose a murderer arraigned before the court, and permitted before his sentence, to speak, if he had aught to say why sentence should not be passed;-- suppose he should rise and say--"May it please the court, my heart for a long time has been as hard as a millstone. I have murdered so many men, and have been in the practice so long, that I can kill a man without the least compunction of conscience. Indeed, I have such an insatiable thirst for blood that I can not help murdering whenever I have a good opportunity. In fact, my heart is so hard that I find I like this employment full as well as any other."

Well, how long will the court listen to such a plea? Hold there! hold! the judge would cry--you infamous villain, we can hear no more such pleas!

Here, sheriff, bring in a gallows, and hang the man within these very walls of justice, for I will not leave the bench until I see him dead! He will murder us all here in this house if he can!"

Now what shall we think of the sinner who says the same thing! O God, he says, my heart is so hard I never can love thee. I hate thee so sincerely, I never can make up my mind to yield this heart to thee in love and willing submission.

Sinners, how many of you (in this house) have made this plea--"My heart is so hard, I can't repent. I can't love and serve God!" Go write it down; publish it to the universe--make your boast of being so hard-hearted that no claims of God can ever move you. Methinks if you were to make such a plea, you would not be half through before the whole universe would hiss you from their presence and chase you from the face of these heavens till you would cry out for some rocks or mountains to hide you from their scathing rebukes! Their voice of indignation would rise up and ring along the arch of heaven like the roar of ten thousand tornadoes, and overwhelm you with unutterable confusion and shame! What, do you insult and abuse the Great Jehovah? Oh! do you condemn that very God who has watched over you in unspeakable love--fanned you with his gentle zephyrs in your sickness--feasted you at his own table, and you would not thank him, or even notice his providing hand? And then when the sympathy of your Christian friends has pressed you with entreaties to repent, and they have made you a special subject of their prayers--when angels have wept over you, and unseen spirits have lifted their warning voices in your pathway to hell, you turn up your face of brass towards Jehovah and tell Him your heart is so hard you can't repent, and don't care whether you ever do or not! You seize a spear and plunge it into the heart of the crucified One, and then cry out--"I can't be sorry, not I; my heart is hard as a stone! I don't care and I will not repent!" What a wretch you are, sinner, if this is your plea?

But what does your plea amount to? Only this--that your heart is fully set to do evil. The sacred writer has revealed your case most clearly--"Because vengeance against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." You stand before the Lord just in this daring, blasphemous attitude--fully set in your heart to do evil.

10. Another form of the same plea is, my heart is so wicked I can't. Some

do not hesitate to avow this wickedness of heart. What do they mean by it? Do they mean that they are so hardened in sin, and so desperately wicked that they will not bow? This is the only proper sense of their language, and this is the precise truth.

Since you bring this forward, sinner, as your excuse, your object must be to charge this wickedness of heart upon God. Covertly, perhaps, but really, you imply that God is concerned in creating that wicked heart! This is it, and this is the whole of it. You would feel no interest in the excuse, and it would never escape your lips, but for this tacit implication that God is in fault for your wicked heart. This is only the plea of inability, coupled with its twin sister, original sin, coming down in the created blood and veins of the race, under the Creator's responsibility.

11. Another kindred plea, is--My heart is so deceitful. Suppose a man should make this excuse for deceiving his neighbour--"I can't help cheating you. I can't help lying to you and abusing you; my heart is so deceitful!" Would any man in his senses ever suppose that this could be an apology or excuse for doing wrong? Never. Of course, unless the sinner means in this plea to set forth his own guilt and condemn himself, he must intend it as some sort of justification; and if so, he must, in just so far, cast the blame upon God. And this is usually his intention. He does not mean sincerely to confess his own guilt; no, he charges the guilt of his deceitful heart upon God.

12. Another excuses himself by the plea, I have tried to become a Christian. I have done all I can do; I have tried often, earnestly, and long.

You have tried, then, you say, to be a Christian; what is being a Christian? Giving your heart to God. And what is giving your heart to God? Devoting your voluntary powers to Him; ceasing to live for yourself and living for God. This is being a Christian--the state you profess to have been trying to attain.

No excuse is more common than this. And what is legitimately implied in this trying to be a Christian? A willingness to do your duty is always implied; that the heart, that is, the will is right already; and the trying refers only to the outward efforts--the executive acts. For there is no sense whatever in a man's saying that he is trying to do what he has no intention or will to do.

The very statement implies that his will is not only in favor but is thoroughly committed and really in earnest to attain the end chosen.

Consequently if a man tries to be a Christian, he heart is obedient to God, and his trying must respect his outward action. These are so connected with the will that they follow by a law of necessity unless the connection is broken, and when this takes place, no sin attends our failure to secure the outward act. God does not hold us responsible.

Hence the sinner ought to mean by this plea--"I have obeyed God a long time--I have had a right heart--and I have tried sincerely to secure such external action as comports with Christian character.

Now if this be true, you have done your duty. But do you mean to affirm all this? No, you say. Then what do you mean?

Suppose I should say to my son, do this; do it my son; why have you not done it? O, he says, "father, I have tried;" but he does not mean that he has ever intended to do it--that he has ever made up his mind to obey me; he only means, "I have been willing to try--I made up my mind to try to be willing;" that is all! O he says I have brought myself to be willing to try to will to do it.

So you say--I have tried to get religion. And what is religion that you could not get it? How did you fail? You have been trying probably in this way. God has said "Give me thy heart," and you turned round and asked God to do it Himself, or perhaps you simply waited for Him to do it. He commanded you to repent, and you have tried to get Him to repent for you. He said, believe the gospel, and you have only been thinking of getting Him to believe for you. No wonder you have tried for a long time in vain. How could it be otherwise? You have not been trying to do what God commanded you to do, but to induce God to change his system of moral government and put Himself in your place to do Himself the duty He enjoins upon you. What a miserable perversion is this?

Now as to this whole plea of having tried to be a Christian, what is the use of it? You will easily see its use when you realize duly;

(1.) That it is utterly false when understood as you intend it.

(2.) That it is a foul implication of the character of God.

You say--Lord, I know I can't--I have tried all I can and I know I can not become a Christian. I am willing to get religion, but I cannot make it out.

Who then is to blame? Not yourself, according to your statement of your case. Where then is the blame? Let me ask--what would be said in the distant regions of the universe if you were believed there, when you say, I have tried with all my heart to love and serve God but I can't?

But they never can believe such a libel on their own infinite Father! Of course they will pronounce your doom as you deserve.

13. Another excuses himself by the plea--it will do no good to try. And what do you mean by this? Do you mean that God will not pay well for service done Him? Or do you mean that He will not forgive you if you do repent? Do you think (as some do) that you have sinned away your day of grace?

Well, suppose you have; is this any reason why you should go on in sin? Do you not believe that God is good? O yes. And that He will forgive you if the good of the universe admits? Most certainly. Then is the impossibility of his forgiving you any reason why you should go on in sin forever, and forever rage against a God of infinite goodness? You believe Him to be compassionate and forgiving; then should you not say, I will at least stop sinning against such a God! Why not say with the man who dreamed that he was just going to hell, and as he was parting with his brother--going, as his dream had it, to heaven, he said--"I am going down to hell, but I want you to tell God from me that I am greatly obliged to Him for ten thousand mercies which I never deserved; He has never done me the least injustice--give Him my thanks for all the unmerited good He has done me." At this point he awoke, and found himself bathed in tears of repentance and gratitude to his Father in heaven. O, if men would only act as reasonably as that man dreamed, it would be noble--it would be right. If when they suppose themselves to have sinned away the day of grace, they would say, "I know God is good--I will at least send Him my thanks--he has done me no injustice;" if they would take this course they might have at least the satisfaction of feeling that it is a reasonable and a fit one in their circumstances. Sinner, will you do this?

14. Another, closely pressed, says, "I have offered to give my heart to Christ, but He won't receive me." "I have no evidence that He receives me or ever will." In the last inquiry meeting, a young woman told me she had offered to give her heart to the Lord, but He would not receive her. This was charging the lie directly upon Christ, for He has said--"Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." You say, I came and offered myself and He would not receive me. Jesus Christ says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man"--not if some particular, some favored one--but if any man "hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him." And yet when you offered Him your heart, did He spurn you away? Did He say--away sinner, BEGONE? No, sinner, He never did it, never. He has said He never would do it. His own words are, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." "He that seeketh, findeth: to him that knocketh it shall be opened." But you say, I have sought and I did not find. Do you mean to make out that Jesus Christ is a liar? Have you charged this upon Him to his very face? Do you make your solemn affirmation--"Lord I did seek--I laid myself at thy gate and knocked--but all in vain?" And do you mean to bring this excuse of yours as a solemn charge of falsehood against Jesus Christ and against God? This will be a serious business with you before it is done with.

15. But another says--"there is no salvation for me." Do you mean that Christ has made no atonement for you? But He says, He tasted death for every man. It is declared that God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whomsoever believeth on Him shall have eternal life. And now do you affirm that there is no salvation provided and possible for you? Are you mourning all your way down to hell because you cannot possibly have salvation? When the cup of salvation is placed to your lips, do you dash it away, saying, That can not be for me? And do you know this? Can you prove it even against the word of God Himself? Stand forth then, if there be such a sinner on this footstool of God--speak it out, if you have such a charge against God, and if you can prove it true. Ah, is there no hope? none at all? Oh, the difficulty is not that there is no salvation provided for and offered to you, but that there is no heart for it. "Wherefore is there a price put into the hands of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart for it?"

16. But perhaps you say in excuse--"I cannot change my own heart." Can

not? Suppose Adam had made this excuse when God called him to repent after his first sin. "Make you a new heart and a right spirit,"--said the Lord to him. "I can not change my own heart myself," replies Adam. Indeed, responds his Maker, how long is it since you changed your heart yourself? You changed it a few hours ago from holiness to sin, and will you tell your Creator that you can't change it from sin to holiness?

The sinner should consider that the change of heart is a voluntary thing. You must do it for yourself or it is never done. True there is a sense in which God changes the heart, but it is only this: God influences the sinner to change, and then the sinner does it. The change is the sinner's own voluntary act.

17. You say, again, you can't change your heart without more conviction. Do you mean by this that you have not knowledge enough of your duty and your sin? You can not say this. You do know your sin and your duty. You know you ought to consecrate yourself to God. What then do you mean? Can't you do that which you know you ought to do? Ah, there is the old lie--that shameless refuge of lies--that same foul dogma of inability. What is implied in this new form of it? This--that God is not willing to convict you enough to make it possible for you to repent. There is a work and a responsibility for God, and He will not do his work: will not bear his responsibility. Hence you, alas, have no alternative but to go down to hell. And because God will not do his part towards your salvation! Do you really believe that, sinner.

18. Again you say in excuse, that you must first have more of the Spirit. And yet you resist the Spirit every day. God offers you his Spirit, nay more, God bestows his Spirit; but you resist it. What then do you mean when you pretend to want more of the Spirit's influence?

The truth is, you do not want it--you only want to make it appear that God does not do his part to help you to repent, and that as you can't repent without his help, therefore the blame of your impenitence rests on God. It is only another refuge of lies--another form of the old slander upon God;--He has made me unable and won't help me out of my inability.

19. The sinner also excuses himself by saying--God must change my heart. But in the sense in which God requires you to do it, He cannot do it Himself. God is said to change the heart only in the sense of persuading you

to do it. As in a man's change of politics--one might say--"such a man changed my heart--he brought me over," which however by no means implies that you did not change your own mind. The plain meaning is that he persuaded and you yielded.

But this plea made by the sinner as his excuse, implies that there is something more for God to do before the sinner can become religious. I have heard many professors of religion take this very ground. Yes, thousands of Christian ministers, too, have said to the sinner--"wait for God; He will change your heart in his own good time; you can't do it yourself, and all that you can do is to put yourself in the way for the Lord to change your heart. When this time comes, He will give you a new heart, while you are asleep, perhaps, in a state of unconsciousness. God acts in this matter as a sovereign, and does his own work in his own way."

So they teach--filling the mouth of the sinner with excuses and making his heart like an adamant against the real claims of God upon his conscience.

20. The sinner pleads, again, "I can't live a Christian life if I were to become a Christian. It is unreasonable for me to expect to succeed where I see so many fail." I recollect the case of a man who said, "It is of no use for me to repent and be a Christian, for it is altogether irrational for me to expect to do better than others have done before me." So sinners who make this excuse come forward very modestly and tell God, "I am very humble--thou seest, Lord, that I have a very low opinion of myself; I am so zealous of thine honour and so afraid that I shall bring disgrace upon thy cause; it does not seem at all best for me to think of becoming a Christian, I have such a horror of dishonoring thy name.

Yes, and what then? "Therefore, I will sin on and trample the blessed gospel under my feet. I will persecute Thee, O my God, and make war on Thy cause, for it is better by far not to profess religion than to profess and then disgrace my profession." What logic! Fair specimen of the absurdity of the sinner's excuses.

This excuse assumes that there is not grace enough provided and offered, to sustain the soul in a Christian life. The doctrine is, that it is irrational to expect that we can, by any grace received in this life, perfectly obey the law of God. There is not grace and help enough afforded by God! And this is

taught as BIBLE THEOLOGY! Away with such teaching to the nether pit whence it came!

What! is God so weak that He can't hold up the soul that casts itself on Him? Or is He so parsimonious in bestowing his gracious aid that it must be expected always to fall short of meeting the wants of his dependent and depending child? So you seem to suppose. So hard to persuade the Lord to give you a particle of grace! Can't get grace enough to live a Christian life with honor! What is this but charging God of withholding sufficient grace.

But what say the word and the oath of Jehovah? We read that "God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." You say, however, "If I should flee and lay hold of this hope, I should fail for want of grace. I could have no 'consolation' in reposing upon the word of Him who cannot lie. The oath of the immutable God can never suffice for me."

So you belie the word of God, and make up a miserably slim and guilty apology for your impenitence.

21. Another excuse claims that this is a very dark, mysterious subject. This matter of faith and regeneration--I can't understand it.

Sinner, did you ever meet the Lord with this objection, and say, "Lord thou hast required me to do things which I can't understand?" You know that you can understand well enough that you are a sinner--that Christ died for you--that you must believe on Him and break off your sins by repentance. All this is so plain that "the wayfaring man though a fool need not err therein." Your plea, therefore, is as false as it is foul. It is nothing better than a base libel on God!

22. But you say, "I can't believe." You mean, (do you?) that you can't believe a God of infinite veracity as you can believe a fellow man? Would you imply that God asks you to believe things that are really incredible--things so revolting to reason that you cannot admit them on any testimony that even God himself can adduce?

And do you expect to make out this case against God? Do you even believe

the first point in it yourself?

But you urge again that you can't realize these things. You know these things to be true, but you can't realize--you can't realize that the Bible is true--that God does offer to forgive--that salvation is actually provided and placed within your reach. What help can there be for a case like yours? What can make these truths more certain? But on your own showing, you do not want more evidence. Why not then act upon the known truth? What more can you ask?

Do you ever carry your case before God and say, "O Lord, Thou sayest that Christ died for me, but I can't realize that it is so, and therefore Lord, I can't possibly embrace Him as my Saviour?" Would this be a rational excuse?

But you also plead that you can't repent. You can't be sorry you have abused God. You can't make up your mind now to break off from all sin. If this be really so, then you cannot make up your mind to obey God, and you may as well make up your mind to go to hell! There is no alternative!

But at any rate, you can't become a Christian now. You mean to be converted some time, but you can't make up your mind to it NOW. Well, God requires it now, and of course you must yield or abide the consequences.

But do you say, You can't now? Then God is very much to blame for asking it. If however the truth be that you can, then the lie is on your side, and it is a most infamous and abusive lie against your Maker.

III. All excuses for sin add insult to injury.

1. A plea that reflects injuriously upon the court or the lawgiver is an aggravation of the original crime. It is always so regarded in all tribunals. It must be pre-eminently so between the sinner and his infinite Lawgiver and Judge.

2. The same is true of any plea made in self-justification. If it be false, it is considered an aggravation of the crime charged. This is a case which sometimes happens, and whenever it does, it is deemed to add fresh insult and wrong. For a criminal to come and spread out his lie upon the records of the court--to declare what he knows to be false; nothing can prejudice his case so fearfully.

On the other hand, when a man before the court appears to be honest, and confesses his guilt, the judge, if he has any discretion in the case, puts down his sentence to the lowest point possible. But if the criminal resorts to dodging--if he equivocates and lies, then you will see the strong arm of the law come down upon him. The judge comes forth in all the thunders of judicial majesty and terror, and feels that he may not spare his victim. Why? The man has lied before the very court of justice. The man sets himself against all law, and he must be put down, or law itself is down.

3. It is truly abominable for the sinner to abuse God and then excuse himself for it. Ah, this is only the old way of the guilty. Adam and Eve in the garden fled and hid themselves when they heard the voice of the Lord approaching. And what had they done? The Lord calls them out and begins to search them: "Adam, what hast thou done? Has thou eaten of the forbidden tree in the centre of the garden?" Adam quailed, but fled to an excuse: "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat." God, he says, gave him his tempter. God, according to his excuse, had been chiefly to blame in the transaction.

Next He turns to the woman: "What is that thou hast done?" She too has an excuse: "The serpent beguiled me and I did eat." Ah, this perpetual shuffling the blame back upon God! It has been kept up through the long line of Adam's imitators down to this day. For six thousand years God has been hearing it, and still the world is spared, and the vengeance of God has not yet burst forth to smite all his guilty calumniators to hell! O! what patience in God! And who have ever abused his patience and insulted Him by their excuses more than sinners in this house?

REMARKS.

1. No sinner under the light of the Gospel lives a single hour in sin without some excuse, either tacit or avowed, by which he justifies himself. It seems to be a law of man's intelligent nature that when accused of wrong, either by his conscience or by any other agent, he must either confess or justify. The latter is the course taken by all impenitent sinners. Hence the reason why they have so much occasion for excuses, and why they find it convenient to have so great a variety. It is remarkable with what facility they fly from one to another, as if these refuges of lies might make up in number what they lack in strength. Conscious that not one of all the multitude is valid in point of truth and right, they yet,

when pressed on one, fly to another, and when driven from all in succession they are ready to come back and fight the same ground over again. It is so hard to abandon all excuses, and admit the humbling truth that they themselves are all wrong, and God all right.

Hence it becomes the great business of a gospel minister to search out and expose the sinner's excuses; to go all round and round, and, if possible, demolish the sinner's refuges of lies, and lay his heart open to the shafts of truth.

2. Excuses render repentance impossible. For excuses are justifications, and who does not know that justification is the very opposite of confession and repentance? To seek after and embrace excuses therefore, is to place one's self at the farthest possible remove from repentance.

Of course the self-accusing sinner makes it impossible for God to forgive him. He places the Deity in such a position toward himself, and I might say, places himself in such an attitude toward the government of God, that his forgiveness would be ruin to the very throne of God. What would heaven say, and hell too, and earth besides, if God were to forgive a sinner while he by his excuses is justifying himself and condemning his Maker?

3. Sinners should lay all their excuses at once before God. Surely this is most reasonable. Why not? If a man owed me, and supposed he had a reasonable excuse for not paying the debt, he should come to me and let me understand the whole case. Perhaps he will satisfy me that his views are right.

Now, sinner, have you ever done so in regard to God? Have you ever brought up one excuse before the Lord, saying, "Thou requirest me to be holy, but I can't be;" "Lord, I have a good excuse for not obeying thee?" No, sinner, you are not in the habit of doing this--probably you have not done it the first time yet in all your life. In fact, you have no particular encouragement to carry your excuses before God, for you have not one yet that you yourself believe to be good for anything except to answer the purpose of a refuge of lies. Your excuses won't stand the ordeal of your own reason and conscience. How then can you hope they will stand before the searching eye of Jehovah? The fact that you never come with your excuses to God shows that you have no confidence in them.

4. What infinite madness to rest on excuses which you dare not bring before God now! How can you stand before God in the judgment, if your excuses are so

mean that you cannot seriously think of bringing one of them before God in this world? O, sinner, that coming day will be far more searching and awful than any thing you have seen yet. See that dense mass of sinners drawn up before the great white throne--far as the eye can sweep, they come surging up--a countless throng;--and now they stand, and the awful trump of God summons them forward to bring forth their excuses for sin. Ho, sinners--any one of you all--what have you to say why sentence should not be passed on you? Where are all those excuses you were once so free and bold to make? Where are they all? Why don't you make them now? Hark! God waits; he listens;--there is silence in heaven--all through the congregated throng--for half an hour--an awful silence--that may be felt; but not a word--not a moving lip among the gathered myriads of sinners there;--and now the great and dreadful Judge arises and lets loose his thunders. O, see the waves of dire damnation roll over the ocean-masses of self-condemned sinners! Did you ever see the judge rise from his bench in court to pass sentence of death on a criminal? There, see, the poor man reels--he falls prostrate, there is no longer any strength in him, for death is on him and his last hope has perished!

O, sinner, when that sentence from the dread throne shall fall on thee! Your excuses are as millstones around your neck as you plunge along down the sides of the pit to the nethermost hell!

5. Sinners don't need their excuses. God does not ask for even one. He does not require you to justify yourself--not at all. If you needed them for your salvation I could sympathize with you, and certainly would help you all I could. But you don't need them. Your salvation does not turn on your successful self-vindication. You need not rack your brain for excuses. Better say, I don't want them--don't deserve them--have not one that is worth a straw. Better say, "I am wicked. God knows that's the truth, and it were vain for me to attempt to conceal it. I AM WICKED, and if I ever live, it must be on simple mercy!"

I can recollect very well the year I lived on excuses, and how long it was before I gave them up. I had never heard a minister preach on the subject. I found however by my experience, that my excuses and lies were the obstacles in the way of my conversion. As soon as I let these go utterly, I found the gate of mercy wide open. And so, sinner, would you.

6. Sinners ought to be ashamed of their excuses, and repent of them. Perhaps you have not always seen this as plainly as you may now. With the light now before

you it becomes you to beware. See to it that you never make another excuse, unless you intend to abuse God in the most horrible manner. Nothing can be a more grievous abomination in the sight of God than excuses made by a sinner who knows they are utterly false and blasphemous. O you ought to repent of the insult you have already offered to God--and NOW, too, lest you find yourself thrust away from the gate of mercy.

7. You admit your obligation, and of course are estopped from making excuses. For if you have any good excuse, you are not under obligation. If any one of you has a good excuse for disobeying God, you are no longer under obligation to obey. But since you are compelled to admit obligation, you are also compelled to relinquish excuses.

8. Inasmuch as you do and must admit your obligation, then if you still plead excuses, you insult God to His face. You insult Him by charging Him with infinite tyranny.

Now, what use do you calculate to make of this sermon? Are you ready to say, "I will henceforth desist from all my excuses, now and for ever; and God shall have my whole heart?" What do you say? Will you set about to hunt up some new excuse? Do you at least say, "Let me go home first--don't press me to yield to God here on the spot;--let me go home and then I will?" Do you say this? And are you aware how tender is this moment--how critical this passing hour? Remember it is not I who press this claim upon you--but it is God. God Himself commands you to repent today--this hour. You know your duty--you know what religion is--what it is to give God your heart. And now I come to the final question--Will you do it? Will you abandon all your excuses, and fall, a self-condemned sinner, before a God of love, and yield to Him yourself--your heart, and your whole being, henceforth and for ever? WILL YOU COME?

[Back to Top](#)

Conditions of Being Saved

Lecture IV

November 8, 1848

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Acts 16:30: "What must I do to be saved?"

I bring forward this subject to-day not because it is new to many in this congregation, but because it is greatly needed. I am happy to know that the great inquiry of our text is beginning to be deeply and extensively agitated in this community, and under these circumstances it is the first duty of a Christian pastor to answer it, fully and plainly.

The circumstances which gave occasion to the words of the text were briefly these. Paul and Silas had gone to Philippi to preach the Gospel. Their preaching excited great opposition and tumult; they were arrested and thrown into prison, and the jailer was charged to keep them safely. At midnight they were praying and singing praises--God came down--the earth quaked and the prison rocked--its doors burst open, and their chains fell off; the jailer sprang up affrighted, and supposing his prisoners had fled, was about to take his own life, when Paul cried out, "Do thyself no harm--we are all here." He then called for a light, and sprang in and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

This is briefly the history of our text; and I improve it now, by showing;

I. What sinners must not do to be saved; and

II. What they must do.

I. What sinners must not do to be saved.

It has now come to be necessary, and very important to tell men what they must not do in order to be saved. When the gospel was first preached Satan had not introduced as many delusions to mislead men as he has now. It was then enough

to give, as Paul did, the simple and direct answer, telling men only what they must at once do. But this seems to be not enough now. So many delusions and perversions have bewildered and darkened the minds of men that they need often a great deal of instruction to lead them back to those simple views of the subject which prevailed at first. Hence the importance of showing what sinners must not do, if they intend to be saved.

1. They must not imagine that they have nothing to do. In Paul's time nobody seems to have thought of this. Then the doctrine of Universalism was not much developed. Men had not begun to dream that they should be saved without doing anything. They had not learned that sinners have nothing to do to be saved. If this idea, so current of late, had been rife at Philippi, the question of our text would not have been asked. No trembling sinner would have cried out, What must I do to be saved?

If men imagine they have nothing to do, they are never likely to be saved. It is not in the nature of falsehood and lies to save men's souls, and surely nothing is more false than this notion. Men know they have something to do to be saved. Why then do they pretend that all men will be saved whether they do their duty, or constantly refuse to do it? The very idea is preposterous, and is entertained only by the most palpable outrage upon common sense and an enlightened conscience.

2. You should not mistake what you have to do. The duty required of sinners is very simple, and would be easily understood were it not for the false ideas that prevail as to what religion is, and as to the exact things which God requires as conditions of salvation. On these points erroneous opinions prevail to a most alarming extent. Hence the danger of mistake. Beware lest you be deceived in a matter of so vital moment.

3. Do not say or imagine that you cannot do what God requires. On the contrary, always assume that you can. If you assume that you cannot, this very assumption will be fatal to your salvation.

4. Do not procrastinate. As you ever intend or hope to be saved, you must set your face like a flint against this most pernicious delusion. Probably no other mode of evading present duty has ever prevailed so extensively as this, or has destroyed so many souls. Almost all men in gospel lands intend to prepare for death--intend to repent and become religious before they die.

Even Universalists expect to become religious at some time--perhaps after death--perhaps after being purified from their sins by purgatorial fires; but somehow they expect to become holy, for they know they must before they can see God and enjoy His presence. But you will observe, they put this matter of becoming holy off to the most distant time possible. Feeling a strong dislike to it now, they flatter themselves that God will take care that it shall be done up duly in the next world, howmuchsoever they may frustrate His efforts to do it in this. So long as it remains in their power to choose whether to become holy or not, they improve the time to enjoy sin; and leave it with God to make them holy in the next world--if they can't prevent it there! Consistency IS a jewel!

And all those who put off being religious now in the cherished delusion of becoming so in some future time, whether in this world or the next, are acting out this same inconsistency. You fondly hope that will occur which you are now doing your utmost to prevent.

So sinners by myriads press their way down to hell under this delusion. They often, when pressed with the claims of God, will even name the time when they will repent. It may be very near--perhaps as soon as they get home from the meeting, or as soon as the sermon is over; or it may be more remote, as for example, when they have finished their education, or become settled in life, or have made a little more property, or get ready to abandon some business of questionable morality;--but no matter whether the time set be near or remote, the delusion is fatal--the thought of procrastination is murder to the soul. Ah, such sinners are little aware that Satan himself has poured out his spirit upon them and is leading them whithersoever he will. He little cares whether they put off for a longer time or a shorter. If he can persuade them to a long delay, he likes it well; if only to a short one, he feels quite sure he can renew the delay and get another extension--so it answers his purpose fully in the end.

Now mark, sinner, if you ever mean to be saved you must resist and grieve away this spirit of Satan. You must cease to procrastinate. You can never be converted so long as you operate only in the way of delaying and promising yourself that you will become religious at some future time. Did you ever bring anything to pass in your temporal business by procrastination? Did procrastination ever begin, prosecute, and accomplish any important

business?

Suppose you have some business of vast consequence, involving your character, or your whole estate, or your life, to be transacted in Cleveland, but you do not know precisely how soon it must be done. It may be done with safety now, and with greater facility now than ever hereafter; but it might possibly be done although you should delay a little time, but every moment's delay involves an absolute uncertainty of your being able to do it at all. You do not know but a single hour's delay will make you too late. Now in these circumstances what would a man of sense and discretion do? Would he not be awake and up in an instant? Would he sleep on a matter of such moment, involved in such risks and uncertainties? No. You know that the risk of a hundred dollars, pending on such conditions, would stir the warm blood of any man of business, and you could not tempt him to delay an hour. O, he would say, this is the great business to which I must attend, and every thing else must give way. But suppose he should act as a sinner does about repentance, and promise himself that to-morrow will be as this day and much more abundant--and do nothing to-day, nor to-morrow, nor the next month, nor the next year--would you not think him beside himself? Would you expect his business to be done, his money to be secured, his interests to be promoted?

So the sinner accomplishes nothing but his own ruin so long as he procrastinates. Until he says--"Now is my time--to-day I will do all my duty"--he is only playing the fool and laying up his wages accordingly. O, it is infinite madness to defer a matter of such vast interest and of such perilous uncertainty!

5. If you would be saved you must not wait for God to do what He commands you to do.

God will surely do all that He can for your salvation. All that the nature of the case allows of his doing, he either has done or stands ready to do as soon as your position and course will allow him to do it. Long before you were born he anticipated your wants as a sinner, and began on the most liberal scale to make provision for them. He gave his Son to die for you, thus doing all that need be done by way of an atonement. Of a long time past He has been shaping his providence so as to give you the requisite knowledge of duty--has sent you his word and Spirit. Indeed He has given you the highest

possible evidence that He will be energetic and prompt on His part--as one in earnest for your salvation. You know this. What sinner in this house fears lest God should be negligent on his part in the matter of his salvation? Not one. No, many of you are not a little annoyed that God should press you so earnestly and be so energetic in the work of securing your salvation. And now can you quiet your conscience with the excuse of waiting for God to do your duty?

The fact is, there are things for you to do which God cannot do for you. Those things which he has enjoined and revealed as the conditions of your salvation, He cannot and will not do Himself. If He could have done them Himself, He would not have asked you to do them. Every sinner ought to consider this. God requires of you repentance and faith because it is naturally impossible that any one else but you should do them. They are your own personal matters--the voluntary exercises of your own mind; and no other being in heaven, earth, or hell can do these things for you in your stead. As far as substitution was naturally possible, God has introduced it, as in the case of the atonement. He has never hesitated to march up to meet and to bear all the self-denials which the work of salvation has involved.

6. If you mean to be saved, you must not wait for God to do anything whatever. There is nothing to be waited for. God has either done all on his part already, or if anything more remains, He is ready and waiting this moment for you to do your duty that He may impart all needful grace.

7. Do not flee to any refuge of lies. Lies cannot save you. It is truth--not lies, that alone can save. I have often wondered how men could suppose that Universalism could save any man.

Men must be sanctified by the truth. There is no plainer teaching in the Bible than this, and no Bible doctrine is better sustained by reason and the nature of the case.

Now does Universalism sanctify anybody? Universalists say you must be punished for your sins, and that thus they will be put away--as if the fires of purgatory would thoroughly consume all sin, and bring out the sinner pure. Is this being sanctified by the truth? You might as well hope to be saved by eating liquid fire! You might as well expect fire to purify your soul from sin in this world, as in the next! Why not?

It is amazing that men should hope to be sanctified and saved by this great error, or indeed by any error whatever. God says you must be sanctified by the truth. Suppose you could believe this delusion, would it make you holy? Do you believe that it would make you humble, heavenly-minded, sin-hating, benevolent? Can you believe any such thing? Be assured that Satan is only the father of lies, and he cannot save you--in fact, he would not if he could; he intends his lies not to save you, but to destroy your very soul, and nothing could be more adapted to its purpose. Lies are only the natural poison of the soul. You take them at your peril!

8. Don't seek for any self-indulgent method of salvation. The great effort among sinners has always been to be saved in some way of self-indulgence. They are slow to admit that self-denial is indispensable--that total, unqualified self-denial is the condition of being saved. I warn you against supposing that you can be saved in some easy, self-pleasing way. Men ought to know, and always assume that it is naturally indispensable for selfishness to be utterly put away and its demands resisted and put down.

I often ask--Does the system of salvation which I preach so perfectly chime with the intuitions of my reason that I know from within myself that this gospel is the thing I need? Does it in all its parts and relations meet the demands of my intelligence? Are its requisitions obviously just and right? Do its prescribed conditions of salvation obviously befit man's moral position before God, and his moral relations to the government of God?

To these and similar questions I am constrained to answer in the affirmative. The longer I live the more fully I see that the gospel system is the only one that can alike meet the demands of the human intelligence, and supply the wants of man's sinning, depraved heart. The duties enjoined upon the sinner are just those things which I know must in the nature of the case be the conditions of salvation. Why then should any sinner think of being saved on any other conditions? Why desire it even if it were ever so practicable?

9. Don't imagine you will ever have a more favourable time.

Impenitent sinners are prone to imagine that just now is by no means so convenient a season as may be expected hereafter. So they put off in hope of a better time. They think perhaps that they shall have more conviction, and fewer obstacles, and less hindrances. So thought Felix. He did not intend to

forego salvation, any more than you do; but he was very busy just then--had certain ends to be secured which seemed peculiarly pressing, and so he begged to be excused on the promise of very faithful attention to the subject at the expected convenient season. But did the convenient season ever come? Never. Nor does it ever come to those who in like manner resist God's solemn call, and grieve away His Spirit. Thousands are now waiting in the pains of hell who said just as he did, "Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee." Oh, sinner, when will your convenient season come! Are you aware that no season will ever be "convenient" for you, unless God calls up your attention earnestly and solemnly to the subject? And can you expect Him to do this at the time of your choice, when you scorn his call at the time of his choice? Have you not heard Him say--"Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded, but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh. When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you; then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me." O, sinner, that will be a fearful and a final doom! And the myriad voices of God's universe will say, amen!

10. Do not suppose that you will find another time as good, and one in which you can just as well repent as now.

Many are ready to suppose that though there may be no better time for themselves, there will at least be one as good. Vain delusion! Sinner, you already owe ten thousand talents, and will you find it just as easy to be forgiven this debt while you are showing that you don't care how much and how long you augment it? In a case like this, where everything turns upon your securing the good will of your creditor, do you hope to gain it by positively insulting Him to his face?

Or take another view of the case. Your heart you know must one day relent for sin, or you are forever damned. You know also that each successive sin increases the hardness of your heart, and makes it a more difficult matter to repent. How, then, can you reasonably hope that a future time will be equally favourable for your repentance? When you have hardened your neck like an iron sinew, and made your heart like an adamant stone, can you hope that

repentance will yet be as easy to you as ever?

You know, sinner, that God requires you to break off from your sins now. But you look up into His face and say to Him--"Lord, it is just as well to stop abusing thee at some future convenient time. Lord, if I can only be saved at last, I shall think it all my gain to go on insulting and abusing thee as long as it will possibly answer. And since thou art so very compassionate and long-suffering, I think I may venture on in sin and rebellion against thee yet these many months and years longer. Lord, don't hurry me--do let me have my way--let me abuse thee if thou pleasest, and spit in thy face--all will be just as well if I only repent in season so as finally to be saved. I know, indeed, that thou art entreating me to repent now, but I much prefer to wait a season, and it will be just as well to repent at some future time."

And now do you suppose that God will set his seal to this--that He will say--"You are right, sinner, I set my seal of approbation upon your course--it is well that you take so just views of your duty to your Maker and your Father; go on; your course will ensure your salvation." Do you expect such a response from God, as this?

11. If you ever expect to be saved, don't wait to see what others will do or say.

I was lately astonished to find that a young lady here under conviction was in great trouble about what a beloved brother would think of her if she should give her heart to God. She knew her duty; but he was impenitent, and how could she know what he would think if she should repent now! It amounts to this. She would come before God and say--"O thou great God, I know I ought to repent, but I can't; for I don't know as my brother will like it. I know that he too is a sinner, and must repent or lose his soul, but I am much more afraid of his frown than I am of thine, and I care more for his approbation than I do for thine, and consequently, I dare not repent till he does!" How shocking is this! Strange that on such a subject men will ever ask--"What will others say of me?" Are you amenable to God? What then have others to say about your duty to Him? God requires you and them also to repent, and why don't you do it at once?

Not long since, as I was preaching abroad, one of the principal men of the city came to the meeting for inquiry, apparently much convicted and in great

distress for his soul. But being a man of high political standing, and supposing himself to be very dependent upon his friends, he insisted that he must consult them, and have a regard for their feelings in this matter. I could not possibly beat him off from this ground, although I spent three hours in the effort. He seemed almost ready to repent--I thought he certainly would; but he slipped away, relapsed by a perpetual back-sliding, and I expect will be found at last among the lost in perdition. Would you not expect such a result if he tore himself away under such an excuse as that?

O, sinner, you must not care what others say of you--let them say what they please. Remember, the question is between your own soul and God, and "he that is wise shall be wise for himself, and he that scorneth, he alone shall bear it." You must die for yourself, and for yourself must appear before God in judgment! Go, young woman, ask your brother--"Can you answer for me when I come to the judgment? Can you pledge yourself that you can stand in my stead and answer for me there?" Now until you have reason to believe that he can, it is wise for you to disregard his opinions if they stand at all in your way. Whoever interposes any objection to your immediate repentance, fail not to ask him--Can you shield my soul in the judgment? If I can be assured that you can and will, I will make you my Saviour; but if not, then I must attend to my own salvation, and leave you to attend to yours.

I never shall forget the scene which occurred while my own mind was turning upon this great point. Seeking a retired place for prayer, I went into a deep grove, found a perfectly secluded spot behind some large logs, and knelt down. All suddenly, a leaf rustled and I sprang, for somebody must be coming and I shall be seen here at prayer. I had not been aware that I cared what others said of me, but looking back upon my exercises of mind here, I could see that I did care infinitely too much what others thought of me.

Closing my eyes again for prayer, I heard a rustling leaf again, and then the thought came over me like a wave of the sea, "I am ashamed of confessing my sin!" What! thought I, ashamed of being found speaking with God! O, how ashamed I felt of this shame! I can never describe the strong and overpowering impression which this thought made on my mind. I cried aloud at the very top of my voice, for I felt that though all the men on earth, and all the devils in hell were present to hear and see me I would not shrink and would not cease to cry unto God; for what is it to me if others see me seeking

the face of my God and Saviour? I am hastening to the judgment: there I shall not be ashamed to have the Judge my friend. There I shall not be ashamed to have sought His face and His pardon here. There will be no shrinking away from the gaze of the universe. O, if sinners at the judgment could shrink away, how gladly would they; but they cannot! Nor can they stand there in each other's places to answer for each other's sins. That young woman, can she say then--O, my brother, you must answer for me; for to please you, I rejected Christ and lost my soul? That brother is himself a guilty rebel, confounded, and agonized, and quailing before the awful Judge, and how can he befriend you in such an awful hour! Fear not his displeasure now, but rather warn him while you can, to escape for his life ere the wrath of the Lord wax hot against him, and there be no remedy.

12. If you would be saved, you must not indulge prejudices against either God, or his ministers, or against Christians, or against any thing religious.

There are some persons of peculiar temperament who are greatly in danger of losing their souls because they are tempted to strong prejudices. Once committed either in favour of or against any persons or things, they are exceedingly apt to become so fixed, as never more to be really honest. And when these persons or things in regard to which they become committed, are so connected with religion, that their prejudices stand arrayed against their fulfilling the great conditions of salvation, the effect can be nothing else than ruinous. For it is naturally indispensable to salvation, that you should be entirely honest. Your soul must act before God in the open sincerity of truth, or you cannot be converted.

I have known persons in revivals to remain a long time under great conviction, without submitting themselves to God, and by careful inquiry I have found them wholly hedged in by their prejudices, and yet so blind to this fact that they would not admit that they had any prejudice at all. In my observation of convicted sinners, I have found this among the most common obstacles in the way of the salvation of souls. Men become committed against religion, and remaining in this state it is naturally impossible that they should repent. God will not humour your prejudices, or lower his prescribed conditions of salvation to accommodate your feelings.

Again, you must give up all hostile feelings in cases where you have been really injured. Sometimes I have seen persons evidently shut out from the

kingdom of heaven, because having been really injured, they would not forgive and forget, but maintained such a spirit of resistance and revenge, that they could not in the nature of the case, repent of the sin toward God, nor could God forgive them. Of course they lost heaven. I have heard men say--"I can not forgive--I will not forgive--I have been injured, and I never will forgive that wrong." Now mark:--you must not hold on to such feelings; if you do, you cannot be saved.

Again, you must not suffer yourself to be stumbled by the prejudices of others. I have often been struck with the state of things in families, where the parents or older persons had prejudices against the minister, and have wondered why those parents were not more wise than to lay stumbling-blocks before their children to ruin their souls. This is often the true reason why children are not converted. Their minds are turned against the gospel, by being turned against those from whom they hear it preached. I would rather have persons come into my family, and curse and swear before my children, than to have them speak against those who preach to them the gospel. Therefore I say to all parents--take care what you say, if you would not shut the gate of heaven against your children!

Again, do not allow yourself to take some fixed position, and then suffer the stand you have taken to debar you from doing any obvious duty. Persons sometimes allow themselves to be committed against taking what is called "the anxious seat;" and consequently they refuse to go forward under circumstances when it is obviously proper that they should, and where their refusal to do so, places them in an attitude unfavourable, and perhaps fatal to their conversion. Let every sinner beware of this!

Again, do not hold on to anything about which you have any doubt of its lawfulness or propriety. Cases often occur in which persons are not fully satisfied that a thing is wrong, and yet are not satisfied that it is right. Now in cases of this sort it should not be enough to say--"such and such Christians do so;"--you ought to have better reasons than this for your course of conduct. If you ever expect to be saved, you must abandon all practices which you even suspect to be wrong. This principle seems to be involved in the passage, "He that doubteth is damned if he eat; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." To do that which is of doubtful propriety is to allow yourself to tamper with the divine authority, and cannot fail to break down in your mind

that solemn dread of sinning which if you would ever be saved, you must carefully cherish.

Again, if you would be saved, do not look at professors and wait for them to become engaged as they should be in the great work of God. If they are not what they ought to be, let them alone. Let them bear their own awful responsibility. It often happens that convicted sinners compare themselves with professed Christians, and excuse themselves for delaying their duty, because professed Christians are delaying theirs. Sinners must not do this if they would ever be saved. It is very probable that you will always find guilty professors enough to stumble over into hell if you will allow yourself to do so.

But on the other hand, many professors may not be nearly so bad as you suppose, and you must not be censorious, putting the worst constructions upon their conduct. You have other work to do than this. Let them stand or fall to their own master. Unless you abandon the practice of picking flaws in the conduct of professed Christians, it is utterly impossible that you should be saved.

Again, do not depend upon professors--on their prayers or influence in any way. I have known children hang a long time upon the prayers of their parents, putting those prayers in the place of Jesus Christ, or at least in the place of their own present efforts to do their duty. Now this course pleases Satan entirely. He would ask nothing more to make sure of you. Therefore--depend on no prayers--not even those of the holiest Christians on earth. The matter of your conversion lies between yourself and God alone, as really as if you were the only sinner in all the world, or as if there were no other beings in the universe but yourself and your God.

Do not seek for any apology or excuse whatever. I dwell upon this and urge it the more because I so often find persons resting on some excuse without being themselves aware of it. In conversation with them upon their spiritual state, I see this and say, "There you are resting on that excuse." "Am I?" say they, "I did not know it."

Do not seek for stumbling-blocks. Sinners, a little disturbed in their stupidity, begin to cast about for stumbling-blocks for self-vindication. All at once they become wide awake to the faults of professors, as if they had to bear the care

of all the churches. The real fact is, they are all engaged to find something to which they can take exception, so that they can thereby blunt the keen edge of truth upon their own consciences. This never helps along their own salvation.

Do not tempt the forbearance of God. If you do, you are in the utmost danger of being given over forever. Do not presume that you may go on yet longer in your sins, and still find the gate of mercy. This presumption has paved the way for the ruin of many souls.

Do not despair of salvation and settle down in unbelief, saying, "There is no mercy for me." You must not despair in any such sense as to shut yourself out from the kingdom. You may well despair of being saved without Christ and without repentance; but you are bound to believe the gospel; and to do this is to believe the glad tidings that Jesus Christ has come to save sinners, even the chief, and that "him that cometh to Him He will in no wise cast out." You have no right to disbelieve this, and act as if there were no truth in it.

You must not wait for more conviction. Why do you need any more? You know your guilt and know your present duty. Nothing can be more preposterous therefore than to wait for more conviction. If you did not know that you are a sinner, or that you are guilty for sin, there might be some fitness in seeking for conviction of the truth on these points.

Do not wait for more or for different feelings. Sinners are often saying--"I must feel differently before I can come to Christ," or, "I must have more feeling," as if this were the great thing which God requires of them. In this they are altogether mistaken.

Do not wait to be better prepared. While you wait you are growing worse and worse, and are fast rendering your salvation impossible.

Don't wait for God to change your heart. Why should you wait for Him to do what He has commanded you to do, and waits for you to do in obedience to his command?

Don't try to recommend yourself to God by prayers or tears or by anything else whatever. Do you suppose your prayers lay God under any obligation to forgive you? Suppose you owed a man five hundred talents, and should go a

hundred times a week and beg him to remit to you this debt; and then should enter your prayers in account against your creditor, as so much claim against Him. Suppose you should pursue this course till you had canceled the debt as you suppose--could you hope to prove anything by this course except that you were mad? And yet sinners seem to suppose that their many prayers and tears lay the Lord under real obligation to them to forgive them.

Never rely on anything else whatever than Jesus Christ and Him crucified. It is preposterous for you to hope as many do, to make some propitiation by your own sufferings. In my early experience, I thought I could not expect to be converted at once, but must be bowed down a long time. I said to myself--"God will not pity me till I feel worse than I do now. I can't expect Him to forgive me till I feel a greater agony of soul than this." Not even if I could have gone on augmenting my sufferings till they equalled the miseries of hell, it could not have changed God. The fact is, God does not ask of you that you should suffer. Your sufferings cannot in the nature of the case avail for atonement; why, therefore, should you attempt to thrust aside the system of God's providing, and thrust in one of your own?

There is another view of the case. The thing God demands of you is that you should bow your stubborn will to Him. Just as a child in the attitude of disobedience, and required to submit, might fall to weeping and groaning, and to every expression of agony, and might even torture himself in hope of moving the pity of his father, but all the time refuses to submit to parental authority. He would be very glad to put his own sufferings in the place of the submission demanded. This is what the sinner is doing. He would fain put his own sufferings in the place of submission to God, and move the pity of the Lord so much that He would recede from the hard condition of repentance and submission.

If you would be saved you must not listen at all to those who pity you, and who impliedly take your part against God, and try to make you think you are not so bad as you are. I once knew a woman who after a long season of distressing conviction fell into great despair, her health sank, and she seemed about to die. All this time she found no relief, but seemed only to wax worse and worse, sinking down in stern and awful despair. Her friends instead of dealing plainly and faithfully with her, and probing her guilty heart to the bottom, had taken the course of pitying her, and almost complained of the

Lord that He would not have compassion on the poor, agonized, dying woman. At length, as she seemed in the last stages of life--so weak as to be scarcely able to speak in a low voice, there happened in a minister who better understood how to deal with convicted sinners. The woman's friends cautioned him to deal very carefully with her, as she was in a dreadful state and greatly to be pitied; but he judged it best to deal with her very faithfully. As he approached her bed-side, she raised her faint voice and begged for a little water. "Unless you repent, you will soon be," said he, "where there is not a drop of water to cool your tongue." "O," she cried, "must I go down to hell?" "Yes, you must, and you will, soon, unless you repent and submit to God. Why don't you repent and submit immediately?" "O," she replied, "it is an awful thing to go to hell!" "Yes, and for that very reason Christ has provided an atonement through Jesus Christ, but you won't accept it. He brings the cup of salvation to your lips, and you thrust it away. Why will you do this? Why will you persist in being an enemy of God and scorn His offered salvation, when you might become His friend and have salvation if you would?"

This was the strain of their conversation, and its result was, that the woman saw her guilt and her duty, and turning to the Lord, found pardon and peace.

Therefore I say, if your conscience convicts you of sin, don't let anybody take your part against God. Your wound needs not a plaster, but a probe. Don't fear the probe; it is the only thing that can save you. Don't seek to hide your guilt, or veil your eyes from seeing it, nor be afraid to know the worst, for you must know the very worst, and the sooner you know it the better. I warn you, don't look after some physician to give you an opiate, for you don't need it. Shun, as you would. death itself, all those who would speak to you smooth things and prophesy deceits. They would surely ruin your soul.

Again, do not suppose that if you become a Christian, it will interfere with any of the necessary or appropriate duties of life, or with anything whatever to which you ought to attend. No; religion never interferes with any real duty. So far is this from being the case, that in fact a proper attention to your various duties is indispensable to your being religious. You cannot serve God without.

Moreover, if you would be saved you must not give heed to anything that would hinder you. It is infinitely important that your soul should be saved.

No consideration thrown in your way should be allowed to have the weight of a straw or a feather. Jesus Christ has illustrated and enforced this by several parables, especially in the one which compares the kingdom of heaven to "a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls, who when he had found one pearl of great price went and sold all that he had and bought it." In another parable the kingdom of heaven is said to be "like treasure hid in a field, which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field." Thus forcibly are men taught that they must be ready to make any sacrifice whatever, which may be requisite in order to gain the kingdom of heaven.

Again, you must not seek religion selfishly. You must not make your own salvation or happiness the supreme end. Beware, for if you make this your supreme end you will get a false hope, and will probably glide along down the pathway of the hypocrite into the deepest hell.

II. What sinners must do to be saved.

1. You must understand what you have to do. It is of the utmost importance that you should see this clearly. You need to know that you must return to God, and to understand what this means. The difficulty between yourself and God is that you have stolen yourself and run away from His service. You belong of right to God. He created you for Himself, and hence had a perfectly righteous claim to the homage of your heart, and the service of your life. But you, instead of living to meet his claims, have run away--have deserted from God's service, and have lived to please yourself. Now your duty is to return and restore yourself to God.

2. You must return and confess your sins to God. You must confess that you have been all wrong, and that God has been all right. Go before the Lord and lay open the depth of your guilt. Tell Him you deserve just as much damnation as He has threatened.

These confessions are naturally indispensable to your being forgiven. In accordance with this the Lord says, "If then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity, then will I remember my covenant." Then God can forgive. But so long as you controvert this point, and will not concede that God is right, or admit that you are wrong, He can never forgive you.

You must moreover confess to man if you have injured any one. And is it not a fact that you have injured some, and perhaps many of your fellow men? Have you not slandered your neighbour and said things which you have no right to say? Have you not in some instances which you could call to mind if you would, lied to them, or about them, or covered up or perverted the truth; and have you not been willing that others should have false impressions of you or of your conduct? If so, you must renounce all such iniquity, for "he that covereth his sins shall not prosper; while he that confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy." And furthermore you must not only confess your sins to God and to the men you have injured, but you must also make restitution. You have not taken the position of a penitent before God and man until you have done this also. God cannot treat you as a penitent until you have done it. I do not mean by this that God cannot forgive you until you have carried into effect your purpose of restitution by finishing the outward act, for sometimes it may demand time, and may in some cases be itself impossible to you. But the purpose must be sincere and thorough before you can be forgiven of God.

3. You must renounce yourself. In this is implied,

(1.) That you renounce your own righteousness, forever discarding the very idea of having any righteousness in yourself.

(2.) That you forever relinquish the idea of having done any good which ought to commend you to God, or be ever thought of as a ground of your justification.

(3.) That you renounce your own will, and be ever ready to say not in word only, but in heart--"Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." You must consent most heartily that God's will shall be your supreme law.

(4.) That you renounce your own way, and let God have his own way in everything. Never suffer yourself to fret and be rasped by anything whatever; for since God's agency extends to all events, you ought to recognize his hand in all things, and of course to fret at anything whatever is to fret against God who has at least permitted that thing to occur as it does. So long, therefore, as you suffer yourself to fret, you are not right with God. You must become before God as a little child,

subdued and trustful at his feet. Let the weather be fair or foul, consent that God should have his way. Let all things go well with you, or as men call it, ill; yet let God do his pleasure, and let it be your part to submit in perfect resignation. Until you take this ground you cannot be saved.

4. You must come to Christ. You must accept of Christ really and fully as your Saviour. Renouncing all thought of depending on anything you have done or can do, you must accept of Christ as your atoning sacrifice, and as your ever living Mediator before God. Without the least qualification or reserve you must place yourself under his wing as your Saviour.

5. You must seek supremely to please Christ, and not yourself. It is naturally impossible that you should be saved until you come into this attitude of mind--until you are so well pleased with Christ in all respects as to find your pleasure in doing his. It is in the nature of things impossible that you should be happy in any other state of mind, or unhappy in this. For, his pleasure is infinitely good and right. When therefore his good pleasure becomes your good pleasure, and your will harmonizes entirely with his, then you will be happy for the same reason that He is happy, and you cannot fail of being happy any more than Jesus Christ can. And this becoming supremely happy in God's will is essentially the idea of salvation. In this state of mind you are saved. Out of it you cannot be.

It has often struck my mind with great force, that many professors of religion are deplorably and utterly mistaken on this point. Their real feeling is that Christ's service is an iron collar, an insufferably hard yoke. Hence they labour exceedingly to throw off some of this burden. They try to make it out that Christ does not require much if any self-denial--much if any deviation from the course of worldliness and sin. O, if they could only get the standard of Christian duty quite down to a level with the fashions and customs of this world! How much easier then to live a Christian life and wear Christ's yoke!

But taking Christ's yoke as it really is, it becomes in their view an iron collar. Doing the will of Christ, instead of their own is a hard business. Now if doing Christ's will is religion, (and who can doubt it?) then they only need enough of it, and in their state of mind, they will be supremely wretched. Let me ask those who groan under the idea that they must be religious--who

deem it awful hard--but they must--how much religion of this kind would it take to make hell? Surely not much! When it gives you no joy to do God's pleasure, and yet you are shut up to the doing of His pleasure as the only way to be saved, and are thereby perpetually dragooned into the doing of what you hate, as the only means of escaping hell, would not this be itself a hell? Can you not see that in this state of mind you are not saved and cannot be?

To be saved you must come into a state of mind in which you will ask no higher joy than to do God's pleasure. This alone will be forever enough to fill your cup to overflowing.

6. You must have all confidence in Christ, or you cannot be saved. You must absolutely believe in Him--believe all his words of promise. They were given you to be believed, and unless you believe them, they can do you no good at all. So far from helping you without you exercise[sic.] faith in them, they will only aggravate your guilt for unbelief. God would be believed when He speaks in love to lost sinners. He gave them these "exceeding great and precious promises, that they by faith in them, might escape the corruption that is in the world through lust." But thousands of professors of religion know not how to use these promises, and as to them or any profitable use they make, the promises might as well have been written on the sands of the sea.

Sinners too, will go down to hell in unbroken masses, unless they believe and take hold of God by faith in his promise. O, his awful wrath is out against them! And He says--"I would go through them, I would burn them up together; or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace with me." Yes, let him stir up himself and take hold of my arm, strong to save, and then he may make peace with me. Do you ask how take hold? By faith. Yes, by faith; believe his words and take hold; take hold of his strong arm and swing right out over hell, and don't be afraid any more than if there were no hell.

But you say--I do believe, and yet I am not saved. No you don't believe. A woman said to me--"I believe, I know I do, and yet here I am in my sins." No, said I, you don't. Have you as much confidence in God as you would have in me if I had promised you a dollar? Do you ever pray to God? and, if so, do you come with any such confidence as you would have if you came to me to ask for a promised dollar? Oh, until you have as much faith in God as

this, aye and more--until you have more confidence in God than you would have in ten thousand men, your faith does not honour God, and you cannot hope to please Him. You must say--"Let God be true though every man be a liar."

But you say--"O, I am a sinner, and how can I believe? I know you are a sinner, and so are all men to whom God has given these promises. "O, but I am a great sinner!" Well, "It is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom," Paul says, "I am the chief" So you need not despair.

7. You must forsake all that you have, or you cannot be Christ's disciple. There must be absolute and total self-denial.

By this I do not mean that you are never to eat again, or never again to clothe yourself, or never more enjoy the society of your friends--no, not this; but that you should cease entirely from using any of these enjoyments selfishly. You must no longer think to own yourself--your time, your possessions, or anything you have ever called your own. All these things you must hold as God's, not yours. In this sense you are to forsake all that you have, namely, in the sense of laying all upon God's altar to be devoted supremely and only to his service. When you come back to God for pardon and salvation, come with all you have to lay all at his feet. Come with your body, to offer it as a living sacrifice upon his altar. Come with your soul and all its powers, and yield them in willing consecration to your God and Saviour. Come, bring them all along--everything, body, soul, intellect, imagination, acquirements--all, without reserve. Do you say--Must I bring them all? Yes, all--absolutely ALL; do not keep back any thing--don't sin against your own soul like Ananias and Sapphira, by keeping back a part, but renounce your own claim to everything, and recognize God's right to all. Say, Lord, these things are not mine. I had stolen them, but they were never mine. They were always thine; I'll have them no longer. Lord, these things are all thine, henceforth and forever. Now, what wilt Thou have me to do? I have no business of my own to do--I am wholly at thy disposal--Lord, what work hast thou for me to do?

In this spirit you must renounce the world, the flesh, and Satan. Your fellowship is henceforth to be with Christ, and not with those objects. You are to live for Christ, and not for the world, the flesh, or the devil.

8. You must believe the record God hath given of his Son. He that believes not does not receive the record--does not set to his seal that God is true. "This is the record that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." The condition of your having it is that you believe the record, and of course that you act accordingly. Suppose here is a poor man living at your next door, and the mail brings him a letter stating that a rich man has died in England, leaving him 100,000 pounds sterling, and the cashier of a neighbouring bank writes him that he has received the amount on deposit for him, and holds it subject to his order. Well, the poor man says, I can't believe the record. I can't believe there ever was any such rich man; I can't believe there is 100,000 pounds for me. So he must live and die as poor as Lazarus, because he won't believe the record.

Now, mark; this is just the case with the unbelieving sinner. God has given you eternal life, and it waits your order--but you don't get it because you will not believe, and therefore will not make out the order, and present in due form the application.

Ah, but you say, I must have some feeling before I can believe--how can I believe till I have the feeling? So the poor man might say--How can I believe that the 100,000 pounds is mine--I have not got a farthing of it now--I am as poor as ever. Yes, you are poor because you will not believe. If you would believe, you might go and buy out every store in this country. Still you cry, I am as poor as ever. I can't believe it;--see my poor worn clothes--I was never more ragged in my life; I have not a particle of the feeling and the comforts of a rich man. So the sinner can't believe till he gets the inward experience! He must wait to have some of the feeling of a saved sinner before he can believe the record and take hold of the salvation! Preposterous enough! So the poor man must wait to get his new clothes and fine house before he can believe his documents and draw for his money. Of course he dooms himself to everlasting poverty, although mountains of gold were all his own.

Now, sinner, you must understand this. Why should you be lost when eternal life is bought and offered you by the last will and testament of the Lord Jesus Christ? Will you not believe the record and draw for the amount at once! Do for mercy's sake understand this and not lose heaven by your own folly!

I must conclude by saying, that if you would be saved you must accept a prepared salvation, one already prepared and full, and present. You must be

willing to give up all your sins, and be saved from them, all, now and henceforth! Until you consent to this, you cannot be saved at all. Many would be willing to be saved in heaven, if they might hold on to some sins while on earth,--or rather they think they would like heaven on such terms. But the fact is they would as much dislike a pure heart and a holy life in heaven as they do on earth, and they deceive themselves utterly in supposing that they are ready or even willing to go to such a heaven as God has prepared for his people. No, there can be no heaven except for those who accept a salvation from all sin in this world. They must take the gospel as a system which holds no compromise with sin--which contemplates full deliverance from sin even now, and makes provision accordingly. Any other gospel is not the true one, and to accept of Christ's gospel in any other sense is not to accept it all. Its first and its last condition is sworn and eternal renunciation of all sin.

REMARKS.

1. Paul did not give the same answer to this question which a consistent Universalist would give. The latter would say, You are to be saved by being first punished according to your sin. All men must expect to be punished all that their sins deserve. But Paul did not answer thus. Miserable comforter had he been if he had answered after this sort: "You must all be punished according to the letter of the law you have broken." This could scarcely have been called gospel.

Nor again did Paul give the Universalist's answer and say, "Do not concern yourself about this matter of being saved, all men are sure enough of being saved without any particular anxiety about it." Not so Paul; no; he understood and did not forbear to express the necessity of believing on the Lord Jesus Christ as the condition of being saved.

2. Take care that you do not sin willfully after having understood the truth concerning the way of salvation. Your danger of this is great precisely in proportion as you see your duty clearly. The most terrible damnation must fall on the head of those who "knew their duty, but who did it not." When therefore you are told plainly and truly what your duty is, be on your guard lest you let salvation slip out of your hands. It may never come so near your reach again.

3. Do not wait, even to go home, before you obey God. Make up your mind now, at once, to close in with the offers of salvation. Why not? Are they not most

reasonable?

4. Let your mind act upon this great proposal and embrace it just as you would any other important proposition. God lays the proposition before you; you hear it explained, and you understand it; now the next and only remaining step is--to embrace it with all your heart. Just as any other great question--(we may suppose it a question of life or death) might come before a community--the case be fully stated; the conditions explained, and then the issue is made. Will you subscribe? Will you engage to meet these conditions? Do you heartily embrace the proposition? Now all this would be intelligible.

Just so now in the case of the sinner. You understand the proposition. You know the conditions of salvation. You understand the contract into which you are to enter with your God and Saviour. You covenant to give your all to God--to lay yourself upon His altar to be used up there just as He pleases to use you. And now the only remaining question is--Will you consent to this at once? Will you go for full and everlasting consecration with all your heart?

5. The jailer made no excuse. When he knew his duty, in a moment he yielded. Paul told him what to do, and he did it. Possibly he might have heard something about Paul's preaching before this night; but probably not much. But now he hears for his life. How often have I been struck with this case! There was a dark-minded heathen. He had heard, we must suppose, a great deal of slang about these apostles; but notwithstanding all, he came to them for truth;--hearing, he is convinced, and being convinced, he yields at once. Paul uttered a single sentence--he received it, embraced it, and it is done.

Now you, sinner, know and admit all this truth, and yet infinitely strange as it is, you will not, in a moment believe and embrace it with all your heart. O, will not Sodom and Gomorrah rise up against you in the judgment and condemn you! That heathen jailer--how could your[sic.] bear to see him on that dread day, and stand rebuked by his example there!

6. It is remarkable that Paul said nothing about the jailer's needing any help in order to believe and repent. He did not even mention the work of the Spirit, or allude to the jailer's need of it. But it should be noticed that Paul gave the jailer just those directions which would most effectually secure the Spirit's aid and promote his action.

7. The jailer seems to have made no delay at all, waiting for no future or better time; but as soon as the conditions are before him he yields and embraces; no sooner is the proposition made than he seizes upon it in a moment.

I was once preaching in a village in New York, and there sat before me a lawyer who had been greatly offended with the gospel. But that day I noticed he sat with fixed eye and open mouth, leaned forward as if he would seize each word as it came. I was explaining and simplifying the gospel, and when I came to state just how the gospel is offered to men, he said to me afterwards--I snatched at it--I put out my hand, suiting the action to the thought, and seized it--and it became mine.

So in my own case while in the woods praying, after I had burst away from the fear of man, and began to give scope to my feelings, this passage fell upon me--"Ye shall seek for Me and find Me when ye shall search for Me with all your heart." For the first time in the world I found that I believed a passage in the Bible. I had supposed that I believed before, but surely never before as I now did. Now, said I to myself--"This is the word of the everlasting God. My God, I take Thee at Thy word. Thou sayest I shall find Thee when I search for Thee with all my heart, and now, Lord, I do search for Thee, I know, with all my heart." And true enough, I did find the Lord. Never in all my life was I more certain of anything than I was then that I had found the Lord.

This is the very idea of His promises--they were made to be believed--to be laid hold of as God's own words, and acted upon as if they actually meant just what they say. When God says, "Look unto Me and be ye saved," He would have us look unto Him as if he really had salvation in his hands to give, and withal a heart to give it. The true spirit of faith is well expressed by the psalmist--"When Thou saidst--'Seek ye my face,' my heart replied, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." This is the way--let your heart at once respond to the blessed words of invitation and of promise.

Ah, but you say, I am not a Christian. And you never will be till you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour. If you never become a Christian, the reason will be because you do not and will not believe the gospel and embrace it with all your heart.

The promises were made to be believed, and belong to any one who will believe them. They reach forth their precious words to all, and whoever will may take them as his own. Now will you believe that the Father has given you eternal life?

This is the fact declared;--will you believe it?

You have now been told what you must not do and what you must do to be saved; are you prepared to act? Do you say, I am ready to renounce my own pleasure, and henceforth seek no other pleasure than to please God? Can you forego everything else for the sake of this?

Sinner, do you want to please God, or would you choose to please yourself? Are you willing now to please God and to begin by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ unto salvation? Will you be as simple-hearted as the jailer was? And act as promptly?

I demand your decision now. I dare not have you go home first, lest you get to talking about something else, and let slip these words of life and this precious opportunity to grasp an offered salvation. And whom do you suppose I am now addressing? Every impenitent sinner in this house--every one. I call heaven and earth to record that I have set the gospel before you to-day. Will you take it? Is it not reasonable for you to decide at once? Are you ready now to say before high heaven and before this congregation--"I will renounce myself and yield to God"? I am the Lord's, and let all men and angels bear me witness--I am forever more the Lord's." Sinner, the infinite God waits for your consent!

[Back to Top](#)

Substitution

Lecture V

December 6, 1848

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--2 Cor. 5:21: "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

The present occasion in which a large number of youth are about to unite with our church, together with the circumstance that many are still inquiring the way of salvation, seems to render the subject presented by this passage peculiarly

appropriate for this day. In treating the subject here presented, I shall,

I. Show what is intended by Christ's being "made sin for us."

II. Show for whom He is made sin.

III. Why He was made sin for us.

IV. What is intended by "being made the righteousness of God in Him."

You will see at once that the subject relates to Christ as the Author and Finisher of our faith, and of course that it presents Him in His most interesting attitudes and relations to mankind.

I. We are first to inquire What is meant by Christ's being made sin for us?

It is plain that the language cannot be understood literally. It cannot mean that God made Jesus Christ actually a sinner, or made Him real sin--for the latter is physically, and the former morally impossible. But the meaning is that Christ was made to stand as the representative of sin and of sinners. The apostle uses very extraordinary language, and it would seem from it that he conceived of Christ as standing before God in a sense as the embodiment or impersonation of sin. God looked upon Him in the scenes of His atoning death, as if all the sins of our race were in Him, and He were Himself the sum total of them all. Against this sin, thus embodied, or better, represented, in Christ, God revealed His high and awful displeasure, so as to show the universe how He regards sin.

The language of the apostle here is very striking. God hath made Him sin, not "to be sin," as in our translation, but better according to the original, "made Him sin for us, who knew no sin." The obvious meaning is that Christ was treated as a sinner. This was for governmental purposes, and as a governmental transaction. He stood in the place of sinners, and God dealt with Him accordingly. He consented freely to take this position, and of course was treated as if He were Himself the embodiment of all the sins of our world.

II. We next inquire--For whom was Christ made sin?

The Bible gives us the only and the true answer. "He tasted death for every man." "And He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." It is clear therefore that Christ stood

governmentally as the representative before God of the whole race. No further governmental provision would have been needed in order to save the whole race.

Again, it should be considered that Christ was made sin in the sense explained, for man alone, and for no other beings but man. The Bible teaches that the work of Christ as a system of salvation, is restricted to our race in its application. "There is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." Between God and men, you observe; not between God and angels. So in Hebrews 2, Paul says--"For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels--or better as in the margin--He did not take hold of angels--&c., to save them, but He did take hold of the seed of Abraham." Christ made no attempt to save lost angels, but lost men He did seize hold of, to save. You observe that the apostle says--"He took hold of the seed of Abraham. From this passage itself we might naturally infer that Christ saves only the lineal descendants of Abraham, but other passages make it certain that this restricted sense cannot be the true one. The phrase must here be used of all real Christians; for "if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

III. Our next inquiry is--Why was Christ made sin for us?

Why was there need of any atonement? Is God so inexorable and implacable that somebody must die to appease His wrath? Would you represent God as being infinitely cruel?

Now these questions would be asked with great force, if the atonement, rightly understood, did represent God as being implacable in the sense assumed. If it were true that God's indignation against sin must be quenched in some victim's blood before He can be pacified, and this for His own sake too, because of His vengeful nature, then would the objections I have mentioned indeed lie with great force against both the atonement and God Himself. But it should be well considered that an atonement for sin by suffering was not necessary on God's account, but on account of His moral government. It was demanded of God out of regard to the intelligent minds of His universe. He must not set aside the penalty of the law against sin without an atonement, lest a false inference should be drawn, lest it should be supposed that God is reckless of sin, and can permit its commission in His kingdom with impunity. Hence divine wisdom and divine love also must provide against so ruinous an inference. Hence this awful demonstration of God's abhorrence of sin, and of His holy purpose to punish it, which was exhibited when He caused His own beloved Son to be made sin for

us, and to bear our sins in His body on the tree. We see therefore that Christ's being made sin for us was a naturally necessary condition of our acceptance with God. And this results not from any want of mercy in God Himself, but wholly from His relations to the intelligent beings who are under His moral government. God well knew that He should certainly be misunderstood if He should pardon sin without an atonement. It is in the nature of the case impossible that He should not have been. If therefore, He would forgive sin--if He would arrest the onward march of law and justice towards their dreadful execution;--if He longed to throw wide open His great heart of mercy, He must first make some terrible demonstration of His utter hostility to sin--must show that He abhorred and would surely punish it. And this was done to perfection in the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ.

Now who can not see this necessity for an atonement? Suppose some one of these United States should rebel. Would it not be a vastly dangerous thing to offer universal amnesty with no atonement? Who does not see that it would be the imperative duty of the President and the General Government to make some terrible demonstration of justice that should make every man throughout the Union quail in dread of the penalty of rebellion? Surely everyone can see that that clemency would be by no means wise which should show a general and indiscriminate mercy towards the guilty. Before any mercy could be wisely shown, such a demonstration must be made, as would make all the people of the nation feel that rebellion cannot be tolerated. And if this be true in the government of the United States, and every child can see that it is; then how much more must it be true in the great universe of God? Who can count the worlds of intelligent minds under His sway? Who can tell how far away in the realms of space they lie scattered, or how immense are the hosts that people them? But God's moral government extends over them all, and every eye of all their hosts is on Him. What infinite folly then, for God to set aside the execution of the penalty of His law in such a manner as would virtually annihilate it altogether! To do this would be to doom the intelligent universe to ruin. Who then could trust, or love, or revere their God? Alas, they have lost the evidence that He cares for the good of His creatures. They cannot trust Him to maintain His own law; there is no longer any God in the universe to be trusted, loved, and obeyed!! How frightful a result is this!

But we need not fear it. God is too wise and too good to let it occur. When He would prevent it, and yet would pardon sinful men, He made (as was

indispensable,) a strong and solemn demonstration of His heart towards sin.

And who must be selected as an atoning victim for this purpose? Shall it be some mighty angel? Oh no; for what could an angel do? How could he endure the wrath of God, standing in the place of all the sin of our race? And still more, I ask, how could any angel's sufferings make such an impression upon the universe, as would sustain God's throne in proclaiming an amnesty on such grounds? No angel, then, however great or exalted could avail, and God must pass them all by, and select His own Co-equal Son! No being less glorious and less exalted than God's Eternal Son can stand forth as the representative of sin, to receive in His own person such inflictions of divine displeasure as would avail to show the universe most impressively how God regards sin. Now it shall be known throughout all worlds, as far as God Himself is known, that it is in His heart to pardon when He can, and punish when He must.

And mark, how perfectly fitted for His work, in character and relations is our great atoning sacrifice. He is a "lamb without blemish and without spot." He "knew no sin." Hence it could not be said or thought that He suffered on His own account. It would be known at once that a just God did not hide His own face from His beloved Son, for any wrong He had done. All the more impressive therefore must this scene have been for this reason. The great inquiry must run through all the ranks and orders of created intelligences--Wherefore does the spotless Lamb of God suffer? Why does He descend so low, and assume a nature into union with His own, which ranked so infinitely beneath His? What mean these strange things? O, what impressions must have been made throughout all heaven when it was made known that the Son of God came down from the throne of the universe to a mean manger in Bethlehem, to toil and weep in the land of His chosen people, and to die an accursed death on Calvary, that He might stand before divine justice as the embodiment of all earth's sin, and pave the way thus for all earth's sinners to be forgiven! The second person of the Trinity--Himself God, assumes in union with His own, the entire nature of the sinning race, that He may thus save them and raise them to a higher rank than that from which they had fallen. What a work is this!

IV. What is intended by our "being made the righteousness of God in Him."

This also cannot be taken in its most strictly literal sense. It cannot be conceived that we should be converted into the intrinsic, essential righteousness of God. The idea of representation obtains in both clauses of our text. As Christ stood

before God to represent the sins of our race, so His pardoned children stand forth to represent the righteousness of God. He stood disowned and forsaken of God, as if He were Himself our sin; we stand forgiven and accepted through Him, as if we were God's righteousness. He is treated as a sinner; we for His sake are treated as righteous. Just think of this. What an exchange! Christ was infinitely righteous, but laid aside the relations of a righteous one, and appeared for us as a sinner and was treated accordingly. We were altogether lost in sin, yet we are transferred governmentally from that position before God, and for Christ's sake are treated as if we were righteous. What a wonderful transaction is this! It were easy to show that this were the perfection of philosophy in government to make such a substitution as will save an indefinite amount of suffering, and yet secure most perfectly, regard for the law, obedience to its precepts, and confidence in the great Lawgiver.

REMARKS.

1. We see that Christ was not literally punished instead of the sinner, while yet it is true that He suffered in the sinner's stead. It is one thing to suffer for another, and quite a different thing to be punished for him. Punishment under a righteous government implies guilt, and it is precisely the execution of the penalty of law. Of course it assumes the fact of actual and criminal transgression. It is often objected to the gospel system that it is unjust, because it punishes the innocent for the sake of screening the guilty. This is a mistaken view of the subject. What Christ suffered was not in any proper sense the punishment of sin.

2. Christ suffered for us and was made sin for us by His own consent. What! It is sometimes said--does God arbitrarily inflict suffering on the innocent and let the guilty go free? No, not arbitrarily. Jesus Christ was not forced--He consented--most cheerfully consented to bear what need be borne for the sinner's ransom. The principle is the same as when a missionary sacrifices his home, his friends, and his life to do good to the lost heathen. In both cases the sacrifice is voluntary--in both it is made for others' good. Perhaps some of these dear children who are today to unite with the church may yet go to foreign lands, and sacrifice all that man holds most dear to carry the gospel to the heathen. And then shall one rise up and complain that an innocent one suffers for the guilty--that God compels His innocent people to suffer, that the guilty may be spared and blessed? The truth is, God compels no one to do this. But He does approve the spirit of self-sacrifice for others' good, and has given us a most glorious

example of it in giving up His own beloved Son. Jesus has given us a divine example in giving up Himself for suffering and death for our lost race. God knows how to reward such self-sacrifice. We shall ultimately see that whoever shall for Christ's sake lose his own life shall save it eternally.

3. Christ's sufferings were not in kind altogether like those of sinners. Not being Himself a sinner, He could not suffer what may be called the natural penalty of sin. He could not experience that state of mind which accompanies sin, the remorse, the shame, the self-condemnation, and the indescribable anguish of self-torture. These natural penalties He could not experience, nor was it at all necessary that He should. The atonement was purely a governmental expedient, demanded only for governmental purposes, and of course should be adapted only to meet those purposes. Viewed in this light it is easy to see that the specific thing needed was to reveal the heart of the great Moral Governor of the universe towards sin, and that this must be done by inflicting in some degree the governmental penalty, that is the penalty which the government had threatened and must inflict for sin.

Now it is plain from the Bible that some of the chief elements of inflicted penalty upon lost sinners are--being driven from God's presence--a consciousness that God hides His face, and expresses His withering disapprobation--a deep conviction that God has withdrawn from them and has left them to the horrors of being abandoned of God. And precisely such, so far as we can ascertain, seems to have been the character of the most awful sufferings of Jesus Christ. When on the cross, He did not cry, O, the agony of such a death--but--"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" And in the dreadful agony of the garden it is plain that physical sufferings bore no part. His chief sufferings therefore throughout were mental, and so far as we can infer from His language and His circumstances, they must have resulted from the withdrawment of His Father's face, from the awful horror of that conviction, My God has forsaken Me, and from the impression of God's dread and withering frown. For Christ now stood before God as sin, and from sin God must avert His smile, and against it He must reveal His awful frown. How the Son of God, spotless in innocence, conscious of perfect rectitude, could have this awful sense of being forsaken, perhaps we may never know, unless perchance we may in the lapse of eternal ages learn it from His own lips. The fact we have no ground to call in question. Christ Himself we may suppose, understood the reason and design of His being thus forsaken of the Father, and if so, we must interpret His

expression--"My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" not as an inquiry for the reason, but as an outburst of intense agony, as if His soul could scarcely endure the anguish of that strange, and dreadful frown of the Infinite God.

It seems probable that the Father intended to treat the Son when He stood governmentally as the embodiment of sin, in such a way that sinners might infer from it what their own doom must be--without mercy. There is nothing impossible or even improbable in the idea that the sufferings of Christ were substantially of the same nature as the governmental penalty due the sinner. If we suppose a being to be perfectly holy, and hence, of course, abstract the idea of his suffering the natural penalty of sin, such as remorse, shame, self-condemnation; what we have called the governmental penalty only will remain, namely; those inflictions which fall upon the sinner directly from the Lawgiver as expressions of His intense displeasure. Precisely this seems to have been the state of the suffering Son of God, when He said--"My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

4. We are not to suppose that in degree and amount Christ suffered the same as all the saved would else have suffered in hell. This has sometimes been asserted, but always without proof. Such a substitution of equal sufferings is by no means necessary to the value and efficacy of the atonement; there is no good reason for assuming it, and the assumption certainly detracts from the honor conferred by the atonement upon the wisdom and the love of God.

5. It is a strong objection to the idea of equal substitution of sufferings that in such a case, the atonement is no gain at all to the universe. The sinners of our race might just as well have borne the sufferings themselves, as to have Jesus Christ bear them, of the amount is in either case the same; not to urge also that it is in itself considered a relief to the mind to have the guilty suffer what they deserve, instead of having the innocent suffer it for them, provided nothing is gained on the score of amount.

But while we hold that the sufferings of Christ are not to be considered equal in amount to the suffering saved thereby from being endured, yet let it not be supposed that the sufferings of Jesus Christ were of small amount. Doubtless we are apt to estimate their amount too low. We shall estimate it higher and in all respects more correctly when we come to hear the description from Christ Himself. Who has not often thought that in heaven we shall want to hear the story from the very lips of Him who was slain? O, what a scene, to gather round

the Lamb of Calvary, and hear Him describe the agonies of Gethsemane--the awful horrors--the darkness, and the being forsaken of God, which extorted those agonizing cries on Calvary!

No doubt those sufferings were exceedingly great--great beyond the comprehension of any finite mind. We shall readily see the reason why they should be, if we consider that it was the design of God in this transaction to make a deep and solemn public impression that should pervade the universe of minds and endure forever! Sin must be rebuked--terribly rebuked--rebuked in a manner worthy of God, and so rebuked, that its awful impression should continue unabated, down, along through all the cycles of eternal ages. This must be done, or God's government will be dishonored. Hence the necessity for so terrible a demonstration of God's justice.

6. We see in what sense the saints are saved by the righteousness of Christ. Much as always been said by Old School divines about imputation. I do not mean now just what they do by this term, but there is a sense in which the righteousness of Christ may be said to be imputed to us. I have already explained what this sense is. Jesus Christ was treated as if He were a sinner, that we for His sake might be treated as if we were righteous. He deserved no sufferings--we deserved them all. They were not endured for His sake, but for ours. He stood before God to be treated as sinful; we as a result, stand before God and are treated as righteous. As He represented the sins of a lost race, so we represent the righteousness of a spotless Savior.

7. Our own personal obedience has no part in the matter of our justification, not even any obedience rendered after conversion. After conversion we are pious and to some extent holy; but this is not taken into account as a ground of our justification.

(1.) Because when once condemned, no subsequent obedience can procure our acceptance on legal grounds. It is perfectly obvious that no obedience performed after sin and condemnation, can in any way atone for the previous sin.

(2.) Our obedience is not our own in such a sense that we can be justified by it according to law. It should be considered that our obedience after conversion is not under law--that is, not a system of mere law, but is under grace--it being all performed in consequence of Christ's gracious work

within, and not wrought out under purely legal influences. We are therefore not to suppose that we do not need Christ after once being converted and pardoned. No idea can be more false and ruinous than this. For the holiness of Christians after conversion is the result of Christ's Spirit working in them and is in this sense a gracious righteousness, and hence can never come into the account as if it were a legal righteousness, so as to justify men on merely legal grounds. We owe to the grace of Christ our entire salvation, and are to be rewarded, not for our own righteousness, but on the ground that we represent the righteousness of God.

8. We see how much we are indebted to Christ for our salvation. He has been set forth as a propitiation for sin, and in Him an atonement was made. He stood in our stead where we must else have stood as condemned and quailing rebels; He suffered in His own person that awful manifestation of divine displeasure which would else have been made in our destruction in order to render it possible for God to be just to His government and good to all His subjects and yet pardon sinners. Christ has done all this for us, and now does it well become us to say--in the inmost soul--

"Had I ten thousand hearts to give,
Lord, they should all be Thine."

9. We can see how great the future glory of the saints must be. We have been looking at the great agony and grief endured by Jesus Christ. Look now in the other direction at the great glory resulting from our being made the righteousness of God in Him. In the days of His flesh God made Him sin for us, laying on Him the iniquity of us all, and in those scenes of anguish making known His own utter abhorrence of sin. It now remains for God to make known to all the universe His own high sense of the value of Christ's righteousness. It remains for Him to show how perfectly pleased He is with the atonement--how delighted He is with the perfect holiness of Jesus Christ, and how fully He appreciates Christ's benevolence in sacrificing Himself for others' good. And all this is to be shown by His treatment of the saints. You will observe that the proximate end of Christ's being made sin for us, as taught in our text, is that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. In us, therefore, that is, in the redeemed from our race, must be revealed before the eyes of the universe the glorious righteousness of God as manifested in and through His Son. O what miracles of glory will be revealed there! Mark, that the saints are not merely to be brought into heaven

and suffered to live there, but they are to be used there for displaying the righteousness of God and His infinite glory in the sufferings of His Son. When God saw it necessary to show forth His abhorrence of sin, then Jesus Christ stood out before the universe as if in the place of all the sin of our race, and in this position the Infinite Father withdrew the light of His face, and gave expression to His fearful wrath against sin. Then the suffering One groaned and agonized--the earth quaked--the sun forbore to shine, and nature herself by her throes of agony seemed to sympathize with the unwonted anguish of her Lord.

Thus closed the first chapter of this wondrous development. The scene of the next is laid in heaven. There must be revealed the righteousness of God. There must be unfolded His infinite goodness and love as embodied in this scheme of substitution and atonement. It now remains to show what results of unutterable glory to God in the highest accrue from this plan of redemption. And these can not be revealed in the myriad worlds of Jehovah's universe except by means of exalting redeemed sinners most gloriously before their eyes. We need not wonder therefore that it should be said--"It doth not yet appear what we shall be." "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." Most truly said, for it can only be in a low and groveling sense that we can be said to conceive of those glorious things prepared by God for His people. O, if some of our departed friends should appear to us in all their present glory, we might perhaps mistake them for God Himself, and be ready to fall down and worship them. You are aware that this very mistake has sometimes been made, nor is it very strange that it should be. The Bible represents the saints as then "shining forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." It need not surprise us that they should appear in the palaces of heaven adorned with robes of glory such as no eye of man hath seen or heart conceived. For they are gloriously exalted not to represent their own righteousness, but the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus their Lord. The glory of God and the blessedness of the universe demand that Jesus should be honored and exalted for what He has done and suffered; but the relations of His people to Himself in this work are such that He can not be exalted and honored except in connection with their exaltation. If Christ is an heir of God, they are "joint heirs with Him." If He is to be rewarded with a glorious triumph, they must join in the triumphal procession--the rescued ones--the trophies of His victory--the purchase of His blood. Behold He says, "Here am I and the children whom God hath given Me." O, "He is not ashamed to call them brethren." Hence

the exalted honor to which they must be raised.

10. This inheritance is received by simple faith. Whoever simply believes and with the heart embraces, shall receive and enjoy it for ever.

11. It is proffered to all, and proffered now. Whoever will believe in Christ, let him come--come now, and receive the earnest of this inheritance in the present gift of the Spirit. The Spirit is given to believers now as the earnest and pledge of that glorious inheritance.

But you say--How can it be that simple faith is the only requisite to secure this inheritance? I am but too well aware that the simplicity of the way of salvation is a great stumbling-block to the world. The mass of men who hear the gospel are stumbled on this very rock, and turn aside and go about to work out some form of self-righteousness. It is too simple a thing in their esteem to have salvation for merely believing on Jesus Christ--not to say also that it is too humiliating. They do not so well like to come into such a possession without having it to say that they have paid well for it. Hence they pass over the simplicity of the gospel, and miss of heaven. Slow indeed are most men to see that it is by simple faith that we commit the soul to God, renounce self in all its forms, and cast ourselves upon the righteousness of God alone.

12. Unbelievers reject this way of salvation, and of course the unmitigated penalty of the law must fall on them. Although Christ has died for them, yet if they will not believe, they must be damned. So the Bible declares--"he that believeth not is condemned already"--"He that believeth not shall be damned." Be it so that they have been bought with blood; yet if they deny the Lord that bought them, they are not redeemed unto salvation, but on the contrary, bring upon themselves swift and more awful destruction. In the nature of the case this must be so. A pardon proposed to the consent of the prisoner, and by him rejected, becomes no pardon at all. The prisoner's rejection of it nullifies it utterly as to its reference to himself.

It deserves special notice that the apostle represents this mode of salvation by faith in Christ as something to be submitted to by the sinner. He says that certain men "going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." Now this submission to the righteousness of God implies a full and cordial assent to God's justice in punishing, and to His grace in providing a substitute. The sinner admits most

fully that he is just as hopelessly lost as God represents him to be, as hell-deserving, as guilty--as mean, as unworthy--and consents to take his place before God and man accordingly. He takes this system of salvation as God proposes it; submits himself to it; gets down in the dust; brings down his high crest, and makes no words about the hardship of taking his own place as a guilty sinner saved by grace. Sinner, can you hope to be saved in any other way than this? You can not but know that this is God's way. Your own reason affirms that it is in harmony with right and with the truth in the case.

13. You may see the impressiveness and force of the question, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation!" Do impenitent sinners imagine that after all God has done in the gospel scheme--He will trifle with it and set it all aside? Do you dream that the great God will treat your objections and your refusal with marked deference, and contrive for your special benefit some more acceptable plan, or will save you in particular without any Savior or any written as with a point of a diamond--"He that believeth not shall be damned." And do you hope by your objections to disannul these awful words?

Sinner, what will you do--make up your mind and answer--what? Do you say--"Well, if Christ has suffered for all my sins--it is enough; what more can I ask? If Christ's righteousness may become mine, it is enough. Why should I forfeit it and go down to hell? The gospel is good enough for me;--farewell sin--farewell vain world; I take the Bible--I take Jesus Christ--I take all His blessed gospel to my very heart!" Will you say and do this, sinner, and do it at once--do it now, in this accepted time? Then, 'tis well.

[Back to Top](#)

Pride of Heart Deceives

Lecture VI

December 20, 1848

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Oba. 3: "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee."

The connection in which these words are found, not being important to my present purpose, I shall pass it without remark, and proceed at once to the subject it presents. It will be my aim,

I. To notice briefly what constitutes Pride of Heart.

II. To show how it deceives men.

III. To specify some of the forms of delusion to which it leads.

I. What constitutes Pride of Heart?

Pride of heart may be defined to be a disposition of mind to exalt ourselves. It is a spirit of self-exaltation--a disposition to get out of our own place, and get above those who of right, even in our own estimation, ought to hold a place above ourselves.

II. How does pride of heart deceive men?

1. It renders men in a great measure blind to their own faults. The man of a proud heart will not see his own faults. He has no desire to see them. He would sooner see anything else in the world than see the bad side of his own character, and of course he takes every precaution to avoid the honest view of himself. He has no intention or even desire to find his own proper level in society, but tries to deceive both himself and others. He would fain imagine that he is vastly better than he really is, and make everybody else believe it if he can. Hence he will overlook his own faults either wholly, or at least as far as he can, and would be glad to make others do the same. This is one of the workings of a proud heart.

2. It leads men to excuse, or at least palliate their own faults. If a proud man can no longer cover his own faults, this will be his next resort. When he cannot deny that many things in his conduct are palpably wrong objectively considered, he will yet maintain that under his very peculiar circumstance, they are nearly or quite right. They will at least admit of much palliation; so he sets himself most diligently to this labor. He will be that last man to come down to a candid and thorough examination of his own faults. Ah, he does not relish this honest-hearted work.

3. It leads men to imagine that they have virtues which they have not. This

is often manifest in their egotistical manner of speaking. In their common conversation they assume that they possess virtues which nobody ever saw them exhibit, or ever dreamed of attributing to them. Whatever in their own conduct has the remotest appearance of virtue, they are sure to drag into their service to prove themselves the best of men.

4. It leads men to overrate the apparent virtues which they really possess. I say apparent virtues, for while a man is proud of heart, he can have no real virtue. Semblances of virtue he may have, and these his pride of heart will lead him to exaggerate as much as possible. He will be sure to give himself more credit for even these than he deserves.

5. It leads to an uncandid estimation of ourselves. The proud man becomes of course partial in his views of his own merits--committed to self, and incapable of taking sober views of his own real character.

6. Pride of heart is always prone to make self-flattering comparisons. The proud man is never slow to institute comparisons between himself and others, but will be always sure to give himself the advantage. He is always better than his neighbors. Although he may be an impenitent sinner, he is better than most professed Christians. "The pride of his heart hath deceived him."

7. The proud man avoids making humiliating comparisons between himself and others. If there are those with whom he cannot compare himself favorably, he turns away from them and avoids if he can, the painful self-mortification of contemplating superior excellence; or perhaps more often he will set himself to traduce their character, and will create or at least retail and aggravate slander against them until he can flatter himself that they are below him; then and then only can he feel happy to let them alone. The sight of superior excellence is annoying, not to say agonizing; so he goes about to level it down and make himself and others believe that the reputed best man is not as good as himself. It is pride of heart that begets envy, that fills society with slander and makes it so grateful to the feelings of some men to pick at the character of their more excellent neighbors. This is the reason why so many of the best men are slandered, and why so few escape its shafts.

8. Pride of heart induces an entirely dishonest application of truth. If the

proud man sits under preaching and if what he hears applies to himself ever so fitly, he is sure not to notice at all its application to himself, but will be very prompt and active in applying it to his neighbor. See him stretch up his neck to look over the heads of the congregation; he wants to see if Mr. B. is not there--this touch in the sermon hits him so nicely. O, thinks he, how completely that point hits such a one, and such a one--so the poor fool (for none are such fools as the proud) cheats himself out of all the truth that fits his own case, and with a strange, self-deceptive politeness, serves out all the food to others and gladly starves himself. Has not his pride of heart deceived him?

9. Pride leads men to evade self-knowledge. How often in conversing with men have I been struck with this! You cannot make them see their own faults. They will dodge and shuffle--change the subject if they can, and look in every other direction rather than within. In courts of justice you may sometimes see a man pushed to admit a fact that incriminates himself, and you may mark his shuffling and evasion, and his skill in denying or concealing the fact that he is badly crowded; but the same thing occurs often enough out of court when the pride of a man's heart makes him hate the light and stubbornly, though often awkwardly, shut his eyes against it. You may hold up the light close to his face--he can't see. Try to open his eyes--he doesn't see anything. You may draw his character to the life--he does not recognize the likeness--because he does not wish to! What is the reason? Pride of heart. It often seems as if a proud man would sooner go to hell than open his eyes to see candidly his own faults. So terribly does pride deceive those who love to indulge it!

III. I am next to sketch some of its forms of delusion.

1. It makes men imagine that they believe the Bible when they do not. Nothing in my own experience has ever more surprised me than the deep and strong delusion under which I labored during my early life on this point. I honestly supposed that I believed the Bible to be God's word. For a long time it had been impossible for me to evade the arguments in its favor. Indeed so thoroughly was I convinced on this point, that the first thing I did after my conversion was to make out a skeleton of an argument to prove on legal grounds the truth of the Bible--which I deemed to be unanswerable. If anybody had told me then that I did not believe the Bible, I should have felt

that they slandered me most ungenerously and shamefully. But yet mine was then only a mere historical belief, and no act of the heart at all. My will did not bow to the supremacy of Bible truth. Indeed I gave it no place at all in my heart; I did not allow it to have the influence of admitted truth upon my heart or my life. Hence my notion that I believed the Bible to be true was a mere delusion.

That this sort of merely historical faith is a delusion is manifest in various ways. (1.) Whoever really believes the Bible will be strongly exercised in view of its truths. In the nature of mind it is impossible that such truths--believed, can fail to influence the mind powerfully. It is intrinsically essential to the nature of mind to be moved by the truth. Hence there never was and never can be a mind of man or angel that will be unmoved by the belief of such truth as the Bible reveals. Yet who does not know that thousands read the Bible and profess to believe it, but are not half so much interested or affected by it as they are in reading Tom Thumb. It is a fact. Many say they believe the Bible, and yet are more interested in reading the silliest story-book ever got up to amuse mere children. Do these people really believe the Bible? Oh, "the pride of their heart hath deceived them."

This delusion is also manifest, (2.) in the fact that, professing to believe the Bible, they yet take no pains to understand what it teaches.

Suppose Br. M. comes to me saying, I have something very important indeed to communicate--something you never heard of before; do you believe it to be true, Br. F? O yes, beyond all doubt, I reply. But stop; how can I quite say this without first knowing what it is. Let me know what it is and then I can better--more rationally, tell you whether I believe it.

Suppose an angel from heaven should present you a book, sealed with seven seals, saying--This is a revelation from God to you; and you believe that it really is so; would you let it lie unopened and unread? Would you let it rest a moment till you should have understood its contents! You would search after the means to understand it--would traverse this whole nation if need be, and if all this sufficed not, you would explore all Europe and even to the ends of the earth. No labor would seem to you to be labor at all in an enterprise like this.

Yet here is the Bible, with its resistless and admitted claims of being direct

from God. How many tens of thousands believe it to be the word of God, yet never take pains to read it--are never upon their knees before God pleading for light to shine upon that blessed page. O this is, as Dr. Young says, one of "guilt's blunders, and the loudest laugh of hell," that men should delude themselves about their belief of the Bible. Do you believe that this Bible is a revelation from God to your deathless soul! And then do you treat this book as if it were a silly tale? You never need ask for stronger proof of your being grossly and fatally deluded.

2. Men are deluded by their pride when they think they love God, yet do not love to please Him. Who does not know that it is a law of our being that we delight to please those whom we love, and always shape our conduct accordingly? Love will have a kind of omnipotent influence upon us affecting everything we do. Love has this influence in every relation of life--between husbands and wives--parents and children. Who does not know it? Who does not know that if the husband love his wife or the wife love her husband, every word and every act will show it; every word and every act will come under the influence of a desire to please, a desire to promote the real interest of the party loved? It cannot be otherwise. It is in the very nature of love to study to please, and to seek the happiness of its object. Withdraw this element from love and what is there left?

Hence it is impossible that true love to God can exist, and yet with it no desire to please Him and do His will. The heart of love will be continually raising the question--"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" "Lord, how shall I most fully please Thee?"

What then shall we think of those thousands of nominal Christians who profess to love God, and yet do nothing to please God, and everything to please themselves? Every day and hour they are doing things and indulging states of mind which they know God must abhor, and yet they flatter themselves that they love God! What delusion!

3. Men think they are willing to be Christians, yet do not consider what is implied in it. They satisfy themselves with the loosest notions of this subject; else how could they fail to see that they are not Christians, and really have no intention to be? For consider, what is implied in being a Christian? Nothing less than a total renunciation of all self-seeking--a hearty confession of sin--in one's inmost soul renouncing it, once for all,

and forever; and a perfect consecration of ourselves to the service and pleasure of God. Of course this implies a breaking up of all our selfish associations and habits--a real change--so that it may most truly be said--"If any man be in Christ he is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold all things are become new."

Now it is a fact that multitudes say they are very willing to become Christians; but they never take pains to know what this means, nor would they be willing to be such Christians as Christ was.

4. Men, deceived by pride of heart, think they are really Christians and truly reconciled to God, while in fact they do not obey God. Are they reconciled to God? No, for if they were, they would be reconciled to His government, and would obey His laws. What does a man mean by saying that he is reconciled to God, while he is at war with His government, and trampling every hour on His laws? What does he mean when he says he is pleased with God's government and laws? He answers that he means nothing more than that he knows those laws and that government to be intrinsically right and good. He knows this, he says, and therefore thinks himself a Christian. So does the devil know this, and the devil might just as well on this ground pretend and profess to be a Christian as any man might, who does not obey God's law with all his heart. Yes, unless a man obeys the divine law with all his heart, he has not ground whatever to think himself a friend of God. No matter as to this point how much he knows about this law--the more he knows the greater and blacker will be his guilt, if he does not obey. No matter how much his reason and conscience approve the law as very good--all the worse for his Christian hope--all the worse for the doom of his soul from a just God--if he refuse to obey a law known and acknowledge to be holy and just and good.

Yet how many there are who claim to be Christians, but nevertheless live in sin, and plead for Christians living in sin, and would be very indignant if anyone should urge them to cease from all sin! They would perhaps think it an insult to their orthodoxy, or that at least there is some plot to ensnare them into a fatal heresy. What do I hear you say about your Christian experience? "O, I don't profess to be perfect--I sin and repent all the time." Oh, there is your mistake utterly. You don't repent. Indeed you don't repent if you sin all the time. The first part of what you say is probably true--but if so, the last

part is of course false--utterly false. Consider for a moment. What is repentance? Many who say this don't know, or at least don't consider at all what it is. If they did, they certainly would not utter such an absurdity as to say that they sin and repent all the time. What is repentance? It is turning heartily and wholly away from sin. And how does this coincide with sinning all the time? What would you think of a man who claims to be all the time sober, and yet all the time drunk; or more precisely thus--all the time drinking, and yet all the time abstaining most sincerely and heartily from drinking--always drinking, and always reformed? All the time murder and love together in his heart--obeying God and yet disobeying, all the time, and simultaneously! Any man must be badly deluded who can believe this.

5. Unregenerate men deceive themselves in supposing that they are as good as Christians. They say--We give as much to support the gospel, we are just as kind to the poor, as ready and active in every good work, and as strong in all the reforms of the age as the best of them; why then are we not as good of Christians as they, and sometimes even better?

Laboring many years since in Rome, I found there a man living in the practice of great external morality. Nothing was more common than for impenitent sinners to make comparisons between him and professed Christians, and to maintain that he was a better Christian than most of them. How did they judge? They said--Mr. B. gives as much as any of them--attends meetings as much--is as regular in all good things, and Mr. B. is the man for us. No man sets a better example than he; he is our model and pattern. If he is not good enough to go to heaven, who is and who can be? But he makes no profession of religion; so we think we shall get along as well without religion as with it.

The revival went on, but long before it closed, Mr. B. found that he was far enough from being as good as any Christian in the place. He came to see that his heart was full of all uncleanness--that he was proud of his reputation, and utterly far away from God in every possible respect.

But let us sift this subject more thoroughly. Take the case of the moral man. He is externally a well-behaved man, perhaps in this respect, even faultless. Well, what of this? Is it therefore certain that he is intrinsically a good man? Can you infer from his external conduct that his heart is right before God? It is indeed true in general that we are to judge men by their fruits; yet who

does not know that we can not always judge correctly of the heart from the mere outside of a man? We can judge of his heart no farther than we can understand his motives and intentions.

Now in these respects, the best moralist, being unregenerate, is precisely opposite in character to the lowest Christian. See them walk to the house of God in company; take together the attitude of worshippers; alike each pays his proportion of the expenses, and each sustains all gospel institutions by his example. And yet if you could look into their hearts you would see that one does all this to be seen of men--the other to be seen of God; the one really worships at the shrine of fashion and respectability--the other at the shrine of his Maker. Can there be a wider contrast than this?

Again, suppose two men--the best impenitent moralist and the lowest Christian, meet on mutual business. The points involved are exceedingly perplexing, intricate, trying; both become very excited and both speak very unadvisedly. Both sin against God and against each other. Consequently, up to this point, you see no difference in their development of character. But now they part, and the Christian threads his solitary way towards his home. His mind is ill at ease. He thinks no longer of the great abuse he has received, but only of his own great sin. O, how this burns on his conscience and his heart! How can I live, he cries, for I have sinned against God and I have scandalized His name before the wicked. He seeks some solitude, that if possible he may find God. If you could follow him with velvet step you might hear him pouring out before God his confessions and imploring forgiveness. You might see his bitter tears--you might hear his groans of sorrow. He pours out the anguish of his heart as if it were an ocean of grief. Alas! he has sinned against God and brought disgrace on the loved and honored name of Jesus!

But in all this, you hear not a word about the abuse he has received--not one word. If however you track the other man away from this scene of common, mutual wrong, what will you see? He turns aside into the next shop--draws around himself a cluster of associates--proclaims with trumpet-tongue how he has seen a Christian falling into ill-temper, and seeks to hide his own wrong in the clamor he gets up over his erring friend. Not a word has he to say before either God or man, of his own wrong. Not a word has the Christian neighbor to say of the wrong of the moralist. The one confesses;

the other has no confession to make. Can there be a broader distinction than this?

You may recollect a case, sketched in some of the Sabbath School books, of a Dr. Hopkins who was a very pious man, but who had a very wicked brother-in-law -- a man who had long cherished a malign spirit towards Dr. H., for he could not bear his piety, and therefore wanted to ensnare him into sin. A case of very difficult business occurred between them. The brother-in-law abused Dr. H. most shamefully in his own house, and ultimately got him angry. They parted, each to their homes--the wicked man to glory over the Dr.'s sin, and taunt his pious wife, saying--"There is the man you glory in as being a good Christian. He got angry with me today. I've got him down and got my foot on him, and I'll hold him there. He will not hear the last of this for many a day."

But where is the Doctor? Gone home, but not to rest. All night he walks the room in agony--his only meat is tears--his heart is bursting with sorrow and grief. With morning light he hastens to that brother-in-law, and pours out his confessions before him--his heart smitten and broken as a bruised reed. It is said that the wicked man was first confounded, then melted. "Now," said he, "I know there is truth in religion. I never believed it before; now I see it and know it." Oh, those confessions were like arrows dipped in blood to the heart of that wicked brother-in-law, and through the blessing of God they resulted in his hopeful repentance.

Another precious fact is recorded, namely, that thirty years after this event, Dr. H. said to a friend--"I have never known the emotion of anger since that night of agony." So thoroughly did he renounce that sin--so intense were his convictions then--so earnestly and effectually did he bathe his soul in the blood of sprinkling, that the sin was slain, to live no more.

Here now were two men who quarreled and seemed alike in it; but say--were they really alike in character? Who does not see that they were as unlike as heaven and hell?

When sinners have the conceit that they are really as good as Christians, because their conduct is as fair externally, they overlook the fact that moral character belongs to the intention. They differ entirely from Christians, as appears from their opposite motives, and from the fact that one is impenitent

and the other penitent. They also differ fundamentally in their dependence for salvation. The Christian trusts in Christ alone; the sinner not in Christ but in some form of self-righteousness. It always is and must be essential to the state of an unbelieving sinner, that he does not submit himself to the righteousness of Christ, but goes about to establish some form of righteousness of his own. Go, visit and compare the death-bed experience of the impenitent moralist, and of the Christian. Their lives may have been externally not greatly unlike, for both have sinned, and both have done many things externally proper and right. But try them on their death-beds. Visit the sinner. "You seem to be very sick." "Yes, I am." "Do you expect to recover?" "O, I don't know. I am very sick." "Are you willing to die?" "I can hardly say I am; yet if God thinks it best I suppose I must submit. I believe God is just; He will do me no injustice." "What do you think of your past life?" "O, I have always meant to be an honest man. I have not been as bad a man as many have supposed. I can't bear to think that God will send me to hell, for He knows that I have done about as well as I could."

You see, my hearer, that this man has been pretty good, pretty good in everything, and he looks to God's justice, not to His mercy, as his ground of hope. His own righteousness is his ultimate ground of reliance.

But let us go into another sick-chamber. Here lies a Christian, near his end. "How do you do, brother? You seem to be very low; do you expect to recover?" "No, not at all." "Well, you have been a very good man." (Mark, he turns his face away ashamed and troubled.) "I have no goodness at all to speak of before God or man. There is no ground for me to hope in that direction. If God were to lay righteousness to the line, I could not stand a moment before Him. If however I may be made the representative of Christ's righteousness, I may be saved. All my hope is in Christ. I never look elsewhere than to Him alone. I am a great sinner and deserve the deepest hell." "What, sir, have you been a hypocrite?" "O, no sir, but before I was converted, and often since, I have greatly dishonored God, and have utterly forfeited all claim to salvation on the ground of my own merits." "Well, brother, are you afraid to die?" "No, not in the least; I see no reason to fear. I believe that Jesus is able to save to the uttermost, and I have cast my naked soul on Him alone."

Now you can not but notice the great contrast between these two men whose

dying experience we have just been contemplating. The moralist passes into an atmosphere of clouds and darkness. Despite of all his delusions and of all the false quiet they can give him, his soul is full of trouble and can find no rest.

But mark the Christian--his soul is in peace. It rests not on his own righteousness--he makes no account of his good works. My hope, he says, is in Christ alone. But his countenance is placid as a summer's sunset. His heart rests on the everlasting promises. It is enough for him that God is faithful and that Jesus is near--inexpressibly near to his soul.

Another development of self-deception occurs in the case of professors of religion. They deceive themselves by comparing themselves with other professors, and assuming that it is right for themselves to do whatever they see other professors do. Now as to this, it is in the first place an utter mistake to set up any other standard of Christian duty than the life and example of Jesus Christ. This, and only this, is the Christian's model. If the spirit of religion reign in his heart, he will naturally enquire--not whether some other professor of religion does so, but whether Jesus Christ, in these circumstances, would do so. For his object is not to please this deacon, or that minister, but his own blessed Lord and Savior. Of course he can not make so great a mistake as to pattern after some deacon or some professed Christian of his own choice, and not after Christ.

In the second place, this practice of making some other professor of religion your model, is delusive and untrustworthy, because what may be admissible for him, may be utterly wrong for you. He may have so much less light than you that God may wink at his ignorance, but condemn you for sinning against actual knowledge of your duty. A few days since I said to a young man who was about leaving this place--"You will find different habits abroad from what you have been accustomed to here. You will doubtless find many Christian people using tea, coffee, tobacco and perhaps wine; and if you allow yourself to argue that you may rightly use these articles because other Christians do, you will be grievously ensnared, and may ruin your soul. They may have so little light on the subject that possibly it may not be wrong for them to use these articles; but you know better than to use them, and you can not hope that God will excuse your sin in the case on the ground that you had not light enough to create moral obligation. And surely it were of no avail for

you to flatter yourself that with all the light you have, you can be allowed to do wrong because others do the same things under circumstances which make their sin much less than yours, or even as the case may be, which remove all guilt from their conduct."

6. Some persons deceive themselves by mistaking the excitement and play upon their sensibilities for real religion. Some persons, for example, are so constituted physiologically, that under the stimulus of ardent spirits they become exceedingly pious, and can sing and talk religiously, so that you might be tempted to think them the greatest saints.

In my early life I boarded with a family in which the father would sometimes come home at night half drunk, and then be so good-natured, and read his Bible, and weep and pray, as full of religious feeling apparently as any man could be. I looked on and marveled; but I could not be long in solving the mystery. But suppose I had argued from this that it is good for a man to get half drunk, because it makes him so beautifully pious. Suppose I were to argue in maintaining it that I had seen its fruits with my own eyes. Fortunately the common sense of mankind has taught them that the spirit from above and the spirit from below are not at all akin to each other. Yet one might just as well plead for an alcohol religion--one which manifests itself in soft and tender developments of the sensibility--as for any other type of mere sentimentalism--as for any religion which lives only in an excited sensibility. Good music may sometimes answer the same purposes of excitement as alcohol, and may be equally deceptive. If it acts only upon the sensibility, leaving the heart untouched, its results can be in the end no more converting, and are no better proof of real piety than the similar results of ardent spirits.

Let me say further that this type of apparent piety is exceedingly deceitful, for the reason that often it seems to carry not the sensibility only, but even the will. The whole heart seems to be melted--the whole man changed and everything borne along so sweetly in the spring-tide of religious emotions. If you were to see this man of alcohol in some of his pious moods, you would be astonished at such developments. If you only keep a little distance from him so as not to smell his breath, you would think him very spiritual--as indeed, (in a peculiar sense,) he is.

Now let it be remembered, this man's religion is just as good before God as

any other type of pseudo-religious excitement which only plays upon the sensibilities, but touches not the heart.

7. Over against this is another form of delusion in which men have no other religious impulses except the hard driving and goading of their conscience. No love, no faith, no sweet drawing towards God, no cordial trust in a divine Father and a sympathizing Savior; nothing but compunction, goading, coercion, under the lash of conscience. They live in a strait jacket-grind like the blind Sampson in the mill, and wear out life in agony. A minister once said to me--"I think I must have mistaken my calling. It seems as if I had preached all I ever had to preach, and emptied it all out. You can not think how much hard labor it costs me to work out my two sermons a week. I don't see as I have any heart for the work, and you may judge that I don't have a very pleasant life of it."

For myself I thought so indeed. If a man has no more gospel in him than this, and finds it such enormous labor to grind out enough for a sermon in four or five days' labor, he has probably mistaken his calling. Above all, if he has no heart for the work, or in it either, he might better try some other business.

Emphatically and characteristically is it true of these self-deceived men, that religion is not their theme. This is not the subject upon which they love to converse. They can talk freely and abundantly on other subjects, but on this one subject of religion their hearts are not interested, and of course their words cannot flow out from the fullness of their hearts. If they should get to heaven, unchanged, how could they live there unless they might have up there their favorite topics? How could they endure to stay where "Holiness to the Lord," is blazing in light and fire all around?

But they expect to go to heaven? Let us see. Suppose they get in. What do they say? Hear them talk: What's the price of wheat? Now for great bargains. What news from the polls? How goes the election? But these men would think you had lost all your Christian charity, if you should intimate that they are not on the way to heaven.

Now let it be known forever, all real Christians have the spirit of religion in their hearts--their souls are full of it. Worldly men are full of the world, and no wonder that it boils over and flows out incessantly. Christ says--"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks;" and who does not know that

this is profoundly philosophical? Of course this principle will be developed in the Christian. The Spirit of Christ has taken possession of his soul, and now, how can it help gushing out in rich overflowings of love, meekness, faith and humility? Mark me now--as God is true--if this is not your character--if love does not reign in your heart, and fill your soul, so that religion must be your theme--nearer and dearer to your heart than all things else--if this be not the case with you, you are a hypocrite, and when your death-knell tolls, you are damned! Mark what I say!

8. Many think themselves Christians, although conscious that they have no peace of mind. What but a desperately wicked and deceitful heart can cherish such a hope? For what is religion? "Not meat and drink" surely; "but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." What says the Bible? That "Wisdom's ways are pleasantness and all her paths peace." "Come unto Me all ye that labor, and ye shall find rest for your souls." "His commandments are not grievous."

Now look around you and mark those professed Christians whose religion involves no peace of mind. You see them all afloat--drifted and driven by all those impulses which agitate other minds. Where is their religion? Do they know anything about peace with God and joy in the Holy Ghost? Do they withdraw from the agitations of worldliness and selfishness, and find repose as on the bosom of their Savior? Have they such faith that they can glory in tribulation, and does their tribulation work for them experience, and experience hope; and is their hope one that does not make ashamed? Is this their experience? If so, then 'tis well; but how can men who go on year after year without peace of mind and without trust in God, flatter themselves that they are real Christians?

9. Many think they are accepted of God although aware that they are indulging in sin. This delusion is more common than any other I have mentioned, and becomes so for the reason that even the church have lost sight of the fact that Christians can and do live without sin. Strange to tell, multitudes of professed Christians--with ample access to the Bible--do hold that all men are to be expected to live in sin, notwithstanding all the gospel can do in this world to deliver them from its power.

Under this view, it is no wonder such results should follow. They expect, they say, to be saved through the imputed righteousness of Christ, and they

hold that this will avail for them without any righteousness of their own. But let us reason a moment about this. I admit most fully that men are to be justified by Christ alone, and on the condition of personal faith in Him; but mark, not without personal holiness. Here lies the fundamental error of those who think to get to heaven without being free from sin; they assume that saving faith in Christ does not involve personal holiness. No mistake can be greater than this! The Bible says, "faith works by love." It declares "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Of course there can be no such faith as this while the soul is in the bondage of sin.

A certain Doctor of Divinity not long since, in opposing the doctrine of sanctification, insisted that holiness is in no sense and in no degree a condition of salvation, and that the condition is nothing but faith. Faith, he holds, can exist, pure and acceptable to God, ensuring the salvation of the believer, and all without holiness. Monstrous absurdity! What! teach that a man can have saving faith without being turned from sin, without forsaking all or even any of his iniquities! Horrible! HORRIBLE! There never was a worse error taught by men or devils! I would as soon rebuke a man for this as for downright atheism. There is not a truth in the moral universe more palpable and certain than that saving faith must imply holiness. The faith that justifies must also sanctify. If not, it were easy to show that God has made a grievous and fatal mistake in the conditions of salvation! What! has God contrived a system for justifying sinners IN THEIR SINS?

10. Multitudes suppose themselves converted who have never been even convicted. I have often fallen in with a certain man who has been instrumental in convicting many sinners, and probably of converting some, but who could give no account whatever of the spirituality of God's law and of what sin is. Not less than a dozen times in a single week has he asked me what benevolence is. He could not retain the idea of what constituted true religion. "What is it," he would say, "How did you define disinterested benevolence?"

Now it is no wonder that he could not develop the true idea of sin and impress it on the minds of others. He did not seem to have himself the very first idea of what sin is. It is therefore natural that under his instructions many should suppose themselves converted who were not even convicted. They had not felt deep and pungent conviction for sin, and therefore it was

not naturally possible that they should repent and put it away. Nothing can be more philosophical than this--that men must know the truth, and the truth must make them free.

11. Many fall into the error of mistaking conviction for conversion. The great distress of conviction passes away; the ease and peace that follow give birth to the hope that they are converted. There is indeed a change, and they flatter themselves it is from sin to grace. They have been alarmed and the alarm has subsided, but they have not received Christ at all.

Now I want you to apprehend this. Many get a hope, but do not get Christ. They get a different state of mind, but not a Christian state. They have no other faith than they had before. They are not conscious of having cast off their own righteousness and put on Christ's. They have not renounced sin and self and gone over to the new covenant.

How is it with you? Do you know how you came by your hope? And what it is to go over from the law as a ground of salvation, to the gospel--to abandon the old way of self-righteousness, and trust in the righteousness of Christ alone? Have you begun really to drink of Christ's fullness--to know the depths of that fountain of living waters--to have it in your very soul, a well of living water, springing up to everlasting life, bubbling up and pouring forth as if really an exhaustless fountain were in your very soul? You know we read of such things in the Bible. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." "And this Christ said of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive."

Have you received it? If not, then there must be a mistake about your having believed with saving faith upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Rely upon it, if a man has this faith in Christ, the living waters from his full soul will flow out, and there will be a green spot around him, however barren the region round about may be. Religion will be his theme. He can not live without manifesting forth that Christ who lives and reigns within him.

How is it with you in this respect? Do your spirit and life bear witness that you have this faith in Jesus Christ, and this indwelling Spirit of Christ in your soul?

12. Many confound resolutions to do what they think right, with real

religion. Now it should be considered that mere resolutions are purely legal, and differ fundamentally from the religion of love. Suppose, for illustration, that the wife should say, "I must do just right towards my husband--precisely right in everything;"--and she screws herself up by dint of resolutions to do every thing that is right--and this is all. Would you suppose this to be love--the whole of the love which befits the relation of a wife to her husband?

I saw a lady in Boston who manifested the greatest anxiety lest some word or thought should be wrong. Indeed she seemed to be in agony lest she should infringe upon some principles of duty towards God or man. I noticed her great legality. I said to her, "Sister, I see you seem to be in great distress lest you should not please your Savior--you seem to be in agony about it all the time; now tell me--Have you the same sort of distress and agony lest you should not please your husband?" "O no," said she. "Why not?" "Because," said she, "It is natural for me to please my husband, and I know that I do. I love to please him and it does not seem to cost me any effort." "Why then," said I, "should it not be so towards Christ? Why not make His service a sweet labor of love? Why act as if nothing but the pricks of conscience can keep you in the path of obedience? Why not yield up your soul to all the impulses of pure love, and let it reign, strong, sweet, attractive, all-controlling? This would make your religious duties a paradise."

13. Many have made up their minds to serve God, as they suppose, and this is the form of their religion and the whole of it. Now it is plain that if they have not formed the right conception of what this service is, it may be the case and probably is, that they have no religion at all.

Let us illustrate this in reference to one vital point. Suppose a wife should make up her mind to serve her husband. By this she understands that she shall do all the things externally which he requires. She is going to be his real servant and evermore do all his bidding. But unfortunately in her estimate of duties, the element of love has entirely dropped out, and she takes no notice of this whatever. She means to be faithful in all her domestic duties--she will keep his house and his clothes in first rate order and will leave no external duty neglected--but all may be as heartless as if it were done by a steam engine. Now although such duty, so performed, might be endurable in an employed domestic, yet who could endure it in a wife? What husband would

not say--"You are the chosen companion of my life--the chosen object of my love, and when I vowed my conjugal affections to you, I flattered myself the vow was really reciprocated. I do not want your tasks--I want your heart."

And is it strange that God also should ask for the heart? Has He not given us His, in such forms as most impressively demand the reciprocal devotion of ours?

But let us see what this man proposes to do who has made up his mind to serve God. First, he is going to pray--pray to be forgiven. Wonderful service this, if rendered as some profitable work for the Lord--with no brokenness, or affection of heart in it! Just as if I should go to a man fifty times a day or twice a day and ask him to cancel my debt to him; and should enter my charge in account for each prayer, paying off my debt--in praying!

What else? Well, he will go to church. O, what service is this, of mocking insult to God, if no heart is in it! In truth no matter what the outside service may be, it is an odious abomination to God, unless the deep outgoings of the heart are with it. You might circumnavigate the globe with your zeal, or give your flesh to a martyr's flame, yet all would be less in Gods' esteem, no heart being in it--than the little tear of penitence and affection which quivers in the dying eye of a saint who can not raise his finger in any act of outward service for God. Aye, it is the love lying deep in the heart, which catches the eye of the great God. And for you to talk about serving Him without love is supreme nonsense.

14. Many deceive themselves by supposing that selfish regrets and sorrow are real repentance. That sorrow and regret are always selfish, which leave sin still in existence--which can be felt and sin still be indulged. Nothing can be plainer than this. You would all judge thus in the case of your child who should regret and sorrow bitterly about his crime and its consequences, if he still kept up the practice of the crime. You could not have any confidence in his tears, if you knew they only covered the purpose to steal or lie as soon as your back is turned. You would know what account to make of such tears.

Let those professors who can weep and pray about their sin, yet never give it up, but hold on in sinning, look into this mirror and behold their own hearts.

15. Many deceive themselves by a faith which abolishes instead of establishing the law. Obviously such faith never can answer under the government of a righteous God.

16. Many suppose that God justifies and accepts them while they really condemn themselves. They seem to think that God approves of them and of their moral state while deep in their minds there is self-condemnation. Now the Bible says that if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things, and of course condemns us. No delusion can be greater than this. Strange notions must he have of the purity of God and the strictness of His law, if he supposes that his own conscience is more strict than God is. He sees that he himself must condemn such a state as his own; but he flatters himself that God is not so particular about little sins as his own conscience is! O, what a delusion!

REMARKS.

1. These delusions are all voluntary. Men need not be deceived by their pride of heart, and would not be if they were not quite willing to have it so.

2. God will by and by tear the mask away and reveal our real character to all the universe. He is now employing various means in His providence and through His grace to undeceive men; but if all these means fail, ere long He will send His hail to sweep away all refuges of lies forever. Then and thenceforward, "he that is filthy shall be filthy still," forever hopeless of moral cleansing.

3. All these delusions are based upon dishonesty of mind. Where there is real honesty, carried out in faithful performance of known duty, and humble trust in divine guidance, there is no danger of being deluded.

4. We see the great folly of those who imagine that if they are only sincere, they shall be saved. What do they mean by sincerity? This; namely, that they really believe what they profess. But may not men really believe a lie? Is it not said of some that because they "do not love the truth, God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness?" The fatal mistake made by those who think that all sincere men will be saved, is this: they overlook the fact that men may be sincerely wicked, and, becoming sincerely wicked, they may bring themselves to believe a lie sincerely, and God may

judicially leave them to the natural influence of a wicked heart upon the mind's apprehension of truth.

5. Many cry "peace, peace, when there is no peace." I often wonder how it happens that when they go alone and fall down before God to pray, it does not strike them at once that they are shut out, and have no communion with God at all. Why do they not see that they have made a fatal mistake in supposing that they have any spiritual access to God, and real communion of soul with Him?

6. Many love to have their hurt healed slightly. They cannot bear to have their wound thoroughly probed. Hence instead of throwing their naked bosom open to the probe of truth, and crying--God of mercy, let this search me, and let it go to the bottom of all the hidden evils of my heart--they wrap themselves all about with mufflers of self-righteousness, and then they will sit and writhe and dodge through fear that some word of truth will make unwelcome revelations of self to their own view. O, what will they say when God shall come down in the cool of the day, and talk with them face to face about this!

7. Some seem determined never to know themselves. They will evade self-knowledge, press it upon their attention as you may. You may try to seize them to hold the mirror before their eyes; they will shut their eyes or turn their heads round--you cannot make them look into any moral self-revealer. I have known cases in which a man's friends have tried to seize him, and hold him still long enough to get the truth before his eyes, but they might as well have tried to grasp the North wind.

8. Pride of heart is one of the most disgusting as well as most dangerous of all forms of sin. A proud man is perpetually exposed to deceive himself in everything. There he stands on top of a precipice; sheets of lightning blaze around his head, and dark waves of damnation roll beneath his feet. What is he doing there? Ah, me! dancing! dancing giddily as if he never had the first idea of danger in his mind.

"I heard the wretch profanely boast,

Till at Thy frown he fell;

His honors in a dream were lost,

And he awoke in hell."

O, let us put all these delusions away. Go to your closet. Search your inmost heart; tear away every delusion--cry out, O, my God, bring in a light! Let me see myself! O for a light--A LIGHT; let me know my own heart to the bottom. O, search and find out where you are, before an arrow smite you!

Hark? has it struck him? Is he dead? Yes, dead; and from my knowledge of him, I fear he has gone down to hell! Religion never was his theme. He did not love God's most searching truth. He never loved to examine his own heart. I think without a doubt, he is afar down in the depths of hell.

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

End of the 1848 Collection.

What Saith the Scripture?

"The Oberlin Evangelist"

Publication of Oberlin College

Sermons and Lectures given in 1849

by

Charles G. Finney

President of Oberlin College

Public Domain Text

Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to

load completely

before selecting **ANY** link below.

Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Lecture I. [Mutual Confession of Faults, and Mutual Prayer](#)

Lecture II. [God's Anger Against the Wicked](#)

Lecture III. [Evil Thinking](#)

Lecture IV. [Prayer for A Pure Heart](#)

Lecture V. [The Joy of God's Salvation](#)

Lecture VI. [Jesus, A Savior from Sinning](#)

Lecture VII. [The Self-Hardening Sinner's Doom](#)

Lecture VIII. [The Death of Saints Precious](#)

Lecture IX. [God Not Pleased with the Death of the Wicked](#)

Lecture X. [The Spirit of Christ, and the Spirit of True Christianity](#)

Lecture XI. [Judicial Blindness](#)

Lecture XII. [The Peace of God Ruling in the Christian's Heart](#)

Lecture XIII. [Receiving Honor from Men and Not from God](#)

Lecture XIV. [Faith the Work of God](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Mutual Confession of Faults, and Mutual Prayer

Lecture I

January 17, 1849

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--James 5:16: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed."

In the present discourse the following points demand our attention.

- I. What is intended by the injunction, "Confess your faults one to another"?*
- II. What is implied in compliance with it?*
- III. The reasons for this injunction.*
- IV. What is intended by the injunction, "Pray one for another"?*

I. What is meant by the injunction, "confess your faults one to another"?

1. There is no reason for supposing that this text gives any countenance to the Roman Catholic doctrine of confession to priests. You understand the doctrine so long prevalent in that communion under the name of "auricular confession," so called because it was made in the private ear of the priest. This doctrine holds that all are bound to make auricular confession of every act and of every thought upon which their conscience is at all troubled.

Consequently the system makes the priest the repository of all the sins of the church--of all the most private sins of all its members, male or female, to be confessed on pain of damnation. Every one who is acquainted with the results of this system, knows that they have been naturally pernicious to the purity and morals of both priest and people. It is most manifest that the apostle did not contemplate and could never sanction such a system. Confessing faults one to another is not the same thing as confessing all faults to the priest only.

2. Although there is nothing in the text which specially defines the sins contemplated, yet we are doubtless to understand the apostle here to infer primarily to faults committed against others, and to enjoin the confession of faults to those whom we have injured. The doctrine of confession in this form is abundantly taught and implied in the scripture, and is therefore, we may suppose, the particular thing intended here.

The principle involved in this may however extend somewhat farther, namely,

(1.) to the confession or disclosure of our besetting sins and of our peculiar temptations and weaknesses. It is plain that by making our confidential Christian friends acquainted with these temptations and besetments of ours, we may enlist their sympathies and prayers in our behalf, and thus secure valuable aid in resisting and overcoming these temptations.

(2.) The principle of the text may also include those sins which though not properly committed against particular individuals, are yet naturally committed in the presence of others, and therefore become a scandal to religion and a stumbling-block to our associates. For example, irritability, which so often stumbles others, and becomes a besetting sin; censoriousness--the practice of speaking harshly of others, and which is often a sore grievance not merely to those against whom we speak evil, but against every benevolent mind that hears us. These and other sins of this class it is plain should be confessed.

In saying these things you will observe I do not say that men are bound to reveal every thing they know--all the sins of which they think themselves guilty--even such as are known to none but themselves and God. It does not

appear that the Bible makes the duty of confession to men thus universal.

II. What is implied in obeying this injunction?

1. That we are thoroughly convinced of our sin; that we not only admit the fact, but its wickedness, as a sin against God and our neighbor. It is one thing for a man to confess his fault as a real fault and a sin; and quite another to acknowledge the fact without recognizing its heinous guilt. Hence our text must imply that we really understand and sincerely confess the actual guilt of our sin.

2. That we repent and renounce our sin. Confession is no better than an insult to God and man if unaccompanied with repentance and renunciation of sin confessed.

3. Humility is also implied. By this is meant that disposition which loves to take its own place, though it be a very low place--which does not seek to palliate, but really unmasks one's self and naturally seeks the very place which seems to belong to us.

Commonly the great difficulty found in confessing is that men are too proud. They do not love to place themselves as low in the estimation of others as they ought to be. Now humility stands right over against this pride, and implies a willingness to come down to its own low place.

A forced and extorted confession is not the thing enjoined in the text. When a man confesses under the sting of a scorpion conscience, or because, convicted by public disclosures and confounded by appalling revelations, he can not do otherwise and yet maintain any show of Christianity--such confessions, though they may cost a proud man a prodigious struggle, are yet in real value exceedingly cheap.

4. Genuine confession implies readiness to make restitution for the wrong we have done. Indeed confession is in one sense an element of restitution--a part of restitution itself; for example, if you have injured your neighbor in property or in reputation,--to make confession of the fact is one step in the process of restitution. But it is by no means the whole. If the case involve property, you must make restitution in kind; if it involve reputation of person, you are bound to make restitution as far as you can. This is really implied in the spirit of this injunction. No man in his right mind could

suppose that if he had stolen, his confession would be worth a straw without ample restitution. And the same principle should certainly apply in all cases where restitution is possible.

5. It is implied that the confession be full and free, not scanty and constrained. Let it be made with a free, full, and honest heart, in such a spirit and manner as will satisfy the reasonable views of the injured party. How can we suppose that God will be satisfied with any thing less? Suppose you have wronged a man and he knows it, and feels it. You come to him and after a sort you confess; but instead of making a full and satisfactory confession, you merely hint at your wrong deeds. He knows that you are not an honest man, and that you have not even answered the demands of your own conscience. Such a confession can do neither yourself nor your neighbor any good. Confession therefore should be poured out free as water, full and thorough.

6. Legitimate confession implies and involves throwing yourself upon mercy. When persons thoroughly confess their sins to God, they cease to justify themselves before Him, and throw themselves entirely upon his mercy. They rest upon his clemency alone and leave themselves wholly in the hands of God. In a similar way, when you confess to man you throw yourself upon his clemency; you confess your wrong, and forego all pleas of justification.

7. Where persons confess their besetting sins, the act implies a sincere desire to be holy, and an honest determination to give up sin and be rid of it forever.

I have often been struck with the different manner in which different individuals hear the announcement of the doctrine of sanctification. Proclaim to a body of professed Christians the fact that through grace they may in this life be delivered from all sin, and the reception of it will often speak volumes in revealing their real character. It serves to show their precise attitude towards sin. For example, I once preached in Rochester on this subject, and no sooner had the congregation dispersed than one man came to me, saying with great earnestness--"Mr. Finney, that is too good news to be true." There was a minister in that audience, however, who did not regard it as good news at all. He did not seem to treat the doctrine as if he had any desire to have it true.

Who has not observed this very difference? Preach the doctrine of a present salvation from sin to a man really panting to be delivered from sin, and he will hail it with intense interest, if not at once with open-hearted welcome. He will receive it most readily if he thinks it may be true. He will long to have it prove true, and his heart will throw no obstacles in the way of his candidly investigating its evidence, and cordially embracing all that evidence can be found to sustain.

But if he does not want it to prove true, he will cavil against it bitterly--will repel its evidence stubbornly, and of course will be likely to reveal himself unconsciously as the enemy of all righteousness. He will show that he takes no interest in being made free from sin at present--no real interest in being free from sin ever.

These developments of character are vastly better testimony to one's real state of mind than can elsehow be given. No man ever yet caviled against this doctrine who in heart longed to become holy. Even if he does not believe the doctrine true, and hence feels constrained to oppose it, there will be no spirit of cavil. When you see men cavil at any doctrine, you may know they do not want it to be true. It is not congenial to their hearts.

Who does not know that the doctrine of entire sanctification has of late received a great deal of opposition under a pretense of zeal for the truth, and opposition to error, which after all has been nothing more nor less before God and the whole world than a mere spirit of caviling and a most manifest opposition to truth and disinclination to have that doctrine proved true? It has been mournful and appalling to notice the exhibition of real opposition to holiness which has manifested itself in many quarters within the last few years. I am sure I do not say this censoriously. It is what every body knows to be true who has kept his eye open to the real manifestations which have been made through the pulpit and the press, through ecclesiastical organizations and in many other ways against the doctrine of holiness in this life.

But to return. When Christians reveal their deep sin to their brethren, it is always implied that they are really panting after holiness--that they abhor these sins which they confess, and are ready to do any thing however humiliating to mortify these horrible sins they so much hate.

III. Reasons for the injunction, "Confess your faults to one another."

1. In respect to personal injuries inflicted upon others, the injunction is founded in justice. We can not be just towards our injured brother without it.

Again, it is indispensable to peace with God. It is naturally impossible that we can have peace with God without confession of known offences against our neighbor. Who needs be told that God can have no fellowship with injustice, and of course none with those who act unjustly! Does not his eye mark all iniquity? Your injured neighbor might come before the Lord and say--"Lord, he has wronged me, Thou knowest, and now wilt Thou hold fellowship with him?"

2. Confession is just as indispensable to peace of mind as it is to peace with God. Suppose all the world were at peace with us and if it were possible, suppose God were too; yet we could not persuade ourselves that we are right. Conscience will forever upbraid us until we confess and do all we possibly can under the circumstances to make restitution for our wrong deeds.

3. Confession is indispensable to peace with those whom we have injured. Although the injured man may have no ill-will towards us--no spirit inconsistent with the gospel--no disposition to retaliate; yet it is impossible that he should have the spirit of Christian sympathy and harmony with us so long as he knows us to be impenitent and unwilling to confess known wrongs. This is a difficulty--a barrier between us,--which can not be removed until he is satisfied that I am honest; and this satisfaction he can not have till I confess my fault.

4. Confession is indispensable to peace and sympathy with all the just and good. While it is true that neither God nor the injured party can be at peace with the wrong-doer till he confess, the same is equally true of all holy beings. Their minds can not be in a peaceful and harmonious state towards me while they know that I am guilty of wrong-doing and will not confess. So long as they know me to be in this state they must regard me as a transgressor, and this must create an everlasting barrier between me and them. They may have no disposition to retaliate or injure me, but on the contrary they may be most earnest in prayer for me that God would humble

me and break down my pride. Their position towards me may be no other than that of true benevolence; yet till I confess they can not be in Christian sympathy and friendship with me. The thing is naturally impossible.

The same is true of even the wicked. They can not be at peace with me till I confess my wrongs. It is remarkable that a wicked man as really condemns wrongdoing as a good man does, although he may do the very same thing himself. His moral decisions upon the right and the wrong may be just and truthful notwithstanding his own bad character. Let him have a case in which his own selfishness does not bribe his conscience and blind his intelligence, and he will decide that wrong is wrong, and ought to be confessed and put away. You can not therefore have the respect of even wicked men unless you will confess your known wrongs. Even the wickedest men or devils in hell can not be satisfied with your course as right till you confess. They might not love you if you were to become holy, but certainly they never can esteem you until you do--never till you confess and abandon all your known wrongdoings. They can never justify and approve your sins.

5. Confession of wrong is indispensable to self-respect. It is naturally impossible that you should respect yourself while you withhold proper confession of your sins. By the very laws of your moral nature this can never be. Who does not know this? If you do not know this, you certainly may know it. Surely you can get no good by resisting the claims of an enlightened conscience, for if all the universe should let you alone in your sin, your conscience would not and could not. Still its voice would ring in your ear, and you could not silence its upbraidings.

Have you not sometimes been ashamed of yourself because you were too proud to confess? This very shame of making confession has filled your soul with bitter agony and the keenest self-reproach and you have sometimes felt that it is a greater shame and a deeper guilt than the original wrong itself. Suppose you were to meet the very man whom you have wronged. The best opportunity is afforded to make the confession which you know to be due--but shame and pride seal your lips. Not a word of confession is lisped. You go away full of remorse and a sense of guilty shame, for you can scarcely help feeling that the last sin is worse than the first. As a physician under these circumstances once cried out--"O how full of hell I am!" So you perhaps are sometimes constrained to say. You know that this which you

experience in your soul is an earnest of hell, for you are but too sure that you deserve the deepest, darkest place in the dwellings of the damned.

Nobody else can have confidence in you or respect for you, so long as it is understood that you will not confess known wrongs. You may labor to restore yourself in their confidence--but you are doomed to labor in vain. You may think to live it down, and wash out by good deeds the foul stain attaching to you by reason of unconfessed bad deeds, but you will certainly toil to no purpose. Who can think you an honest man? The truth is, they know better; for you have given them the best possible evidence of your being supremely proud and selfish. Put on the air of the saint as much as you will, you can not make them confide in you as an honest Christian man, until you confess your sins wherever confession is in the nature of the case, fit and demanded.

Consider, farther, that you can never regain the confidence of discerning men until you are willing to go farther in confession than you are absolutely compelled to go. It often happens that men will go as far as they must, but no farther. They show plainly enough that they go along in the path of confession, only because they are so pushed that they can not help it. Step by step--one step at a time, just as fast as they must, but no faster, they move along. I have often stood and looked on with astonishment to see this singular process. The guilty man finds that one thing is out too far to be denied any longer; so he confesses that;--but nothing more. No, he says, that's all. Soon another feature of the same transaction comes out, blacker than the first. Sir, you are guilty of this too! No, I am not. You can not prove it. Yes, my friend, it is proved beyond all question. O, well then, I confess that I am very sorry; but that's all. There is nothing more. Well, by the next day some new point is brought up, and the same road is traveled over again. Denial, conviction, confession--and then to save all the rest of his character, he will beg you to accept his solemn word that there is nothing more of the sort to be revealed. Now such a man often uses up his character faster than he is aware. He little thinks how cheap his forced confessions become, and how little confidence is reposed in his most solemn protestations of having made clean work in confession. It is vastly better to go to the bottom in the outset. Yes, go to the bottom--pour it all out--all, so thoroughly that neither man nor God can find anything more belonging to that subject. Do this, and there is hope for you. Men will say of you--Now we know he is honest--

hearted, and though he has done wrong, yet he lays his heart all open and we can trust him again. It is not in human nature to resist the appeal which earnest, honest-hearted confession makes to the human heart.

Again, confession of personal wrongs is exceedingly useful to both parties concerned. It greatly relieves the guilty man, rolling off a mountain-weight from his soul, and restoring sweet peace and joy again. On the other side it often seems to be necessary to the party wronged. You will recollect a case which I adduced not long since, of Dr. Hopkins, whose deep and full-hearted confessions were the means of converting his wicked brother-in-law. Confessions will often do what nothing else can. It often serves to show wicked men that Christians are in spirit utterly unlike themselves. They are conscious that they do not confess their faults so--that they know nothing about such brokenness of spirit. Hence the confessions of a humble Christian reach their conscience, as nothing else can. Often have I known men scatter conviction like fire through a congregation by a simple confession of their own sins. I now recollect the case of a minister who by a confession to his people set on foot a glorious revival. He had been to Rome during the great revival there, and become deeply convicted of his great guilt in having cared so little for the salvation of his people. He returned home, prepared a sermon for his people, but when he entered the pulpit the next Sabbath, he could not preach it. His heart was full, and ready to burst, and he told the people that he could not preach a word. O, said he, I have been among you so many years, and alas! how little have I cared for your souls! I have tried to please you, and have discharged my regular duties in a way but too heartless; but ah, my guilt in having so overlooked the salvation of your dying souls. Well, he had scarcely begun to confess in this strain, before the deacon wanted to confess, and then other members of the church, and that house became another Bochim. The Lord was there, and his work moved on with power. You can readily see the bearing of that minister's confession. Every one said--If our minister has sins to confess, so have we! If he has reason to confess with such contrition and bitter weeping, how much more reason have we! Thus his confessions effected what no sermon of his ever did.

Again, sincere confessions are highly honorable to the party who makes them. There is perhaps no other way in which men evince more strongly their earnest and sincere approval of the right. It is surely no small testimony to the integrity of a man's character, if he shows that he approves the right so

fully and strongly that he does not shrink a moment from condemning himself for any known deviation. His love of right prevails over his pride of character. This man's confessions are a noble testimony to his deep sincerity of heart.

How strange it is that men should be ashamed to confess their sins! They could not make this great mistake if they did not "put darkness for light and light for darkness." Is it not most honorable for a man who has done wrong to make restitution--for a man who has sinned to make a full and free confession? How strange that men should be afraid to confess! They might as well be ashamed to expose their honesty--ashamed to let the world see that they approve the right more than they value an undeserved reputation--a reputation for being what they are not.

6. Confessions serve to unburden the mind of the injured man, and lead him to exercise forgiveness. Injuries inflicted especially by professed Christians, often become great snares and temptations. Many are overcome by them, fall into a bad state of mind, in which divine truth and grace seem to have no good influence on their hearts. They know, perhaps, that it is wrong for them to indulge such feelings, but they have been sorely abused, they say--and by a professed Christian, too, and they do not find it easy to divest their minds of the impression thus made. Now in such cases, an honest confession by the offending party is the natural remedy. It usually does more to remove that dreadful stumbling-block than any thing, or every thing else.

Christian reader, is any sinner stumbled thus with any sin of yours? Take care that you do not ensnare his soul to his ruin. Take care that the blood of his murdered soul be not found on your skirts!

I have sometimes known one man provoke another till he had made him angry, and then reproach him for this very anger, instead of reproaching himself or having caused it. This is cruelly wicked. The man who has thus provoked another to anger, ought to humble himself to most thorough confession, and say--"I have most meanly tempted you to sin, and then reproached you for yielding to my temptation--when I ought to have most reproached myself. I am sorry. I deplore and condemn my own wickedness."

You may perhaps recollect a case in which it is said that a man who was

opposing Wesley's views of Sanctification, and who wanted to prove that a certain believer in those views was not perfectly sanctified, went and took a wash-bowl of filthy water, and threw it into his face. Now we will suppose that the injured man took offence and got angry, and seeing this, the offending party exults, and says--"Fine sanctification this--to get angry on so slight a provocation!"

But mark how ineffably mean and wicked is the course of this tempter to sin. Let him break down and confess his own sin with shame. Let him say--I have been the guilty wretch in this matter! Let him do this, and repentance would flow freely from both their hearts.

Again, confession tends strongly to secure the prayers of those against whom you have sinned, and to whom you confess. Nothing tends more strongly to beget instantly the spirit of prayer in your behalf. How naturally they cry out--"O Lord, forgive the man, for he confesses his wrong; forgive all his sins and show him the light of thy face." The confession of our besetting sins otherwise than to an injured party, and for the purpose of getting aid to overcome them, is exceedingly useful. It usually interests our Christian brethren very much in our behalf. Who does not know how powerfully the heart is drawn out to pray for those who in this manner confess their besetting sins? Have not you had some experience of this?

IV. What is meant by praying one for another is easily understood in this connection.

It implies that we interest ourselves deeply in the spiritual welfare of those who confess their faults, and use our influence with God to secure their pardon. It is as if we were to sign a petition for their acquittal from the sentence of a broken law. Suppose your neighbor has broken the law of the State, and being convicted, is sent to State's prison for life; but he repents most deeply--gives evidence that he is a changed man, and now a petition for his pardon is laid before you for your name. Will you join in the prayer? Will you say--Does he confess his sin? If he does, I can pray for his pardon.

So when men confess their sins to God and to men, you should pray God to forgive them. God requires you to do it.

V. Obedience to this requirement implies a real spirit of forgiveness--a

desire that God should forgive and an expression of this desire in real prayer to God.

This is too obvious to need illustration.

In the case where besetting sins are confessed, it is implied that we interest ourselves in their sanctification and pray earnestly to God for this great result.

REMARKS.

1. Wrongs committed against the public should be confessed publicly. Of this no one can have any doubt. If confession should be made at all, it should be made to those against whom the sin is committed.

2. Wrongs against individuals may be committed either publicly or privately, and in either case the confession should correspond to the manner and publicity of the offence. If any man injures another in the public estimation, by writing a libel against him, or preaching libel against him, the sin is public, and manifestly confession of it should be co-extensive with the extent of the offence. You are bound to make the retraction as broad as the wrong done, if you can.

3. You may see why many persons never overcome their besetting sins. They are never humble and ingenuous enough to confess them, and pour out their hearts before their brethren, so as to secure their sympathy and prayers in their own behalf. They never take advantage of the great moral lever which confession puts under a man's giant sins to dig them up and roll them out and away for ever.

4. You may see the error of supposing that it is enough to confess to God, and that confession to man is useless and not required. The Catholic doctrine of confession has driven many Protestants to the opposite extreme, so that many churches are opposed to having any confessions at all made before men. But it does not follow at all that because Catholics have abused the doctrine of confession, therefore it should be all cast away. It does not follow that we are not under obligation to confess to those whom we have injured. By no means. If this principle were a just one, we should soon lose all our Bibles.

5. I have often known persons labor a long time under a load of sins unknown to others, and sins which there might have been no need of confessing, but for their great pride. But God saw that their pride must be humbled, and he could not give peace to their souls until it was. Now let such a man go to those whose good

opinion he most values, and confess his sins; let him really take up his cross in this thing, and spare not his proud heart at all; he will find it a most excellent antidote. I have often seen this done. A man goes to some person whom he esteems very highly and says--I am ensnared by my pride--it is dragging me away from God, down to hell, and I am determined it shall be subdued. So he pours out his confession of sin.

Now this is seizing the great club to crush the serpent's head--the head of cursed pride--and it is commonly successful.

6. When in a case of personal fault both parties are to blame, one should never wait for the other to begin the confessions. Let each hasten to be most hearty and full in his own confession--then a right spirit will obtain, and each will provoke the other to good. It often happens that one holds back lest the other should make a bad use of his confessions. No matter if he does. I mean comparatively speaking it is no matter, worth a moments' regard. It is infinitely more important that you should do what is right before God, the world, and the man you have injured, than that you should withhold confession to prevent him from abusing it. Besides this there is little danger of his doing it. If he does, the responsibility is his alone.

In a case of this sort, I once knew a man who said--I will confess my wrong, and if my neighbor does not choose to confess his, or pleases to make a bad use of what I confess, he must bear the responsibility alone. He poured out his confessions like water, found sweet relief and peace of soul--soon after died; that neighbor and every enemy he had, mourned over his ashes in bitterness, and confessed that there had lived at least one good man.

I have known the case of a church involved in great difficulty, pitted against each other with strong prejudices and party feelings; but ultimately the spirit of confession began to prevail; each man felt himself more to blame than his neighbor, and now the only strife was to see which should confess first and most. The controversy now was not to prove each that his neighbor was in fault, but that himself had been the chief sinner and had been the great cause both of his own sins and of his neighbor's. Every man was ready to take his hand off from his neighbor and lay it on himself. This was good. If you could have seen those humbled, confessing Christians, you would have said, it is good to come down, and get the spirit of confession.

Under such circumstances mutual confession seems to be the only thing that can save Christian character and save the church. When men have done wrong they must come down and confess their faults one to another. To see two brethren meet in the spirit of mutual confession, forgiveness and prayer is a blessed sight. God rejoices in it and every holy angel strikes a fresh note of joy and praise in heaven. It is one of the loveliest scenes ever known on earth.

Prayer offered in such circumstances is specially prevalent. Suppose you had been wronged--the wrong-doer is prosecuted, convicted, and sentenced--but in process of time becoming penitent, you are ready to forgive him and you send up your petition to the Executive for his pardon. Now who does not know that your name will have ten fold more weight because of your peculiar relation to that crime?

So it was in the case of Job and his three friends. They had spoken unkindly of him and there was good reason for their asking his forgiveness. God's wrath was kindled against them, What did he say? "Go," said he, "to my servant Job--my servant Job shall pray for you, for him will I accept." They had accused Job of being a hypocrite. Now let them make up the matter with Job and obtain his intercessions with the Lord in their behalf and they can be forgiven. He of all others is the man to pray for them. God can hear him.

Have you wronged a brother? Go, make your confession to him, and beg his prayers in your behalf. He is the man to pray for you. God can hear him. Humble yourself at his feet till he can feel a spirit of faith to pray for you; then you may hope for prayer that will avail before the Lord.

O, said a dying slaveholder, how can I die here on my bed and have no prayer offered up for my guilty soul? What shall I do? said his sympathizing wife--shall I send for the minister? No, no, said the dying man; send for my slave Tom. I have heard him pray in my barn many a time--send for him. Tom came softly in--dropped his hat under his arm--walked towards the bed;--what does Massa want? I want you Tom to pray for your dying Master, I have wronged you and robbed you of your liberty these many years; I am sorry--O if I could live to reward you--but if you can pray for a poor lost sinner, do pray! And who would not rather have the prayers of the man he had enslaved and wronged than the prayers of all other men on earth. Such a prayer is worth a world of other prayers! But how can you have it without confession?

[Back to Top](#)

God's Anger Against the Wicked

Lecture II

January 31, 1849

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Psa. 7:11: "God is angry with the wicked every day."

In speaking from this text I design to show briefly,

I. Who are wicked in the scripture sense of this term;

II. That God is angry with them;

III. The nature of this anger;

IV. The reasons for it;

V. Its degree;

VI. Its duration;

VII. The terrible condition of sinners under it.

I. The Bible divides all the human race into two classes only; the righteous and the wicked.

Those are righteous who have true faith in Christ, whose spirit is consecrated to God, who live a heavenly life on earth, and who have been renewed by the Holy Ghost. Their original selfishness is subdued and slain, and they live a new life through the ever present grace of Christ Jesus.

Right over against them in character are the wicked, who have not been renewed in heart--who live in selfishness, under the dominion of appetite in some of its forms, and it matters not in which out of all possible forms, it may be; but self is

the great and only ultimate end of their life; these are in the scriptural sense, the wicked.

II. God is angry with the wicked. Our text explicitly affirms this.

The same truth is affirmed and implied in numerous other passages. Let the sinner remember that this is the testimony of God Himself. Who should better know the feelings of God towards sinners than God Himself does? Who on this point can gainsay what God affirms?

But this truth is also taught by reason. Every man in the exercise of his reason knows it ought to be true. If God were not opposed to the wicked, He would be wicked Himself for not opposing them. What would you think of a judge who did not hate and oppose law-breakers? Would you think him an honest man if he did not take sides against transgressors? Everybody knows that this is the dictate of reason and of common sense. Sinners know this, and always assume it in their practical judgments. They know that God is angry with them, and ought to be--though they may not realize it. Sinners know many things which they do not realize. For instance, you who are in sin know that you must die; but you have more reason to be assured that God is angry with you than you have to be sure that you must die; for it is not necessarily so certain that you will die as it is that God is angry with you for your sin. God may possibly translate you from this world to another without your death--as He has some others; but there never was and never can be any exception to the universal law of His anger against all the wicked. You know this therefore with an absolute certainty which precludes all possibility of rations doubt.

Sinners do know this, and I have said, and always assume it in their practical judgments. Else why are they afraid to die--why afraid to meet God face to face in the world of retribution? Would they have this fear if they did not know that God is angry with them for their sin? It would be gratuitous therefore to prove this truth to the sinner; he already knows it--knows it not only as a thing that is, but as what ought to be.

III. The nature of this anger demands our attention. On this point it is important to notice negatively,

1. It is not a malicious anger. God is never malicious; never has a disposition to do any wrong in any way--to any being. He is infinitely far

from such feelings, and from any such developments of anger.

2. His anger is not passion in the sense in which men are wont to exhibit passion in anger. You may often have seen men whose sensibility is lashed into fury under an excitement of anger; their very souls seem to be boiling with fermentation, so intense is their excitement. Reason for the time is displaced, and passion reigns. Now God is never angry in such a way. His anger against the wicked involves no such excitement of passion.

3. God's anger can not be in any sense a selfish anger; for God is not selfish in the least degree, but infinitely the reverse of it. Of course His anger against the wicked must be entirely devoid of selfishness.

In our attempts to conceive of the mental faculties of the divine mind, we are under a sort of necessity of reasoning analogically from our own minds. Revelation has told us that we are "made in the image of God." Of course the mind of God is the antetype from which ours was cast. The great constituent elements of mind we must suppose are therefore alike in both the infinite and the finite. As we have intellect, sensibility, and will, so has God.

From our own minds moreover we infer not only what the faculties of the divine mind are, but also the laws under which they act. We know that in the presence of certain objects we naturally feel strong opposition. Those objects are so related to our sensibility that anger and indignation are the natural result. We could not act according to the fixed laws of our own minds if we did not utterly disapprove wrong-doing, and if our disapproval of it moreover did not awaken some real sensibility in the form of displeasure and indignation against the wrong-doer.

Some suppose that these results of the excited sensibility against wrong would not develop themselves if our hearts were right. This is a great mistake. The nearer right our hearts are, the more certainly shall we disapprove wrong, the more intensely shall we feel opposed to it, and the greater will be our displeasure against the wrong-doer. Hence we must not only suppose that God is angry in the sense of a will opposed to sin, but in the further sense of a sensibility enkindled against it. This must be the case if God is truly a moral agent.

4. God is not angry merely against the sin abstracted from the sinner, but

against the sinner himself. Some persons have labored hard to set up this ridiculous and absurd abstraction, and would fain make it appear that God is angry at the sin yet not at the sinner. He hates the theft, but loves the thief. He abhors adultery, but is pleased with the adulterer. Now this is supreme non-sense. The sin has not moral character apart from the sinner. The act is nothing apart from the actor. The very thing that God hates and disapproves is not the mere event--the thing done in distinction from the doer; but it is the doer himself. It grieves and displeases Him that a rational moral agent, under His government, should array himself against his own God and Father, against all that is right and just in the universe. This is the thing that offends God. The sinner himself is the direct and the only object of His anger.

So the Bible shows. God is angry with the wicked--not with the abstract sin. If the wicked turn not, God will whet His sword; He hath bent His bow and made it ready; not to shoot the sin however, but the sinner--the wicked man who has done the abominable thing. This is the only doctrine of either the Bible or of common sense on this subject.

5. The anger of God against the wicked implies all that properly belongs to anger when it exists with good reason. We know by our own experience that when we are angry with good reason, we have strong opposition of will and also strong feelings of displeasure and disapprobation against the wrong-doers. Hence we may infer that the same is true of God under the same circumstances.

IV. The reasons of God's anger against the wicked next demand our attention.

His anger is never excited without good reasons. Causeless anger is always sinful. "Whoever is angry with his brother without a cause is in danger of the judgment." God never Himself violates His own laws--founded as they are in infinite right and justice. Hence God's anger always has good reasons.

Good reasons exist for His anger, and He is angry for those reasons. It is not uncommon for persons to be angry, under circumstances too, which are good reasons for anger, but still they are not angry for those good reasons, but for other reasons which are not good. For example, every sinner has good reasons for being angry with every other sinner for his wickedness against God. But

sinners are not angry against other sinners for those reasons. Although these reasons actually exist, yet when angry at sinners, it is not for these good reasons, but for some selfish reasons which are not good. This is a common case. You see persons angry, and if you reprove them for their anger as sinful, they seek to justify themselves by affirming that they are angry with the man for his sins--for his wrong-doing against God. Now this is indeed a good and sufficient reason for anger, and the justification would be a good one if the anger were really excited by this cause. But often, although this reason exists, and is pleaded by the man as his excuse for anger, yet it is not excuse, for in fact he is not angry for this cause, but has some selfish reason for his anger. Not so with God. God is angry with the wicked not irrespective of his sins, but for his sins.

1. Wicked men are entirely unreasonable. Their conduct is at war with all reason and with all right. God has given them intelligence and conscience; but they act in opposition to both. God has given them a pure and good law, yet this they recklessly violate. Hence their conduct is in every point of view utterly unreasonable.

Now we all know that by a fixed law of our being nothing can be a greater temptation to anger than to see persons act unreasonably. This is one of the greatest trials that can occur, and one of the strongest incentives to anger. So when God looks at the unreasonable conduct of sinners He feels the strongest indignation and displeasure. If they were not rational beings endowed with reason, no anger would be awakened and called forth; but since God knows them to be endowed with reason and to be capable of true and noble-hearted obedience, He cannot fail of being displeased with their transgression.

2. The course of the wicked is utterly ruinous. No thanks to the sinner if his influence does not ruin the whole world. By the very laws of mind, the sin of any one man tends to influence other men to sin, and they spread far and wide the dreadful contagion of his example. It may truly be said that the sinner does the worst thing possible to him to ruin the universe. He sets the example of rebellion against the supreme government of all worlds. And what influence can be more potent than that of example? What worse thing therefore can the sinner do to destroy all good than he is doing by his sin? No thanks to him if every man who sees his sin does not imitate it to his own ruin, and throw the power of his own example broad-cast over all his associates. No thanks to any sinner if his own influence for ruin does not

run like fire on the prairies over all the world, and then over every other world of moral beings in the universe of God.

Think of the father of a family, living in his sins and exerting his great influence over his household to make them all as wicked as himself. Who can estimate the power of his influence over his wife and his children? Does he pray with them and seek to lead them to God? No; his example is prayerless. It proclaims every day to his family -- "You have no occasion at all to pray. You see I can live without prayer." Does he read the Bible to them or with them? No; his constant example before them sets the Bible at naught, and continually suggests that they will be as well off without reading the Bible as with. His whole influence therefore is ruinous to the souls of his family. No thanks to him if they do not all go down to hell along with himself. If they do not scream around him with yells of mingled imprecation and despair, cursing him as the guilty author of their ruin, he will have other agencies to thank besides his own. Surely he has done what he well could do to secure results so dreadful as these. Has not God good reasons to be angry with him? Why not? Would not you feel that you have good reasons to be angry with a man who should come into your family to destroy its peace--to seduce your wife and daughters, and to entice your sons into some pathway of crime and ruin? Certainly you would. Now do not all families belong to God in a far higher sense than any man's family belong to him? Why then has not God as good reasons for anger against a wicked father as you could have against a villain who should plot and seek to effect the mischief and ruin of your family? Is it wonderful to you that God should be angry with every wicked father? Just consider what that father is doing by his bare example--even supposing that his words are well-guarded and not particularly liable to objection. Who does not know that example is the very highest and strongest moral power? It does not need the help of teaching to make its power felt for terrible mischief. The prayerless husband and father! The devil could not do worse--nay, more, not so bad, for the devil never had mercy offered him--never stood related as this wicked father does, to offered pardon and to the glorious gospel. If then God would have good reason to be angry at the devil, much more has He for anger against this wicked father.

The same substantially is true of other classes of sinners. It is essential to their very course as sinners, that they are in rebellion against God, and are doing the very worst thing in the universe by drawing other moral beings

into sin.

Again, God is so good and sinners are so wicked, He can not help being angry at them. If He were not angry at the wicked, He would be as much worse than they as He is wiser than they. Since in His wisdom and knowledge He knows more fully than they do, the great evil of sin; by so much the more is He under obligation to be displeased with sin and angry at the sinner. We sometimes hear men say, "God is too good to be angry at sinners." What do men mean by this language? Do they mean that God is too good to be opposed to all evil--too good to be displeased with all evil-doers? This were indeed a strange goodness! God too good to hate sin--too good to oppose sinners! What sort of goodness can this be?

3. I have sometimes heard men say that if God should be angry with sinners, He would be as bad as the devil himself. Now this is not only horrible language on the score of its blasphemy; but it is monstrous absurdity on the score of its logic. The amount of its logic is that God would be Himself wicked if He should be displeased at wickedness. So wrong it must be to hate the wrong-doer!! Pray who is it that holds such doctrine? Is it not possible that they feel some interest in sustaining wrong-doers even against God Himself.

Really there is no force, no plausibility even, in this language about the wrong of God's being angry at sinners, except what arises from misconceiving and misrepresenting the true idea of the divine anger in this case. If God's anger were in itself sinful--as is the case often with man's anger--then of course, nothing more can be said in its vindication. But since His anger is never sinful, never selfish, never malicious, never unholy or wrong in any degree whatever, nothing can be more false, nothing more sophistical, nothing more ungenerous and vile and Satanic than to imply that it is. But this is just what men do when they say that for God to be angry at sinners is to be Himself wicked.

The true view of this case is not by any means abstruse or difficult of apprehension. Who does not know that good men are by virtue of their goodness opposed to wicked men? Surely all wicked men know this well enough. Else why the fear they have of good and law-abiding men? Why do all horse-thieves and counterfeiters keep dark from good men--dread their presence--commonly feel a strong dislike to them and always dread their

influence as hostile to their own wicked schemes?

So wicked men feel towards God. They know that His goodness places Him in hostile array against themselves. This fact seems to be implied in the Psalmist's expostulation--"Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? The goodness of God endureth continually." God is always good; how can you be proud of your wickedness? God is too good and too constantly good to afford you any scope for sin--any ground of hope for peace with Him in your iniquity.

V. The degree of God's anger against sin should be next considered.

It is plain that the degree of God's anger against the wicked ought to be equal to the degree of their wickedness, and must be if God is what He should be. The times of heathen ignorance and darkness "God winked at"--the degree of their guilt being less by as much as their light is less than that of such cities as Chorazin and Bethsaida. God does not hold them innocent absolutely, but relatively they might almost be called innocent, compared with the great guilt of sinners in gospel lands. Against those who sin amid the clearest light, His anger must burn most intensely; for example, against sinners in this place and congregation. You may be outwardly a decent and moral man, respected and beloved by your friends; but if you are a selfish, impenitent sinner the pure and holy God loathes and abhors you. He sees more real guilt in you than in ten thousand of those dark-minded heathen who are bowing down to idol gods, and whose crimes you read of with loathing and disgust. Think of it. God may be more angry against you for your great wickedness than against a nation of idolaters whose ignorance He winks at, while He measures your light and consequent guilt in the balances of His own eternal justice. O are you living here amid the blazing sun-light of truth--knowing your duty every day and every day refusing to do it; do you not know that in the eye of God you are one of the wickedest beings out of hell, or in hell either, and that God's hatred against your sin is equal to your great guilt? But you say perhaps, Am I not moral and honest? Suppose you are moral. For whose sake are you moral, and for what reason? Is it not for your reputation's sake only? The devil might be as moral for such a purpose as you are. Mark, it is not for God's sake, not for Christ's sake, that you are a moral man, but because you love yourself. You might be just as moral if there were no God, or if you were an atheist. Of course if so, you are saying in your heart let there be no fear of God before my eyes--no love of God in my

heart. Let me live and have my own way as if there were no God. And all this you do not under the darkness of heathenism, but amid the broadest sun-light of heaven's truth blazing all around you. Do you still ask, What have I done? You have arrayed yourself against God, rejected the gospel of His Son, and done despite to the Spirit of His grace. What heathen has ever done this, or anything that could compare with this in guilt? The vilest heathen people that ever wallowed in the filth of their own abominations are pure compared with you. Do you start back and rebel against this view of your case? Then let us ask again, By what rule are we to estimate guilt? You pass along the street and you see the lower animals doing what you would be horrified to see human beings do, but you never think of them as guilty. You see those dogs try to tear each other to pieces; you will try perhaps to part them, but you will not think of feeling moral indignation or moral displeasure against them; and why? Because you instinctively judge of their guilt by their light, and by their capacity of governing themselves by light and reason. On nearly the same principle you might see the heathen reeking in their abominations, quarreling, and practicing the most loathsome forms of vice and selfishness--but their guilt is only a glimmering taper compared with yours, and therefore you can not but estimate their guilt as by so much less than your own as their light is less! Your reason demands that you should estimate guilt on this principle, and you know that you can not rightly estimate it on any other. For the very same reason you must conclude that God estimates guilt on the same principles, and that His anger against sin is in proportion to the sinners' guilt, estimated in view of the light he enjoys and sins against. The degree of God's anger against the wicked is not measured by their outward conduct, but by their real guilt as seen by Him whose eye is on the heart.

VI. As to the duration of God's anger against the wicked, it manifestly must continue as long as the wickedness itself continues.

As long as wicked men continue wicked, so long must God be angry at them every day. If they turn not, there can be no abatement, no cessation of His anger. This is so plain that everybody must know it.

VII. The terrible condition of the sinner against whom God is angry.

This dreadful truth that God is angry with the wicked every day, sinners know, but do not realize. Yet it were well for you who are sinners to apprehend and estimate this just as it is.

Look then at the attributes of God. Who and what is God? Is He not a Being whose wrath against you is to be dreaded? You often feel that it is a terrible thing to incur the displeasure of some men. Children are often exceedingly afraid of the anger of their parents. Any child has reason to feel that it is a terrible state of things, when he has done wrong and knows it must come to the knowledge of his father and his mother, and must arouse their keenest displeasure against himself--this is terrible, and no wonder a child should dread it. How much more has the sinner reason to fear and tremble when by his sin he has made the Almighty God his enemy! Think of his state; think of the case of the sinner's exposing himself to the indignation of the great and dreadful God! Look at God's natural attributes. Who can measure the extent of His power? Who or what can resist His will? He taketh up the isles as a very little thing, and the nations before Him are only as the small dust of the balance. When His wrath is kindled, who can stand before it, or stay its dreadful fury?

Think also of His Omniscience. He knows all you have done. Every act has passed underneath His eye; and not every external act, merely, but what is far more dreadful to you, every motive lying back of every act--all the most hidden workings of your heart. O, if you were only dealing with some one whom you could deceive, how would you set yourself at work to plan some deep scheme of deception; but all in vain here, for God knows it all. If it were a case between yourself and some human tribunal you might cover up many things; you might perjure yourself, or might smuggle away the dreaded witnesses; but before God, no such measures can avail you for one moment. The whole truth will come out, dread its disclosure as much as you may. The darkness and the light are both alike to Him, and nothing can be hidden from His eye.

Again, not only does God know everything you have done, and not only is He abundantly able to punish you, but He is as much disposed as He is able, or omniscient. You will find He has no disposition to overlook your guilt. He is so good that He never can let sin unrepented of pass unnoticed and unpunished. It would be an infinite wrong to the universe if He should! If He were to do it, He would at once cease to be a good and holy God!

O, sinner, do you ever think of God's perfect holiness--the infinite purity of His heart! Do you ever think how intensely strong must be His opposition to your sin--to those sins of yours which are so bad even in your own view that you cannot bear to have many of your fellow men know them? How do you suppose

your guilty soul appears in the eye of the pure and holy God?

You often hear of God's mercy. You hope for some good to yourself, perhaps, from this attribute of His nature. Ah, if you had not spurned it, and trampled it under your feet! If you had not slighted and abused its manifestations to you, it might befriend you in your day of need; but ah, how can you meet insulted mercy! What can you say for yourself in defense for having sinned against the richest mercy the world ever saw? Can you hope that God's injured mercy will befriend you? Nay, verily; God has not one attribute which is not armed against you. Such is His nature, and such is His character that you have nothing to hope, but everything to fear. His dreadful anger against you must be expressed. He may withhold its expression for a season to give the utmost scope for efforts to reclaim and save you; but when these efforts shall have failed, then will not justice take her course? Will not insulted Majesty utter her awful voice? Will not the infinite God arise in His awful purity, and proclaim--"I hate all wickedness, My anger burns against the sinner to the lowest hell"? Will not Jehovah take measures to make His true position towards sinners known?

REMARKS.

1. God is much more opposed to sinners than Satan is. Doubtless this must be so, for Satan has no special reason for being opposed to sinners. They are doing his work very much as he would have them. We have no evidence that Satan is displeased with their course. But God is displeased with them, and for the best of reasons.

Men sometimes say--"If God is angry with the wicked He is worse than Satan." They seem to think that Satan is a liberal, generous-hearted being. They are rather disposed to commend him as on the whole very charitable and noble-hearted. They may think that Satan is bad enough, but they can not be reconciled to it that God should be so hard on sinners.

Now the facts are that God is too good to be otherwise than angry with sinners. The devil is so bad himself that he finds no difficulty in being well enough pleased with their vileness. It does not offend him. Hence from His very nature God must hate the sinner infinitely more than Satan does.

2. If God were not angry with sinners, He would not be worthy of confidence. What would you think of a civil governor who should manifest no indignation

against transgressors of the law? You would say of course that he had not the good of the community at heart, and you could have no confidence in him.

3. God's anger with sinners is not inconsistent with His happiness. Why should it be, if it is not inconsistent with His holiness? If there were anything wrong about it, then it would indeed destroy all His happiness; but if it be intrinsically right, then it not only can not destroy His happiness, but He could not be happy without anger against the wicked. His happiness must be conditioned upon His acting and feeling in accordance with the reality of things. Hence, if God did not hate sin and did not manifest His hatred in all proper ways, He could not respect Himself. He could not retire within the great deep of His own nature, and enjoy eternal bliss in the consciousness of infinite rectitude.

4. God's opposition to sinners is His glory. It is all-glorious to God to manifest His anger towards wicked men and devils. Is not this the fact with all good rulers? Do they not seize every opportunity to manifest their opposition to the wicked, and is not this their real glory? Do we not account it their glory to be zealous and efficient in detecting crime? Most certainly. They can have no other real glory. But suppose a ruler should sympathize with murderers, thieves, robbers. We should execrate his very name!

5. Saints love God for His opposition to sinners, not excepting even His opposition to their own sins. They could not have confidence in Him if He did not oppose their own sins, and it is not in their hearts to ask Him to favor even their own iniquities. No, where they come near Him, and see how He is opposed to their own sins, and to them on account of them, they honor Him and adore Him the more. They do not want any being in the universe to connive at their own sins, or to take any other stand towards themselves as sinners, than that of opposition.

6. This text is to be understood as it reads. Its language is to be taken in its obvious sense. Some have supposed that God is not really angry with sinners, but uses this language in accommodation to our understandings.

This is an unwarrantable latitude of interpretation. Suppose we should apply the same principle to what is said of God's love. When we read, "God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son," suppose we say, this cannot mean real love, such as we feel for each other--no, nothing like this; the language is only used by way of accommodation, and really has no particular sense whatever.

This sort of interpretation would destroy the Bible, or any other book ever written. The only sound view of this matter is that God speaks as sensible men do--to be understood by the reader and hearer, and of course uses language in its most obvious sense. If He says He is angry against the wicked, we must suppose that He really is.

It is indeed true that we are to qualify the language as I have already shown by what we absolutely know of His real character, and therefore hence infer that this language cannot imply malicious anger, or selfish anger, or any forms of anger inconsistent with infinite benevolence. But having made the necessary qualifications, there are no more to be made, and the cardinal idea of anger still remains--a fixed eternal displeasure and opposition against all sinners because of their great guilt.

7. God's anger against the sinner does not exclude love--real, compassionate love. Not however the love of complacency, but the love of well-wishing and good-willing; not the love of him as a sinner, but the love for him as a sentient being who might be infinitely happy in obedience to his God. This is undoubtedly the true view to be taken of God's attitude towards sinners. What parent does not know what this is? You have felt the kindlings of indignation against the wickedness of your child, but blended with this you have also felt all the compassionate tenderness of a parent's heart.

The sinner sometimes says--"It can not be that God is angry with me, for He watches over me day by day; He feeds me from His table, and regales me with His bounties." Ah sinner, you may be greatly mistaken in this matter. Don't deceive yourself. God is slow to anger indeed: that is, He is slow to give expression to His anger, and Himself assigns the reason,--because He is long-suffering towards sinners, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." But take care that you do not misconceive His real feelings towards you. Beware lest you misinterpret His great forbearance. He waits, I know; but the storm of vengeance is gathering. How soon He may come forth out of His place and unlock suddenly all the whirlwinds of His vengeance! Ah sinner, this once done, they will sleep no more!

8. It is plain that sinners do not realize God's anger, though they know it. If they do both know and realize it, they manifest a degree of hardihood in iniquity which is dreadful. But the fact is, they keep the thought of God's anger from their minds. They are reckless about it, and treat it as they do death. Sinners

know they must die, but they do not realize this fact. They do not love to sit down and commune with death--thinking how soon it may come, how certainly it will come--how the grave-worms will gnaw the flesh from their cheek-bones, and consume those eyes now bright and sparkling. These young ladies don't love to commune with such thoughts as these, and realize how soon these scenes will be realities.

So you don't love to think of God's anger against sin; of His reasons for His anger, and of His great provocations. You probably don't like to hear me preach about it, and yet I preach as mildly as I can. You can't bear to hear the subject brought forward and pressed upon your attention. Tell me, are you in the habit of sitting down and considering this subject attentively? If you were to do so, you could not condemn God and treat Him as if you had no care for Him.

9. Are you aware sinner, that you have made God your enemy, and have you thought how terrible a thing this is? Do you consider how impotent you are to withstand God? If you were in any measure dependent on any one of your fellow men you would not like to make him your enemy. The student in this college is careful not to make the faculty, or any one of them his enemy. The child has the same solicitude in regard to his parent. Now consider what you are doing towards God--that God who holds your breath in His hands--your very life in His power. Let Him only withdraw His hand and you sink to hell by your own gravity. On a slippery steep you stand, and the billows of damnation roll below! O sinner, are you aware that when you lie down at night with your weapons of rebellion against God in your very hands, His blazing eye is on you--are you well aware of this?

You may recollect the case of a Mr. H. once a student here. For a considerable time he had been rebellious against the truth of God as presented here to his mind, and this spirit of rebellion rose gradually to a higher and yet higher pitch. It seemed to have made about as much head as he could well bear, and in this state he retired to bed, and extinguished his light. All at once his room seemed full of dazzling splendor--he gazed around--there stood before him a glorious form--with eyes of unearthly and most searching power; gradually all else disappeared save one eye which shone with indescribable brilliancy and seemed to search him through and through. The impression made on his mind was awful. O, said he, I could not have lived under it many minutes if I had not yielded and bowed in submission to the will of God.

Sinner, have you ever considered that God's searching eye is on you? Do you think of it whenever you lie down at night? If you should live so long and should lie down again on your bed, think of it then. Write it down on a little card and hang it where it will most often catch your eye--"Thou, God, seest me." Do this; and then realize that God's eye is penetrating your very heart. O that searching, awful eye! You close your eyes to sleep--still God's eye is on you. It closes not for the darkness of night. Do you say, "I shall sleep as usual--I am not the sinner who will be kept awake through fear of God's wrath--Why should I be afraid of God? What have I to fear? I know indeed that God says 'Give Me thine heart,' but I have no thought of doing it. I have disobeyed Him many years and see no flaming wrath yet. I expect He will feed me still and fill my cup with every form of blessings."

O sinner, for these very reasons have you the more cause to dread His burning wrath! You have abused His mercy well nigh to the last moment of endurance. O how soon will His wrath break forth against thee, and no arm in all the universe can stay its whelming floods of ruin! And if you don't believe it, its coming will be all the more sure, speedy and awful!

[Back to Top](#)

Evil Thinking

Lecture III

February 28, 1849

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 Cor. 13:5: "Charity thinketh no evil."

The context in which these words stand is doubtless familiar to many of you; but it may not be amiss for me to read it. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the

poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

You observe that I have selected for my text but one of the many attributes of charity;--namely, that she "thinketh no evil."

In considering this attribute more extensively, I propose,

I. To inquire what it is to think evil in the sense of the text;

II. To show that in this sense charity thinketh no evil;

III. To give some of the evidences of evil thinking;

IV. To adduce some evidences of that charitable state of mind which thinketh no evil.

I. Thinking evil in the sense of the text includes thinking unjustly.

1. Forming unjust opinions of others, and giving indulgence to feelings in correspondence with our unjust opinions is certainly evil thinking.
2. So is thinking enviously. When envy governs our opinions of others, we are guilty of evil thinking.
3. So is suspicious thinking. It is another modification of thinking evil. When we are suspicious of others' motives, we think evil of them.
4. The same is true of all malicious thinking. Thoughts of malice are of course evil.
5. Nor can we say less of revengeful thoughts. They are evil and only evil, continually. Unkind and ill-natured thoughts partake of the same general character. None can doubt that all such thoughts are intrinsically evil, and not good.

Again, dwelling upon others' faults, real or imputed, is evil-thinking. Even if

those faults are real, it is not wise to dwell upon them, certainly not unless we can answer the ends of benevolence by so doing. If we can devise means to correct them, so much thinking as may be necessary for this purpose may be good; but thinking of others' faults for any other than a good object is certain to work evil.

6. What then shall we say of brooding over those assumed faults of others which are not real but only imputed? Perhaps they owe all their apparent evil to the tinge they get from your morbid imagination, or your jealous heart. In such a case what can be worse than the fermentation of such a mind as yours? It not only wrongs others, but terribly corrodes your own mind. There can be no peace to him who indulges such evil-thinking.

7. Thinking over personal injuries, whether real or imaginary, is evil. In such a world as this it will often happen that men are really wronged. But even then why should they double and treble the evil resulting to themselves by dwelling upon it, poring over it, talking about it till they get every sensibility of their being on fire? What is the use? None at all. He only spoils his own peace, and the peace of as many others as he can bring under his poisonous influence. Such thinking is surely a great evil.

8. Worse still if the supposed injury is only imaginary. Then wrong is done to the assumed authors, besides all the mischief to the self-tormenting sufferer who perhaps is himself the only cause of all the evil, resulting first to himself, next to his friends, and last but not least, to the man wrongfully accused of the imaginary injustice. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth! Is not all thinking which kindles up such fires, "evil?"

II. Charity thinketh no evil.

1. The word here rendered charity means love. This is its legitimate meaning, and in other passages in the Bible it is usually rendered love. It refers especially to love as the action of a renewed heart--to holy love, and not to any form of the social or domestic instincts. Of this holy love, it is said that it "thinketh no evil." This is popular and not strictly metaphysical language; for in strict phraseology, charity does not think at all; nothing can think except a mind. The meaning therefore is that a charitable mind thinketh no evil. This is plain, and very true.

2. It is not however implied that charitable men are blind to facts, or that they are incapable of thinking of things as they are. God's mind is all love--supremely under the control of benevolence; and yet He sees evil none the less; thinks of it and estimates its real nature none the less accurately. So of the human mind under the control of love.

Again, charitable minds may misjudge, but cannot really think or do any evil, subjectively considered. In a charitable state they cannot consent to say or do anything wrong. For example, charity cannot be subjectively unjust. It can never intend injustice. It will always form its judgments honestly, according to its best light. It may form opinions objectively wrong, that is, wrong as to fact--wrong in themselves considered; yet even in forming these it will be subjectively right because under the control of love. For the same reason charity cannot be envious or suspicious. There will be the greatest simplicity in such a mind. Conscious of its own uprightness, it will not be looking out for hypocrisy in others. It is remarkable how simple-hearted the charitable mind will always be; so truthful, so upright; it has no thought of suspecting others, for it seems a stranger to the idea of wrong. But the uncharitable mind is the reverse of this. It is an old adage--"Set a rogue to catch a rogue." He seems to have the art of suspecting, and knows a world of things about the ways and works and signs of the rogue that no honest man should be expected to know.

3. When you see a man very suspicious, you may usually suspect him. If he is a hypocrite he will suspect others of being hypocrites, for he is very familiar with that state of mind. If he is a liar, a thief or a counterfeiter, it will be easy for him to suspect others of some equally scandalous form of vice.

4. But on the other hand, the charitable mind is eminently simple-hearted and unsuspicious.

Again, charity cannot be revengeful. It naturally abhors revengeful thoughts. Suppose the charitable man has been injured:--what then? Shall he study revenge? No. He "suffereth long and is kind." It is in his nature to be not revengeful, but kind. Who does not know this? He is inclined to put the best possible construction upon the acts and the motives of others. You do not find him brooding over all the apparent wrong he sees, and magnifying it in his imagination. For example, think of the conduct of parents who really love

their children. You do not see them dwell exclusively upon their children's faults, to the entire neglect of their excellencies. Love never does that. Nor can candor and honesty do it. What should you think of a man who should get a telescope of sufficient power to reveal to him one black spot on the sun's disc, and who then gazes at this till it fills his whole vision, and the whole face of the sun seems only black and dark as midnight? You would think him no better than crazy. His mind labors under a hallucination, and does not by any means see things as they are. So of men who gaze at their neighbors' faults till their own minds become so green as to give a greenish hue to everything they see. The mind seems in some peculiar circumstances to have a wonderful power of unconsciously imparting its own moral complexion to the character it contemplates. Hence a very charitable mind often puts upon the conduct of others a more charitable construction than strict truth will sustain; and much more often on the other hand does an uncharitable mind impart its own dark and foul type to the character which it pretends to delineate.

5. That is always an ill-natured state of mind which loves to dwell upon others' faults where no interests of benevolence demand it. Think of a husband who is forever poring over the faults of his wife and has no heart to notice her excellencies. He has only evil and not good to say of her, and the more of evil he finds to think of and talk about, the more his mind is fed and feasted. Is not he a monster? Do you believe that he has the heart of a man within him? Of one thing you may be very sure; he has none of that charity which "thinketh no evil." The charitable husband would be grieved to notice her faults, and certainly would never speak of them unless compelled by the sternest necessity.

6. The same principle is often developed in the hearing of sermons. Some men notice only the faults they can find; and if a sermon has ninety-nine good qualities and but one of a questionable character, the latter is the only thing thought of, and no pains are spared to discuss and display its demerits. Of course such hearers are only cursed, never benefited, by hearing sermons; no sermon can ever be good enough to bless their souls. They will lose all the good by watching for anticipated and desired evil. Of course you would not say that such hearers are in a charitable state of mind.

7. A charitable man cannot dwell upon injuries received. It grieves him to

think of them, and he will of choice banish them entirely from his mind unless some important interests or rights are so involved as to demand his attention to them. He finds more pleasure in dwelling upon the good received than upon the evil.

III. Some evidences of evil thinking next demand our attention.

Some things under this head have already been anticipated. Hence I shall be the more brief now.

1. Evil speaking of course evinces a state of evil thinking; for "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."
2. Evil treatment makes the same development. Some men don't like to speak out all they think, but they can not easily prevent its working itself out in their actions. Their looks and their whole demeanor will show it. Perhaps they refuse to exchange the common tokens of civility, and will not even shake hands--their state of mind is so uncharitable.
3. A disposition to find fault with others is an evidence of evil thinking. How remarkable that some men say almost nothing else but in the way of fault-finding. If they attempt to speak or pray, fault-finding is uppermost. If they speak in a church meeting, you can anticipate the strain of their remarks--always some form of fault-finding. It seems as if the man was forever brooding over the faults of his brethren. He sees no bright spots ever in any brother or in any church. His temper is morose and crabbed; he is a natural-born Arab; his hand is against every man and every mans' hand against him. You may always know that his bosom is the prey of perpetual evil thinking.
4. A disposition to complain of the ill-treatment received from others is another evidence. Fall into conversation with him where you will, he is complaining of having been injured. Somebody has injured him, and it engrosses his mind to the exclusion of almost everything else. This man is given to evil thinking.
5. Another evidence of evil thinking is a disposition to complain of being neglected. Some persons have a world of trouble on this score--alas, they are always overlooked; nobody cares as much for them as in their humble opinion they deserve. This state of mind becomes a source of great

uneasiness. It proves that they are given to evil thinking.

6. Others show their evil thinking by a disposition to question the purity of other's motives. You see some people who can scarcely ever believe that their neighbors and acquaintance are really what they profess to be. It seems most natural to them to assume that everybody besides themselves is dishonest. It may happen that all appears right in their neighbor's conduct. "Well," in such a case they will say--"that will do--if--IF he is honest in it." Now you may know without an if that such men are evil thinkers. Their very souls are putrid with jealousy and suspicion. They cannot even put a good construction upon what appears unexceptionable.

The same is true substantially of those who are always disposed to question the piety of others. A man may do some things which are entirely wrong, and yet his general character may be so good that you have no sufficient reason to question his piety. In such a case let charity prevail.

7. You sometimes see the evidence of evil thinking in a slowness to credit professions of repentance and sincerity. Sometimes there may be good reasons for being slow in this matter. I speak of cases where the backwardness is not really warranted by anything in the individual's character, or in the present circumstances.

8. Evidence of evil thinking is seen sometimes in a readiness to question the truthfulness of others. On this point it should be considered that men may state what is really false, and yet be in heart entirely truthful. They may misapprehend the real state of the facts, may truthfully state the case as they understand it. I have heard during my life thousands of men state things which I knew to be false; yet I did not for this reason feel authorized to say they lied. To assume that they lie is uncharitable--so long as it may be the case that they misapprehend the facts. Memory is sometimes at fault, and sometimes the man may be in real fault for lack of care to inform himself of the certainty of what he affirms; but charity forbids us to put any man down a liar till we are well assured that he affirms for truth what he knows to be false.

The disposition to impute lying to a man on the slightest occasion should be reprobated as in the highest degree uncharitable. Often the mere fact of a man's stating what is not true affords scarcely the shadow of evidence that he

lies. We must not believe the man lies unless the circumstances utterly forbid the charitable conclusion.

9. A readiness to hear evil is another indication of a state of mind which thinks evil. Sometimes persons will not allow themselves to originate evil reports, but will take them up, believe and circulate them without scruple. It is remarkable that the Bible places these two classes--the originator and the receiver of evil reports--on the same footing, for it promises an abiding place in God's holy will to him "that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor." Whoever therefore takes up a reproach against his neighbor, saying, "Aha, aha, so would we have it"--may be known as one that "thinketh evil."

Moreover, when men manifest a readiness not only to hear but to believe evil reports of others, you may know they are evil thinkers.

10. An unhappy state of mind is often an evidence, for it is a development of thinking evil. From the very laws of mind, such persons are always unhappy. You never see persons of evil thinking habits whose countenances shine with the joy of their hearts. Show me an uncharitable man, and I will show you an unhappy man.

11. Men who are discontented with their present position are wholly given to evil thinking. Mark those men who cannot bear the neighborhood they live in; those students here who are forever uneasy, rasped, vexed, discontented--who want to get away, and are forever restive for some change; mark them I say; for if you could know the bottom of their hearts, you would find evil thinking there. They are brooding over the dark features of others' character and conduct, and practically forget that there are many good things in almost all men and all situations. Uncharitableness breeds misery and discontent.

12. A general want of confidence in others betrays a heart of evil thinking. You see some who seem to have lost confidence in everybody. The Psalmist once said in his haste "all men are liars." If you read that psalm and mark his state of mind you will see that he seemed not to know whom to trust. He didn't believe anybody is pious. He has no confidence in any man. The trouble lies--at least in part--with himself; his heart is thinking evil continually.

13. Another evidence is the absence of pain in view of any exhibition of uncharitableness. For example, if you hear persons speak uncharitably and it does not give you pain, you have great reason to suspect yourself of an uncharitable mind. If your own mind were deeply imbued with love, you could not fail of being shocked whenever you hear uncharitable speaking.

14. An indisposition to pray for others is yet another evidence. I do not now allude to cases where Christians have no ill feelings at all towards others, and yet for reasons to themselves unknown seem to gain no access to God in prayer for them; but I allude to cases in which men have such a state of uncomfortable feeling towards certain persons that they feel no spirit to pray for them. Such a sign is ominous.

15. Finally, evil thinkers may be known by their not rejoicing at the prosperity of others, and not mourning in their adversity. Whoever finds this to be the case with himself may know that he has an uncharitable mind.

IV. The evidences of a charitable state of mind, which thinketh no evil, are the very opposite of those which I have just been adducing.

1. Where men do not speak evil of others, but speak well, where their treatment of others is benevolent and kind; where instead of fault-finding, you see a disposition to vindicate, apologize for, and commend; where there is no apparent love of dwelling upon others' faults, but a delight in dwelling upon their virtues; in all such cases you see evidences of a charitable spirit.

2. The charitable man is not morose, but cheerful; wishes no man evil but every man well; if ill-treated, does not complain, nor is disposed to dwell upon it; don't know as he has any enemies, certainly does not feel as if he had; for although he may know the fact as Christ did in his own case, yet like Christ it is in his heart to say--"Father, forgive for they know not what they do." He loves to overlook injuries, and is by no means disposed to dwell upon them.

3. Some men always think they are persecuted and wronged--suppose everybody is their enemy; while others seem never to dream of any such thing. You hear them remark--such a man thinks ill of me, but he is misinformed; he doesn't mean any wrong. You have seen such persons; their state of mind is so sweet that they don't seem to think anybody can do

them any harm. In a charitable state of mind, it is very natural that they should take this view. They manifest no disposition to regard themselves as neglected by others. A pastor who visits his people occasionally, has often a good opportunity to notice the great difference which obtains among persons in this respect. I call on one family, and in the course of our conversations I observe, "It is a long time since I have seen your family at your own home." "Yes," the reply is, "I thought my pastor had neglected me. I began to think he never would visit us again."

I call on another family; I remark to them that it seems a long time since I have seen them; but they have not a word to say about being neglected; no they say--"We know you have a great deal to do--so much to do that we could not expect you to turn aside from your urgent and more important duties, to see us; we are all exceedingly glad to see you--but really we never could blame you if you should not call upon us." Sometimes such a family will go much farther in excusing me than I can in excusing myself, so that I have often felt ashamed and condemned by their apologies for me. Now all this is natural for a charitable mind; but if the mind is in an uncharitable state, everything is horribly distorted.

Again, those whose minds are charitable have no disposition to question the purity of others' motives. They love to put the best admissible construction upon every man's conduct. Herein is fulfilled that truthful and beautiful sentiment--"Charity shall cover a multitude of sins."

REMARKS.

1. Many think evil who do not speak it. Often such persons take great credit to themselves for not speaking evil, when really they are thinking a great deal of evil. The reason they do not speak evil is not because their hearts are full of love and good will; but perhaps because they have not a good opportunity, or because some motives of policy restrain them. It is a great mistake to be proud of such virtue.
2. Many forget that charity thinketh no evil. It seems to escape their minds that the law of love reaches to the heart and to the most secret thoughts.
3. Evil thinkers are for the time being impenitent. Theirs is not a religious state of mind. This is most manifest, for nothing can be religious which is not

charitable. The uncharitable man, remaining such, can have nothing really good about him.

4. This state of mind is exceedingly deceptive. The uncharitable man dwells so much and so intensely upon the faults of others, and gets so much excited by his own thinking and talking on the subject, that he makes himself think that he ought to be uncharitable. Oh, he has been so egregiously wronged; he would forfeit all self-respect if he did not resent it and manifest his indignation. Those fearful wrongs done himself--how they fill the whole field of his vision, and seem to be the greatest wrongs that ever fell to the hard lot of any mortal. And can it be wrong for him to dwell upon them and condemn their author?

5. Those who sympathize with each other in this state of mind can see neither their own nor each other's faults. All being alike in an uncharitable state of mind, they are unfit to judge correctly of the moral quality of their own, or of each others' moral exercises. The same causes which blind the uncharitable man to his own sins, blind him also to the sins of his neighbor, provided those sins sustain and vindicate his own. Hence where a church falls into an uncharitable state of mind, there is the less hope of any remedy originating from themselves. Hand joins in hand, and heart sustains heart in defense of uncharitableness. Their moral state becomes dark indeed, and the prospect of any improvement is gloomy.

6. The manifestations of this state of evil thinking are often odious and shocking. Sometimes men make these manifestations without being themselves aware of it. I recollect the case of a minister who once spent some time at our house. After he had gone, one of the children said, "Don't you think Mr. ___, has a bad spirit?" "Why do you ask that question?" "Because he is finding fault with everybody." If ever I see him again, I mean to tell him what impression his conversation made on my children. I have warned him against this practice of evil-speaking, and I cannot acquit my conscience without rebuking him again.

It is astonishing that a man can be so blind as not to see such things in himself. But there are men who will manifest a spirit which will shock even a child, and yet be quite unconscious of being in a bad state of mind.

7. Our own blindness and self-conceit make us think ourselves abused when we are not. Hence a man may regard the treatment he received from others as wholly wrong, when it is really occasioned by his own position and

circumstances. If this man is honest and candid, and should come to see things as they are, he would cry out--"I certainly have deserved a thousand times more than I have received. I once thought myself wronged, but I have changed my views. I now see that the wrong was chiefly and perhaps wholly on my side." I have known cases of this sort. Men are sometimes so blind to their faults, that they cannot bear to have others say of them what is most just. It is hence common for men to attribute to others a bad spirit, when if they saw things as they are, they would see that themselves are chiefly in fault.

8. Just apprehensions of ourselves would often remove the temptation to think hard of others. When you come to estimate yourself rightly, you no longer wonder that men should think evil of you. So I have found it in my own case. Hence, when men feel themselves tried, they would do well to say--Is there not a cause? This is always wise; for it may be that a candid self-scrutiny will put the whole matter in a new light before our own minds. It certainly can do no harm for us to ask--Now really, am I not full as bad as others think me to be? In very many cases you will find by honest searching of yourself, that there lies the cause!

When persons find themselves tempted to take a wrong view of a matter, instead of brooding over the wrong, they should ask--What does God intend by this in His providence? Lord, search me--let him say--Lord search me, try me, and know my thoughts, and let me see whether these people are not Thy rod. As Shimei cursed David, and David said--"Let him curse; the Lord hath bidden him"; so we should look upon those who speak evil of us, when we are ourselves conscious of having occasioned it. In such a case what have we to do that we should retaliate? God has designed it for our good, and it becomes us to receive it from His hand. Let us then inquire--May there not be some truth in these charges or these insinuations? Is it not for some good reason that the Lord has permitted the tongue of evil men to run loose against me? What is the lesson which God in His providence would teach me by these things?

Right over against this is the other course--"I do well to resist and repel; somebody has spoken evil of me, and I am a grievously abused man." Now shall I take this course under reproach? No. I would as soon take arsenic. Shall I cry out--"Oh, I have been abused--My God, take my part, for I am greatly abused"? No; let me rather say--O, my God, what wouldst Thou teach me? Wouldst Thou have me pray for my enemy? Then let me do it. If a man has smitten out my

right eye, let me first inquire what God means by permitting such an event. And moreover, let me also inquire, not only what provocations they actually have, but what they may think they have. How often have I wished that I could see myself through other people's eyes! I should love to place myself in their position, and ask how things look from their stand-point of observation. Perhaps they are so situated as to know only the evil things of my character and conduct. It was so even of Jesus Christ. Those who knew Him only through the wicked Scribes and Pharisees would of course hear no good of Him, and much evil--not indeed, in His case, evil that He had ever done, but evil that they alleged against Him.

9. Evil thinkers are self-tormentors. This has been intimated before. A man who is continually brooding over the real or supposed faults of others, the injuries he has received, and the evil that others have done, is in any other than a desirable state of mind. He renders himself completely wretched, and from the very nature of mind can not be otherwise. We see some men in almost every community who seem to be always unhappy, discontented. They are complainers, murmurers, fault-finders, and are a source of vexation to themselves, greatly to be pitied, and greatly to be blamed.

10. Again, evil thinkers are a curse to their families. If either fathers or mothers allow themselves to think evil, they almost of course become censorious and fill the minds of their children and all over whom they have influence with prejudices against others. They so often speak of the faults, real or supposed, of their neighbors, and oftentimes, of their nearest friends that they create the impression in their family that these persons are not to be trusted. Consequently the minds of the family become filled with evil thoughts, evil-surmisings and suspicions which work like poison itself through the moral heart and constitution of the whole family. It is remarkable to witness the state of religion in a great many families, owing manifestly, at least in a great degree, to the fact that some influential member of the family, perhaps the father or the mother, is in the habit of indulging evil thoughts, and of manifesting these thoughts either in conversation or in conduct to the family. A man can in scarcely any way be a greater and more sure curse to his family than by such a course as this. See that man who is a father. He seldom speaks in such a way to his family as to give them confidence and charity towards any of his neighbors. He brings home little else to their ears than the evil reports of the neighborhood in respect to everybody about him. His family soon become a band of evil thinkers and evil speakers, and slander is the order of the day.

11. An evil thinker is a curse to the church of which he is a member. He does much to undermine Christian confidence, create prejudices and alienate feelings. He is a root of bitterness, springing up and troubling the church. He is suspicious of his minister, has little confidence in his brethren. He broods over their faults, without seeing or commending their virtues. He finds fault. He makes his minister and his brother an offender for a word, and overlooks what is excellent and of good report. The sooner a church can get rid of such a member, the better for them.

12. An evil thinker is a great stumbling-block to the world. What can be a greater stumbling-block to the world, than for a professor of religion to overlook all the virtues, and retail all the failings, real or supposed, of his brethren. How greatly do ungodly men feel themselves strengthened in their opposition to the church when they get the countenance and support of such a man as this.

Again, a charitable mind insures peace and quietness of spirit. An individual who thinketh no evil, but who "hopeth all things and endureth all things," has that peace and quietness of mind to which all other persons are strangers.

Again, we see how to account for the discontent and unhappiness of a great many persons in the church and out of the church. You mark one of these discontented spirits when and where you will, and will find that they are evil thinkers, that they are ready to say, or have said in their hearts--"All men are liars."

Again, how important it is to control the thoughts aright; important to our peace, important to our own usefulness, important to our own salvation, important to the peace and usefulness and salvation of all around us. A great many people seem to lose sight of the great importance to themselves and others of obeying this precept of the apostle, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

[Back to Top](#)

Prayer for A Pure Heart

Lecture IV
March 14, 1849

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Psa. 51:10: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

The term rendered "right" in this passage is in the margin, constant, and this seems to be its precise meaning. A constant, steadfast spirit, as opposed to the fickle and unstable state in which he had so sadly fallen before temptation, was the thing he now desired and sought in earnest prayer.

In discussing the subject brought before us in this passage, I shall,

I. Show what this petition really means.

II. What is implied in offering it acceptably.

I. The terms heart and spirit are used in the Bible in various senses.

The term heart often denotes the will, or the voluntary attitude or state of the will. Sometimes it is opposed to flesh, and then is synonymous with mind as distinct from body. In our text, both heart and spirit seem to be used in their widest and most general sense, including the whole mind--not its voluntary powers and states only, but also those which are involuntary. We must suppose that these terms as here used, include other powers than the will, for it is manifest that his will was substantially in a right state already. He did not regard his will as opposed to God, for his will goes out in this earnest, and apparently most sincere prayer that his whole being might be made pure, and be put in such a state that he should never sin again. It lies on the very face of this psalm that David's will was right before God. Hence he prays for something which he calls a clean heart and a right spirit, which is more than merely a right state of the will -- which may be wisely sought in prayer after one's will is subdued, humbled, yielded to God and submissive. Of course a clean heart and a right spirit, as here used, imply a thorough cleansing or sanctification of the whole mind; including the regulation, or cleansing of the imagination, the thoughts, desires, feelings--all those modifications of the sensibility, and all those habitudes of thought and

feeling which so often annoy the Christian and become most distressing and dangerous snares to his soul. These are often spoken of in the Bible as fleshly--"fleshly lusts that war against the soul." David obviously prays that God would do for him all that his omniscient eye saw needful to make and keep himself pure from all sin, forever. He prays to be made right throughout all the powers and habitudes of his being.

II. What is implied in offering it acceptably?

1. That it be offered intelligently. The suppliant must understand what he needs, and have a practical and just apprehension of it. There can be no real prayer without this.
2. This implies, of course, a deep conviction of past sin. One who is not convicted by the Holy Ghost has no conception of what this language means. Indeed, without the illumination and convicting agency of the Spirit, the sinner has no right conceptions of any thing of a spiritual nature. Hence, he needs to be convicted, so as to understand thoroughly the nature of sin; then he will see his need, and feel it deeply. This deep feeling, based on a just apprehension of his sin and guilt, is essential to acceptable prayer for a clean heart.
3. A sincere offering of this prayer implies sincere repentance--a real turning of the will from all sin; for without this there can not be sincere prayer for a clean heart.
4. It implies, also, confession of sin to God. By this I mean more than simply uttering our acknowledgment of sins before God; I mean confessing them as sins committed against God, deeply realizing the power and self-application of David's words--"Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." Now it is easy, and cheap too, for some men to confess their sins, but truly to understand the nature of sin in its relations to God--to see how odious and how abominably guilty one's own sin is in view of these relations; this is much more than mere oral confession. And yet the suppliant must enter deeply into those views of sin, and realize that for his great sins against God he deserves the divine wrath forever, or he can not throw his whole soul into this prayer for a clean heart and a right spirit.

5. There must also be a deep apprehension of one's danger of falling under temptation. It is plain that David in praying for a clean heart and a right spirit, made use of popular language, but really referred to those things in his constitution and habits which had been to him occasions of great sin. Who does not know that after the will is set right, and has done all it can do towards consecrating the whole being to God, the occasions of sin still exist, and may still act with great energy. For example, the imagination, long trained in the course of sin, long corrupted, polluted, filled with foul images, and terribly under the control of impure associations--this remains to be regulated, renovated, and as we might well say, cleansed, before it can be otherwise than a snare, and a most unfit associate of a right will.

It should however be understood that sin, strictly speaking, belongs to acts of the will only; and that of course, when sin or moral defilement is predicated of other faculties or states of the mind, the language is used in a popular and not a metaphysical sense. While this is true and important to be understood, it still remains true also that our mental associations, our habitudes of both mind and body have been during our life of sin such that they continue after conversion to be active and fruitful occasions of sin. This is illustrated in the case of David. His imagination had not become so regulated, nor had his passions been so crucified and sanctified as to cease to act as occasions and temptations to sin. His lusts and appetites had long been so indulged and so developed by indulgence, that though his will was converted to God, yet it might still be overpowered by their temptations. Every Christian knows more or less of the presence and power of these temptations. He is also conscious that these appetites, feelings, passions, imaginations and habitudes create within the mind a certain uneasiness and sense of loathing as if they were really unclean.

The Bible speaks of "the motions of sins," while we are in the flesh, as "working in our members to bring forth fruit unto death," and it would seem to speak of them in popular language as being sinful. As to the case of David, whoever has had experience in the government of a vitiated sensibility, and of indulged passion, can not read this psalm without seeing what were the workings of his mind. Deeply convicted of his great sin, his mind turns within upon those propensities of such fearful power--those appetites and habitudes, and those workings of a vile imagination which had so woefully ensnared his soul and dishonored his God, and he cries aloud--O,

my God, give me a pure heart--"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."

Hence this prayer implies, as I said, a clear apprehension of those things which become occasions of sin, and involve especially a request for their entire subjugation and cleansing.

Those of you who have read Madame Guyon, noticed that in speaking of the great work wrought in her, she alludes to the fact that her imagination had been greatly polluted, but was at length, through sanctifying grace, so brought under the power of a holy will, as to be no longer a source of conflict as before, so in the case of all Christians, the correction of all these habitudes of mind and wayward imaginings and physical propensities constitutes an important part of the work of moral cleansing.

6. This prayer offered acceptably implies a loathing of these occasions of sin and a deep dread of them. Take, for example, the man who has a polluted imagination. If he be a Christian, will he not find this an occasion of great self-loathing? Deeply ashamed of himself, he often feels as if it would be a relief to him if he could spue out his very self--all those vile pollutions of thought and imagination--and be a new and pure creature. For although the action of the imagination is not itself sin, not being directly a voluntary state of mind, yet it often becomes a most disgusting and loathsome occasion of sin, and consequently in the renewed mind an occasion of great conflict. Hence the strong desire to be made pure in these respects.

7. It involves also an apprehension of our dependence on God to subdue those habitudes of sin. Every one who has tried to manage them himself has learned his own weakness; but ordinarily men learn their weakness and dependence no faster than they gain this experience by efforts to master these propensities to sin. How often does the Christian find himself thrown in to deep agonizing, struggling and struggling a long time perhaps in vain to gain the fixed ascendancy over all within which creates temptations and occasions to sin! When this painful and dear-bought experience has thoroughly taught a man his dependence on God, he can then sincerely ask God to do this great work of moral cleansing for him. Without the teachings of experience, you can scarcely expect any man to be so sincere and

heartily earnest in praying as to prevail. It seems indispensable that every Christian should know, past all doubt or demurring, that he needs God's aid, and can do nothing to the purpose without it.

8. This prayer also implies a confidence in the ability of God to do this work. It is a most remarkable fact that nearly the whole church has embraced the opinion that death must do this work. I speak now only of the masses of professed Christians, for some individuals hold different views, and pray as David did for entire moral cleansing to take place here in time. There is no evidence in this Psalm that David prayed or expected death to do this work; on the other hand he most obviously prayed for a work to be done here and now, and himself expected to live after it was done, and tells God what he shall do after his heart is made clean in answer to his prayers. "Then," says, he, "will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee."

But most Christians in these latter ages of the world have expected and do expect death to this work, and of course they expect nothing better than to carry along all these loathsome things till they die. A hard lot this, if indeed it were all allotment of Jehovah; but a strange lot for a Christian to impose upon himself by failing to embrace the proffer of almighty aid, in the speedy accomplishment of a universal renewal unto holiness.

Certain others have thought that subduing the propensities is equivalent to their annihilation. This, however is a great mistake; for David who prayed that his whole being might be cleansed, evidently did not expect to lose his imagination altogether, nor indeed did he think of having any other faculty of mind or body annihilated, as if God had created some faculties which are intrinsically evil, and must therefore be expunged from the system before it can be morally pure! Not so, I say, did David think and pray; but on the contrary he prayed virtually that God would regenerate his whole being--overhaul it--make it over, mold it into purity and order, till it should subserve, and not derange the right action of a sanctified will.

9. This prayer implies confidence not only that God is able to answer it, but also not less that He is willing, and moreover that to do it is in accordance with the plans and purposes of his moral government. If he had only believed that God is able, but that He has no purpose, plan or will to do such a thing, under any circumstances of our earthly life, would it not have

been blasphemous for him to have offered this prayer? Look at it! Suppose David had believed as some now are understood to hold, that God, though able, had no intention or will to give the Christian a clean heart during this life, would not this prayer of his have been impious? It would be as much as to say--Lord I know thou hast no desire or intention to give thy children a pure heart in this world; but, Lord, we want this blessing, and we want it now, and we can not be denied--let thy purposes stand ever so much opposed to granting the blessing. Now could the Psalmist have offered such a prayer without tempting God? Certainly not. Hence we may infer that he doubtless believed it to be in accordance with God's government and plans to bestow this blessing when earnestly sought by prayer.

I have often known men who had great misgivings whether God did not intend, in all cases, to leave Christians through life impure--their hearts not cleansed in the sense of our text. Consequently if they ever ask for these blessings, they are afraid to believe, and hence they can not possibly cast themselves upon the Lord in such confidence as is essential to prevailing prayer. They know that God is able, but they do not believe Him willing; hence they are greatly troubled, and there can be no strong confidence, no child-like trust in their prayers.

Not so David. Plainly he held God to be willing as well as able. You must certainly admit that David assumed God's willingness to do the very thing he asked, whatever you may suppose that thing to be. The real thing requested in his prayer, he must have supposed God most willing to perform.

10. The sincere offering of the prayer that God would create in us a clean heart implies that on our part we are willing to have the thing done. Persons often have strong desires that something were done, who yet are not willing it should be done. A tooth aches bitterly; they know it ought to come out; O, how they wish it were out now--but are they willing to have it done? That's the trying point. Their desires in the matter are very strong, but don't amount to a willingness. So, often, in regard to wishing and praying for a clean heart. It often happens that persons think they want a pure heart; but when they come to see all that is implied in it, they shrink back, and say, no; we can not meet all those consequences. A striking case of this sort once fell under my observation. A young lady claimed she was willing to become a Christian, and I suppose honestly thought so, I often pressed her

with the fact that she was not really willing to become a Christian, but she as often resisted my position and my arguments. Ultimately she heard a sermon which greatly affected her, and brought her to determine that she would not live in her sins any longer. She turned her thoughts in deep earnest towards God--she began to ask Him to take away all her sins--when suddenly she saw so clearly how much would be involved in this, that she shrunk back--withdrew her petition--rose from her knees and went her way. She had found that she did not want to be such a Christian.

So, often, with professed Christians. When they see all that is implied in a clean heart, they turn away. They may have offered this prayer often without at all apprehending how much it implies. When they come to see the whole matter they are conscious of shrinking from meeting such results.

Hence an acceptable offering of this prayer implies that we are willing to have this whole work done--are willing to have every constitutional appetite, passion, tendency and function of either flesh or spirit so modified as to come perfectly under the control of right reason, and of God's revealed will. We must be willing to have our bodies become fit temples for God's indwelling Spirit; every function or faculty of our entire nature being in harmony with a holy heart, being such as would not soil an angel's purity, if his spirit were to inhabit our body, and act through our physical organs.

11. This prayer offered acceptably, implies that we are willing God should do his own work in his own way.

It often happens that really men dictate to God the manner in which things shall be done. They ask only with certain reservations and qualifications--as if they would say--May God be pleased to do this thing provided it shall not touch my idol; my God sanctify all my appetites, so as to bring them under the law of enlightened reason, except this favorite one--spare me this, for I am very partial to it, and it has been such a comfort to me so long! Or perhaps they are afraid to pray right out--without qualification or exception, that God would actually give them a heart universally clean, and a spirit altogether right, lest, if their prayer should be answered it might smite some of the precious things they love. As a woman once said to me--"I dare not ask for sanctification, lest if I should, God should take away my husband!" "But why such fears?" "Because I am conscious that my heart is greatly bound up in him, and I am terribly afraid that God could not sanctify me

without tearing him away from my heart."

Of course the woman could not pray--"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." This prayer implies that we are willing to have any sacrifice made which God sees to be necessary; that we yield up ourselves to all the outward training, and also to all the inward training which in the eye of God may appear to be requisite. We submit ourselves to his discretion as to the things to be done--as to the time, the manner, and all the circumstances of doing it. We do most fully and freely consent that God should use his own infinite wisdom. Let Him smite whatever he sees it best to smite. Let my soul commit itself into his hands to suffer any pain, and endure any sacrifice which his wisdom may choose and his love can inflict. Let me never fear any unreasonable severity from such a Father!

But how often Christians have their own way marked out for God to walk in. They would have Him be careful to deal with themselves very gently, and especially beware not to use his providential rod too roughly. It would suit them well if the Lord would come down upon them as with an electric shock and shake their very souls into purity and holiness. Some sudden and purely spiritual agency is often the thing they are dreaming of, and they prefer that the clean heart shall come in this way rather than by any form of sore trial. They seem not to realize that there are some attachments of such a character that God can not rectify them without seizing upon the loved object, cutting it down, tearing up its very roots, and rending asunder all those tender ligaments which bind our hearts in selfish, idolatrous love to our idol. Every Christian ought to consider that asking God sincerely to create in us a clean heart involves the submission of our entire case to his management, with full permission from us to use the knife, or any thing else He may find necessary for a thorough cure.

12. This prayer, to be acceptable, must involve not only a willingness to have the thing done, but to take with it the consequences which will naturally follow. If the gift of a clean heart involves new relations and new duties, we must meet them cheerfully, and what is more, in anticipation of them we must not shrink; for if we do, we can not have the gift. Thus, for example, it is obviously the duty of those whom God thus blesses to glorify his name. Let them, like the ancient leper, go into the temple to bear their public testimony to saving grace. Or, like David let them be able to say--"I

have not hid thy righteousness within my heart, I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great congregation." Even beforehand let them say as he did--"Deliver me, and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness;" "open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise."

Now many would be very willing to be religious, if they might accomplish it all without any consequent reproach. They might even be happy to be sanctified if they might have the blessing with no attendant dishonor--no sacrifice of reputation; if nobody would talk about them--if none would observe their conduct and their spirit more closely than before. But all such compromises for reputation's sake are vain and ruinous. You must be willing to lay your very self upon God's altar--yourself I say, your all; reputation, name, ease, your estate if need be, your personal liberty if God's providence calls for it, and even your life. Go up with firm, unfaltering step and lay your all upon that altar; then let God do with that offering what He will;--blast it--burn it--blow it to every quarter of the heavens; yet lay it down and say, whether in the fear or the fact of all losses--"These things are thine, O my God--do with them all as thou pleasest. Spare me nothing which thou pleasest to take. I trust thy wisdom and thine infallible love." Now every Christian should know that the gift of a clean heart and a right spirit comes not from God till he is willing to take with it its legitimate consequences--nay more, till he is willing to trust those results to the wisdom of his great Father. You must be willing to be made a spectacle to angels and to men, for God will never light a candle to put it under a bushel. You may lift up your cry the hundredth time for the blessing; still the question will return--Will you glorify God? Will you let your light shine? Will you do all you can to make the gift, if bestowed on you, available to the glory of the Blessed Giver? God asks--Are you willing I should put you in the furnace and heat up the fire to seven-fold fury, and let the world look on to see what grace can do? You greatly mistake if you suppose God does such works of sanctifying mercy for your sake alone. "Not for your sake, be it known unto you, O house of Israel, saith the Holy One, but for my holy name's sake."

Let it then be well understood that you must be willing to meet and bear the trials which God sends. You must expect trials, such trials as will probably call the attention of others to your case. God perhaps would fain profit others by the blessings He gives you. If so, should you rebel? Perhaps He would

glorify Himself. If so, shall you shrink? Never. It becomes you rather to glory in tribulation, outward or inward--for it is sweet even by suffering, to be made the passive instruments of glorifying our Father in heaven. Let the burning trial come, if the grace of God thereby shines the more brightly. It is the manner of our God to make the holiness of his people and the riches of his own grace shine most gloriously in the furnace of affliction.

REMARKS.

1. I remark first what I have already said in substance but repeat here, that David intended to be sanctified in the present life. His will at the time of his offering the prayer in the text was already right, but he had others things about him which were not right, and his soul was fixed to have them corrected. His vile imagination must be regulated--his lusts subdued and slain. He wanted the whole man set in such tone that he should not be forever falling before temptation. All these were blessings which he needed in the present life if ever--needed then--which moreover he prayed he might obtain then, and which he manifestly expected then.

2. Many are in the habit of using this language of prayer frequently without really apprehending what it means. Consequently their prayers obtain no particular answer. No man need expect a specific answer to prayer unless he prays for something specific and knows what it is. It is impossible that there should be intelligent desire for objects unless those objects are apprehended by the mind with considerable distinctness.

3. Many do not fulfill the conditions so as offer the prayer acceptably. They lack the requisite confidence in God. Not asking in faith, they can not receive, for their unbelief places it beyond the power of God to bless them without sacrificing his own honor.

4. We do not understand the recorded prayers of Scripture, nor the promises, until we are brought into a state of mind similar to that of the writer. Recurring to the case of David, I do not mean that none can understand his prayer in our text until they have committed David's sins; but I do mean that we must see ourselves to have committed some sins, and that we must be greatly humbled and deeply penitent as he was--be filled with utter self-loathing as was the case with him. Such a state of mind brings out the full and precious meaning of the promise; it unfolds it like a charm, in lustre and glory such as none but the

humbled soul can possibly appreciate.

It is moreover quite essential that we should understand our liabilities to fall before temptation. Probably David, before his sin, was not aware of his great danger--did not know how powerful those occasions to sin actually were. He might have been entirely unaware that any circumstances could ever have involved in such dreadful sin--first seduction and adultery; then betrayal and murder in their meanest form; who can believe that David, anterior to his sin, understood all his own fearful liabilities to such sins as these? What, therefore, must have been his amazement when these terrible tendencies and occasions of sin came to be developed! How did he then cry out in the deep anguish of his soul--"O my God, save me from myself! O my God, create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me." So must every Christian see himself in these dark, fearful aspects of his character, before his prayer will be, like David's, a prayer of deep agony of soul.

5. It is not uncommon for Christians to have a right will and of course be in this respect acceptable to God while yet their previous habits have been so bad as to subject them to continual struggles and warfare; the imagination taking its filthy course and rioting in its pollutions unless constantly held in check by the pressure of some great considerations. Now the thing needed by such persons is to see their dangers and liabilities, and then to throw themselves upon the saving strength of the Most High.

6. The unsanctified, involuntary states of mind are great enemies to the soul. These appetites are the "fleshly lusts" that war against the soul's peace and purity. If these were removed there would still remain the devil to war against; with them we have both Satan from without, and our unsubdued propensities and ungoverned imagination within.

Formerly it was supposed that these conflicts with appetite were a real warfare with inborn and inbred sin. I hold no such doctrine. These appetites are not themselves sin, but they are the occasions of sin--the means of temptation to sin, and hence are objects of dread and loathing to the Christian.

7. In proportion as these lusts are subdued, there will arise in the mind a sense of purity. I have said that the soul loathes these appetites and passions which become occasions of sin, and loathes itself on account of them and their vile associations. For the same reasons, when purified from these loathed

abominations, there will ensue a sweet consciousness of being pure, such as can by no means exist prior to their subjugation and cleansing.

8. This rectification of the appetites, sensibilities and imagination, has been commonly called sanctification, because men have really supposed that these things were themselves sinful. If they really were so, then their rectification would be genuine sanctification. In popular language there seems to be no strong objection to their being so called now. Indeed the Bible, ever using popular language, speaks of sanctification as affecting "spirit, soul and body." "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly. And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless"--as if blame might attach to either. The writer doubtless intends simply the sanctification of the whole man--in which state the body would no longer become the occasion of sin to the mind.

9. This blessing is exceedingly valuable and desirable. It is hardly possible to estimate adequately its great value. Let one experience what David did--have reason to loathe himself as he had; have occasion to know the dreadful power of those inward foes--those terrible snares to his soul;--let him see how his tyrant lusts have overpowered him and laid him prostrate and bleeding in the dust;--then may he see how greatly desirable it is to have even the hottest fires of providential discipline seize upon him and burn up all his tin and all his dross, till nothing remains but gold well purified. O how he will rejoice even through such a process to come forth redeemed, and cleansed, so that he may stand henceforth perfect and complete in all the will of God!

10. This blessing is indispensable to inward tranquility and peace of mind. In no farther than this entire work is advanced, can one enjoy repose in God. The will may be right; but the mind will almost continually experience those terrible agitations which result from conflict with unsubdued, ungoverned sensuality. There can be no abiding peace till the whole man is brought into harmony with God's service--with a holy will and a holy life.

11. Especially is this blessing greatly desirable as a condition of passing tranquilly through sore outward trials. When men have received this blessing, it seems to be the order of God's providence to test them, and cause them to exhibit great calmness, to the praise of victorious grace. Then observers will wonder how they can pass so calmly and so sweetly through trials so fiery. As the three children in Daniel walked within the burning furnace, amid its hottest flames, and when they came forth no smell of fire had been on them, for the Son of God

had been with them there--so when Christians have their lusts subdued and slain before hand--so that Jesus can walk with them through the furnace, no fires can burn upon them from without, nor from within. All is calm and all is safe. Said a man once of a Christian sister who was under most distressing trials--"I wonder how she can live." But she was calm and quiet as a lamb. God can purify us so that we can pass through the most terrific trials unruffled as the air of a summer evening.

12. This state is greatly important to our highest usefulness. Men have been useful without this; but if they would be useful in the highest degree they must go to God imploring him to do all He sees they need. This is the very spirit in which we should apply to God for this blessing. "O my God, do all thy will in me; then put me in any position in the universe which will most fully illustrate and extol thy grace. No matter what it be, only let it greatly glorify thy name."

13. Until this work is done, Christians will, more or less frequently, be a great stumbling-block to the world, and indeed to all others. So was David. His heart was not thoroughly made pure; hence a constant liability to such dreadful sins as those into which he fell. Pres. Edwards made, and put on record this most excellent resolution;--"When I fall into any sins, I will not rest until I have searched out and found the occasion and have removed it." This great man had learned enough from his own experience to show him that he must look for the occasions of sin. When a patient is sick you would not attach the symptoms, but would look for the occasions or causes and would seek to remove them; so in the occurrence of sin, you must look for the occasions and give yourself no rest till they are thoroughly removed. Hence the fitness of this prayer made by the Psalmist--and hence the reason why you should go to God and cry, "O my God create in me a clean heart;--take away all these distressing occasions of sin, or I shall continue to dishonor thee and bring reproach on thy name."

[Back to Top](#)

The Joy of God's Salvation

Lecture V

April 13, 1849

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Psa. 51:12: "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation."

In speaking from these words, I shall,

I. Show what the Psalmist prayed for.

II. Why he prayed for it.

III. The essential elements of such a prayer.

IV. What is implied in offering such a prayer acceptably.

I. Our first enquiry respects the elements which enter into the Christian's joy, or in other words, the joy of God's salvation.

It is pertinent to observe here that there are elements in this joy which belong not to the holy joy of beings who have never sinned. The saved sinner has some forms of joy that the unfallen angel has not and can not have. From this I do not infer that the sinful, when saved, are more happy than the sinless who have never needed salvation. I only say that the joy of each has elements in it which are unlike those of the other, and this every one must see who enters at all into the peculiar circumstances and state of mind of each class.

The words of our text are found in what is called David's penitential psalm. This psalm, as the caption states and as the scope sufficiently shows, was written with reference to David's great sin in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah. It may have been written at the very time of his being rebuked by Nathan, and of his becoming penitent, as the caption of the psalm would seem to indicate; or if written sometime, more or less, afterwards, it was evidently in recollection of those scenes; so that we must regard these circumstances as being the occasion

of the prayer in our text.

Our question now is--What are the principal ingredients or elements of this state of mind?

1. A sense of pardon. A man might repent, and yet not have in full measure the joys of God's salvation; for one element of this joy is a sense of pardon. The sinner needs to have the revelation made in some way to him that God forgives him.

2. A sense of divine reconciliation. We can conceive that a man may be truly penitent and yet have no manifestations made to his soul of God's forgiving grace; he might not see that God is reconciled to him; might not think of or believe any such thing. But it is plain that some degree of divine manifestations on this point is essential to constitute the joy of God's salvation, in the case of a sinner convicted of sin. It might not be essential to a sinless being; but must be to one who like David has sinned, and feels himself to have fallen under the divine displeasure.

3. The love of complacency. The Scriptures speak of "the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost." The experience of Christians show that this shedding abroad of divine love in the heart by the Holy Ghost usually follows the deep exercises of penitence and of faith in redeeming blood.

This love of complacency is a state of the sensibility as opposed to any action of the will. It consists substantially in emotions of pleasure and delight in God and in his ways and works, and differs essentially from the love of benevolence. It is one of the elements of a forgiven sinner's joy.

4. A sense of inward purity. I do not suppose an individual could have the joy of God's salvation unless he had a sense of inward purity. He could not have real and rich joy unless he felt as Brainard expressed himself--"I am clean from both past and present sin." With out this element one may have excitement, but can not have the real joy of God's salvation. For he still lacks the real salvation itself; still lacks that in which the real blessedness of a saved soul chiefly consists;--namely, inward purity; positive deliverance from present sin. When God applies the energy of his Spirit to renew the soul, and in place of selfish lusts, to shed abroad his own love in the heart,

there is begotten a sweet sense of present purity, and the soul has the witness in itself that sin is put away, and that divine love has taken its place.

5. A sense of inward harmony. By this I refer to a state of mind which is in harmony with God and with all other holy beings in the universe, and also in harmony with itself. Its own powers are brought into such fitting correlation with each other, and all together are in such relations to God, that the very working of their perfect machinery produces harmony. Perhaps there is no word which so well expresses this delightful result as harmony. It is indeed like the harmony of sweet music. Each separate vibration fits every other; and together they produce the results of most exquisite harmony. None will understand this unless they have a keen apprehension of what the word harmony means. I have often been struck to see how differently men will understand the meaning of words, or language. It is so with regard to this word, harmony. Some minds have no just conception of what harmony is. But one who has a keen relish for harmony in sounds, who has a cultivated taste, and an ear well attuned, can understand what is intended by harmony of soul when all its powers are in tune. He can understand it too by the law of contrast. Let him listen to the grating discord of a piano, or worse still of an organ when utterly out of tune: O, how it rakes his sensibilities! So the mind in its unconverted state; and so too as it passes along slowly in its progress towards becoming attuned to the sweet harmony of love. But when God Himself sits down to it to put it in tune--when He really takes it in hand and puts every pipe and every string in order, so that He can run his divine fingers over it, and make it breathe forth the very harmony of heaven--then, O what music! No words can describe it! But if you will commit your own soul into God's hands that He may put it in spiritual tune, you may learn by experience what it is. You will find it a most blessed experience. When every power, every affection, every element of your soul's activities is in such tune that not a note, not even a semitone can be found in it which is not perfectly in tune, then what rich harmony will it discourse! Peace will be an all-pervading element in the atmosphere of your soul. Every opinion, every emotion, every affection is in harmony with God.

6. Of course there will be implied in this, a delight in the whole revealed will of God; in all his character; in all he does and in all he omits to do. It involves acquiescence in all his providential arrangements, including all He

accomplishes and all He neglect to accomplish. When this state of mind exists in its purity, there is a universal satisfaction of mind in God. Every want and demand both of our nature and of our circumstances is seen to be perfectly met in God. A deep apprehension of this forms a prominent part of the joy of God's salvation.

II. Why should this blessing be sought in prayer?

1. The thing is desirable in itself. It is in itself a good, and therefore it is lawful to pray for it.
2. It is honorable to God that his people should possess this joy. Such happiness ought to characterize the children of so great and so bountiful a Father.
3. Its absence is greatly dishonorable to God. Is it not dishonorable to a king that his "children should go mourning all their days?" How strange that those who profess to be children of God should have no joy! What! Is it not dishonorable to God to have his people lean and ill-favored, going about the streets like walking skeletons? As if He could endure this Himself; and not only so, but even like them the better for their rags and filthiness! Who can believe this? What prince on earth ever kept his court and above all, his children, looking in such style?
4. It is not only dishonorable to God, but highly disgraceful to themselves for Christians to live without spiritual joy and peace. Consider what is implied in a Christian's complaining of the absence of spiritual joy. It must imply either that God is very careful about giving his children occasions of joy, or that they are loath to embrace and improve those occasions.
5. The joy of the Christian is exceedingly useful to others. Who can estimate the value of a living fountain of water in a barren desert? Like Siloam's well in a land of drought, or like an oasis in a wilderness is a Christian who has always some thing to say of the joy of God's salvation. His words and his spirit are all the more reviving because so many are always complaining. How often are we grieved and distressed with these complaints!

On the other hand, a single joyous-hearted Christian is a priceless blessing in a family. To have one such Christian in each household who should be so full

of the joys of God's salvation that he could not help speaking it out on all fit occasions--this would be like planting a well-spring of water in every acre of earth's desert sands. How soon would the wilderness rejoice and blossom as the rose! How often has one such Christian set a whole community on fire with desire to get rid of their darkness and come forth into God's glorious light!

6. The spiritual joy of Christians is exceedingly useful to sinners. Sinners know that Christians ought to rejoice in God, and of course they are not surprised at all that they should. How impressive to the sinner to see that the Christian is at rest in God! Oh, he knows nothing of that peace himself; and the view of it as enjoyed by the Christian reveals his own desolation. What sinner was ever in the habit of mingling in the society of Christians whose heart and lips are full of joy, without himself feeling unutterable yearnings of heart for such joys as these? I can well recollect that some of my earliest impressions of a serious nature, were occasioned by hearing a young man speak of his joy in God. I went home from that meeting weeping. I said to myself--that joy is rational; it is a joy worthy of a human soul. I walked along with many tears, and when alone, I sought a retired and dry place to kneel down and pray that God would give me what that young man had. All that I had ever heard of sermons and lectures had not made half so much impression as that young man's religious joy.

Sinners know that their own joy is a mean affair. Hence, when they see the Christian's joy, they can not help contrasting it with their own, and the result can scarcely fail of revealing to them their own wretched state.

These struggles of the sinner for joy are indeed altogether selfish. My prayers at the time alluded to were so; but yet they were useful, for they served to enforce conviction of the value of religion and of the worthlessness of everything short of it. The Psalmist understood the value of Christian joy. "Restore unto me," said he, "the joy of thy salvation; then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee." He knew this would make a powerful impression on their minds, for good.

7. The absence of this spiritual joy is a great stumbling block to all classes. What a stumbling block to a church to have a minister who is perpetually in spiritual darkness and trouble! How can he lead on the sacramental host whose own heart is quailing with spiritual fears, or suffering under spiritual

agonies for himself! And the more important the position a man holds, the more desirable it becomes that he should be full of the joy and peace which the Holy Ghost inspires. Deacons in a church; parents in a family; professors in a College:--how can men who hold such stations of responsibility ever think of acquitting themselves of their responsibilities without possessing grace enough to give them the joy of God's salvation?

In saying this I would not be understood to imply that Christians never have trials and sorrows; they will have them doubtless; but even in these very trials and sorrows, how precious will be the joys of God's salvation to their souls!

Especially is this joy of God's salvation indispensable to one who preaches the gospel! A man might preach something without it; but not the gospel. He might deliver moral essays, or might contend valiantly for his polemic creed; but as for preaching the vital matters of salvation, how can he if he knows nothing about them by experience? He needs such faith as brings peace; such communion of soul with God as necessarily brings joy of heart. And this is something more than being penitent; of course something more than being merely pious. The Psalmist knew that he was penitent, and yet he knew also that he needed something more. God had not yet revealed the light of his own face. Hence, when he had confessed and humbled himself before God, it still remained that he should pray--"Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." David had known well what it was to be full of joy before God. He had danced for joy with all his might before the ark of the Lord, and often we find him preparing songs of joy and praise; but now, alas, his harp is silent and all unstrung! He has sinned grievously against God; a thick cloud has come over his soul; and though he has confessed, yet still he has occasion to pray--"Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." Why does he want these joys? Because without them he can not reach transgressors to any good purpose. What Christian does not know how to sympathize with David in this state of mind? Who has not known experimentally the state of those who have sinned, confessed, but still have the greatest occasion to ask God to restore to them the lost joys of His salvation? The soul cries out--"Lord, how can I live, shut out in darkness from thee? O, if thou canst, wilt thou not reveal thy reconciled face and restore again those lost joys of thy salvation?"

III. The conditions upon which this prayer can be answered.

1. We must have a sense of our won sins, and their deep and damning guilt. I said that some of the elements in the Christian's joy do not exist in the joy of sinless beings in the universe of God. In the Christian's case it is indispensable that his joy should be preceded by a sense of sin and guilt. Else he cannot appreciate the grace of pardon--cannot really appreciate any thing about the gospel. He needs such a sense of sin as to understand how great a thing it is to be delivered from sin--rescued from its farther commission, and pardoned of its horrible guilt.

2. Confession of sin, and real repentance. God would be but poorly employed in restoring the joys of salvation to one who has not repented.

3. Making restitution also, must be a condition, for this is essential to real repentance.

4. An apprehension of the atonement and way of acceptance. I have said that one might repent and yet not have this sense of restored joy. I know this to be the case; and I believe every Christian in this house knows it. In order to have this joy, we need a sense of pardon; but this is not all. We need such a sense of it and such a view of its mode as shall justify God--such a view as will show you that God is just in pardoning the sinner. The sinner in the state of mind supposed is not selfish; hence he desires God to be justified, and could not be happy to receive pardon in any way which he did not see would fully acquit and greatly glorify God. Hence, he needs to see that the gospel mode of pardon is such as most fully justifies and honors God. He needs to see that the atonement through Jesus Christ most perfectly answers all these great and most desirable ends. I do not believe it possible for a man to enter into the joys of God's salvation without some just notions of the atonement as the way in which God can be glorious in forgiving sin.

5. Another essential condition is the acceptance of Christ in the fullness of his relations. Unless we see what relations Christ sustains to us, and what He consequently can do for us, it is impossible that we can experience this joy. Unless we apprehend Christ's fullness, we cannot receive fully the joys of his salvation.

6. Another condition is universal confidence in God. If there be any one thing in which we have not confidence in God, there will be chafing and trouble. The soul is not right towards God.

Again, an entire renunciation of self is a condition. Whoever does not renounce himself, cannot have this joy.

7. You must renounce all idols. What would you think of God if He were to give this joy to those who are sipping at every fountain of earthly pleasure, trying to find some little joy besides that from God?

8. There must also be a sympathy of will with God. Our will must be so thoroughly with his that we can go with Him in all He does, without the least reluctance or misgiving.

Again, subdued appetites and passions are essential; for while these are clamoring for indulgence, it is utterly impossible for the soul to experience the joys of God's salvation.

9. Another condition is the indwelling Spirit of God; for who will have his appetites subdued, or indeed, who will fulfill any of these conditions without the Spirit?

10. It is essential that there should be a clear medium of communication between our souls and God. A man who has not communion with God cannot have the joys of gospel salvation. When from any reason the soul is shut out from God and the communion is not free, but God hides his face, then the soul cannot rejoice in the joy of his great salvation.

IV. What is implied in offering such a prayer acceptably?

1. A sense of our necessities; for until we feel our wants we never shall pray with any fervency. So long as we are sipping at every accessible fountain of earthly pleasure and getting up for ourselves poor broken cisterns besides, we are never likely to come to the gospel fountain. The soul needs to have a sense of its great necessities--a consciousness of being altogether empty, and hence a conviction of its need of access to the divine fountain, or there is not hope it will ever come to this fountain for the waters of life.

2. Another requisite is a sense of dependence on God for this state of mind. Persons may feel their need of the blessing, and yet may not realize their dependence on God. But this feeling of dependence must exist in the mind before one can deeply and earnestly rest upon God for the blessing. Men need to know and to realize that although they have power to repent, yet

they can not get access to this fountain of divine pleasures without God's help. His angel must come down and trouble the waters of this "house of mercy;" and lend us a kind hand to help us down therein, then our soul is made whole of "whatsoever disease it had."

3. Acceptable prayer implies fulfilling the conditions. Else we only tempt God. He who knows the revealed conditions, and yet prays God to bestow the blessing without fulfilling the conditions, insults God to His face. It amounts to demanding that God should recede from his expressed conditions; a thing which of course He never can do, and which no man can even impliedly ask Him to do without abusing his God exceedingly.

Especially is it important that this prayer be not selfish. The soul must be consecrated to God, fully purposed to use the blessing if obtained, and if not obtained, yet to use everything it has, for the glory of God and the highest good of man. So David felt. "Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee." There is the greatest danger in asking for spiritual joy, that our hearts will be merely selfish in it, instead of disinterestedly seeking to glorify God in all things, and even with the religious joy and peace which He may graciously impart to us.

4. A sense of its great value is another requisite. This should be coupled with a deep sense of ill-desert. Combining together these two sentiments in their great strength, you then have a state of mind in which you are in small danger of seeking in vain.

5. In connection with these, there must be great confidence in God's willingness to bestow the blessings sought. David seems to have had this.

6. Also a willingness to have God use all the necessary means to open the way for this result. There may be a great many springs of earthly joy to be dried up; many idols to be removed; many a cup of earthly pleasure to be dashed, before we shall be prepared to receive in our souls the joy of God's salvation. Consequently there must be on our part a willingness to have God do anything He pleases with us to prepare the way in our souls. Unless we are thus willing that God should take his own course, we are making conditions for God which show that we are real hypocrites. We are trying to get the joy of holiness without the holiness itself.

7. There must also be a willingness to leave the time, the way, and the conditions of conferring the blessing wholly in the disposal of Infinite Wisdom. All must be left in his hands with most unqualified submission, ourselves ready to do or suffer anything that is necessary, that we may most glorify God.

8. There must also be a fixed purpose to make a wise and holy use of the blessings which we receive. It must be in our heart to use this blessing wholly for God. Unless we pray for it with the sincere intention of asking it thus for God, we have no reason whatever to expect it. A man would be but poorly employed in praying for this blessing to put it under a bushel. The great Giver would fain make His goodness known; and why should not you lend your aid in so noble an enterprise, for an end so glorious?

If God fills your cup you must be willing to pass it round and let all others be refreshed from the same fountain. Show them where the fountain is, and how good its waters are. They do not know much about these things, and they need such hints as you can easily give them, if your own heart is full of that divine joy.

REMARKS.

1. Many professors of religion know nothing of the joys of God's salvation. I recollect to have been impressed with this long before my conversion. At that time I was in the habit of conversing with Christians about their own experience. Having much curiosity on this subject I felt free to inquire about it and took frequent opportunities to do so. It was with me then, a matter of speculation, being then, as now, much struck with the apparent fact that so few Christians had much real joy in God. The impression was often made on my mind that most Christians were wretched, unhappy, muttering, grumbling, and full of trouble. Hence the conviction ripened more and more on my mind that they had little or no real joy in God. They might have repented of sin, and lost their burden at the cross; but yet they seemed not to know much if anything about the joys of God's salvation. On this subject they were generally dumb, having little or nothing to say of the salvation of God, and the light of His countenance.

2. A great many professors of religion seem not to care for this blessing. Scrambling after dress or money; as anxious after worldly good as if there were no other good for them to seek; as anxious for this world as if God had told them

to seek first the kingdom of this world and its good things; so they press on, running to this concert, to that show or party of pleasure, always lusting after something sensual and worldly;--such are their pursuits, and such of course is their character. They had much rather go to a circus than into their closet, or to a prayer meeting. They cannot imagine how any man can wish to go like Francis Xavier into his closet, and spend seven hours at once in such deep and holy communion with God that his countenance glowed like an angel's; they can form no just conception of the attractiveness of such a scene and of such employments.

3. When a Christian has really tasted this joy in God, and then subsequently has been deprived of it, he will go with his head bowed down like a bulrush. He looks as if he had lost all the friends he ever had. Having once drank of the sweet waters of life, O how insipid are the draughts of earthly joy! I do not mean to imply by this that Christians cannot enjoy earthly things. They can. None can enjoy earthly good with half so solid a relish as they when they can have God in all their earthly good, and take all as His gift, and from His hand. But let a man who has experienced these joys, once get away from God, away into sin as David did, and his peace and joy are spoiled; he looks ashamed before God and before men; he cannot hold up his head. If you meet him in a Christian spirit, he cannot look you in the face, especially if you show him that your heart is full of the joys of God's salvation. How often have I seen this; and so probably have many of you. Look around you. There is a professed Christian, fallen into sin. Let one arise before him, full of the joys of God's salvation, and Oh, how self-condemned he is; how full of agony and trouble! Poor man; he is far from God and can find no rest there.

4. Some persons care just enough for these joys to pray for them selfishly, but in no other way. Most of you who are present today will recollect that I stated a fact here some weeks since which may apply well here. A man with whom I was boarding in a season of revival, being greatly troubled about his own spiritual state, said to me--"What would you think of a man who prays for the Spirit of God week after week, but never gets it?" My reply was, "I should think the man prayed selfishly. I presume that is all the trouble. The devil might pray for spiritual joy in the very same way--his only end being his own spiritual enjoyment. The Psalmist, said I, did not pray so. He did indeed pray that God would restore to him the lost joys of his salvation; but his motives in it were not selfish; no, for he adds--"Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners

shall be converted unto thee." This seemed to the man a hard saying, and he went away, as he afterwards told me, in great anger, and prayed that God would kill him. A little more thought however, together with the melting power of the Spirit, subdued him, and he became as docile and humble as a lamb.

So it often happens that men want God to meet their selfishness; and when they find He does not, they have often a long struggle before they really humble themselves, so as to meet God on his own ground.

5. Many think that all caring for the joy of God's salvation is necessarily selfish. They do not realize the value of this joy to the church, to God, and to the world, and hence they cannot realize that any other than selfish motives can induce Christians to pray for it. Consequently, with these views of the selfish character, they pray for it very little, if at all.

Again, few realize the importance of having this joy of the Lord in their souls. They seem not to appreciate its important bearings upon the interests of vital godliness.

Many Christians have special seasons and states of mind in which they are very desirous to have this blessing; but on the whole they are unwilling to yield up the sources of their carnal joys. They would gladly have both if they could; but since they cannot be, they cleave to the carnal, and forgo the spiritual. A most unwise, most wretched, and most guilty choice!

Again, spiritual joy often abounds when all other sources of joy are dried up. By this I do not mean that joy in God precludes all enjoyment of the world and its pleasures; for this is very far from being true. My meaning is that when worldly sources of pleasure are cut off from us or are dried up, then God comes in to fill the void with richer spiritual joys. Poverty and losses may have withdrawn from you many of the comforts of life; God can make his grace to abound so much the more, that your soul shall rejoice exceedingly in the exchange. Sickness may have robbed you of the joy which health affords; but God can make your soul prosper and be in health to such a degree that your physical loss shall be more than counterbalanced by your spiritual gain. God knows how to fill up the chasms of earthly happiness which his providence makes. Often He makes them for the very purpose apparently of filling them with the more precious material of his own spiritual blessings. He sometimes finds himself under the necessity of cutting off every source of earthly joy in order that He may shut us up utterly to

Himself. When He finds us unwilling to let go of earthly idols, God leaves them to their own choice, saying--"They have loved idols and after them they will go." "They are joined to their idols; let them alone." But if we are willing to serve God, then we may find sources of spiritual joy springing up in the most barren of earth's deserts. Nothing earthly is so desolate that God cannot gladden it with the intermingled joys of his salvation.

On the other hand if you will selfishly cleave to earth, and thrust away the proffered joys of God's love, then if He would save you there remains no alternative but to scatter desolation broadcast over all your earthly joys. God will blight them if He can; and surely He who has the resources of the universe at his command can never lack the means of filling your cup with dregs of wormwood and gall. It would be the worst form of folly if you should compel your loving Father to do this as a last resort in order to save and bless your soul.

Again, very few realize how much the absence of spiritual joy and of its manifestations, will dishonor God. Few realize how great a stumbling block it is to men to see professed Christians go about with a heart all sorrowful, bowed down and hatefully selfish; no trust, or almost none, in God; no joy in the light of his countenance, and no preparation of heart for doing anything efficiently in God's service. It is a living reproach to the name of Jesus, that his people should appear thus before either their brethren or the world.

Legalists are greatly stumbled at those who possess the joy of God's salvation. Legalists are never happy in themselves; always in a strait-jacket, every muscle drawn up with a tightness never to be relaxed; they don't know about such a joyous state of mind. They see a great many things that look suspicious. When they see souls rejoicing greatly in the Lord--O they don't know about that. If a Christian's soul triumphs in his God--alas, they say to themselves, what can that mean? There is nothing like that in my religion!

There is quite too much cheerfulness often in other people's religion to suit their taste, or to tally with their own experience. Never having had any experience in such joys as those, they are greatly scandalized.

So it seems to have been with one of David's wives, when she saw him running and dancing before the ark of the Lord in the overflowings of his joy. Indeed, thought she, this looks very unbecoming for a king--for the king of Israel. Christians of a somber, heavy countenance, who have never known anything of

the gladsome joy of holy love--who cannot explain to themselves even the peaceful look of the saint who is communing with God; and above all who know not the first element of his state of mind whose soul pours forth the gushing tides of its affection before God as if it could never express the half it feels--those who look on amazed at such manifestations because they know nothing of them in their own experience will doubtless be greatly stumbled. But notwithstanding all their stumbling, if this spiritual joy is sustained by a holy consistent life, it cannot fail to exert its power upon their hearts. They maybe at first offended; but soon they must see that there is both reason and reality in the peaceful joy of those who walk humbly with God. O Lord, they will be compelled to say, I don't know that experience. There is something to which I am a stranger. I must know what that is. I doubt whether my religion is worth a straw. Sure I am that it gives me no joy in the Lord like what I see in those other Christians.

Few things are a greater curse than a legal state of mind. It is often as bad as open wickedness, if not worse. Often it is such a misrepresentation of religion as makes the little children more afraid of such a religious man than of a fiend. Does he recommend religion? He could not possibly disparage and misrepresent it more than he does. Better far if he were never thought to be a Christian at all; for then his somber, morose and harsh spirit would be ascribed to its true cause--the unselfishness of his heart, and the utter absence of the gentle spirit of gospel love.

Many fail of this joy because they do not ask for it. Will you, my hearers, lose it through lack of prayer and of faith? It is too choice a blessing to be missed for such a reason.

[Back to Top](#)

Jesus, A Savior from Sinning

Lecture VI

April 25, 1849

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 1:21: "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins."

In discussing fundamentally the subject presented in the text, it is pertinent to remark,

I. That salvation from sin is the great want of humanity.

II. The facts already adduced are always assumed in the Bible.

III. Why is it that so many men are not saved at all?

IV. Why is it that so many are saved only in part?

I. That salvation from sin is the great want of humanity.

On this point there can be no mistake. Whatever else may be controverted or denied, this cannot be. Universal observation combines with universal consciousness to attest that this is a stubborn fact--salvation from sin is the great want of our sinning race. Nothing is more true than that as a race, men are sinners. All men know each other to be sinners, and of course what all know to be true of each one, and what each one knows to be true of all, must be a matter of universal knowledge.

I said, whatever else is true or is not true, this is true; that men need salvation from sin. The reason of this need is that they are sinners and as sinners, they are utterly lost to happiness, unless they can be saved from their sins. No man can be honest and yet deny this. This one truth is forever settled and known by all men.

By being saved from sin I do not mean pardon; for every man knows that pardon, without salvation from sinning, would not really save; for if a man were pardoned, but were still given up to the working of his sinful passions and selfish spirit, he would make for himself a hell even in heaven; nay more, it is undoubtedly true that heaven would be the severest form of hell to the unsaved in heart. There can be no heaven without holiness, and the change from sin to such holiness as fits for heaven is exceedingly great. A world of selfish beings thrown together anywhere would be unutterably miserable.

II. The facts already adduced are always assumed in the Bible.

1. The Bible throughout assumes these facts, as if everybody knew them. It assumes that all men need to be saved from sin and have sense enough to know their need. Consequently it brings forward a plan by which through Jesus Christ they may be saved from sin. This is the great burden of the message sent to us from God in His revealed word.

Our text speaks of Jesus Christ. The angel said to Joseph; Mary "shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins."

2. The Bible represents Jesus as having undertaken this work. It represents His name as being prophetic of the work He came to do. He is a Savior. His work is denoted in His very name. So the Bible uniformly represents Him, as the following instances will show.

It is said that "in Him shall all fullness dwell." "He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him." "Who is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." "Who is able to keep us from falling," and "to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day."

3. The Bible also represents Him as being perfectly willing to do this work, as coming for the very purpose of doing it; as making this His errand and business in the world. He is ready to undertake this work for all who will meet the conditions. The Bible represents Him as waiting to enter upon it and anxious to effect it in the case of all sinners and of every individual sinner. "Behold," says He, "I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with Me." He thus presents Himself to be accepted by each and every sinner, "If any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him." And this is only one of a large class of passages which represent Jesus as waiting to accomplish this work of salvation in the sinner. He waits to be allowed to come in. He knocks, and knocks; but then does not force the door; He waits till it be opened in the proper way, and His entrance is invited.

Yet does the Bible most fully represent Him as being anxious to gain admittance--as "waiting at the door of the sinner till His head is wet with the dew and His locks with drops of the night."

O He would show us that He has the greatest desire conceivable to save us from all our sins. His heart is oppressed with sorrow and grief because sinners will not consent, and because He must therefore give them over to final ruin. Hear Him cry--"How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? My heart is turned with Me, my repentings are kindled together. O, that there were such an heart in them, and that they would consider their latter end!" In fact the Bible is full of the most earnest and affecting testimonies of this sort.

4. Moreover, the Bible represents Jesus Christ as taking the greatest pains to secure the consent of mankind to His terms and proposals of salvation. For this end He places before them the humiliation to which He has voluntarily subjected Himself--the sufferings He has endured, and His waiting attitude now to do for them all they can possibly need to have done for themselves. O could He only make them believe all this, and appreciate it all as the fruit of infinite compassion for their souls!

5. The Bible also represents Christ as hearing and granting all the petitions of really praying souls. Christ Himself says--"everyone that asketh receiveth." He does not merely say--he shall receive; but he receiveth. It is asserted as a fact--a universal fact--from which there can be no exception.

To vary the figure, He says, the door is opened to everyone that knocks. None can fail of gaining admittance who really knocks. Christ does not say that everyone who supposes himself to ask, receives; or who supposes himself to knock, shall find the door opened to Him; but everyone who really asks, receives. This is all He can be understood to mean.

III. Why is it that so many men are not saved at all?

It is a fact beyond dispute that some who hear and know the gospel, have no part or lot in its blessings. Why is this?

1. Many do not care to be saved from their sins. This is not the kind of salvation which they would have. If they could be saved in their sins, they would like that full well. But they have no desire to be saved from their sins. The punishment they would gladly avoid if they conveniently could; but the presence of sin and its daily practice is no source of grief or trouble

to them.

2. Some have a sort of desire, but yet are not willing to be saved from sin. They have seen so much of the hatefulness of sin as to wish to be saved from it; just as many drunkards wish to be saved from their cups, but you cannot for their life get them to sign a temperance pledge. This is often the case with sinners. They mistake their desires, for a willingness; but they are not really willing. They often pretend they are willing, but if you push them you will find they are not. They will draw back and will not go straight forward in the gospel path of faith in Christ Jesus and of self-renunciation.

3. Many mistake entirely the nature of this salvation, and hence fail of embracing and securing its blessings. They are looking for salvation from punishment and from hell. Hence the thing they have their eye upon is not a pure heart, but a hope. They want to be rid of their fears. They would fain have a salvation, but not this, which consists in deliverance from their sins. They would fain have a Savior, but not Jesus, for He saves men from their sins. They cannot get Him to do the thing they want done; for He will save none from hell who will not be first saved from sin. Hence many fail because they are trying to make Jesus Christ serve with their sins. Their effort is to induce Jesus to take them in their sins, and make them--in this state, His people, and give them heaven. Their essential mistake is that they seek salvation from punishment and not from sin.

4. Others are so self-righteous that they really depend on their outward morality for salvation, and of course they cannot take Christ as their Savior. It is astonishing to see how many such are found even among those who hear the gospel preached in its purity. They reason in their own hearts--"If this or that professor is saved, I shall be, too; for I am as good as he is. My life is as fair and unblemished as the life of any professed Christians within my knowledge." They are blessing themselves continually that they are no worse than some Christians are. No wonder that such persons never come to Christ to be saved from their sins.

5. Many are not expecting to be saved without being in some way interested in Christ; but they seek this interest by means of their religious duties or works, and not by simple faith. Their works are after all works of law; and what should be especially noted, they are works of law, put either in the place Christ should occupy, or done as a means of securing the blessings

which are to come from Christ. Hence they are exceedingly strict and precise in their observance of the Sabbath, and of all the external duties of religion, and by this means they hope to get the salvation of the gospel. They know indeed that their hearts are not filled with the love of God. They know that theirs is not a religion of heart-rest, of joy in the Holy Ghost, and deep peace of conscience. They find in themselves none of that which lifts them above the world. Most strict are they in their outward life, but without a particle of true religion. They forget that religion belongs to the heart, and that all their duties are nothing but self-righteousness. A man might keep every one of God's commandments in the letter, from the day of his birth to the day of his death, and yet know no more of the real gospel of Christ than a heathen does. All his observance of law might not give him even the first idea of salvation by faith in Christ. I have often thought of what Paul said to the Christians at Rome on this point; "What shall we say then? That the Gentiles which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith: but Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling-stone." The Gentiles who had no law or righteousness of their own, attained readily to the righteousness which is by faith. But Israel who was following hard after a mode of righteousness, failed of receiving the gospel. Why this failure? The apostle gives us the clue to the answer: "They sought it not by faith, but as it were by works of law." Their self-righteousness prevented their getting a correct estimation of the gospel. The gospel did not take hold of them; it could gain no access to their souls.

But the Gentiles who had no law and no self-righteousness to stand in their way, readily apprehended the gospel.

Now many persons brought up in pious families and under gospel light are in a state similar to ancient Israel. They have too much good morality and self-righteousness to come to Jesus just as if they had none at all; and yet all this time they know that their own hearts are a moral desolation.

6. Many are endeavoring to get faith by works. They see their need of faith, and they think to get faith not by simply believing, but by setting about a series of works. When they have practiced works long enough, they seem to

suppose that faith will be wrought out as a product of their working.

Now this is strange indeed! As if they could perform duty without faith, and as if their duties, performed without faith, would be so acceptable to God that He would give them faith as their reward for duties wrought out in the spirit of unbelief! As if God had never said--"Whatsoever is not of faith is sin!" How marvelous that men should think to get faith by mocking God, and by sinning against God! How is it possible that men with our Bible in their hands should hope to get salvation without faith, or faith by works and without believing? Yet so it is. Instead of resting right down upon the divine promises by simple faith, they go to work to get faith by works of righteousness! Nothing can be more plain than that such persons misapprehend the gospel scheme of salvation by grace alone, through faith in a crucified Savior.

IV. Why is it that so many are saved only in part?

It is a fact too obvious to be denied or doubted that many Christians stumble and fall in their Christian course. They show that they have not thoroughly taken hold of this Jesus who saved His people from their sins. Why is this failure of real salvation?

1. Some apprehend their necessities only in part. They have only a partial view of their real need of such a Savior from sin as Christ is. They are so far blind to their necessities that they do not lay hold of Christ with an active, earnest faith. They almost assume that they are already saved, and thus entirely misconceive their own real case.

2. Others apprehend Christ only in part, having very imperfect notions of His offices and character. It would seem that the great mass of professed Christians are looking to Christ to forgive their sins and secure their pardon; but this is all. They look for no sanctifying influence or agency from Jesus Christ. In place of this they resort to a notion of Christ's imputed righteousness. It is remarkable that so many Christians have settled down in this notion of an imputed rather than imparted righteousness; on the notion that Christ, instead of imparting, imputes righteousness to His people; instead of begetting in them personal holiness, makes over to them the credit of His own holiness, while they are yet unsanctified; instead of making them holy in fact, only accounts them holy in law, while they are

really sinful. This is a most strange and singular doctrine indeed. I am well aware it is not singular in the sense of being uncommon or out of fashion; but it surely is most strange in view of either Bible teachings, or the essential nature of things. Its advocates must read our text thus--not "He shall save His people from their sins"--but, shall save them from the punishment of their sins. Salvation from punishment is to them the essential thing in the gospel. They do not, to be sure, expect men to be saved without holiness; but they suppose that death secures deliverance from sin; and then to finish the work, Jesus imputes to them His own righteousness. This they deem all-sufficient as both fitness and title to heaven.

Said a Presbyterian minister of high standing in his church--"I never heard of such a thing as this--that Christ is the sanctification of the soul!" Horrible! Horrible!! This, a leading man in the Presbyterian church, and yet has not heard that Christ is a Sanctifier of His people--seems never to have heard that Jesus "saves His people from their sins!"

This class of Christians have some notion that there is a Holy Ghost who will have some agency in sanctifying His people just at death, or just after death--somehow, and somewhere near the eventful point of death, but just how or when is certainly not made very definite in their teachings. How it is done in cases where death supervenes suddenly, or where disease arrests all sane action of the mind, I believe is not distinctly stated. Yet death is relied on as the great sanctifier! The Christian in the prospect of death is encouraged and animated with the hope that his deliverance from sin is just at hand! All this is said as confidently and solemnly as if the Bible had said, not of the child Jesus, but of death,--"Death's name shall be called Jesus--for death shall save you from your sins;" or as if God had never said--"Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord."

O how great and how prevalent is this difficulty--men apprehend Christ only in part, and seem incapable of apprehending Him in all His precious relations!

3. Many who have known something of the gospel live on their resolutions, and not on Christ. They are not perhaps aware of this fact; but if they ever come to depend on Christ, they will see that they have been trying to brace themselves up on the strength of their own resolutions.

4. Many depend on faith without any resolution. Theirs is a puny, sickly faith, void of energy or activity. Now both these last mentioned classes are utterly mistaken; both those who depend on resolutions without faith, and those who trust in faith without resolutions. Both equally miss the very thing which the gospel requires, and which alone can ensure success--namely, resolving and executing in the promised strength of Jesus Christ.

Again, many who know something about the necessity of having a pure heart, are yet seeking comfort without purity. They give themselves up to pray for comfort and happiness, while all the time they are inflicting self-torture by the indulgence of sin. They act as if they supposed that by His own arbitrary act God could make them happy and fill their souls with blessedness, while yet their hearts are full of sin; than which, no more rank delusion or essential absurdity was ever broached by mortals.

Yet again, some want to be delivered from sin because they want the personal comfort of being sanctified. Inasmuch as their desires extend not at all beyond themselves, and are hence purely selfish, there is good reason why they get so little of that blessing which they so selfishly seek.

5. Many satisfy themselves with the hope of a future salvation only. They are satisfied with the hope of its coming at length, and can forego the present possession without any painful solitudes. It is enough for them that they shall ultimately go to heaven, and they seem not to be straitened with the intense desire of entering into the deep rest of the gospel at once. When persons begin to be pressed strongly with the desire for present and full salvation, there is hope for them that deliverance is near. When like the prodigal son, they begin to be in want; then they become painfully conscious that there is a mighty famine in the land where they are, and that starvation stares them in the face; so that when their thoughts revert to the bread in plenty, in their father's house, there is a deep yearning of desire and a stirring up of purpose--then there begins to be hope in their case. But many content themselves with the hope of future salvation, and have no strong conceptions of the power of Jesus to secure for them a present salvation. Thus they slide along, and never know half the present power, the present value and present blessedness of gospel salvation.

6. Many draw back through fear of the present consequences of being pure from sin. They see, or think they see the trials to which it may subject them,

and they shrink before these trials--as if the blessing of a pure heart must cost too much!

7. Many think their sins are forgiven, and seem to satisfy themselves with the hope that they are justified before God. They know they live in sin, but they strangely imbibe the impression that they are accepted of God, are His real children, and have a well-founded hope of eternal life. Of this class, one thing must be certain; they have not one particle of religion. If they can content themselves and bless their souls that they are justified, and then live along without a devoted life and without a penitent, grateful heart, drawn to God evermore by a sense of His pardoning grace, they have not the first particle of real religion. For how can this state of mind consist with real love to God? How can there be real love to God in the soul, which yet shall not "constrain" the soul to love God and do His will?

8. Multitudes who have professed religion have lost their path, have got out of the way; are thrown off their track, and are now wandering like boys in the woods; going round and round forever in a circle perhaps when they think they are steering a straight line and in the right direction. Whoever has been really lost in the woods so as to lose utterly all his points of compass and to have his head completely turned, will understand the situation of multitudes of professed Christians. They once knew what it was to believe, and rejoice in hope--to live under the smiles of God's countenance; but they have sinned; they have got out of the way; for days and weeks, they are lost in the wilderness of sin. Dark clouds and dense fogs alternate around their path, and they feel sadly desolate. They seem to be as much at a loss what to do, as if they had never known the way of life. A darkness that can almost be felt gathers around and seem to press its thick gloom hard upon them on every side. I recollect to have seen the remark in some of the old writers, that "it is one of the hardest things in religion for a backslider to return to God." At first I thought this a strange remark, and said to myself--"How can this be?" But subsequent observation and reflection showed me that there is much truth in it, and I have seen many striking manifestations of its truth. So doubtless have you. You have seen professed Christians get out of the way; begin to struggle and flounder; plunge into the mire, and only get in the deeper for all their struggles to get out. They even begin to doubt whether they were ever converted, and perhaps even whether anybody else is, not even excepting those who are most esteemed for piety.

They may next question whether there is any such thing as conversion, or whether the Bible be true. They find no God to pray to, and when they attempt to pray, it is as if they were speaking into the vacant air. When Christians get away from God they often go farther into doubts and skepticism than they did before they were converted at all. Some dreadful cases of this sort are a warning--a portentous warning against the perils of backsliding.

9. But it often happens that those who go not nearly so far as this, and who never doubt the truth of the Bible, yet get away so far that they lose their way and do not know at all how to get back. This leads me to say that when these persons become anxious and perplexed, one reason why they fail of finding their path is, they seek it without their guide. They think they must get back on to the right track before they can have Christ to help them. They think they are seeking the track in order to find Christ there. Like a man lost in the wilderness, who is trying to get out somewhere, so that he can get a guide, he pitches into a slough on this side, and into a thorn bush on that side, and never thinks to ask himself--How can I hope to get out of this dreadful swamp, in this pitchy darkness too--without a guide? So the Christian sets himself to work self-righteously with all his might, to get relief. Like the lost traveler, he runs; he shouts at the very top of his voice and makes the deep glens of the forest echo with his cries; he rushes into thickets and brambles, and plunges into sloughs of deep mire, and wears out his strength in vain: alas, it does not seem to occur to him to ask--How can I ever extricate myself from this dreadful condition without my guide? See him; his heart struggles intensely; he cries, "O that I knew where I might find Him!" All is discouragement. What is the matter? The trouble is--he has no guide. Where is his guide? Where is his Jesus? Has Jesus lost sight of His dear child? O no; He is following hard and close after him; crying in his ears--"Lo, this is the way, walk ye in it." He draws near; He offers to the lost wanderer His own hand to help and to guide. Alas, that the poor and the guilty wanderer will rely on his own wisdom to find the way himself, and on his strength to get out of his deep Slough of Despond; and will not cast himself wholly and at once on the offered help of his present Savior!

How many times have I seen people in this state, pressed with trouble, till they actually give up all for lost, and then bethink themselves of one more last resort--just to leave themselves simply in the hands of Jesus: then

salvation comes! They return to the first simple thing of the gospel--let go of self-dependency and cast themselves on Christ--or rather--drop in the sinkings of their self-despair--drop into Christ alone and there find help! Then they see the pole star of hope, peering through the darkness of their despair.

10. In all this I am speaking of things that I know; for I can well recollect being in this state of mind myself. I was striving to get the salvation of the gospel without Jesus. I had not forgotten that there was a Jesus, but I was conscious of not enjoying His presence and His aid; and the deep inquiry in my heart was, Where shall I find Him? While thus sitting and deeply musing with myself to know why I did not get hold of the gospel, those words of Isaiah came to me--"I will lead the blind by a way which they know not." I saw at a glance that my trouble was--a want of my guide. I had spent many days and hours trying to get hold of salvation. This passage came home to me as if sent on purpose to meet my case. "Now," said I, "the remedy has come. I have been trying to get out of my entanglements without my guide." Here is the explanation. "I have been blind, and I have not taken hold of His hand who says, 'I will lead the blind by a way which they know not.' O let me now take hold of Christ, just where I am, here in this deep and dark wilderness, and all will be well. He is on my right hand and I need not fear."

Again, many do not lay hold of Christ because they totally misapprehend the way, and are trying to do something else first. Instead of committing their whole souls to Christ, they are trying to save themselves. Hence they run hither and thither--every where else but to Christ alone. They do not seem to understand that Jesus is really the Savior from sin, and that they have only to commit themselves to Him at once, just as they are. They seem to have lost the idea that Jesus must be received for just what He is--a Savior from sin; and that they must renounce themselves and receive Him--saying--I never shall keep myself--I renounce forever the expectation of doing anything without laying hold on Thee;--Lord Jesus, hold me up; the work is Thine; I depend on Thee to do it, and on Thee alone will I rest henceforth and forever.

What Christian does not know by his own experience what it is to be thrown into circumstances of great trial, in which the soul is fully brought to say--"Lord, I can not hold myself up at all; I must sink without Thee; Lord, save,

or I perish!"

REMARKS.

1. Many have hope who are not really saved in any proper sense of the word. They are neither saved from sin now, nor will they be saved from hell hereafter.
2. No one has reason to hope for heaven any further than he is really saved from sin.
3. They who possess the religion of the gospel and yet are not sanctified, virtually bring up an evil report against the gospel. They say, "I am a Christian, but I know that I am not saved from sin. I embrace a gospel which professes to save from sin, you see in me how much its professions are worth." What must be the influence of such a testimony?
4. When a Christian commits himself to Jesus to save from sin, it is well for him to use this argument in prayer; "Lord, it will dishonor Thee if Thou dost not save me from all sin. I have trusted in Thee; I do now take hold of Thy promises; let them be fulfilled in my case, and let all men seeing what Thy grace has done for me, know Thy salvation."
5. Some seem not to have in view Christ's honor, but their own. They think they shall disgrace themselves if they do not overcome temptation; but they do not feel that the greatest evil of all is that they will thus dishonor Christ.
6. If any man will believe, he shall see no other difficulty. No obstacle can possibly be in his way to shut off the power of the gospel from his soul, when once he has embraced the sinner's Savior by a living faith.
7. The great difficulty now is for the Savior to persuade men to believe, and to cast themselves on Him by a perpetual self-renunciation and a perpetual dependence. Let me ask you, my hearers, how many of you can testify that this is the case with yourselves: that in your own individual case, Jesus has to your certain knowledge been laboring to present Himself before you in such inviting forms as should inspire faith in Himself; but He has labored almost, or perhaps altogether in vain.
8. Half-way believers are the greatest stumbling-blocks in religion. They profess to embrace Christ, and to be religious, and yet fail of having grace enough to

overcome sin. O! if they would only embrace Jesus, so as to be full of His Spirit, how greatly would they honor their Lord! As it is, how earthly-minded, sensual, and devilish do they become! No wonder they are ashamed to say that Jesus is a Savior from sin. How can they bear such testimony without reading themselves out of the pale of the heirs of heaven?

[Back to Top](#)

The Self-Hardening Sinner's Doom

Lecture VII

May 9, 1849

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Pro. 29:1: "He that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

In discussing this subject I will consider:

- I. When and how persons are reprov'd*
- II. God's design in reprov'ing sinners*
- III. What it is to harden the neck*
- IV. What is intended by the sinner's being suddenly destroyed, and*
- V. What is implied in its being without remedy*

I. When and how persons are reprov'd.

God's reproof of sinners may properly be considered as embracing three distinct departments; namely, reproof by means of His word, by means of His providence, and through His Spirit. My limits will allow me to make only a few suggestions under each of these heads.

1. God reprov's the sinner by His word whenever He in any way presents

truth to his mind through His word, which shows the sinner His sins, which reveals to him duties that he is not performing. Any such revelation of duties not done, and of sins positively committed is reproof from God. Suppose you are a parent, and you point out to your child some neglect of duty. You by this act reprove your child. There may be connected with this some degree of threatening explicitly announced, or there may not be; in either case it is reproof for it must always be understood that threatening is involved. Hence if you call the attention of your child to anything in his conduct which displeases you, this very act is reproof. So when God by the revealed truth of His word calls the sinner's attention to the fact of sin, He virtually reproves him, and this is God's intention in calling his mind to the fact of his sin.

2. By God's providence sinners are reprov'd, when their selfish projects are defeated. Sinful men are continually planning selfish schemes, and God often through His providence frustrates those schemes; and does so for the very purpose of reprov'g their projectors. He could not rebuke them in a more emphatic way than this.

Sinners often form ambitious projects. The student seeks for himself a great name as a scholar; in other spheres, men seek the renown of the warrior, or the civilian--their aspiration being to enroll their names high above their fellows on the pillar of fame; but God in His providence blasts their hopes, frustrates their plans, and would fain make them see that they had better by far get their names written in the Lamb's book of Life. So He blots out their name on Ambition's scroll as fast as they can write it there; as if He would show them their folly, and allure them to write it where no power can ever erase it.

Again, it often happens that men by means of their selfishness become involved in difficulty; perhaps by a selfish use of their property, or by a selfish indulgence of their tongues; and God springs His net upon them, and suddenly they are taken, and find themselves suddenly brought up to think of their ways, and to experience the mischiefs of their selfish schemes. How often do we see this! Men make haste to be rich, and start some grasping scheme of selfishness for this purpose; but God suddenly springs His net upon them--blasts their schemes, and sets them to thinking whether there be not a "God in heaven who minds the affairs of men."

Another man finds himself entangled in lawsuits, and his property melts away like an April snow; and another pushes into some hazardous speculation--till the frown of the Almighty rebukes his folly.

As men have a thousand ways to develop their selfishness, so God has a thousand ways to head them back in their schemes and suggest forcibly to their minds that "this their way is their folly." In all such cases men ought to regard themselves as taken in the net of God's providence. God meets them in the narrow way of their selfishness, to talk with them about the vanity and folly of their course.

Everything which is adapted to arrest the attention of men in their sins may be regarded as a providential reproof. Thus, when God comes among sinners and cuts down some of their companions in iniquity, how solemn often are those dispensations! Often have I had opportunity to notice these effects. Often have I seen how solemn the minds of sinners become under these reproofs of the Almighty. Their feelings become tender; their sensibilities to truth are strongly excited. Who can fail to see that such events are designed to arrest the attention, and to rebuke and reprove them in their course of sin?

Every obstacle which God in His providence interposes in your way of selfishness, is His reproof. You can regard it in no other light.

God sometimes reproves sinners in a way which may be deemed more pungent than any other. I allude to that way which the Bible describes as heaping coals of fire on an enemy's head. A man abuses you; and in retaliation, you do him all the good in your power. Glorious retaliation! How it pours the scorching lava on his head! Now God often does this very thing with sinners. They sin against Him most abusively and most outrageously; and what does He do? How does He retaliate upon them? Only by pouring out upon them a yet richer flood of mercies! He pours new blessings into their lap till it runs over. He prospers their efforts for property; enlarges their families like a flock, and smiles on everything to which they put their hand. O how strangely do these mercies contrast with the sinner's abuse of his great Benefactor!

I can recollect some cases of this sort in my own experience, when the deep consciousness of guilt made me apprehend some great judgments from God. But just then, God seemed in a most remarkable manner to reveal His

kindness and His love, and to show the great meekness of His heart. O what a rebuke of my sins was this! Could anything else so break my heart all to pieces? Who does not know the power of kindness to melt the heart?

So God rebukes the sinner for his sins, and seeks to subdue his hard heart by manifested love.

Often sickness is to be regarded as a rebuke from God. When persons for selfish purposes abuse their health and God snatches it away, He in a most forcible way rebukes them for their madness.

Sometimes He brings the lives of men into great peril, so that there shall be but a step between them and death; as if He would give this movement of His providence a voice of trumpet-power to forewarn them of their coming doom. So various and striking are the ways of God's providence in which He reproves men for their sins.

3. God also reproves men by His Spirit. According to our Savior's teachings, the Spirit shall "reprove the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment." Hence when sinners are specially convicted of sin they should know that God has come in His own person to reprove them. His Spirit comes to their very hearts, and makes impressions of truth and duty there--revealing to the sinner his own heart, and showing him how utterly at variance it is with a heart full of divine love.

Again, I have no doubt that in the present as in former days God reproves men of their sins by means of dreams. If all the reliable cases of this sort which have occurred since the Bible was completed were recorded, I doubt not they would fill many volumes. I am aware that some suppose this mode of divine operation upon the human mind has long ago ceased; but I think otherwise. It may have ceased to be a medium of revealing new truth--doubtless it has; but it has not ceased to be employed as a means of impressing and enforcing truth already revealed. Sometimes the great realities of the coming judgment and of the world of doom are brought out and impressed upon the mind with overwhelming force by means of dreams. When this is the case, who shall say that the hand of the Lord is not in it?

A striking instance of a dream in which the hand of the Lord may be seen, is related by President Edwards. One of his neighbors, an intemperate man,

dreamed that he died and went to hell. I will not attempt to relate here the circumstances that according to his dream occurred there. Suffice it to say that he obtained permission to return to earth on probation for one year, and was told distinctly that if he did not reform within one year, he must come back again. Upon this he awaked, under most solemn impressions of the dreadful realities of the sinner's hell. That very morning he went to see his pastor, Pres. Edwards, who said to him--"This is a solemn warning from God to your soul. You must give heed to it and forsake your sins, or you are a ruined man for eternity." The man made very solemn promises. When he had retired, Edwards opened his journal and made an entry of the principal facts; the dream, the conversation, and of course the date of these events. The inebriate reformed and ran well for a time; attended church and seemed serious; but long before the year came around, he relapsed, returned to his cups, and ultimately, in a fit of intoxication opened a chamber door in a shop which led down an outside stairway--pitched headlong and broke his neck. Pres. Edwards turned to his journal and found that the one year from the date of his dream came round that very night, and the man's appointed time was up!

Now it is no doubt true that in general, dreams are under the control of physical law, and follow, though with much irregularity, the strain of our waking revelries; and for this reason many persons will not believe the hand of the Lord ever works in them; yet their inference is by no means legitimate; for God certainly can put His hand upon the mind dreaming as well as upon the mind waking, and multitudes of instances in point show that He sometimes does.

Again, God reproves the sinner whenever His Spirit awakens in the mind a sense of the great danger of living in sin. I have often known sinners greatly affected with the thought of this danger--the terrible danger of passing along through life in sin, exposed every hour to an eternal and remediless hell.

Now these solemn impressions are God's kind warnings, impressed on the soul because He loves the sinner's well-being, and would fain save him if He wisely can.

4. Often God's Spirit gives sinners a most impressive view of the shortness of time. He makes them feel that this general truth applies in all its power to themselves--that their own time is short, and that they in all probability

have not long to live. I am aware that this impression sometimes originates in one's state of health; but I also know that sometimes there is good reason to recognize God's own special hand in it; and that men sometimes ascribe to nervous depression of spirits what should be ascribed directly to God Himself.

Again, God often makes the impression that the present is the sinner's last opportunity to secure salvation. I know not how many such cases have fallen under my own observation, cases in which sinners have been made to feel deeply that this is to be the very last offer of mercy, and these the very last strivings of the Spirit. My observation has taught me in such cases, to expect that the result will verify the warning--that this is none other than God's voice, and that God does not lie to man, but teaches most solemn and impressive truth. O how does it become every sinner to listen and heed such timely warnings!

Again, God's Spirit reproves sinners through their particular friends, or through gospel ministers. The affectionate admonitions of a brother or a sister, a parent or a child--a husband, or a wife, how often have these been the vehicle through which God has spoken to the soul! His minister also, God often employs for this purpose, so directing their minds that they in fact present to the sinner the very truth which fits his case, and he says, "It must be that somebody has told the minister all about my thoughts and feelings. Who can it be? I have never told anybody half so much of my heart as he has preached today." Now in such cases you may be safe in ascribing the fitting truth to the guiding hand of the divine Spirit. God is making use of His servant to reprove the sinner.

In all such cases as I have now been adducing, the reproofs administered should be ascribed to the Spirit of the Lord. In the same manner as God often in various ways administers consolation to penitent souls; so does He administer reproof to the impenitent. He has a thousand modes of making His voice audible to the sinner's conscience, and in His wisdom He always selects such as He deems best adapted to produce the desired result.

II. The design of God in reproving sinners.

1. One thing aimed at is to press them with the means of reform. A benevolent God sincerely desires their salvation and honestly does all He

wisely can to secure this desired result. Hence His oft repeated reproofs and warnings. He will at least leave them without excuse. They shall never have it to say--"Oh, if we had only been forewarned of danger in those precious hours and years in which salvation was possible!" God designedly forestalls such exclamations by taking away all occasion, and putting in their mouths a very different one--"How have I hated instruction and my heart despised reproof!"

2. For this purpose God forewarns the sinner in season. Take the case of the man who dreamed of going down to hell. This dream was a loud and timely warning, adapted as well perhaps as any warning could be to induce reform and real repentance. It effectually took away all excuse or apology for persisting in his sins.

3. God designs by these reproofs to prepare men for the solemn judgment. It is in His heart to do them good--secure their seasonable--that is, their present, immediate repentance, so that they may meet their God in peace at last. His benevolence prompts Him to this course and He pursues it with all His heart.

4. It is no doubt equally true that the great God designs to be ready Himself for the final judgment--to meet every sinner there. He foresees that it will be important for Him there to show how He has dealt with each sinner--how often and how faithfully He has acted towards them the part of a kind Father. For this end every reproof ever given to a sinner will come in place. That dream recorded by Pres. Edwards will then be found recorded also by an angel's pen--to be revealed before all worlds then and there! This is one step in the process of parental efforts for reclaiming one sinner. The admonition so faithfully given by Pres. Edwards is another. All will go to show that truly God has been "long suffering towards sinners because He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Thus will God in these providential warnings glorify Himself by exhibiting His true character and conduct. Nothing more is ever needful in order to glorify God than that His true character and conduct should be known as it is. The developments brought out at the judgment-day will thus reveal God, and of course will enhance His glory.

5. It is also interesting to see how God makes one warning create another.

One providential event, sent as a judgment upon one sinner, multiplies its warning voice many fold as it falls upon the ears of hosts of other sinners. God cuts down one out of a class of hoary sinners, or of sinners in middle life, or in youth, and the event speaks in notes of solemn warning to hundreds. At Rome N.Y., several years ago a great revival occurred, the power of which rocked and rent the stout hearts of many sinners, as the forest trees are rocked and rent by a tornado; but with it came some awful judgments revealing another form of the mighty hand of God. There were in that place a small class of hard drinkers who seemed determined to resist every call from God to repent. On the Sabbaths they would get together for drinking and reveling. On one of these occasions, one of their number suddenly fell down dead. Mr. Gillett, pastor of the church in that place, hastened to the spot, found the fallen man yet warm, but actually dead; and turning to the surrounding company of his associates, said, "There--who of you can doubt that this man has gone right down into hell!" This case made a deep and thrilling impression.

6. Another man, a famous apostate from a profession of religion, greatly opposed the revival. All at once God smote him with madness, and in his insane ravings he sought to take his own life. Men by turns had to watch him and restrain him by violence from committing suicide. Ere long he died a most horrid death--an awful warning to hardened apostates of their impending doom! So God tries to reform and save guilty men.

Again, God would manifest the utter madness, recklessness and folly of sinners. How striking it will appear in the judgment to see such a multitude of cases of reproof brought out to light, and then in connection to see the folly and madness of sinners in resisting so many reproofs! What a gazing-stock will sinners then be to the gathered myriads of intelligent beings! I have sometimes thought this will be the greatest wonder of the universe, to see the men who have displayed such perfect and long-continued infatuation in resisting so much love and so many kind and most heart-affecting appeals and reproofs! There they will stand monuments of the voluntary infatuation of a self-willed sinner! The intelligent universe will gaze at them as if they were the embodiment of all that is wondrous in madness and folly!

III. What is it to harden the neck?

The figure is taken from the effect of the yoke on the bullock. Under constant

pressure and friction the skin becomes callous, and past feeling. So with the sinner's conscience. His will has resisted truth until his constant opposition has hardened his moral sensibility, and his will rests in the attitude of rebellion against God. His mind is now fixed; reproofs which have heretofore chafed his sensibilities no longer reach them; friction and resistance have hardened his heart till he is past feeling. No dispensations of providence alarm him; no voice from God disturbs him; under all appeals to his reason or conscience his will is doggedly fixed; his moral feelings are insensible.

In this state, one might well say, the neck is hardened. The figure is pertinent. Who has not seen cases of this sort? Cases of men who have become so hardened that every reproof passes by them as if it touched them not--as if their moral sensibility had ceased to be any sensibility at all. I was struck the other day in conversing with a man of seventy-five, with his apparent insensibility to religious considerations. Are you a Christian, said I? "No; I don't know anything about them things--what you call Christians. I never murdered anybody, and I guess I have been as honest as most folks in my way."

But are you prepared to enter heaven--to go into another state of existence, and meet God face to face? "O, I don't believe anything about them things. If I only live about right, that's enough for me." I could make no impression on such a mind as his; but God will make such men know something about these things by and by. They will change their tone ere long!

You sometimes see men in this condition who have given their intelligence up to embrace error, and have of free choice put darkness for light, and light for darkness; have stultified themselves in their own iniquities, and have said to evil, "Be thou my good." These have a seared conscience and a hard heart; their neck is an iron sinew, and they are fixed and fully set never to yield to God's most reasonable demands.

What then shall God do with such men? The text tells us. They "shall be suddenly destroyed, and that without remedy." This leads me to inquire.

IV. What is meant by being suddenly destroyed?

1. It implies their being cut off unexpectedly, in such an hour as they think not. We often speak of things as coming suddenly not because they come early in life, but because they fall upon men all suddenly and without being

at all anticipated. In this sense the term suddenly seems to be used in our text. When some awful stroke of God's providence falls suddenly among us, smiting down some sinner in his sins, we say--What a sudden death! What an awful dispensation! So the Bible says, while they cry "Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, and they shall not escape." No forewarning is given; no herald with trumpet-call proclaims the coming of that death-shaft; but all suddenly it cuts the air and strikes its blow! It has no need to strike another! Noiseless as the falling dew it comes; with velvet step it enters his bed-chamber; in such forms as no skill or power of man can baffle, it makes its approaches; death raises his bony arm--poises that never-erring shaft--in a moment, where is the victim? Gone; but where? The Bible says, he is "suddenly destroyed." Does this mean that he is borne up as on a chariot of fire to heaven? Where the wicked men of Sodom and Gomorrah--"set forth as an ensample" of the doom of the wicked--caught away up to heaven in mounting columns of fire and brimstone? If that had been, methinks all heaven would have fainted at the sight! Or were the people of the old world, who had all corrupted their way before God, and who were so full of violence and bloodshed that God could not endure them on earth--were they all swept by the flood into heaven, while poor Noah, scorned by the men of his generation, must toil many long years to prepare him an ark to save himself and family from being also destroyed into heaven?

2. What infinite trifling is this with God's words! To say that the sinner's destruction is only taking him by the shortest route and the quickest way into heaven! Does God say or mean this? No! If it had been His purpose to deceive men, He could not have taken a more direct and certain method than this, of calling the taking of men suddenly to heaven, destruction! No, this mode of using language belongs to Satan and not to God. We should never confound the broad distinction between the God of truth and the Father of lies!

V. What is meant when this destruction is said to be "without remedy?"

1. That this destruction can not be arrested. It comes with resistless and overwhelming power, and seems to mock all efforts made to withstand its progress. A most striking exemplification of this appeared in the dreadful Cholera which swept over many of our cities some years ago. I was then in

New York city--an eye-witness and more than an eye-witness of its terrific power. My own system experienced its withering shock. A man of the strongest constitution occupied a room adjacent to mine; was attacked the same hour that I was, and within a few hours was a corpse. Its powerful sweep was appalling. You might as well put forth your hand to stay the tornado in its rush of power as think to withstand this messenger of the Almighty. So with those forms of destruction which come at God's behest to overwhelm the hardened sinner in destruction. They come with the strides and the momentum of Omnipotence. The awful hand of God is in them, and who can stand before Him when once His wrath is moved?

Many other forms of disease, as well as the Cholera evince the terror of Jehovah's arm. The strong man is bowed low; his physician sits by his bedside, powerless for help; disease mocks all efforts to withstand its progress; human skill can only sit by and chronicle its triumph. God is working, and none but a God could resist.

2. The very language shows that the principle idea of the writer is that this destruction is endless. It is destruction--the utter ruin of all good--the blighting and withering of all happiness forever. No rescue shall be possible; recovery is hopeless; it is a grave beyond which dawns no resurrection. The destruction wrecks all hope in the common ruin, and in its very terms precludes the idea of remedy. Can you conceive of another element of terror, not already involved and developed in this most dire of all forms of destruction?

REMARKS.

1. We see how to account for the sudden deaths of the wicked that occur often, and what we are to think of them. Some such deaths have occurred here which were exceedingly striking to me. Here we have seen young men, sons of pious parents, children of many prayers and many warnings; but they waxed hard under reproof; and their days were soon numbered. Away they go--and we see them no more. There was one young man who came here to study. He had been warned and prayed for. Perhaps the Lord saw that there was no hope in any farther effort. His sickness I can never forget; nor his horror as death drew on apace. Away he passed from the world of hope and mercy. I will not attempt to follow him, nor would presume to know his final doom; but one thing I know--his companions in sin received in his death a most solemn and awful warning.

2. The danger of wicked men is in proportion to the light they have. Men of great light are much the more likely to be cut off in early life. Of this we have seen some very striking instances in this place. Some young men have been raised here--were here when I came to the place, and then, in the tender years of childhood and youth they saw their companions converted, and were often affectionately warned themselves. But they seemed to resist every warning and come quick to maturity in moral insensibility. I need not give their names; you knew them once; where are they now? It is not for me to tell where they are; but I can tell where they are not. They are not grown up to bless the church and the world; they did not choose such a course and such an end to their life. They are not here among us; No! the places that knew them once shall know them no more forever. You may call for them in our College halls; in the sad-hearted families where once they might be found; they respond to no call--till the blast of the final trumpet. They knew their duty but too well, and but too soon they apparently settled the question that they would not do it.

That old man of almost four score of whom I spoke was not brought up in any Oberlin. His birth place was in the dark places of the earth--in Canada--where he learned neither to read nor to write. There are children here not ten years old who have forty times as much knowledge on all religious subjects as he. He has lived to become hoary in sin; these children, brought up here need expect no such thing. Tell me where you can find an old man who has been brought up on the midst of great light, who yet lives long and waxes more and more hard in sin and guilt. Usually such men as have great light in their youth will not live out half their days.

3. It is benevolent in God to make His providential judgments in cutting down hardened sinners a means of warning others. Often this is the most impressive warning God can give men. In some cases it is so terrible that sinners have not dared to attend the funeral of their smitten associates. They have seemed afraid to go near the awful scene--so manifest has it been that God's hand is there. In many instances within my personal knowledge the hand of God has cut down in a most horrible manner, men who were opposing revivals. I cannot now dwell upon these cases.

4. We may learn to expect the terrible destruction of those who under great light, are hardening themselves in sin. I have learned when I see persons passing through great trials to keep my eye on them and see if they reform. If they do not

I expect to see them ere long cut down as hopeless cumberers of the ground. Being often reproved yet still hardening their neck, they speedily meet their doom according to the principle of God's government announced in our text.

5. Reproof administered either soon subdues, or rapidly ripens for destruction. This ripening process goes on rapidly in proportion to the pressure with which God follows them with frequent and solemn reproofs. When you see God following the sinner close with frequent reproofs, plying him with one dispensation after another, and all in vain, you may expect the lifted bolt to smite him next and speedily.

6. The nearer destruction is to men, the less as a general thing they fear or expect it. When you hear them cry, "Peace and safety, then sudden destruction" is at hand and they shall not escape. Just at the time when you are saying--"I never enjoyed better health"--just then when you are blessing yourself in the prospect of securing your favorite objects, then sudden destruction comes down like an Alpine avalanche, and there is neither time to escape nor strength to resist. How often do you hear it said--Alas! it was so unexpected, so sudden--who would have thought this blow was coming! Just when we least of all expect it, it fell with fatal power.

7. Sinners who live under great light are living very fast. Those who are rapidly acquiring knowledge of duty, standing in a focal center of blazing light, with every thing to arouse their attention--they, unless they yield to this light, must soon live out the short months of their probation. They must soon be converted, or soon pass the point of hope--the point within which it is morally possible that they shall be renewed. Men may under some circumstances live to the age of seventy and never get so much light as they can in a few days or weeks in some situations. Under one set of circumstances a sinner might get more light--commit more sin and become more hardened in a twelve month than he would under other circumstances in a life of four score years. Under the former circumstances he lives fast. A sabbath school child might in this point of view die an hundred years old. The accumulations of a hundred years of sin and guilt and hardness might in his case be made in one short year. Where light is blazing as it has blazed here; where children have line upon line as they are wont to have here, how rapidly they live! How soon do they fill up the allotted years of probation for the reason that the great business of probation is driven through with prodigiously accelerated rapidity! O how suddenly will your destruction come,

unless you speedily repent! Of all places on earth, this should be the last to be chosen to live in, unless you mean to repent. I would as soon go to the very door of hell and pitch my tent to dwell there, as to come here to live unless I purposed to serve God. Yet many parents bring or send their children here to be educated--in hope often that they will be converted too; and this is well; so would I; but by all means, ply them with truth and press them with appeals and entreaties, and give them no rest, till they embrace the great salvation. Let these parents see to it that their children are really converted. If they pass along without being converted, do you not expect they will soon break away and plunge into some of the dark mazes of error? Who does not know that this is the natural result of resisting great light? "Because they receive not the love of the truth that they may be saved, God shall send them strong delusion that they may believe a lie, and all be damned who believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness." O how they go on with rapid strides down to the depths of hell! You scarce can say they're here, before they are gone. And the knell of their early graves proclaims, "He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy."

[Back to Top](#)

The Death of Saints Precious

Lecture VIII

June 6, 1849

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Psa. 116:15: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."

The sentiment of the text is clearly expressed, leaving us in no doubt as to what it is. God looks upon the death of His saints as an event of peculiar interest.

In discussing this subject I shall

I. State several reasons why the death of His saints is precious in His sight.

II. Show that the death of saints should be precious to us.

III. State some reasons why this is often not the case, and why we fail of viewing this event as God does.

I. Several reasons why the death of His saints is precious in His sight.

1. God deems the death of His saints precious because their happiness is very dear to Him. When they die, they enter at once into eternal rest. Death is to them the gate way to perfect blessedness. Of course, He who deeply rejoices in their happiness cannot fail to sympathize with them most intensely in this eventful period of their existence. If God takes the interest in the welfare of His saints that parents do in the welfare of their children, He cannot be otherwise than greatly interested in their death.

2. God deems their death precious because He can now receive them home from all their wanderings. Unless He had been at pains to subdue their temper and cleanse them from all their sins, they could not bear to dwell with Him, and of course He could not dwell with them. His labors therefore have been not only faithful and kind, but wise and indispensable. And who needs be told that it has cost Him much painstaking, and great watchfulness to prepare them so that He could receive them again to Himself? How diligent and often how long-protracted is the process of discipline by which He trains them to let loose their grasp on earthly and sensual, and selfish pleasures, and set their hearts supremely on the living God! If an earthly parent had a prodigal son, of wayward temper and estranged affections--one who should be in no condition to return home and enjoy its society; but the father, aware of the case, should with great care and pains and with much wisdom and love pursue a train of measures to restore him to the spirit of a son, and should at length succeed; then would not the day of his return home be one of special rejoicing? Ye who are parents can appreciate this; and I therefore ask you if that day which should restore to your embrace such a son--a son who had thus wandered, but had been also thus reclaimed, would not be most precious in your eyes? O, that day would be long remembered in your house! Deeply would its remembrance be enshrined in your hearts! Why should it not be at least equally so with God when His children come home at last to Himself?

3. In a very important sense, when God receives His children home, He receives the reward of all His labors in their behalf. We are apt to speak

only of our reward, when we allude to the joys of saints in heaven; why should we not also think and speak of God's? Has not He deserved a reward for all His cares and sacrifices and labors? And is it not fit that He should receive it? Is it not reasonable that He should rejoice in His own reward, and furthermore, that we should also rejoice with Him?

4. If the parent, in the case I just now supposed, should prepare his son to return home by a wise and careful discipline, that son would naturally think much of his return and of the reward it would secure to himself. But be assured, that father and that mother would think of it not less than their son does. It is the day of their reward, not less than of his. O, how a parent's great love would gush forth! Hear him say--"Now I am rewarded--now I am more than repaid for all my tears and all my toils!" O, this is a gratification, such as none but a parent can appreciate. Those who love their children can understand this, and you need a parent's love in order to understand it as it is. Parents regard their children as a great treasure, and so does God regard His. He often calls them "His treasure," "His inheritance." In a thousand ways He shows how much He loves His children, and how He rejoices over them with joy unspeakable, as if they were His greatest treasure. We need not assume that His love of them is measured by their intrinsic value; no, but rather by the depth of His own benevolent heart. He loves them the more because they are fit subjects for His compassion, and because His great compassion has been so drawn out in their behalf. Do not parents love most tenderly those poor unfortunate children who have most strongly enlisted their compassion; nay, sometimes those guilty children, who have most exercised their patience, wisdom and love in reclaiming them to filial virtue? So God rejoices over His children, brought home from all their wanderings, as one who rejoices over great spoil. Can we not appreciate in some measure how great this joy must be? Is it not said that there is joy over one reclaimed more than over the ninety and nine who went not astray?

5. God accounts their death precious, because He really enjoys their joy better than they do themselves. We are wont to think only of the joy of the departed saint; but suppose ye that God has no sympathy with such joy as theirs? When they come home, and He sees how happy they are, does not He enjoy their happiness with most intense satisfaction? You know how a parent in similar circumstances would weep for very joy in sympathy with

dearly loved children; how much more shall God rejoice in the happiness of those whom He so greatly loves! And the holy angels too; did you never conceive how they receive the glorified saint--with what intense and hearty welcome--with what a gush of new and heavenly delight? Yea, all heaven is filled with new joy when another glorified saint is added to their number. The glorified saints already there, know how to sympathize most fully. We can in some measure conceive how unutterable their emotions will be.

Let it now be considered that the infinite Father casts His eye over this whole scene. With the most intense sympathy He looks down upon the joyous surprise of the newly-arrived saint--upon the joyous sympathy of every holy angel, and upon the thrill of rapturous welcome that vibrates through every glorified saint around the throne. Is it strange then that the death of His saints is most precious in His eyes?

6. Again, their death must be precious to God because He has so long sympathized with them in all their trials, pains, and sorrows. Whatever has touched them has touched the apple of His eye. Hence, when He sees their trials come to a perpetual end; that their last pang has ceased forever, their last sorrow died away to return no more at all, think you not that this event is most precious in His eyes? He has watched all their labors and sorrows with a parent's most tender interest; He has seen them mourning, broken down with grief and penitence; agonizing in their warfare against sin and temptation; when therefore, He shall see all these trials terminate, to be renewed no more--their physical pains and trials cease--all their wants supplied forever, and the state of want passed forever away; when He sees all this, think you not that He rejoices in it with great joy? No doubt He does. There can scarcely be a more erroneous view of God's character than that which denies to Him the attribute of sympathy and joy in the happiness of His creatures.

7. God has the more joy in their death because He never takes them away from earth without providing against the evil consequences which might otherwise result. He always takes care that their death shall not on the whole be any loss, but rather a gain to His church on earth. Hence His joy is not abated by any actual damage done on the whole by their being taken out of the world.

8. God is greatly glorified in their death. Who could witness such a death as

that of our dear sister whose funeral we have this day attended, without giving glory to God for His blessed gospel--glory to God for His abounding grace? And not this case of death only; how many cases have we seen here in which the triumphs of grace have been illustrious? Their exit from earth did not seem to be death; no, it was rather the entrance of a freed, triumphant spirit into a glorious eternity! With what a spirit of calm and fearless triumph they leaned upon the arm of a present Jesus and passed away as in a cloud of glory from our sight! And do not such deaths greatly glorify God?

9. The death of the righteous is also greatly useful to the living. Often it is one of the most precious instrumentalities which God can employ. What does God ever do which more deeply impresses survivors than this? Let it not then be thought strange that God should deem such an event most precious.

II. The death of saints should be precious in our sights.

1. Because it is so in the sight of God. A daughter whose father was dying, said to her mother--I opened my Bible to read, in my sorrow, and I fell upon this text--"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." I then thought--surely if my father's death is precious in God's sight, why should it not be in mine? Now this was simple and truthful. Why not? Does not God take the right views of things? Can we suppose that His views and feelings are not so correct as ours? Can we demand that He should come over to our views and conform Himself to our notions, and not we to His?

He deems the death of His saints precious; shall we deem it calamitous, grievous, and evil? Why shall we not assume that God sees all events and this one of death in particular, in a far more just light than we do, so that we ought to conform our views to His, and not seem to insist that He ought to conform His to ours? Is not His view more broad and deep and in every way more perfect than ours?

2. It is most obvious that we ought to sympathize with God, both in our opinions and in our feelings. If He regards the death of the righteous as being precious because it is joyous to them, glorious to Himself--because it places them beyond the reach of care and trouble, it is plain that every one of these considerations ought to have no less and no different influence on

our minds.

3. Really the entrance of a soul into eternal glory is an event which ought to be regarded as precious in our sight. Before my conversion, and indeed for some little time afterwards, I had had no just conception of the right view to be taken of the death of a saint. But in process of time I had opportunity to witness a most triumphant death. Then I saw its nature and its bearings as I never had before. I could not mourn. Nay, so far was I from mourning over such a death, that I literally held my hands over my mouth to keep myself from shouting. The whole scene seemed to me like celebrating the triumph of a soul ushered into the glorious presence of Jehovah, and not like the gloom of bidding farewell to a friend bound to some unknown clime. You may well suppose that my emotions rose almost beyond control. Many of you perhaps know what it is to have your emotions rise and swell till they seem to be irrepressible. Mine were so when I first came to realize what the death of the righteous really is. Be assured, that death was "precious" to me. It seemed like a precious feast to my soul. So much did I enjoy these views, that I said to my father--then recently converted--"If you were to die today, it seems to me I could not mourn, but should rather rejoice in view of the glory upon which your ransomed spirit would enter."

III. Let us inquire, why it is that we sometimes do not consider the death of saints as precious.

To prevent any misunderstanding, let me say here that in a certain sense it cannot be regarded as unlawful to grieve over the loss of friends. Christ Himself wept over the grave of Lazarus; surely we too may give scope to our natural sensibilities which cannot but suffer when ties so dear are rent asunder. Christ knew that His disciples would grieve at His death; hence He sought to comfort them; but even this comfort did not assume that it was morally wrong for them to feel afflicted at parting with such a friend. Christians learn by their experience that the outward man may be deeply afflicted, while yet the inward man enjoys great consolation. The sensibilities bleed under the wound; but yet the joy of the Lord is such a strength to the soul that many of its tears are tears of submissive, trustful joy.

But let us now pass on to say,

1. That we often fail to regard the death of saints as precious, because of

our own selfishness. The selfishness of surviving friends is so great that they do not look at the great glory and great gain of the departed saint. So much are they absorbed in their own loss, that they seem incapable of looking away to the glory of that dear child of God who has been permitted at last to go home. Of course this must be a very short-sighted view of things. How can we justify it to our minds that we should think only of our own interests, and not of the interests of our dear friends? Why should not their happiness be as dear to us as our own?

2. Sometimes, through unbelief, we do not really appreciate the fact that our deceased friends have gone to eternal glory. I mean that we do not take home this fact to our hearts as a reality. We do not sincerely doubt it; we are ready to prove it against any avowed skeptic; and yet how much we may need one to prove it to our hearts! Nothing is more common than for the mind to hold opinions which yet have not attained their due sway over the sensibilities and the heart. The evidence has commanded the assent of the intelligence, but the mind has not so embraced it, so incorporated it among acknowledged realities, and so learned to act upon it, that it exerts its legitimate influence as truth upon our entire being.

In accordance with this peculiar attitude of mind, mourning friends often act as if they did not believe what the Bible says of the blessedness and glory of the saints in heaven. They may talk of what the Bible teaches on this subject; may theorize upon it, but after all may fail to believe it so that it has the power of a reality upon their hearts. In fact they do not trust their friends with God--do not give their Savior credit for faithfulness in having carefully taken His own loved children to His own bosom in the upper mansions.

3. There is often much unbelief as to its being the wisest and best thing possible for our friends to be taken away just as they in fact are. This is one reason why we do not esteem the death of saints precious. I know it is generally admitted that God has done the best possible thing; but though they may admit this in theory, they yet may not believe it in heart. It is no small matter in such cases to admit fully and believe heartily that infinite love sought the very best result; that infinite wisdom devised the best means to secure it; and that infinite power could not lack the resources to do the best thing in the best way. To take hold of these truths in their broad extent and precious application, soothes the turmoil of the afflicted soul, and

makes the death of a saint seem truly precious. But many fail of this because they do not thoroughly confide in the wisdom and love of God.

4. Often there is much unbelief in regard to the provisions God has made to prevent evil to the church by the death of His servants. We lose sight of the fact that God has been careful to make provision, so that no harm shall accrue to His church. We seem to suppose that the church depends for wise guardianship chiefly upon ourselves, and hence we feel greatly distressed that God should remove important instrumentalities for her prosperity. O, if we only saw that the all-wise God is Zion's best friend, we might quell many of our sad disquietudes. Then no fear lest Zion should suffer, need abate our joy in the precious death of the saints.

5. Sometimes our darkness of mind in regard to the reasons God may have for His conduct, gives us trouble. We do not consider that we ought to have confidence in God's wisdom and love, without seeing His reasons, and that our faith in Him ought to take the place of perceived reasons. When our ignorance makes us tremble for the ark of God, let our faith counteract our ignorance, and say continually--"Is not my Father at the helm?" We ought to have sufficient confidence in God to believe that He has not removed a saint from earth one day too soon--has not done it without having made all needful provision to supply his place and press forward the labors in which he was engaged.

6. We are often in an unrealizing state of mind in regard to the real happiness of the saints in heaven. We may indeed know enough to constrain us to say--"All is well; I could not wish it were otherwise; I can not have any misgivings in this case about the wisdom or the love of God in this death." Yet we may be quite unable to rise to enter into God's views and feelings, so as to feel it precious to have His saints die. We are in a strait; we feel greatly perplexed and troubled;--I can scarcely express it;--we are benumbed and confounded. It was so with me at the death of my wife. Although I could say I would not have it otherwise, yet it was some days before I could get over the numbness which the dreadful shock of her death gave me. But ere long I came into a state in which I could rejoice in her blessedness. Indeed I think I never had a more perfect sympathy with her in all my life than I had then. It seemed to me that I could understand the state of mind of a saint gone home to Jesus. I could see its elements; and could

appreciate in some good measure the amazing depth of their joys and of their peace.

When I stood by the sick-bed of this dear sister, now just gone from us, I remembered how she had often said, "I grow stronger and stronger." And I also recollect one occasion when she said in substance--"I can not conceive how I can think of earthly scenes even when I have reached heaven, and not feel anxiety about them." I told her, faith sufficed for all; she would trust God, and all would be peace. Such a smile came over her countenance as bespoke the presence, already, of the peace of heaven.

When I came to see her die, I could not but think of the blessed words of the text--"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." There she lay, in her last conflict with pain and the ills of mortality. God was just about to receive her to Himself, and to wipe away all her tears forever. O how plain to me then that the death of the saints is most precious!

7. Often we do not allow ourselves to sympathize with God, and enter fully into His views and feelings. If we would only realize how God must regard such an event, we could see why it should be precious in His sight, and consequently why it should be so in ours.

8. Another reason is, we have loved our deceased friends for our own sake. I think this is very often the case. For a few days after my wife died, my sorrows seemed to increase upon me, until it seemed to me that I should go deranged. I had no refuge, and could get no relief only in flying to God as my helper. He seemed to say--Have you not loved your wife for your own sake, and with a selfish affection? If you have loved her only for My sake, you will be willing to let her come and dwell with Me. If you have loved her for the churches' sake, you have no occasion to mourn; I will take care of the church; its interests shall not suffer by the death of your wife.

This showed me my great folly and made me ashamed of my immoderate grief and my selfish regard to my own comfort and happiness. I said to myself--Shall I be thinking of my loss and not of her much greater gain? Besides, God has taken nothing from me that was really mine. My wife was not mine; she belonged to God and not to me; or if in a certain sense she belonged to me, yet she belonged in a far higher sense to God, and shall I grieve because God has taken away what was so properly His own? Can I

mourn that she has gone to heaven?

But the loss experienced by the children: shall I not mourn for them? Yet what is their loss compared with her gain? And will not God take care of the children? Does not God care for these children more than I do? Yes, doubtless He does. These considerations did me immense good.

9. We sometimes fail to see that the death of saints is precious, because we are really unsubmitive. We do not bow to the will of God as revealed in His providences. Often persons are found complaining of what God does in His providences. In such a state of mind, no wonder persons do not see that the death of saints is precious.

Again, some have very low and imperfect views of what death is to a saint. They reverse the Bible order of things. Whereas God says, the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth, they reverse it, and make the day of one's death almost wholly grievous. They have very low conceptions of what heaven is, even though they may really believe in theory what the Bible reveals on this subject.

Again, many are prone to conceive of their Christian friends as gone to the grave, and scarcely think of them as being anywhere else save in the cold ground. Now so long as we take this view of their case, it can not appear precious. An event which should really commit our dear friends to the cold prison of a tomb, and to "corruption and worms," can not be rationally regarded as joyous. But we ought to know better than to think of them as laid in the ground. They are not in the grave, it is only their wasted flesh, which they have done using--which is too poor to be used longer--that is laid in the ground. Why should we mourn the burial of their wasted and worn-out bodies? We might as well gather up their old clothes and bury them with many tears and lamentations because we shall see them no more. No; our dear friends are not in the grave. They have gone to be with Jesus; "absent from the body, but present with the Lord." We are ourselves much more properly in the grave than they.

REMARKS.

1. It is very useful for us to follow the departed saint to the world above. I am sensible that I have greatly failed in this respect. Since my frequent loss of dear

friends has drawn me to think of this, it has been greatly blessed to me. Since I came here to reside, you know I have buried my father, my mother, and a sister; a little daughter; my son-in-law--and my dear wife. These repeated deaths have made me familiar with the thoughts of heaven, and with all that appertains to death as the passage thither. My experience has thoroughly taught me the value of such influences, drawing the mind away from earth and constraining it to hold communion with the eternal world. This deep communion with heaven and heavenly things disrobes death of all terror, and makes it look in every aspect of it, glorious. It has been so in my own case. During my sickness more than a year ago, when for some days I was brought to look upon death as probably near at hand, I found that death in all its aspects was not only not dreadful, but was even altogether desirable. If I thought of leaving my friends, I knew God would take care of them. The pangs of dying were no longer terrible. The thought of being dead was wholly pleasant. There was nothing to fear; everything to desire. Not one aspect of death, or anything connected with it gave me a single pang. How it will be with me when I shall come to die, I can not say; but in that sickness, I was able to appreciate how it might seem to look right into the scenes of dying and entering the eternal world. Then I could close my eyes and seem to lose myself--fully aware that not improbably my next consciousness might be in the eternal state.

2. It is very profitable for us to refuse to pity ourselves and dwell on our own loss. From the time I have alluded to, when the Lord showed me how I ought to rejoice in the perfect blessedness of my departed wife, I refused to pity myself. I said--"Let me rather rejoice that God has saved one whom I so much loved, and has removed her at once and forever away from all pain and sorrow." Shall I not rejoice that she has gone and taken possession of heaven itself? Why not? Could I wish for her greater blessedness than this?

3. If our faith in the gospel be consistent and intelligent, it will lead us to look upon such events as this without murmuring, and without ever counting such events as on the whole sad and painful. Yet let me say, this state of profoundest resignation and this regarding the death of the saints as truly precious, is not inconsistent with human tears and human sighs. Even in repentance there is joy. So when saints die, though we mourn, yet in the depths of our souls we may have the joy of heaven. We may sympathize strongly with our earthly relatives and friends, and yet have the joy of heaven in our souls. Jesus Himself knew how to sympathize with afflicted, bereaved friends, and we may well thank Him

for giving us this precious fact on scripture record, for our consolation down through all time. O how many hearts have been comforted by the sweet record of those sympathizing tears at the grave of Lazarus! Our sympathies may be far less deep and pure than His; yet it is good even for us to learn how to sympathize with afflicted friends. I have found it to be so. Within a few years I have lost friends in every form of relationship; parent, child, sister and wife; and now I find it a luxury to mingle my tears with those who are in any similar affliction. It seems to renew the bonds that bind us together as social beings, and to renew them, moreover, under circumstances well-adapted to make them more tender and hallowed than ever before.

Finally, if the death of saints is precious to God, let it be also to us. If God is pleased and happy in this event, shall we not sympathize with Him? What better thing could God have done for them than He has done? And now shall we not sympathize with Him, and rejoice also with Him, and bless His name for His great mercies to our friends? Surely not to do so is nearly equivalent to refusing to thank God for heaven! Shall we be so ungrateful as to overlook the great gift of a blessed immortality? Shall we act as if God ought to let us live here forever; or ought to keep our friends here as long as we ourselves live; or ought to have provided some better mode of transit from earth to heaven than death? Let us beware how we take exceptions, even impliedly, to God's dealings!

[Back to Top](#)

God Not Pleased with the Death of the Wicked

Lecture IX

June 20, 1849

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Eze. 33:11: "Say unto them, as I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

In discussing these words it will be important to consider,

I. What the death spoken of is not.

II. What it is.

III. Why God has no pleasure in it.

IV. Why He does not prevent it.

V. The only possible way to escape it.

I. What the death spoken of is not.

1. Manifestly this death cannot be merely the death of the body; for all will die this death, whether they turn to God or not; and whether they live a spiritual life or not. The righteous are as really and as much exposed to natural death as the wicked. But the death spoken of in the text is one which may be escaped by turning from one's wicked ways to obedience.

2. The death spoken of cannot be spiritual, or a state of sinfulness; for God represents them as being already in this state. They are now in sinful ways from which He entreats them to turn. But the death spoken of is prospective. God does not ask, Why are ye dead? but Why will ye die?

II. What it is.

Positively, the death spoken of must be the opposite of the life here referred to. This life cannot be natural life, for all, both saint and sinner, are conceived of as being alike in natural life. Of course, the life must be salvation -- eternal life -- that blessedness which saints enjoy in the favor and love of God, begun here, prolonged forever hereafter. Now, if such be the life alluded to, the death, being in contrast with it, must be eternal death; the misery experienced by all God's enemies. As the life referred to here is not a mere state of existence, but a state of positive blessedness, so the death placed over against it, cannot be annihilation -- the natural opposite of mere existence -- but must be misery -- the natural opposite of blessedness.

These remarks must suffice on this point, it being one on which no rational doubt can exist.

III. Why has God no pleasure in the sinner's death?

A few days since you may recollect I preached a funeral sermon, to show that the death of saints is precious in God's sight. Their death is to Him an event of deep interest. But the sinner's death is not so. Here is death in which God has no pleasure. He gives us His own solemn word, nay more, His oath, that He takes no pleasure at all in the death of the wicked. We are now to consider why.

1. The death of saints in which God takes a special interest is only the death of the body; but the death of the wicked is the death of both soul and body together. Both together are involved in misery and ruin. By this I do not mean that either is annihilated. The body we know is not annihilated at death; its constituent elements only change their chemical relations; but do not by any means cease to exist. There is no more reason to suppose the soul experiences annihilation, than that the body does. Indeed there is no reason whatever for supposing that annihilation ever can be the lot of either soul or body. I was amazed to hear some of the Adventists maintain that the threatened death of the wicked is nothing but annihilation, for nothing could be more obvious than that this position of theirs utterly lacked all foundation either in scripture or reason.

2. God has no pleasure in the sinner's death because He is a moral being, and it is contrary to the nature of moral beings to delight in suffering for its own sake. To all moral beings happiness is intrinsically good, and unhappiness is intrinsically evil, and must be from the very constitution of

moral beings. Hence unhappiness can never be a source of pleasure, in itself considered. The view of it as endured by others cannot be deemed a good by any moral being, for its own sake, and considered simply as misery, for the reason that it is what it is -- misery, and not happiness -- the very constitution of a moral being demanding that happiness shall be held as the only good, and misery as intrinsically evil. Even Satan with all his malignity against God can never enjoy the sight any more than the endurance of misery, for its own sake. How much more must this be true of God! Selfishness may wickedly trample down the rights and happiness of others; but yet good to itself, and not misery to others, is its direct object. The consequent misery to others will in its time re-act upon selfish beings with terrible vengeance, harrowing up their souls with the bitterest torture. It is in the very nature of selfishness and sin to accumulate the resources for its own torment, just as benevolence accumulates the means of its own blessedness; and the reason in both cases lies fixed in the changeless nature of moral beings. The selfish cannot enjoy evil-doing let them try ever so much, for it is not in their nature as moral beings to enjoy misery. If it were, they might make a heaven of hell itself. But as it is, their selfish attempts to wrest away others' good will cause misery first to others, and next, ultimately and eternally, to themselves. Sin must be its own tormentor. Neither the sight nor the infliction of misery can ever in itself beget happiness. The nature of all moral beings forbids it.

3. God cannot have pleasure in the sinner's death because His character forbids it. God is not only by nature a moral agent, but He is in character a good moral agent -- a being of infinite benevolence. Hence He cannot delight in misery anywhere, for its own sake, and in view of its own nature. The sight of misery endured is always distressing to a benevolent being, in itself considered. He can acquiesce in it and tolerate its infliction only when circumstances make it necessary as a means for a greater good. In such a case, He might truly say, I have no pleasure in their suffering.

So with God in regard to the sinner's death. Since He is purely and perfectly benevolent, it is contrary to His character that He should find pleasure in the misery of His creatures. Love desires evermore the happiness of all beings, and is from its very nature disposed to secure the highest possible degree of it. God pities the self-ruined sinner; never rejoices in his dreadful doom, for its own sake.

4. It must be that God regards the death of the sinner viewed in itself as a great evil. In its own nature it is an evil of the very greatest magnitude. No finite mind can begin to conceive how great and dreadful this evil is. It needs the sweep of an infinite mind to measure its length and breadth, its depth and its height. None other than the mind of a God can grasp its limitless dimensions, or measure its boundless magnitude. To His mind therefore, the death of the sinner must appear an immensely great evil.

5. God can have no pleasure in the death of sinners because it is a state in which He can wisely show them no more favor. Their relations to His government become such that He is constrained to debar them from all mercy and from all good. Unmingled retribution must now take its course. Mercy has had its day; simple justice must henceforth have unimpeded exercise. So long as the wicked were in this world of probation, God took pleasure in showing them all the favors He wisely could, for it is always in His heart to bless the guiltiest as far as He consistently can; and He seeks to constrain the sinner by His mercies to turn from his sins. But when the sinner has murdered all his probation-time and used up all his mercies upon his lusts, he passes away to another state unknown to Mercy. There he can have not one drop of water to cool his tongue. There his prayers to Father Abraham will be utterly unavailing. On all these points, the account given us by Jesus Christ Himself of the rich man and Lazarus is most full and explicit. Whatever else this account teaches or does not teach, one thing is made plain by it; namely, that God finds it necessary to refuse the least favor to sinners in hell. "Thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things" -- thou hast had them all, and there are no more to be given. Not so much as one drop of water is left for the lost sinner in hell. He begs for this smallest favor, but begs in vain. How dreadful this fact! The lost sinner is in such relations to God that God is compelled to restrain Himself from giving him one drop of water. Even infinite benevolence cannot give so small a favor as this.

Now it is plain that a God of love can have no pleasure in being brought into such a position as this. He took the greatest pleasure in bestowing good upon even the sinner, so long as He wisely could. It was His happiness to send His rain on the just and on the unjust; but when the dreaded hour at last came, and God as the great Executive Magistrate of the universe was compelled to cut down the guilty sinner and show His own eternal abhorrence of sin, then

He could no longer show the sinner the least mercy. This removing the sinner beyond the range of mercy is a thing in which, considered by itself, God can have no pleasure. The same is true of all benevolent beings.

It is remarkable to see how earnestly God repels the slander upon Him of taking pleasure in the sinner's death. The Jews in Ezekiel's time went so far as to use the proverb -- "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." The Most High solemnly rebukes His people for this slander; protests His own innocence of the implied charge, and finally closes with the explicit averment -- "For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth; wherefore turn yourselves and live ye." (Ezek. 18:2, 32)) So also in our text, He takes His solemn oath, and since He could swear by no greater, He swears by Himself. "As I live saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." Therefore let no sinner seek to throw the blame of his own ruin off from himself and upon his Maker. No slander could be more groundless and more foul.

6. Another reason still is that when sinners have outlived their probation and are cut off in their sins, their depravity will be thenceforth unrestrained. How shocking it must be to the pure and holy God to see His creatures giving themselves up to utter and unrestrained depravity -- to see them giving boundless scope to the most odious and horrible rebellion. The book of Revelation speaks of the wicked, under God's punitive judgments, as "gnawing their tongues for pain, and blaspheming the God of heaven because of their pains and of their sores, and yet repenting not of their deeds." Their condition amid the dread realities of hell will not reform them; nay, so far from this, it will only drive them to desperation, and in the utter desperateness of their depraved hearts, they will break out in most horrid blasphemies. O how will sinners damn themselves to a deeper and still deeper damnation! What an unutterable state of depravity will hell be when sin takes its ample, unimpeded course, and has a whole eternity in which to range and ripen, and develop its horrid spirit and terrible tendencies! No wonder that God can take no pleasure in such a world as that.

In that world the sufferings of the wicked will be unmitigated. Here, although their depravity is great, nay, even total, yet so many restraints are upon them that many of them appear quite respectably among their fellow

beings. They are induced to conform outwardly to the rules of good society. Consequently in this world they enjoy many comforts, and ordinarily they have an ample supply for their physical wants. The common pleasures of society, of earthly friendships and relationships, fall to their lot. Consequently they are by no means so miserable as they might be. Indeed they are often wont to think themselves quite happy. And they do doubtless have a sort of feverish enjoyment, poor enough at best, as the portion of the human soul, yet vastly unlike that dreadful state in which every source of enjoyment shall be utterly cut off. There shall be gnawing desire but no gratification; pressing want, but no supply, no employment but groans and sighs and such developments of their depravity as bring their own torturing punishment with them. If the Bible had said nothing about their case we might yet know that they must be purely and utterly miserable; for what source of happiness can remain to them in all the realms of nature, or in all the universe of God? Here they manage to get some good because God is sparing them to give them space to repent, and is trying them if so be He may subdue their hearts by His love; but when they have abused all this good till God can bestow it no longer, what shall remain then? When death shall have smitten their last pleasure, where are they!

IV. But it is time that we should ask, Why does not God prevent the death of the wicked? If He takes no pleasure in it, why should He suffer it to be?

1. You are aware that men have often inferred from God's benevolence that He will not suffer the wicked to be lost. But who has any right to infer this? How does it appear that benevolence cannot inflict a lesser evil for the sake of preventing a greater? Who can prove it unwise for God to create beings and suffer them to continue their existence, although they may sin -- yes, may sin, despite of any power which God can wisely use to prevent it? That is -- for the question resolves itself into this -- who can prove that on the whole more evil than good must result from the existence of a sinning race of moral agents? Who can show that it may not be indefinitely better to have such a race with all the attendant results than not to have created them, or having created them, to establish a government so different from the present as would have prevented it?

But if a God of infinite wisdom and love might give existence to a race who could and should sin, then surely it is no marvel that He should punish them.

Indeed the only marvel is that He should ever do otherwise than punish -- should ever pardon. Pardon, not punishment, is the strange thing. Revelation apart, who could ever infer rationally that God would pardon one sinner? From what data could man infer it? The wisest sinners that ever have lived have made the inference that God could save none. They have seen that God is a Moral Governor, and hence cannot be pleased with sinners. Hence they inferred, and most reasonably too, that He can save none. How could they have made any other rational inference without the aid of revelation?

2. God does not prevent the death of the wicked for the good reason that He cannot wisely do it. Some are shocked at this remark; but why should they be; for what God Himself says on this subject most surely implies that He cannot wisely prevent the sinner's death. He solemnly avers that He has no pleasure in it, and plainly implies that it is in itself an unpleasant and undesirable thing. If so, then He would prevent it if He wisely could. He says to sinners -- "Turn ye, for why will ye die?" implying that He is grieved that they should die, and also that their own turning is the only means of preventing so dreadful a doom. No language could imply more plainly that He cannot and will not do Himself what He commands and exhorts them to do.

To the same purport He says again -- "What could I have done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?" Does not this forcibly imply that God could not do more to secure holiness and save from hell than He actually had done? Now it should be well considered that what God could not do wisely to save sinners, He could not do at all without sinning. There is no middle course between acting wisely and sinning. For God to act otherwise than with wisdom must be wrong.

3. God could not have prevented their destruction by refusing to create them. Many ask, Why did God create men if He knew they would sin? The answer is, He could not forbear to create without Himself sinning. He saw it would be wise to create moral agents, who would sin, and some of whom would be lost; and how could He act other than wisely without forever condemning Himself for wrong-doing? If God has ever in any instance acted unwisely, it has not been in His case as sometimes in ours -- through ignorance. No; there never can be in His case this vindication for acting unwisely. If God in any case does more or less than infinite wisdom

dictates, He cannot but know it, and cannot but regard it as sin.

Now therefore if wisdom dictated the creation of the beings who would become wicked, God could not forbear to create, without personal sin, nay, could not forbear without absolute self-ruin! Do we think it a small matter that God should sin? Then we have not yet begun to take right views of the subject. For God to sin would be to lose His own self-respect -- destroy His own peace and blessedness -- unfit Himself either to enjoy His own character and works, or to govern His universe.

4. God could not wisely have done more than He has done for the sinner's salvation. He has all along done all that Infinite Wisdom has demanded. To have done more or other at any moment would have been sin. And who does not see that it must be a far less evil for God to suffer moral agents to sin than to take Himself any course which is sinful? If either God or His creatures must be ruined by sin, let it be the sinner and not God. It is infinitely better that God should suffer the sinner to ruin himself than suffer Himself to be ruined. By so much the more is this true because the ruin of God by His own sinning would inevitably involve the ruin of the whole universe, a calamity the magnitude of which defies all our comprehension.

We should never lose sight of the great truth that God always acts considerately and wisely. If He creates moral agents who become sinners, He does it wisely, following evermore the dictates of His intelligence and of His benevolence. It is plain that God could not wisely abridge the liberty of moral agents, nor indeed could He save them even if He should, for the very idea of the salvation of a moral agent implies his own voluntary turning from sin. None but moral beings can have salvation from sin and from hell; the existence of moral beings involves a moral government over them, and over them as moral beings, which is the same thing as to say, that they must have the liberty of free voluntary action. If therefore God would have a moral government, He must let it have scope, and meet the results be they what they may. I do not mean that He must preclude Himself from throwing in moral influences to affect their action; but I do mean that their liberty of moral action must not be abridged. His interposing influences must evermore be of a moral and not of a physical or compulsory nature.

I have said that God acts wisely, and cannot act otherwise. I mean this in its fullest extent. It is always true. At every hour and moment of each sinner's

existence God could truly say -- What could I have done more for thee that I have not done? The sinner may misapprehend the case, and may suppose that God might do, or might have done more; but God makes no mistakes; God never misapprehends the real facts of the case.

5. God cannot save men without their concurrence; in the nature of the case they could not be holy without their own concurrence; how then could they be happy without it? Being constituted moral agents, and made subjects of moral government, it must be in every point of view impossible to save them unless they will turn from their sins. God's government must remain moral, and hence He can do nothing inconsistent with its moral nature. If then God works upon the sinner by means of His providence and His Spirit, to the utmost extent He wisely can, and all in vain, there remains nothing more which as a Moral Governor He can do to save him.

6. Another reason why God does not prevent the death of the wicked is that He regards it as a less evil than to interpose in any way possible to Himself, to save them. If they would turn under such influences as He can wisely use, He would rejoice; but He is already going to the utmost limit of His discretion, and how can He go farther? Sooner than go farther, He would let ten thousand worlds go to ruin. Who can find fault with Him for this? Who can blame the all-wise God for following the dictates of His own wisdom? If He should in any single particular deviate from His own sense of propriety and from His own judgment of what is best for the universe, how dreadful the consequences! Perhaps we are not wont to consider that there are bounds beyond which God cannot go, and beyond which He never does go. These bounds are always ascertained by Infinite Wisdom. They have their foundation in the nature of moral agents, and in the exigencies of God's vast government. Who but God Himself can decide how long He can safely bear with a lingering, self-hardening sinner -- and how far He can wisely go in the strivings of His Spirit, and in the favoring arrangements of His providences?

This view of the case is not only in accordance with the Bible, but it is inferred irresistibly from the known attributes of God. Some of you may ask -- How does it appear that God does as much as He can do for the good of each sinner? I answer -- we all know that God is a good and not a wicked being. He is moreover a moral agent, possessing attributes of mind and of

heart, of which our own are a copy, for we are made in the image of God. Of course when we speak of God as a good being, we may, nay, we must reason by analogy drawn from other good beings. If we are good men, we shall of course seek to prevent all possible evil and produce all possible good. This is necessarily implied in our being good men.

Now what is implied in God's being good? That He consecrates Himself to the good of being. Goodness in God implies that He is all awake to prevent all the mischief He wisely can, and secure all the good He wisely can. He knows intuitively that if He is a moral agent as we are; if He has a conscience as we have; if He has moreover a good heart, He will evermore do all He wisely can both to prevent evil and produce good.

7. Yet another reason is that although the evil of the sinner's death is great, yet He can make a good use of it. He can overrule it for important good to others and to various interests in His kingdom. The sufferings of the wicked may be in themselves a very great evil; yet God can bring those sufferings into such relations to His government, and can make them so useful in their influence on other beings, that the good results become in His mind a sort of compensation for the evil, so that on the whole He may see it wise to admit sin with all its results, rather than exclude it by any means possible to Himself.

V. We may now see that the only possible way in which the sinner's death can be avoided, is for the sinner himself to turn from his evil way and live.

The sinner need not look for God to change the policy of His government. He need not expect God to pardon sin without the sinner's repentance and the sinner's faith in Christ. He need not wait for some other name than that of Jesus given among men, whereby they may be saved, or for any other mode in which the sinner may avail himself of that name. God's government being what it is, repentance and faith in Jesus Christ are natural and necessary means of the sinner's salvation. He might as well ask Jehovah to come down from His throne, as ask Him to do anything more or anything different from what He is doing to save sinners. The sinner, therefore, who would be saved, must meet Jehovah's own revealed conditions.

REMARKS.

1. The goodness of God is really no encouragement to those who continue in sin. Hear the rebuke given by the Psalmist -- "Why boastest thou thyself in mischief. O mighty man! The goodness of God endureth continually." Why should you be proud of mischief? Know thou that God is good; and a good God is terrible to the wicked.

I am often amazed to hear persons talk as if the goodness of God afforded some security to those who live in sin. Some of you may be resting on this assumption. But how is this? If the goodness of God has hitherto prevented His using such means as have actually saved you from sin, how can you know but it may likewise prevent His saving you from hell? God has been good all along; but you are yet in sin. If His goodness has not stopped your sinning, how can you hope it will prevent your suffering? If His goodness has not availed to secure your conversion under the most favorable circumstances which even infinite love could arrange, how can you hope it will save you without your being converted? How can you venture on the assumption that God will recede from His ground, and since you will not come to His terms, He will come to yours? Suppose you that goodness and wisdom will ever do this?

It may be that you have not duly estimated the fact that God is immutable -- always good, and always having the same sort of goodness. If then His goodness has not prevented your sinning, and your suffering too, in this world; if all the efforts which goodness has been continually putting forth have hitherto failed, how can you infer that the same goodness may not fail hereafter? Especially when He assures you that now is the accepted time, and now His day of salvation? If His goodness cannot arrest you in your course of sin, in the most favoring hour, how can you hope it will arrest you from going straight down to hell? What can you find either in the Bible or out of the Bible to warrant such an inference as that of your salvation from the goodness of God?

One thing you may certainly know to be fact. God has been always as good as He is now, or as He ever will be. Yet He has created this world; it has fallen into sin; He has visited it with many and sore judgments and much suffering for its sins; has declared that He will send every sinner to hell who will not turn from his evil ways, and has done all He wisely could to make you believe it. And now, can you rationally infer from God's goodness, that you as a sinner have no hell to fear? Ah, no, sinner no. You are moving on fast through the only period of your existence in which salvation is possible; you cannot arrest your progress towards

the grave; you can never change the course of God's government towards sinners. God is too good to suffer any sinner to triumph over justice, or to subvert His own throne.

2. The goodness of God is not the security of the impenitent sinner's salvation, but the guarantee of his damnation. Sinners know this. They are not afraid of God because they think Him wicked, but because they think Him good, and dread the consequences of His goodness. What sinner ever feared injustice from God? Not one. Their fear is that God will deal with them as they deserve. Not without reason is it that they fear His goodness and His justice. These are the very qualities in His character which they have to fear; just as they fear good men and the best men most, not because they are bad men, but because they are good men.

3. The death of the wicked is not inconsistent with God's happiness. I have heard persons say that they never could be happy even in heaven, if they knew that any of their own friends or relatives were in hell; and they seem to wonder how God can be happy while He knows that sinners are in hell. The reason why God will not be unhappy is that He will have the eternal consciousness of having Himself done right, and of not being in any sense or degree to blame for the death of the wicked. When the smoke of their torments shall go up forever and ever, His consciousness will forever affirm -- no blood of theirs is on My raiment. With this consciousness God need not be unhappy in the sinner's eternal death.

4. God will have the eternal consciousness of having laid Himself out to the utmost to save sinners. He knows that He has gone to the very verge of propriety, just as far as He wisely could, at every successive step in their course through a life of sin to their eternal death. What a satisfaction that must be to such a mind as His to be able to say -- "What could I have done more to My vineyard that I have not done" in it? It is no fault of Mine that when I looked for it to bring forth grapes, it brought forth wild grapes, fit only for burning.

In this view of the case it is easy to see that God will be content with having done the best thing He could do. Conscious of this, He will be satisfied, and will have no occasion to wish that He had been more than infinite, or to regret in any respect that He has not done more or better than He has.

He will be well satisfied on the whole with all the results of all He has done. He will indeed see that the misery of the wicked is, as viewed in itself, a great and

almost an infinite evil; but when all the results are considered, He will be satisfied. For, it should be considered, God had foreseen all these results. They do not break upon Him by surprise. He did not commence a plan with which He should be in its development, dissatisfied. He foresaw all the evils incidental to His plan -- all the sin and all the suffering consequent upon sinning. In full view of all, He asked Himself -- Shall I be satisfied with these results? He did not go forward without making up His mind that this course was, on the whole, altogether wise and good. Hence the evils which are to be developed in the sinner's death are not new to Him. They do not break forth suddenly upon Him so as to embarrass His movements and turn Him aside from His course. By no means. Right onward move His eternal counsels, as certain as His own existence. What infinite wisdom has devised, infinite power will execute. God never can lack the necessary firmness to do the very best thing in the best way.

These results, therefore, do not interfere at all with the happiness of God. The death of the sinner may be in itself a very great evil, and yet God sees that on the whole -- taking all results into view, He has the best of reasons to be satisfied with His own plan, and with all that He has Himself done in its execution. He will be satisfied with the results as a whole, although there may be things connected with it which are in themselves to be regretted.

Again, the death of the wicked will not be inconsistent with the happiness of heaven. Persons have often said, that they could not be happy in heaven, if they knew the wicked were in hell. Some of you may have thought so; but why? Are you a great deal better than God? Are you more benevolent or more wise than God is? Suppose you stand on the shore and you see a ship in the offing beating hard against a dreadful storm, and laden with precious human lives. You see their signals of distress; ah, you can even hear their shrieks and cries for help, and in your inmost soul you feel that you would save them all if you could. No doubt you would. God has the power to do it, but yet He lets the noble ship strike the breakers! You would have saved them; but are you therefore better than God? No; the reason why your course differs from God's course in the matter is, that you are not so good and not so wise as He. If you were as benevolent as He, you would act as He does.

But with your short vision of results, it would fill you with great anguish to see a ship's crew and passengers all dash upon the dreadful rocks and go to the bottom. Yet God can look calmly on, and trace the whole course of the dreadful

calamity, satisfied that all shall be well in the end.

When saints reach heaven they will have more confidence in God than many people have now. They will see more than they do now, and will have indefinitely more confidence in the wisdom of what they cannot see. It will then appear plain to them that they have the same reason for being happy in all the results of moral government that God has. They will begin to see these results as they have never done before. With enlarged views they will see most clearly that God has done right, perfectly and infinitely right. O how their minds will be eternally solemnized by a view of hell! What a spectacle! What could make more solemn impressions of the fearfulness of sin, and of the firmness that prevails forever in the counsels of Jehovah! I have sometimes been greatly edified by seeing how Christians have borne the loss of friends dying in their sins. For a long time I could not understand this, and was greatly stumbled to conceive how Christians could be reconciled to such a trial. Is it stupidity, said I to myself, or is it unbelief? Subsequent reflection however, and observation, showed that it was neither. I saw how they might be happy in God, confiding in His wisdom and love. I no more suppose that heaven would be unhappy because of their vision of hell, than I suppose a virtuous community would be in seeing a man punished who was bent upon their ruin. Suppose there were in this community a man full of all mischief, a child of the devil, reckless of law and right, periling and even taking life, whenever excited passion maddened him to the deed; suppose this man seized, convicted, and shut up in the state's prison, or even suppose him to be hung: you see it and you say -- this is in itself a great evil, but in view of all the results, you would say, Amen. Better that the guilty wretch should suffer as he deserves, than that society should be broken up -- other lives be destroyed, and an evil vastly greater than one man's death be done.

Now if in this world you may be brought to acquiesce in condign punishment brought upon the guilty, how much more so in the future world! There we shall see that their case is hopeless -- that nothing more could be done wisely to save them -- that they forced their way down to hell in full view of Calvary, despite of the tenderest entreaties and the most affecting invitations; then we shall see that nothing remained but for God to shut them up in the state's prison of the universe!

Persons sometimes say-- O if my relatives, my husband or my children must go to hell, I never can be reconciled with God's doings, never, NEVER! I never can

be happy in heaven myself and see them in hell! What! Do you say to God -- You may send anybody else's children to hell if you please, but spare mine! All this will have passed away if you ever reach heaven. There God's friends are my friends, and God's enemies are my enemies. I have only one question to ask there: Is he a friend of God, or is he an enemy? All these distinctions about self and self's friends, or self's children, will then have vanished forever away. Does that pious mother think now that she could not be happy to see her own son sent to hell? Once in heaven, or even once fitted for heaven, your soul will rest calmly in God, sinking down sweetly into His will, and rejoicing that He never does and never can do otherwise than right.

But we must revert to the exhortation in our text. God says to each sinner, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" Many sinners in this house have continued long in sin, expecting God to do something more than He has yet done, and indeed enough to save them; but will He? Do you know that He will? How do you know that He will? All this time while you have been waiting for Him, He has been waiting for you. He has come to you by all His servants, rising up early and sending them, saying, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?" This you will observe assumes that you are bent on your own death, and that you act as if you thought yourselves to have good reasons for choosing death. Your God asks to know what those reasons are. He tells you most solemnly that you need not die because He wants to have you, or because He has any pleasure at all in your death; nor because any one else -- unless it be Satan -- wants to have you die. No; if you have reasons they must be your own, and God asks you what they are. Now go home and ask yourself what they are. Press home to your own heart this question -- put to you by your Maker -- Why will ye die? Take your pen and write the reasons down, for you may have occasion enough to review them in the coming years and ages of your existence. Then write them down. I should like to know what they are, and it might be of use to yourself to study them more attentively than you have been wont to do. You will do well to write them all out fully, so that your own mind can measure them and weigh them and estimate soberly their real value. Won't you do this; do it seriously, in the stillness and solitude of your own chamber; write them all down; get upon your knees and spread them out before God. Say, Lord, Thou hast put this question to me -- Why wilt thou die?" Here is the answer. Lord, it is because Thou hast no mercy on sinners. It is because Thou hast done nothing to save me. Because I can't help going on in my sins. Because I can't repent and

can't believe. * * * But stop, sinner, read this over again before God. Is there a word of truth in all you have written? Will it stand the test of even your own conscience? Will it bear to come before your Maker? Can it be of any use to you to "deny the Lord that bought you," and "make God a liar" to His very face -- in contempt of His own solemn oath?

[Back to Top](#)

The Spirit of Christ, and the Spirit of True Christianity

Lecture X

July 4, 1849

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Heb. 12:2: "Who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame."

These words are spoken of Jesus Christ. They stand in the following connection. "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

To develop fully the sentiment of our text, I will consider

- I. What this joy set before Christ was not.*
- II. What it was.*
- III. What is implied in the state of mind here described.*
- IV. Show that nothing short of this is real Christianity.*

I. This joy is not the joy of His own personal salvation.

1. Christ did not undertake this great work for the sake of saving His own soul, and hence the joy in prospect was not the joy of being Himself saved from ruin. It is most manifest from the whole Bible that the object which Christ had in view was not His own good.

2. Neither was it His own glory. He everywhere insists that He does not seek His own glory, and that in this respect His course was directly contrasted with that of the Jews "who sought honor of one another."

II. What then was the joy set before Him?

I answer, it was the great good to be secured, and the satisfaction to be found in securing it. He saw a world to be redeemed, out of whom a great multitude which no man can number could be actually saved. He saw the blessedness that would accrue to them eternally from this salvation. He saw the augmented joy of the heavenly hosts in their rescue and in their eternal joy; and He saw how His Father rejoiced in reclaiming the lost; these joys set before Him were enough to make His cross sweet and the shame of it a mere trifle.

III. What is implied in this state of mind.

1. Consecration to the good of being, a real devotion of one's self to this object.

2. A single eye to this end. Persons are never satisfied and filled with joy in view of an object unless their hearts are fully set upon it, and set upon it evermore in proportion to the value of that object. Our joy in any object will depend very much upon the singleness of eye with which the end is sought.

3. The end must be chosen for its own sake. This must be a condition of our receiving joy in any object; that we choose it for what it is in itself. It must be a good object; an object the attainment of which is naturally adapted to give us joy. Then let it be sought earnestly and sincerely, and its pursuit will not disappoint us. The Bible represents Christ as having set His heart on this great end of securing the good of others.

IV. Nothing short of this state of mind, possessed and manifested by Jesus Christ, is real Christianity.

1. Nothing else than this is the spirit of Jesus Christ; and we have the highest authority for saying that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His," and can not have any real religion. If we would understand what Christianity is, we must understand what Christ is. It is plain that we can never understand Christianity only as we understand Jesus Christ. He is the great and perfect embodiment of real Christianity. Hence to know Christianity we must know Christ--must know His ends and His means for attaining those ends. Now it is certain, as we have seen, that His end was the highest good of being. Hence nothing else than this can be Christianity.

Again, nothing short of this is intrinsically right. Nothing short and nothing else can satisfy the demands of the intelligence. We know it to be essentially and necessarily right that all beings--even the Deity Himself, should devote themselves to this end. We know that we, and that all our race ought to consecrate ourselves to this end sincerely and supremely. Hence nothing less, and nothing else than this can be real Christianity.

2. Nothing short of this can prepare us for heaven. How could we receive joy in the employments of heaven unless we are prepared for it by sympathy with their great ends and objects? Who does not know that there must be interest felt in an end before its attainment can give us joy? How then could even heaven be agreeable to us only as our hearts are set upon those objects, the attainment of which makes heaven blissful to its inhabitants?

The Spirit of Christ will naturally manifest itself in all men as it did in Christ Himself. Why should it not? Why should not the same Spirit manifest Itself in the same forms and modes?

Hence when persons have set their hearts upon the same object as Christ set His heart upon, they will count all things else but trifles in order to attain this. They will cheerfully make any sacrifices and count them mere trifles, enduring the cross, and despising the shame, as if all or either were matters of small account in view of an object so valuable. Who does not know that when men have a worldly fortune in view, they carry out this principle to its full extent? How many will tear themselves away from all the social endearments and comforts of home and go to California for gold, encountering hardships without number and perils of almost every sort, and

yet they shrink not, because the object before them is so attractive and their hearts are so earnestly set upon it. We often see worldly men set their hearts so strongly upon some favorite object that they make no account of the greatest sacrifices. In the same manner, it was perfectly natural for Christ in His state of mind to endure the cross, despising the shame. No hardships could discourage, no perils could daunt, no scorn could deter Him; for His great end seemed too glorious, so precious, there was nothing so forbidding that He would not endure for the sake of securing it.

Often when you are thinking of His self-denials and sacrifices you ask yourself, How can this be? What motive could have induced such a course of life and of suffering? But when you get your eye upon His state of mind and see the deep love of His heart for the souls of men, all is explained. It is perfectly in accordance with a law of our mind that we count everything else of trifling value compared with the one great end upon which the heart is set. Who has not experienced at least some degree of this? When your heart has been set upon some great worldly good--property, a valued companion for life, some post of honor and emolument,--you have not deemed it a great thing to labor and toil and make many sacrifices. How many count it no great hardship to labor and toil their life long to secure a competence for themselves and their families.

Now with this universal law of mind in view, consider the great end which Christ placed before Himself. You can now understand His devotion to this great end; His readiness to make sacrifices for its attainment; you see how He could despise all the shame and endure all the pains, never shrinking for one moment from anything whatever which He had to encounter.

Now let any man have the same end in view that Christ had and he too will account all things but loss for such an object. Self-denial will be as easy and natural as a second nature. By the very laws of our mind, it is sweet to deny ourselves of a lesser good for the sake of a greater. Husbands and wives deem it no hardship to deny themselves of positive good for each other's benefit, the pleasure of giving scope to their deep and pure affection for each other readily overbalances and throws into the shade all the hardships they may be called to endure for each other's welfare. That mother will labor till her strength is gone that she may meet the wants of the children she loves. That father will toil till he is bent and worn with years and many infirmities--

so does the love of his household fill his heart, and make toil for them a daily pleasure. The fond mother will toil over her washtub year after year to educate her son at college, until at last, he comes forth a young man of promise, and she says--"I am more than paid for all my sacrifices and all my toils." You might perhaps have entered her humble dwelling at some hour when most ladies are at leisure, but you find her over her washtub. You accost her--"Madam, I am indeed sorry that you have so hard a lot--that you are doomed to such and so much labor." "Are you indeed," she replies; "I am glad of it. I enjoy it. There you see my dear children educating themselves I trust for God, and to serve their generation according to the will of God, and it is my daily joy to toil and suffer if need be for such an object. I can endure any cross and despise any shame for their sakes." You, my hearers, have seen exemplifications of this principle even among yourselves. It may have occurred to you as it has often to me that such cases develop the same spirit which we see in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ, "who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross despising the shame." It is only what we always see when the mind lays hold of the great end that God lays hold of. Then men cannot grudge the sacrifices they may be called to make, however great, or frequent, or long protracted, any more than God does.

REMARKS.

1. True Christians need no appeal to their selfishness or to their self-interest to secure their highest exertions. You need not urge them to deeds of charity that they may be seen by men; not implicate their good name in any way, and the reason is, they sympathize with Christ. They have a single eye to the same end which He sought. Hence they do not ask as many others do--"Who is the Lord, that we should obey His voice?" or "What profit shall we have" if we give anything for His cause? You need only place before them the good to be secured; and at once the joy springs up in their hearts, and they use most cheerfully the means to secure the good contemplated.

2. True Christians enjoy everybody's good things. There is no such thing as robbing them of happiness. If they see anyone else enjoying good, they are always sure of being blessed in it and by it, themselves. They rejoice in their neighbor's happiness and welfare as much as in their own. So long as souls are converted and blessed, they are blessed in it and rejoice over it. They will rejoice as long as God is honored and glorified. They sympathize in His infinite joy;

hence, they can never be unhappy while God exists in all the fulness of His infinite blessedness.

3. Those who have the same end in view as Christ had, will have happiness similar to His. Those who sympathize with Christ cannot fail of Christ's happiness. While Christ lives, they will live. While Christ rejoices, they will rejoice. If Christ rejoices in the joy of His Father, so will they. Hence their happiness, like that of Christ, is forever interlinked with that of the infinite God. While His great ends are promoted, they will rejoice exceedingly. Why? Because this is what they most of all desire. This meets the most earnest and longing desires of their hearts. Hence, just so certainly as God is not disappointed, they will have joy. Let them know that God's great ends are secured, and their cup of joy is full. They sympathize with Him, and therefore, they cannot fail of being happy while God lives and remains the same benevolent and blessed Being.

4. It is so far from being true that sinners enjoy the good things of others, that in their selfishness they do not half enjoy their own. That sinner never has enough so long as he sees anything enjoyed by others which is not at his command. Haman may be next in honor to the great king, and yet a single Jew sitting at his gate, irreverent, may spoil his enjoyment. So with the selfish sinner always. If there is anything in the universe, not his own, he cannot be happy. Everything good which he sees must sustain a certain relation to himself, or he cannot be happy in view of it, but it rather excites his envy. O how he enlarges his desire as hell, and cannot be satisfied! All the good he sees beyond his reach is evil to him. He sees others enjoying it, and this spoils his own enjoyment of what he actually possesses. So restless is he, so anxious, so hungry, so thirsty after everybody else's happiness; so miserable because there are good things within his view which he cannot appropriate wholly to himself. Thus he is so far from enjoying other's good things, that the sight of their good, lying beyond his reach, effectually poisons his own. Poor wretched being! Who has such a tide of misery as he? If a benevolent God fills the world with happiness, this very fact dooms him to misery. How just and fitting that he should be wretched! He has chosen and cultivated the disposition which must make him so forever.

5. Every selfish person is at war with God by his very position and character as selfish. Hence if God secures His ends, the selfish sinner must fail of his. As surely as God succeeds, so surely must His selfish enemies be frustrated. Both cannot triumph for the good reason that each party is arrayed against the other,

each pursuing opposite and conflicting ends. God would make all beings happy according to their merits--that is, as far as they coincide in spirit and effort with His own ends; but the selfish sinner breaks away from God's plan, and makes it his chief end to bless himself. Of course there can be not harmony; indeed there can be nothing but eternal opposition between God and all selfish beings. Hence, as I said, if God carries His point, the selfish must certainly fail of carrying theirs. While eternity endures, the selfish may hunger and lust after good; but they must forever hunger and lust in vain.

6. True Christians find their life by sacrificing it. They find their bread by throwing it on the waters; it comes to them after many days. Their own highest well-being they secure by laying their souls and their all upon the altar. Jesus Christ set them an example. He did not come to our world to please Himself. No; He came to do the will of His Father in heaven. In thus living to please God and secure the good of being, sacrificing even His own life for this end, He saved His life in the noblest sense. By self-denial He obtained the highest possible good to Himself.

This is the very nature of all benevolence. It gives away, to make its own rich, immortal gain. Its profits are always in the ratio of its expenditures. True Christians save their lives by sacrificing them for God. Christ said--"He that will save his life shall lose it, and he that shall lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it." It is remarkable to see what an illustration we have in the life of Christ, of the truth and the meaning of this doctrine which He taught.

7. Sinners sometimes lose their lives by trying selfishly to save them. This result follows by an inevitable law. By grasping at their own good, and by refusing to make any sacrifice, or even any sort of effort purely for other's good, they of course and of necessity lose that at which they do aim.

8. True Christians necessarily enjoy their religion. I am aware that people often talk about enjoying religion in a way which subjects the very idea to scandal. This language is often abused and misunderstood, and as a consequence, the idea is scandalized, and hence some lose sight of the truth that religion must bring its own enjoyment.

I am aware that some make the great mistake of supposing that religion is all emotional, is all a matter of excited feelings; and hence often neglecting what is essential in true religion, and yet talking largely of their enjoying religion, they

scandalize the whole subject.

Yet the real truth must forever remain; religion must be a source of real joy to its possessor. Look at the case of the mother who toils day and night for the education of her children. Ask her how she can endure such a life of toil, and she will tell you, "I enjoy the labor and the toil for the end I have in view." Ask the missionaries. You may suppose that their whole life is misery--that their numerous self-denials and sacrifices must make them wretched; but if you think so, you have made one of the greatest mistakes. These self-denials and sacrifices constitute their revenue and income of daily happiness.

To illustrate this, let me refer to a young lady who had left home, friends and country to go to the heathen, and who, the next morning after leaving port at New York, makes this entry in her private journal: "On rising this morning found that we were fairly out at sea, out of sight of land. Felt ready to give three cheers."

So, many would think that the life of Christ must have been full of sorrow; but no; few ever enjoyed so much even in this life as He; nay, more, we are safe in saying that as none ever carried out so perfectly the law of self-sacrifice for others' good, so none ever enjoyed so much of the real bliss of benevolence. In accordance with this, we hear Him say--"I have meat to eat that ye know not of." You recollect the remarkable circumstances under which this was said. Traveling in midday on foot over the hill country of Judea and Samaria, He came, weary and worn, to Jacob's well, and sat down to rest Himself there. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. The benevolent heart of the weary one felt for her spiritual welfare, and prompted efforts for her good. He spake to her of the waters of life--of the pure and spiritual Being who should be worshipped in Spirit and in truth. His tenderness and sympathy won her heart; His doctrine and His wonderful bearing convinced her that this must be her Messiah; she called her neighbors, and many seem to have been converted there. So soon did the benevolent efforts and sacrifices of Christ bring forth their fruit in the salvation of souls. Hence, though faint with hunger and toil, He could say--"I have meat to eat that ye know not of." Such labors and results really refreshed His soul, and He seems to have forgotten that He was hungry.

This is just like all true religion. It forgets its own labors and self-denials. You may go and talk to the Christian of his labors and of his self-denials, and pity him; but you don't understand his case. He is the last man to think of his toils or

to pity himself. Look at the men who go to the wilds of the far West. You say to them, Brethren, you must be very unhappy; how could you bear to leave your mother and your dear brothers and sisters? They reply--You do not understand the nature of our work. We have meat to eat that you know not of. We are laboring for Jesus Christ, and He never fails to give us our wages.

A missionary in the remote North West traveled one bitter cold day last winter over ice which was covered mostly with six inches of water. He says, "I froze my feet dreadfully, and suffered more from fatigue and cold than I recollect ever to have suffered before in one day; but I find that these days of greatest sufferings bring me my highest wages. The rich blessedness of divine love fills my soul only the more by how much the more I suffer for His name."

9. Let no man think he is doing the work of the Lord who can not enjoy it, or rather, let no man think he is doing the Lord's work when all his religious duties are like rolling a stone up hill. He needs not flatter himself that he is doing the Lord's work unless this is the very path in which he wants to go. There can be no greater mistake than is made by those who think they have the religion of Jesus Christ, and yet do not enjoy it. The fact is, if they are doing His work they can bear and endure all things for Christ's sake, and find delight in it too. They will not ever be called to suffer as He did in degree, and yet we know that even in His case, the cross was made light by a view of the joy set before Him. His dreadful cross was not a small matter in itself considered, but it became small when compared with the great end in view. And so it will be with the Christian.

10. It will always be found true that real Christians make light work of their religion, just in proportion as they make a just estimate of the great ends in view and as they earnestly set their hearts upon those ends. In the same degree as they give themselves up to their work will they find their trials light and their joys abounding.

On the other hand, as they swerve away from God will their trials and crosses seem great and unendurable, and they will feel as if they did not know how to meet their difficulties.

11. Self-indulgent persons are not Christians. The proof that they are not is simple and short; they are not Christ-like--for "Christ pleased not Himself." And "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."

12. The most laborious and self-denying Christians are the most happy. The more sacrifices, honestly made for the good of souls, the more blest in the very deed themselves. Only let his eye be single--let it be in his heart to do all for God, and he cannot fail to give the deepest and purest joy in the midst of his toils and sacrifices.

Great mistakes are wont to be made in this matter. Indeed sinners usually make them. Many suppose that to give up all idea of being rich is almost awful. It is a great thing, scarcely to be endured for any consideration. That young man says in his heart, Why should I go and preach and toil for almost nothing, laboring for a very small salary and for a most ungrateful people? Ah indeed! You cannot make up your mind to follow in the steps of Him who "had not where to lay His head," and who "came unto His own and His own received Him not." It would involve too many sacrifices! But did you not know that after all, the most devoted and self-sacrificing ministers of Christ, are among the happiest people in the world? You entirely mistake, young man, if you think otherwise. Even when nobody thanks them, God smiles on their souls and all is joy and blessedness within. If nobody else gives to supply their wants, God does. He knows how to supply the great deep want of the soul for peace and joy, and He is not forgetful to do so towards His faithful, self-denying servants. Ask the faithful missionary of the cross in what portion of his life he has had most satisfaction. You will be told that by how much the more he has sacrificed, by so much the greater is his joy. He will say to you--I love my work; it is good for me to endure the cross, despising the shame. Ask any true missionary--Are you rewarded for your toils and self-denials? He will reply--O if I might see salvation flow to those heathen tribes, it would be my greatest joy. Nothing else could make me so happy. It is the hope of this success and the consciousness of pleasing God in my labors that makes all my toils sweet. Why should I not give myself up to such a work with my utmost might?

13. Persons who have no true religion are made less happy by what religion they have. Look at such a man. If his heart is not in his work and upon it, he certainly gets no good from it. Let a man preach the gospel who does not love the work, and all is labor without compensation; toil without a redeeming object. But if he loves his work, it sheds a fresh and precious balm over his spirit; and fills his daily cup with joy.

14. The most selfish are the most unhappy. The very fact of being selfish is an

infinite mistake. If a man keeps his money for selfish purposes, instead of pouring it out bountifully for others' good, he makes the greatest mistake possible. If he thinks to enjoy it most by self-gratification, he does not begin to know what the highest enjoyment is. He could not suppose so if his heart were set upon God's work.

By the very laws of mind, a man is never so much delighted with the disposal of his property as when it goes most directly to promote his most favorite object. He hates to bestow upon objects foreign to his heart's chief desire. Whenever, therefore, you see Christians giving grudgingly, you may know that selfishness is the law of their life. For all men, and of course Christians too, will naturally make most efforts to secure their chief object. Whatever stands highest in their esteem and regard will command the most of their efforts, and of their money. If they are selfish, they will think they cannot do better than to lay out their money for self. Hence you will see them constantly shaping all their plans to give little and keep much. Why, say they, should I not do this thing since it will be for my good? Instead of finding their highest satisfaction in giving, they find it in hoarding.

Did you ever see a miser? If so, you have seen a man who grudged everything he gave unless the object were to secure property. I knew one in New York. He wore a buckskin coat for his only covering, and as this was never washed, he made an important saving of money on it. He seemed to grudge himself even his necessary food, and to find all the comfort he ever had in hoarding up money. So all-controlling did his passion become that he could starve himself for the sake of laying up the more money. Of course when this passion of money-hoarding is so terribly developed that men will pinch and wring everything they can out of themselves to put into their great iron chest, you need not expect them to be merciful, if they are even so much as just, towards their fellow men. O how terribly does that man curse both himself and his race who gives himself up to this form of selfishness!

But Christianity is entirely another thing. It sets the heart with most intense and all-consuming energy upon the great object of serving God and one's generation according to the will of God. It is the same great principle which, energizing in the depth of the Infinite Mind, moved Him to create beings whom He might bless. The same glorious principle gave birth to the plan of redemption. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" to save it. There arose an

exigency. A race had fallen, and must be rescued or lost. The Divine Word saw and felt the exigency; rushed forward to the rescue; seized as it were upon human flesh, that in and with our nature He might live and labor, suffer, bleed and die. This great work became with Him an all-absorbing passion. See Him toil in Judea, traverse the regions of Samaria and Galilee; hear Him pray during the long hours of the night; hear His deep groans in the garden of Gethsemane, and mark that bloody sweat; see Him on the cross, pierced and bleeding;--then ask--What is all this? What but the working out of the great principle of benevolence--love to God and love to man, consuming the energies of His being! Mark how He rolls off to the right and to the left all other objects that invite attention and would divert Him from His work. He suffers nothing to intervene between His heart and the labors and sacrifices needful to effect the work of human salvation.

And now must it be deemed so great a cross for His people to spare even a dollar to complete this work by sending the gospel to every creature? Shall they grudge their shillings where Jesus Christ gave ungrudgingly His heart's blood! It must be that many Christians are under a great and radical mistake in this matter. Every true Christian as really has a cross to endure and shame to despise as Christ had, although his crucifixion may come in a very different form. But it is equally his duty to live and to die for the promotion of the same great object. This is so far from seeming to be a hardship to the real Christian, that it is the very thing which before all other things he would choose. Ask him which among all the objects of life he deems most precious, and most desirable. He will tell you at once, this, of suffering and toiling for Jesus Christ and for His cause. I ask no higher honor, and no purer enjoyment than to deny myself and bear my cross for my dear Lord and Master.

15. If men would be merely comfortable, they must abandon living for self. I need not say that none can enjoy selfishness. I say more. If men would not be positively unhappy they must cease to be selfish. Self is so utterly unreasonable in its demands, and makes you so wretched if all its demands are not met, there is no living in peace unless it is thoroughly kept under. No man, or woman either, ever yet satisfied self by indulgence. Like the horse-leach, it cries forever, Give, give; and might well have been numbered among the three and four things which never say--"It is enough." Consequently, persons only torture themselves and make their own happiness impossible by giving scope to their selfishness.

16. Those who have Christ's Spirit will have also His peace of mind. They who "bear His cross will wear His crown," not in the future world only, but in the present. "If they suffer with Him, they shall also be glorified together."

17. You may see why so few professors really enjoy their religion. If their eye were single for God, they would not fail of enjoying His service; but being selfish, they starve themselves, and pave their path with many thorns. The principle which prompts all their religious duties is, that they had rather do them than go to hell. These religious duties give them no pleasure, and never would be done for their own sake; but they can be endured as a choice of evils, it being better to endure them than do so much worse. The hope of escaping hell thereby makes even these religious duties tolerable. All these toils and hardships are better than hell. But as for positive satisfaction in their Christian work, they know nothing about it. If they want any present satisfaction, of course they look for that in the way of self-gratification.

Let the reader pause and ask--Am I the character described here? Is this a painting of my heart?

18. Selfish persons may as well give up their selfishness first as last, for they cannot get good by it. Have you not seen plainly enough that it is of no use to be selfish; that if you gain anything, it is all of no use as to the matter of substantial enjoyment? If you should gain the whole world, it would be of no avail to you as a fund of enduring happiness. There can therefore be no real motive--no good motive for being selfish. Have you not often seen this so clearly as to be compelled to say--"I will never again act for self, for I may just as well not act at all, and better too." It does no good to seek to gratify self, for it only serves to enlarge one's desire even as hell, and it can never be satisfied. It is as if a man diseased should drink to slake his thirst, and it only makes him the more thirsty; or should eat to allay his hunger and it only sharpens his appetite the more. What then can you gain by pushing on in this direction or in that, to gratify the insatiate demands of self? Suppose you should drive your efforts selfishly even for your own salvation. You make a great mistake--yea, an infinite mistake. You will only make the matter inexpressibly worse. I can well recollect a crisis in my own religious history. I felt that there was not another step to take in the direction I was going. I had pursued my worldly interests a long time, all in vain; I had sought God selfishly, but all in vain; and I now betook myself to mighty prayer as I supposed, as if I would pull down blessings at any rate upon my

needy soul. Often since, I have looked back with wonder to that moment. I came then to see and I actually said to myself--I may just as well stop this course of seeking now as ever. I hastened away to the woods to pray, pressed with the consideration--I am a selfish man--altogether selfish. I must come to a dead stand in this course; my selfish efforts are of no use, and even my selfish prayers are nothing better than an abomination before God. I had gone out with the determination never to leave the place without giving myself to God. I could see that all had been perfectly selfish, and that now the thing God demanded of me was to desist from my selfishness and give up myself supremely and wholly to Him.

While laboring in Western New York, I saw a young woman who seemed to be by nature and education most amiable and lovely. Indeed, she was regarded by her friends as a perfect model of propriety. Her sisters and relatives could not bear to think that she was a sinner, or to hear her spoken to as a sinner. Yet she was selfish. When I saw her I could not help being strongly impressed with this fact, and urged it earnestly upon her conscience. At length she saw it and then exclaimed, I have sown to the wind and I must reap the whirlwind. My whole heart is selfish. I see that I might as well make no effort for salvation as to make selfish ones, and that truly I have but one right and hopeful way, and this is, to renounce my selfishness at once and forever.

See that young man selfishly pursuing his education. What do you want of your education? What will you do with it? You reply, "O, perhaps I shall be a great man." Then persisting in your selfishness, you will be the greater in hell. "Perhaps I shall get to be the President of these United States." Then, unless you repent of your selfishness, you will sink to be the merest drudge in hell. "Oh," says that young man, "I shall get into some learned profession and make a brilliant display of my talents, and make an impression on the world." And will all this make you happy? If selfishness rule in your heart, it will only make you a greater curse to yourself. You may drive in this direction and in that, you can only fill up the cup of your own misery, if you will make self your idol god. Suppose you toil for fame; there will be a canker-worm at its root. What good will it do you? All is against you and nothing can work for your real good so long as you will not yield your heart to God and crucify your selfishness.

Do you ask, Who will show me any good? I will show you all the good you can ever need. I have been showing you today where real good is to be found. You

have money, and do you ask, what money is good for? To do good with. This is all. What is the strong arm for, and the ardor of youthful energy? To do good with--nothing else. O young man, you who do not want to be a minister of the gospel because there will be so much hardship and so little emolument--if you don't know the peace and blessedness of self-denial, you know nothing yet as you need to know. You have not yet begun to learn how to live for real blessedness.

Living for the general good is the only way to secure your own individual good. If you would be happy, pour out your heart for others' good. Set your heart on the great end which God is laboring to secure, and your happiness is safe.

Brethren, is it a matter of real experience with you that you enjoy your religion? Do you enjoy it even without any of the accompaniments of superadded respectability, and public confidence, and social regard? Do you enjoy the simple business of doing good, in itself, and for its own sake? Is self-denial for Christ's sake, a positive enjoyment to you in view of the great and glorious end of the joy set before you of honoring God and doing good? Does your religion, attended though it be with many toils and trials, become to you daily the very elixir of life? How is this?

[Back to Top](#)

Judicial Blindness

Lecture XI

August 1, 1849

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--John 9:39, 40: "And Jesus said, 'For judgment I am come into this world; that they which see not might see, and that they which see, might be made blind.'

And some of the Pharisees which were with Him heard these words, and said unto Him, 'Are we blind also?' Jesus said unto them, 'If ye were blind, ye should have no sin, but now ye say, "we see": therefore your sin remaineth.'"

In discussing the subject presented in these words I propose,

I. To notice some truths that are assumed in this text.

II. To point out some principles of the divine administration which are revealed here.

III. To adduce some illustrations of these principles as revealed in the history of God's providences.

I. Some truths that are assumed in this text.

1. Christ obviously assumes that obligation is conditioned upon light. "If ye were blind ye should have no sin." Beyond question the blindness here spoken of is mental not physical, so that our Savior here explicitly asserts that if the Pharisees had no knowledge of duty they would have no sin; which of course assumes that the presence of some knowledge of duty is a condition of sin -- and consequently of moral obligation.

2. Christ also assumes that the guilt of disobedience is graduated by the degree of our knowledge. In proportion as we are enlightened, is our guilt, if we resist the demands of conscience, enhanced.

These principles are implied not only in our text but universally throughout the Bible. The careful reader of his Bible cannot fail to notice this.

In this as in other respects its teachings are most entirely accordant with the convictions of our own minds. Every unsophisticated mind affirms that these principles are righteous and that nothing else could be.

II. I am to point out some principles of the divine government which are revealed in these words.

1. God does not require of us natural impossibilities. If He did He might require us to do duty although we do not understand either what the requirement is, or the authority of Him who requires it. Right over against this Christ says, "If ye were blind ye should have no sin." What principle is implied in this language? Beyond all question, this; that if we have no knowledge of duty, we can incur no guilt by neglect. Indeed, neglect always implies something known, which is neglected. As also transgression implies

some known rule or law which is wickedly passed over.

Where no knowledge of law exists, it is impossible that there should be either culpable neglect or transgression. And God never requires such impossibilities. He never demands the making of brick without straw. As it is impossible for men physically blind to see physical objects; so is it impossible for men utterly ignorant of duty to act morally; therefore God never requires them to do it.

2. God really does require of us according to the blessings we have received. He holds us responsible for the light He has given us. As Christ said to the Jews, "But now ye say, "we see;" therefore your sin remaineth." You profess to be enlightened; grant that you are; then your sin is not only actual but great.

You will observe that the Pharisees scornfully repelled the idea that they were morally blind. "What!" they would say; "do you mean to insinuate that we have not the true knowledge of God? Indeed we have it, before any people on earth." "Very well," said our Lord; "then on your own ground you have the greater sin." Now this shows most plainly that Christ assumed the principle of guilt according to light, and neither holds the morally dark-minded responsible, nor exempts the enlightened from responsibility.

3. God will visit with judicial blindness those who have light, but abuse it. "For judgment," said Christ, "have I come into this world, that those who see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind." What is this "judgment?" Christ Himself explains it. It is awarding retribution according to deeds -- especially those deeds of mind which respect the use or abuse of moral light. He comes to try with the presentation of light those who have not hitherto enjoyed it, (the dark-minded heathen) and to doom to judicial blindness those (the Jews) who have had light to see by, but have neglected to improve and use it. Christ comes to smite them with blindness for their great sin.

Since the sin lies in rejecting light, it is plain that the greater the light is which God gives to a people or to an individual, the more certainly and speedily will He visit them with judicial blindness, if they reject this light. All this seems plainly implied in what Christ says here.

III. Illustrations of these principles.

1. We have one in the case of these Scribes and Pharisees. They had long enjoyed much light respecting God and their duty. In their hands they held many clear and precious prophecies of the coming Messiah, prophecies which unfolded His spiritual character, and which might have shown them that Jesus of Nazareth is the personage of whom Moses and the prophets spake.

But they did not relish the spiritual views of the Messiah; they preferred a different character; the wish became father to corresponding thoughts, and they formed an ideal mainly from their own hearts' imagination. To this ideal the man of Nazareth did not correspond; so they rejected Him; and God by consequence rejected them. Christ's actual coming added nothing to their light, but only confounded them in greater, deeper darkness. They had been enlightened above any other people on earth; but their worldly, sensual views, begotten in a worldly, sensual heart, led them to reject Him who came as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and the result was that they speedily sunk into darkness more dense and dreadful than that of any people on earth. The clearest exhibitions of truth only blinded them the more. Their wicked hearts seemed to react against the truth only the more violently by how much the brighter it shone.

2. The same was true of the nation as a whole although there were many individual exceptions. Among the more illiterate portions of the people were many who had never heartily sympathized in the great movements against Jesus of Nazareth; who had been the led and not the leaders; and who not unnaturally embraced the true light when it came distinctly before them. It is a most remarkable fact that Christ was obliged to choose His disciples from among the illiterate and unenlightened classes -- inasmuch as those who had been educated after the Jewish mode had almost to a man become so hardened by long resistance of the light they had, as to render their reception of more, quite hopeless. To those who had enjoyed most light, and abused it, the teachings of Jesus Christ were only darkness. They might have seen before Christ came, but having made themselves voluntarily blind, they were precisely in a state to be cursed and not blessed by His teaching.

3. We often see the same principle illustrated in the case of children brought

up in highly religious families. Such are in danger of experiencing the greatest moral blindness. Unless they embrace the truths made known to them, they must experience the terribly hardening influence of knowing yet not doing their duty.

Few men have lived under stronger light than Aaron Burr. A grandson of the elder President Edwards, son of an eminently pious mother, his parents and friends holding forth before him the best forms of gospel light then known, who could be more favored than he? Pierpont Edwards was another man of perhaps equally favorable early training -- yet how dreadful the depth of hardness and crime to which he sank! If you had searched the whole world you might not have found two children brought up under stronger light and clearer instruction than they. Yet what sons were they of such pious parents! Aaron Burr, and Pierpont Edwards, stood among the highest class of gifted intellects; but O, how did they fall like Lucifer, son of the morning! The very name of Aaron Burr became a hissing and a bye-word. Few men have better earned a deep and lasting infamy. He trod the pearls of divine knowledge under his feet, and what other result could follow than judicial blindness and the most utter moral desolation!

I might name a great many cases of this sort where men have been reared in the very garden of the Lord -- nurtured on the praying hearts of some of God's dearest children; yet resisting all light and all persuasion, they became devils incarnate! Some are so presumptuous, and so misjudge, as to suppose that for His honor's sake God will not suffer the children of so pious parents to go to hell. The greatest possible mistake! The truth is that when sinners resist so much light the honor of God demands that He should withhold His Spirit, and let them alone, and ere long, often most suddenly, He turns them into hell. Since God has called, but they refused, therefore in dread retribution, He says, "Now ye may call, and I will not answer. Ye may make many prayers and I will not hear."

4. On the same principle, many instances occur in which those congregations which have enjoyed the most enlightening instruction, have been at length given up of God to become the most hardened and desolate of men.

Some of you have heard of or read the sermons of Pres. Davies. You know them to be among the most excellent sermons ever preached. I read them in

my early life with the deepest interest. For a long time I felt a great desire to learn the history of that congregation and church to whom he preached. At last I fell in with a man who knew their history most intimately. There is no place, said he, in all the land, where so deep darkness reigns, and reigns with such fearful sway as there. The church on that once consecrated spot has but one surviving male member.

As usual, where many are greatly blessed, others too are greatly cursed, and sometimes, for an awful warning to the latter class, God lets the swelling waves of moral desolation roll over a place, and almost utterly extinguish the light of the candlestick which shone on so many eyes in vain.

5. Another illustration may be seen in the astonishing blindness of many who embrace all forms of error and religious delusion. I can recollect several whom I knew in my early childhood. They were brought up under the prayers and instructions of very pious parents and teachers. Yet they were the first to embrace Mormonism. Others seemed to be foremost in yielding a ready assent to Universalism. Others have embraced Davisism, running after every foolish and absurd thing, discarding all they used to believe, as if they would have their revenge on those blessed truths for the unwelcome restraints and annoyances which themselves had experienced from such enemies. It seemed to be a delight to them to explode all they had ever believed. Why? Let their history only be known and you will see why. They were visited with judicial blindness. Christ comes to them as to the ancient Jews, that they which see might be made blind. Can there be a more terrific doom!

Go and visit those places which have been blessed with great revivals. You will find that those who have been blessed with the greatest light, but have rejected it, are fearfully blinded and hardened. You will find Universalism and all the other ridiculous forms of error springing right up where the brightest light has shone, and where the greatest revivals have prevailed. Right here, among that very people where God has done so much to enlighten men's minds, there, among those who resisted that light, you will find more errors, and errors more pernicious springing up than anywhere else. There you will find men ready to swallow down greedily the most ridiculous and disgusting forms of error.

When men have been deeply convicted of sin and have resisted their

convictions, they will almost inevitably fall into the most profound moral darkness. They will get entirely bewildered; will seem to lose their delicate perception of nice moral distinctions, and readily call good, evil; and evil, good. In this state of mind they are ready to embrace all forms of fatal and delusive error. Nothing is too gross and revolting for them to receive and love. How often have I been surprised to hear what men would say who had run this career -- things which it would seem impossible for any man in his senses to believe. Indeed you cannot account for their believing such things, except on the supposition that God has given them up to judicial blindness. This blindness is far greater in their case than ever occurs among those who have never been so highly instructed. The violence done to their moral nature is more terrible, and consequently the shock it receives is the greater. In this state of fearful blindness, all means for their salvation are nearly or quite hopeless. Others under the same means may be enlightened and saved; but they will be only the more benighted, by how much the clearer and stronger the light you pour upon their sightless moral eye-balls. Their hearts seem to be set upon resisting the light, and their reaction against it will be the greater according as the action to be resisted is the more annoying. They "hate the light, and will not come to it lest their deeds should be reproved."

Ye who have been in revivals and have watched the subsequent course of those who have passed through them unblessed, can bear your testimony to what I am saying. You have seen many cases which seemed most strange and unaccountable, only on the supposition that "God has sent them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." Not long since I had a long conversation with a man who had been carried away with Davisism. To my astonishment he told me, in substance, that in his belief Davis was far ahead of Jesus Christ. He thinks it an honor to Christ that Davis speaks well of Him, as if the name of Christ needed to be honored, or could be, by the commendation of such a man as Davis! The man of whom I speak has been greatly enlightened; he has been wont to hold up his light for other men to walk by; but now, alas! how has his light been turned to darkness! Who that knew him once could believe what their eyes now see of him and their ears hear?

Again, who does not know that where churches have become formal, they have soon been given up to strong delusion. For example, the Papal church. When they refused to conform in heart to the truth they held, into what

ridiculous and gross delusions did they fall! Down, down, they went with rapid pace into the grossest darkness.

On the same principle many of the most enlightened sinners become infidels. Rejecting what light they have, God gives them over to judicial blindness, and they are then ripe for the grossest delusions. Commonly you will find the most bitter infidels among those who have known most of the gospel -- who have been most pressed with its claims, and whose minds have consequently become most sore and restive under its galling demands. They have done most violence to their moral natures, and God has righteously given them over to the most deep and damning delusions.

REMARKS.

1. Those who have been so much enlightened as to see and admit the truth, have reached a point where it is most perilous to stop. This is the last place at which man should think of stopping. It is nothing less than utter madness to stop there. If you were to hear the cry of fire in the dead of night, and even suppose it to be probably a false alarm, yet you would naturally look out and see, and if you found all well you would rest again. But if you should find that verily your house is all on fire -- if this truth should flash on your mind, and you could not but admit it, what should we think of you if you should sit down and invite sleep again? Think of you! Of course, that you are mad or deranged -- or it not, that you are infinitely wicked! What? let your house burn down upon your wife and children, and make no effort to save either of them! And are you not mad that you should do this?

Now apply this illustration. You know the gospel; you admit its truth. You start up and find, in fact, that you are upon the brink of an eternal hell. You see the deep pit opening beneath your feet, and the flames rolling up just ready to seize upon you -- and yet you can lie down and sleep! Can anything be so perilous as this? You know that this hell is kindled to burn forever! You know that the destruction of the sinner there is "without remedy." You know that no other loss can begin to compare with the loss of the soul. Your own soul is in most certain and dreadful peril, and yet you can remain inactive, as if all this were only a false alarm! O, was there ever such infatuation? Better that you had never known the gospel, than that having known it, you should turn away from its proffered salvation. Infinitely less guilty and less dangerous for you it were, that you should never have seen a Bible -- never have heard a sermon, never have been

made the subject of one prayer.

2. Many seem to bless themselves for the light they enjoy, and give themselves great credit for knowing and admitting the gospel in theory. "O," say they, "we are not infidels, not we! We know all about the gospel." But do you obey it? "O no, we are in no haste about obeying it. We shall have a convenient season yet." So you resist the light God has given you! Your knowledge of the gospel is, so far, a curse to you and not a blessing. You are treasuring up fearful wrath against the day of wrath, and can do nothing else than this so long as you withhold your heart from its claims.

3. We see whence come the multitude of errors that overspread the land. Their number and grossness are just what might be expected where God has so greatly blessed the people as He has in our churches. In all cases this will be found to be the course; great light abused, has resulted in gross delusion. Men have resisted God's claims and grieved away His Spirit; and now the Spirit withdraws; Satan comes in with seven other spirits more wicked; he takes full possession, and the last state is worse than the first. All forms of fanaticism revive; spiritual blindness ensues; the men who would not come to the light lest their deeds should be reprov'd may now have darkness to their hearts' content; they have loved it and God says, let them have it! and on, on, they go down the dark road to hell.

4. Those who are judicially blinded will usually give this indication of the fact -- they will never take warning! You may utter the most solemn admonitions in their ears, and seek to press the truth upon their conscience; you labor in vain! They will not believe you unless you tell them lies! If you speak to them the truth, they will not believe. Speak to them lies, and prophecy deceits, and they will hail you as a friend and a brother. But speak only the truth, and you can gain no access to their hearts. You can carry them whither you please with error; but you cannot lead them into truth. You cannot reach them with warnings, for they will not take the alarm.

How remarkable that when the gospel preacher sounds the note of warning, the tender conscience will feel its utmost power, and perhaps be even extremely alarmed; while those to whom it really belongs will not suffer it to touch themselves. They leave it to pass by them as the idle wind which men regard not.

Such give the strongest proof that they are judicially blinded.

5. It is always to be expected that individuals, families or communities who enjoy great light, but will not yield their hearts to it, will turn out badly. You might select from such a community the most horrible instances of depravity. Such families will furnish cases at which the Christian would stand aghast. These are, under God's government, only the natural results of having and abusing great light.

6. The revivals of the last thirty years have resulted in the judicial blindness of multitudes of modern Scribes and Pharisees. It is to be feared that many ministers even have fallen into a most alarming state of declension, as the result of failing to act up to the light God gave them. Many churches too have gone backward with a fearful and perpetual backsliding. They should have pressed onward and upward; but they did not embrace all the truth which God revealed to them; they shrunk from bearing the cross; they held parley with the spirit of the world; and a dreadful blindness has come over them. Although in many churches there are many pious members, yet in not a few it would seem that the majority are given up to believe a lie, and to lapse into a most horrible state of carnality and declension. In fact they are often opposed to any effort to promote revivals of religion! What can this mean? What does it indicate? After having experienced such great blessings from revivals, why do they now oppose revivals? Why is this? Go back and trace the history of those who were only nominally in them, and you will get the answer. They never loved revivals. They had more light in those revivals than they chose to admit or obey; hence their eyes were blinded and their hearts hardened. They do not want to be annoyed again with such appeals to their consciences. They dread to be brought again into such burning contact with convicting truth. Consider these things, and you will see reason enough for all the facts now present in the history of the churches.

7. When Christ comes among a people, some are blinded rather than enlightened by His coming. This is probably a universal fact. I have often known the blindness of persons increase precisely as the work of God increased. As light progressed, and truth beamed and blazed with increasing power, their hearts grew hard and their eyes dark. When it seemed impossible that they should resist, then they seemed only the more opposed, and the more embittered against the truth.

For a long time this seemed a great wonder to me, but now I understand it. The reason of it is most apparent. Men who do not love the truth will resist it till they

have paralyzed the power of truth upon their will; till they have grieved the Spirit of God away, and nearly put out the moral eyes of the soul; then they can believe any lie and deny any truth. Then they are ready for any deeds of darkness, or for any depths of absurdity.

8. In looking over the history of this place, I have said to myself -- Now I shall not be disappointed to see enemies to the truth rising up among us, growing more and more benighted in mind and besotted in error till they become darkened and deluded beyond any other people on the earth. What have we seen elsewhere in the history of the church? Just what our Savior would have us expect -- "For judgment am I come into this world, that they which see not, might see, and that they which see might be made blind."

Contemplating the state of things here, my mind has been greatly impressed with the fear that we should get into a state in which God's honor would demand that He should blot us out and leave us to moral ruin. We may say -- "We have Abraham to our father" -- yet it may avail us as little as it did the Jews. We may have said it too long already, and may have relied upon it too much. None the less reason for our relation to father Abraham is there to fear that God will give us up. On the contrary, just in proportion as we have been favored with light may we expect that God will send on us judicial blindness. We may think we are doing well; but God will surely carry out the changeless principles of His moral government just as He always has done in all ages and in all other places.

In my more personal conversations with this people, I am struck to find so many who are greatly in the dark. Instead of advancing in knowledge, and becoming more and more enlightened, they are only the more darkened and confused; they say things now which they would not have said years ago. How often has it happened that persons have begun to doubt, and finally to yield up opinions which they once held strongly, progressing continually forward towards giving up the truth they once knew. Now take warning, beloved; see if it be true that you really embrace in your heart the truth you profess to believe. If ever in all my life my soul was filled with trembling, it was when this question came home to my mind -- Does my heart really embrace the truth which I believe, or is it merely received in my intelligence? O there was a searching power in this question, and I could not help feeling it. I found myself continually on my knees, crying out -- "Lord, I never knew this before. Did I ever believe this before? Surely this seems to me like a new gospel." So much more thoroughly did I now

see the marrow and fatness of the gospel, that it seemed as if all my former faith in it had been only as a dream, and not a reality. When God was making such revelations as kept my very being all on fire, then the question -- Is not all my faith in the gospel a merely intellectual belief? pressed upon me with unwonted power. Then I cried out -- "Lord, don't enlighten me and yet suffer my heart to draw back, for if Thou dost, I shall certainly go down by the shortest road to destruction."

Brethren, do you believe with all your heart what you profess to believe? Some say -- "I believe the doctrine of sanctification." If you do, you should embrace it with all your hearts. Failing to embrace it heartily, you resist the truth; and then the result will naturally be that God will leave you to darkness, and you will find a short path to error, delusion and damnation. If you will not receive into your heart the truth you know, you cannot rationally hope that you have a particle of real religion. "He that doeth truth cometh to the light" -- for he loves all that is real light, and bids it most welcome to his soul. Do you suppose you can be a Christian and yet refuse to obey known truth? Nay, verily; a disobedient Christian can no more be, than an obedient, dutiful sinner. When you see a truth which you yet refuse to obey, in the very nature of the case you abjure your religion. You are at once on the ground of God's enemies. You are saying to God -- "I am not Thy servant." There can be no greater mistake than to suppose that men can be religious and yet not obey known truth. Nothing is more plainly taught in the Bible than this, that if you "keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, you are guilty of all." You really evince a spirit of disobedience to God and of disregard to His law; and this is just what God regards as sin. It is in the very nature of the case impossible that a man should be allowed to say before God -- "Lord, I will obey this precept, and this; but I will not obey that, and that." There cannot be the least particle of virtue, piety, or obedience in this. So long therefore as there is one promise which you know, but do not embrace, you cannot heartily embrace any. So long as there is one threatening known, but not regarded, you do not really regard any.

I am afraid there is a great delusion in the church on this point. Many think they have considerable religion, while they say frankly -- "I know I am living in a great deal of sin." They flatter themselves that they are all pretty good Christians, because they are not the greatest sinners. Some degree of known disobedience they think to be quite admissible in Christian character. Must not such persons be utterly fallen from all real obedience? Are their hearts at all with

God? Nay, verily.

Let the question be asked -- Do you believe that you ought to live in entire obedience to all the known will of God? Yes. Most will say -- we believe that. Do you believe that through gospel grace you may do so? No doubt of it. Well, do you practice accordingly? O no, we never professed to practice on this doctrine. Let others make their high professions; for our part we choose not to make any such professions. Perhaps you even find fault with those who do make such professions, and think yourselves quite as good Christians as they. Perhaps you misjudge them and perhaps they may not be either prudent or humble; but no matter; if all the world should profess the highest experience, and should then apologize before your very eyes, your guilt could be none the less if you have seen your duty and your privilege, and have resisted this light from God to your soul. You must keep up with the light God gives you, or you are ruined. There can be no exception to this righteous law -- no failure in its swift and terrible execution.

Then let every hearer ask himself -- Do I embrace and obey all known truth? Do I reverence every precept and apply by faith every promise?

But you say -- "I don't pretend to be sanctified." I answer, you did profess to be sanctified when you came out from the world and separated yourself from the ungodly. You do profess to take the Holy Ghost for your Sanctifier every time you renew your church covenant. You solemnly declare that you renounce the world and all sin, and take the Lord Jehovah to be your God and portion. If this be not the truth, what did you profess? To be living in sin? To be serving the devil in part and Christ in part? No, you said no such thing. If you were honest, you could not possibly have meant any such thing. The church when she opened her arms to receive you assumed that you came, as the whole-hearted servants and followers of Jesus Christ. And now are you eager to back out from your covenant-responsibilities upon the claim that you never professed to renounce all sin? What does this mean? Are you aware that in this matter you have to deal with God, and not with man only? Did you not know that He who walks among the golden candlesticks searches the hearts and tries the reins? Will you forget that He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity?

[Back to Top](#)

The Peace of God Ruling in the Christian's Heart

Lecture XII

August 15, 1849

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Col. 3:15: "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful."

In speaking from this verse, I propose to show,

I. What is intended by "the peace of God."

II. What we should understand by its "ruling in the heart."

III. The conditions under which God enjoys peace.

IV. The conditions of our enjoying a similar peace.

I. The peace, called in our text the "peace of God" is obviously so called for two reasons:

1. Because it is the same in kind which God Himself enjoys; and
2. Because He imparts it. It comes to the Christian from God through the work of His Spirit on the heart. It is God's peace because it is like His in character, and from Him as to its origin.

II. Peace may be said to "rule in the heart," when it prevails over all disturbing influences; when it becomes stable, abiding and all-controlling.

There are ever wont to be more or less causes in operation either external or internal to disturb our peace. Hence it can be said to "rule" in the heart only when it triumphs over all opposing influences, and abides, firmly established in the soul.

III. It is not improper for us to inquire reverently after the conditions under which God enjoys peace of mind.

In the outset of our inquiry we have the fact that God is a moral agent, and in this respect is like ourselves. Or rather in this respect we are made in His image, and hence knowing ourselves, we learn the attributes requisite for moral agency, the laws of their action, and consequently the conditions under which a moral agent can enjoy peace of mind. Pursuing this course of inquiry in respect to God it is easy to see,

1. That His powers of mind must be at peace with each other. All within the depths of the infinite mind must be in harmony. For example, His will must be in entire agreement with His reason. He must evermore choose that which His reason affirms to wisest and best.

Again, His sensibility, must be in harmony with His reason. He must be in such a state of mind as not to feel either more or less intensely than reason dictates, and such moreover as not to have feelings other in kind than His reason affirms they should be. For obviously, if His sensibilities were not in harmony with His reason they would necessarily disturb the repose of His mind because they would disturb its harmonious action.

2. In the same manner, if His will were not in harmony with His reason and His conscience, the most terrific discord would supplant the peace of the divine mind.

3. It must be therefore that God has no desires that are unreasonable, or impossible, or wrong; for if He had, He could not be at peace with Himself. There would be a deep and fearful struggle within -- the energies of His infinite mind reaching after something that could not be attained, or aspiring after objects which reason or conscience forbids.

Again, it is essential to His peace that God should desire nothing inconsistent with the highest good. If He has any desires whatever, inconsistent with the highest good, He has no right to gratify them; and hence a struggle within must ensue -- a struggle, too, of a fearful and terrible character -- one whose energy must utterly destroy the internal peace of His mind. Hence if God has peace, it must follow that He has no desires inconsistent with the highest good.

Again, it is an essential condition of the peace of God that He should have no selfish desires. For if He had any selfish desires whatever, His benevolent

heart must utterly disapprove them, and hence a conflict must ensue, and God must be at once at war with Himself.

Again, the peace which God enjoys must be conditioned upon the fact that He is conscious of doing as well as He can in all cases and evermore. For if otherwise, then He must know it, and know it, He cannot be happy. God can no more be happy than we can, while He is conscious of not doing the very best He can. It is essential to His peace of mind that He should be fully conscious of having done the very best He could during the whole eternity of His existence.

Again, His peace must be conditioned upon the fact that He is satisfied with Himself. For if He is not, He cannot have internal peace.

4. Moreover, He must be satisfied on the whole with the results of all He has done or has purposed to do. He must have in His own mind the assurance that He shall secure the great end upon which His heart is set. He must see that He has chosen the best possible end, and the wisest means for attaining that end. Seeing as He does the end from the beginning, -- His infinite mind sweeping in its vast survey all events and their causes and results, He must see that on the whole the system of His choice is the best possible, and that therefore nothing more or other remains to be desired. Viewed therefore as a whole, He must be satisfied both with the ends to be secured, with all the means, and with all the modes of using those means.

5. It should be considered that there are many things that result incidentally, and it may be, unavoidably, from the best possible system of means -- things which may be in themselves most distressing. Such, for example, is all the sin that exists in our world. It exists, as I suppose, unavoidably, in a system of moral government. Under such a system agents must be left so free that they can sin if they choose to do so; hence there must of necessity be a liability to the evils of sin. God must have foreseen from the beginning that in the progress of His moral government over men a great many evils would spring up which in themselves would be very trying, and which if viewed apart from their relations and bearings, would greatly disturb His peace. Yet on the whole, taking into view all the results, He has no regrets, for He sees that this system, even with all its incidental evils, is yet the best possible.

Again, it is another condition of His peace that there shall be nothing in all the universe which is to Him a cause of regret. He must know nothing of those regrets to which we are exposed, for He sees everything resulting as He foresaw it would. His mind, therefore, can rest peacefully in all this, just as He foresaw it would rest.

6. It is essential to the peaceful attitude of the divine mind that He should view all things in their relations and results as developed under His overruling providence and not separate and isolated from them, as our finite minds usually do, and often are compelled to. We often see only one link of a chain at a time, and hence we may not even dream that there is a chain; or if we do, we cannot tell what points the extreme ends connect. We are quite incapable of seeing the end from the beginning even if we would -- except by faith -- except as we confide in the certainty of those ends which God has revealed as the result of His moral government.

7. In fine [in conclusion, finally], God has purposed an end worthy of Himself -- an end which He is certain of securing. Nothing can occur to surprise Him -- nothing that He will on the whole have cause to regret. He may indeed see many things in moral agents which in themselves are to be regretted; but He sees that He can restrain them within such limits as He judges most wise -- can say to sin and pain -- Hitherto mayest thou go, but no farther. Being able to oppose limits to the reign of sin, and also to overrule all permitted evil to secure from it results of good, He has ample reason to be satisfied with the system as He has devised it. When therefore He sees it all spread out before Him as it were on a map, He finds nothing which disturbs the deep, eternal peace of His mind.

IV. The conditions of our enjoying a peace similar to that which God enjoys.

I have said that our peace is called the peace of God, because it is like His. We too are moral agents, and are therefore in this respect like Him. Hence the conditions of peace of mind must be substantially the same in our case as in His.

1. It is essential that there should be internal harmony among the powers of our mind. Our sensibilities must be so subdued that all shall be in their proper place, and of the appropriate character. No one must be allowed to act in a manner inconsistent with reason. No one must be allowed to be unreasonably excessive in degree, or be misdirected as to its object. Reason

and conscience must regulate the sensibility, for if the sensibility has no regulator, the mind can hope for no internal peace. Not let it be forgotten, that the divine will, if revealed, and so far as revealed, must be paramount law to us. Then our sweet and cheerful obedience to it will secure internal rest and peace.

2. Our peace is conditioned not only upon the fact that we are at peace with ourselves, with conscience, and with God's revealed will, but also, and especially, upon our having faith in the place which sight holds in the mind of God. God sees all things with infinitely clear and perfect vision, and therefore rests; let us believe in His wisdom and love with implicit faith, and therefore rest. He sees the end from the beginning, and of course fearing no change -- secure against all vicissitudes, He rests in peace; -- our faith should do for us what sight does for Him, and in it we too may rest. It is naturally impossible for any creature to walk by sight as God does, for the good reason that none can see as He does. Hence arises a natural necessity that faith supply in the case of all creatures what God enjoys in the omniscient grasp of His infinite mind.

3. Substantially the peace of all moral agents must depend upon the same conditions. But God knows by seeing; we must know by believing. If God were left in doubt as to the issues and results of things, He could not have peace of mind. Neither could we. God's mind is at rest as to the issues of all events, because He sees through all, and knows all issues with infallible certainty; we may have a similar peace, if we have such faith in His wisdom, love and power as will equally assure us of the best possible ultimate results.

Suppose you are leading a blind man. You say to him, "Now we are ascending the plank walk; we are in the right way; you need not fear." In this case you walk along confidently and fearlessly because you can see. He cannot see; but he can believe, and this may answer the same purpose. If he has faith he can move along with as much confidence, holding the hand of his trusty guide, as though he had sight itself.

God has thus put it in our power to have the same peace substantially that He has. He cannot make us see as He sees. This would imply the gift of omniscience, an attribute which we do not need -- an attribute which would be no blessing to us unless we had with it all other divine attributes -- that is,

unless we were ourselves to become the infinite God. It were vain therefore for us to wish for omniscience. But we may wisely pray for faith. Faith is the very thing we need to supply for us the place which omniscience supplies to the Deity. Let God possess all the attributes of divinity, -- omniscience, omnipotence, boundless wisdom, infinite love; these attributes are all needed in the Godhead; let them exist there, and let the Infinite Mind repose in the exercise of these attributes, assured that all is infinitely well which He does, and that all will result well in the end. Thus He will have perfect peace. How can we have a similar peace? Obviously not by aspiring to have Jehovah's natural attributes, but by simple faith in Him. We do not need His attributes; they would not befit us; but we need faith; for faith befits us and our relations to God above us and to a dark and trying world around us. It is enough that one great Being should possess divine attributes; He has them; He will use them; and He has told us how He will use them. He assures us that He wields all His natural attributes in infinite love and wisdom. What could we ask more?

Since therefore His attributes create a certainty that all shall be well as He can make it, and since this certainly gives Him a deep and unalloyed peace, it follows most clearly that faith on our part should give us the same certainty and the same sort of peace. If we believe that God has framed the best possible plan and will certainly execute it in the best possible way, we shall not feel anxious for the final result. Then let us have faith in His universal providence. Let us confide in the wisdom of all He does and of all He suffers to be done. It becomes us to acquiesce in all God does whether for its own sake, or as unavoidably incidental to His best possible system; whether occurring to us or to others; whether done so that we can understand its objects and end, or done in a manner inscrutable to our imperfect vision. It is easy for us to understand that in a universe of moral agents many things will result which cannot be avoided without defeating the end. Hence we should acquiesce in the wisdom, love and resources of God. Suppose a man takes some great and important journey, for some worthy and remunerative end. He accomplishes his journey and happily secures the end he sought, but here are various incidental evils accruing. He has blistered his feet by walking, or has worn out his shoes, or he has missed his dinner once or twice on the road, or has caught a shower; but shall these light and incidental evils destroy his peace or make him regret his journey?

4. In like manner the incidental evils in the government of God should be patiently borne and the more so since they are not only light compared with the resulting value of the ends gained, but because infinite wisdom can overrule even these for much important good.

5. It is essential to our peace that we should be sure that under God all things are working out the utmost good, possible to God, and indeed, great and infinite good, absolutely. Here before you is a blind man who lives happily with his son. But suppose he had no confidence in his son at all. He is afraid as he takes his hand on a Sabbath morning to come to the house of God, that his son will pitch him off the steps. He cannot trust his wife or his daughter to prepare his food lest they should take advantage of his blindness and give him poison. How wretched he must be!

But if he has proper confidence, he may be as quiet as to these fears, and as placid, as the best eyes could make him. How natural that he should enjoy other people's eyes, and not only be happy that they can see, but also himself enjoy the advantages of their perfect vision. He can enjoy his breakfast as well as they do. Faith makes up in many respects the place of sight.

Suppose now that we have confidence that nothing can happen which shall disturb God in any wise, or shall frustrate His plans. Suppose God has assured us that He is working all things according to the counsel of His own will; shall we not confide in His management? True He apprises us that there are some things done by moral agents, which taken by themselves and considered as their voluntary acts, He utterly abhors, as for example, their sin; yet He assures us that He can overrule it for so much good that on the whole its incidental evils in the system of a moral government do not disturb His deep, eternal peace. As in a machine there will be friction, and yet its action and results are excellent and no man need be troubled because of the incidental evil of its friction, so in the government of God. Suppose the man who invented steam engines had foreseen all their friction -- every case of bursting boilers, and all their consequences, and withal, every instance in which they should be used for evil purposes; if he should foresee these evil results and nothing else, he might be deeply troubled; but if he sees also all the resulting and far-overbalancing good, he may set his mind at rest. Much more still might he repose in peace if he had resources enough to convert even the friction to some useful end; if he could overrule every explosion of

an engine to work out important good. How reasonable in this case that he should say -- "All is well; I can make all things work together for good."

6. So deep and blessed is the calm, eternal repose of the Infinite Mind, despite of the presence of some sin in His moral universe. His eternal gaze pierces all that can occur, or ever shall, surveying all relations and bearings and all possible results. In view of all, His peace is unalloyed. Why? Because He understands all He is doing and all the possible results. But how can His peace become available to us? We must consider what He has told us; and what is this? That all things are wrought out according to the counsel of His own will. That whatsoever He has purposed, He will assuredly perform. That not one sparrow can fall to the ground without Him. That we may confide in Him to govern all things with infinite wisdom and love. Then let us receive all He has said, and trust Him for all He is doing, and ever shall do.

7. But we are finite beings and are liable to get exceedingly bewildered and confounded if we lose our faith in God. You take a child into an engine room amid the noise, the crash, the dreadful displays of power, and he screams with fright; you must take him out or he will go into fits. So we are often troubled when we see a world in commotion, rocking with tempests, bleeding in war, filled with the groans occasioned by sin and by death. But why so? Does not God reign on high? Has He not told us what He is doing, and why He has framed a system of machinery to us apparently so vast and complicated, and so fraught with evil? Indeed He has told us enough for us to know. He has assured us that nothing can occur, without His intelligent and wise permission; that He is working all things according to His own most wise and benevolent plans.

8. How broad and glorious is the ground laid for peace, if we will only sympathize with God and fully trust Him! What more could we possibly have?

Again, as a condition of peace we need a perfectly rectified sensibility. The fact is, that our sensibilities have been suffered so long to run riot, and have become so enormous and so unreasonable, it is impossible that we should be at peace till they are subdued. The satisfaction of perfect peace can be had in no other way.

9. Our will, also must be subdued till there shall be no lusting after unreasonable and forbidden objects. Its stubbornness must all give place to a deep and unresisting submission to God's will. Then our souls will be at peace.

REMARKS.

1. God says in this text that He has called us to enjoy this state of mind. Indeed, can this be so? Has called us to enjoy what? His own eternal blessedness. He calls us to come and drink at the same eternal fountain whence flow the streams of His exhaustless felicity. Spreading out before us the infinite calm and repose of His own mind, He cries -- Ho! come, ye troubled and anxious ones; come and partake of this blessed peace. Let it rule forevermore in your hearts.

2. If God has called us to this, it is of the utmost importance that we should understand our calling. What is this to which He has called us? To let the peace of God rule in our hearts. Then let us understand what this peace of God is, and on what conditions we can secure its permanent reign in our own hearts.

3. If we are not enjoying this peace now, it is high time we should enquire why we do not. If God has called us to it, and we have not come, why have we not? Is it because we do not choose to fall in with the natural and necessary conditions? The very fact that God leaves it with our choice may occasion our loss of it. It puts it in our power to lose the blessing if we will.

If you cannot be satisfied with what God must do, you cannot be satisfied at all. God has no right to satisfy you and you have no reason to expect that He will. If you are so unreasonable as to be unwilling God should pursue His own ends by His own means, He will leave you to take care of your own peace. He will by no means turn aside from His plan for your sake. He will not make Himself unhappy because you cannot be persuaded to believe in Him, to confide in His wisdom and love, and submit yourself to His will. It would indeed please Him to make you happy; but if you will not be happy in Him, you must go your own way and provide for your own miserable happiness according to your own foolish wisdom.

4. Our peace cannot be perfect unless we ourselves are perfect.

5. To have unbroken peace, we must be physically perfect in this sense, namely, that our sensibility must be subdued so as not to be thinking and craving after

impossible things, for obviously, so long as this is our physical state, it is vain for us to hope for uninterrupted peace.

6. We can see in this subject what constitutes the peace of saints on their death-bed. How often standing by the bedside of dying saints, have I philosophized on their case as I have marked their perfect peace of mind and have asked them questions to draw out their real feelings and views. I know not how often my former wife said to me on her death-bed, "My peace is perfect." She said this too with an emphasis very unusual -- an emphasis which showed me that she meant all her words implied. This led me to look at the question, -- What can be the elements of this peace?

It is plain that this peace is of no ordinary character. No desire remains unsatisfied. There is no anxiety to live and no fear to die. No passions or appetites remain to lust and crave and disquiet the mind. The soul has no unbelief; its faith is perfect. It rests in God with inexpressible composure and satisfaction. Grasping His universal providence, the mind is satisfied that God will evermore do all things well. Suppose the dying saint has children to leave behind. They are left confidently with God, in the most perfect confidence that He will take care of them and of all their interests. There remains in the mind no anxiety about the great object of the conversion of the world. This too is felt reposing on the everlasting promises, and the soul feels happy to rest the case with God.

How wonderfully deep this peace often becomes on the dying bed of God's people! It seems as if nothing could disturb it. It beams forth from their eye; it rests in placid repose on every feature; their very pulse testifies that not an anxious thought intrudes. How wonderful and how calm! Said Dr. Burritt, a pious physician, to Dr. Robbins, an infidel student of his -- "I am dying; please come and feel my pulse." The young man took his hand. Dr. Burritt said, "Can you die like that? You see all is calm and peaceful -- not one troubled thought or fear ruffles my mind or my body. Could you die so? When you shall come to die I hope you may have pulse as calm as that."

The scene affected the young doctor greatly, and became the means of his conversion. He saw that the gospel was doing for a dying saint what his infidelity could never do for him. He knew very well by the pulse of the dying Christian that there was not one agitated thought in his mind. He could not but see that the peace of God ruled in his heart, and spread its soothing influence

over every object that could reach the mind.

7. With this subject before us we can understand the secret of the peace of heaven. There the mind is subdued into unalloyed and perfect peace -- a peace which rules in the heart forever. Faith in God supplies the place of omniscience, so that though they cannot know all, they can trust all in the hands of Him who does. Let come what will, therefore their peace remains undisturbed, for they believe implicitly in God, and they know that His hand is in every event that does or possibly can occur.

Suppose a mother has gone to heaven, and she does not know that her children are yet converted, or will be. But this does not disturb her perfect peace. Why can that Christian look at death approaching and not so much as wink or twinge a particle? She fears not death's bony arm; dreads not his posed and quivering dart; sees her children around her and yet is calm and undisturbed. Her calmness is not the stupor of mental imbecility, for she manifests a most wakeful concern in all that passes. Her mind was never more active and full of interest than it now is. Draw near and ask her the state of her mind. Hold your ear close down to her parched and stiffened lips, for she can scarcely articulate a word. Catch her gentle whisper -- "peace, peace" she says, "all is perfect peace." But your children; how is it with them? Are they converted? She replies, "I have left them all with God. He has the care of my children."

Now if you can tell me the secret of the peace of the death-bed, I will tell you the secret of the peace of heaven. Or if you can tell me the secret of the peace of heaven, I can tell you the secret of the peace of the saint's dying bed. Or if you can tell me either, I can tell you the secret of all spiritual peace.

8. To those of us who have lost near and dear friends, these thoughts must be peculiarly precious. We have seen them peaceful and calm, their minds smooth as the unruffled lake -- their faith perfect and universal -- their will sunk into the will of God, and the whole mind chastened and purified. O how such a mind looks out upon the foaming ocean of events! It sees the air filled with spray, hears the thunder of the roaring billows; it sees in the distance the fearful storm, but looks out calmly from the little cleft of the rock, securely, as if there never was a storm or a billow and never could be. Not so much as the wing of the storm can touch him -- not a ripple of a wave can reach him. His soul has peace in God.

9. Many do not realize the conditions of peace of mind. They may have heard of them by the hearing of the ear, but no just impression of what they are has been made upon their minds.

10. The absence of peace of mind in any one Christian is often a great stumbling-block to others. When parents fail of possessing it, their state is often a great stumbling-block to their children. And yet they are not aware of the evil influence of their uneasy temper. In fact some seem to make a virtue of being eternally uneasy. They seem to think it becomes them to be anxious and troubled about many things. Mother, you may do more good in one single day by letting the peace of God rule in your heart, than by everything else you can do. Ah yes; let your children see your brow placid and calm; then they will see one thing in your religion attractive and not repulsive. But you may go on, bustling and fretting and talking of the wickedness of your children from morning till night, and you will only ruin them. Such influences have no natural tendency to save them. So long as your brow wears upon it storms and not sunshine, you cannot hope to win your children to embrace the gospel you profess.

11. Many seem to have so many wishes, they are likely to be damned unless God takes some strong measures with them to break up their uneasy and lusting spirit. This having an everlasting craving is entirely aside from the order of God. These lustings and cravings must be all put away, and you must learn to settle down into your own niche and be satisfied in all respects with what God does. But you cry out, "O I must have this thing, or I must have that!" You must learn to be satisfied with what God gives you and be quiet. No longer insult God by assuming that He is making mistakes in His disposal of your affairs.

12. The peace of God will rule in us in proportion to the strength of our confidence in God. It requires strong faith to see God in everything, to believe that under His hand all things are working together for good -- to know and realize that all events are pushed forward with one divine, eternal energy, and so controlled by infinite wisdom that all the wickedness of moral agents is made to work out moral good. To believe all this and live daily in the full and quiet assurance of it is no small thing.

Why does not God make Himself uneasy with the trouble and mischiefs of this crazy world? He rests in His own eternal knowledge and power. The Christian says -- "Ah em, I don't know what is before me." But I do, says God to him -- I know all most perfectly. But says the Christian, "I cannot see anything how these

matters will turn out." I can, says the Omniscient One, and you need not be anxious. Faith therefore -- faith in God is the great remedy for all this disturbance of mind. "Said I not unto thee," said Christ, "that if thou wouldst believe thou shouldst see the glory of God?" Then why, O Christian, wilt thou fret thyself down to the depths of hell!

[Back to Top](#)

Receiving Honor from Men and Not from God

Lecture XIII

August 29, 1849

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--John 5:44: "How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?"

The discussion of the subject presented in these words will lead me,

I. To show what is implied in receiving honor from men rather than from God.

II. To adduce the evidences of this state of mind.

III. To show that while this state of mind continues, faith is impossible.

I. To show what is implied in receiving honor from men rather than from God.

1. "Receiving" implies an act of the will. It is not therefore merely approbateness. When a person constitutionally desires the approbation of his fellow-men, and this constitutional desire remains a mere feeling--an involuntary state of the sensibility, and does not lead to any acts of the will aimed towards the attainment of the object sought, no blame can attach to it. This therefore can not be what our Savior intended. He could not complain of this constitutional tendency, and therefore it can not be that He

designates this in this language.

2. It implies a will committed to this propensity. The will is devoted to the gratification of this desire. Men seek applause from their fellow-beings, and make it an object--usually a great object, to gain the high esteem of others of their species.

3. This state of mind implies great spiritual blindness. Men who can prefer the honor of their fellow men to the honor that comes from God only, must be exceedingly blind. Their minds must be in such a state that they really can see nothing relating to God and spiritual things in its true light. If they saw spiritually they would not make so unreasonable, so insane a preference. They must be stone blind to the value of God's approbation--else they could never place the approbation of man above it.

4. It implies unbelief. No man in the exercise of faith could receive honor from men rather than from God. If he believed what the Bible teaches of God and of spiritual things, it would be impossible for him to make such a choice.

5. It also implies contempt for God. No one could prefer man's approbation to God's if he did not really in heart condemn God. This state of mind practically says, Give me the esteem of my fellow-men and I am satisfied; they are of some consequence; their good opinion is worth something; but as for the honor that comes from God only--what is that to me? Why should I care for His good opinion?

Now who does not see that this is really the spirit of contemning God?

II. Evidences of this state of mind.

1. Men are certainly in this state when they are more affected by loss of character with man than with God. This would show of course that they are more solicitous for reputation with man than with God; or which amounts to the same thing, that they love the honor that comes from man more than that which comes from God only.

2. Persons are in this state of mind when they more naturally inquire what man will think of them than what God will; when they are more solicitous to know the former than the latter, and are more anxious about the result.

This anxiety reveals one's state of mind on the point in question beyond all doubt.

3. We may know ourselves to be in this state if we do or omit to do anything from regard to what man will think rather than from regard to what God will think. To be more influenced by man's opinion than by God's--by man's word than by God's word, must be taken as decisive proof of this state of mind. For example, some go to meeting more from regard to what man will think than to what God will think--more to please man than to please God. This is sometimes the case with professed Christians, and in their attendance upon the prayer meeting, as perhaps some of you can testify. Some persons abstain from labor, or from idle gossip on the Sabbath, with their eye more on man than on God. Some students get lessons more from regard to their teachers and classmates than to God. With many, how rare a thing it is to inquire--what will please my God and Father? Who does not see that such can have no faith? That remaining in this state of mind, they can not exercise faith in God.

In the same state of mind, persons will regulate their dress, their habits and manners more to please man than to please God. How much do we see of this?

4. Those are in this state of mind who need the impulse of approbateness to secure the performance of that which they are under obligation to do. Suppose it be the case that regard to God is not enough to induce us to do known duty, but we need also the inducement of human praise or human esteem, what does this prove, if not that we seek the honor that comes from men and are not satisfied with that which comes from God only? When our regard for God is thus impotent as a motive to duty, it proves most conclusively that the heart is set upon the honor that comes from man.

5. On the same principle when we find that we need this stimulus to make us omit anything that should be omitted, we have the same praise-loving state of heart revealed. It is often the case that persons will neither do nor omit things which duty and God demand, but which public sentiment forbids. Men need the spur of public sentiment to induce action, or to dissuade from action as the case may be; which shows an exceedingly corrupt state of mind--one over which God has no practical sway whatever.

6. Another proof of this state of mind is, that persons are deeply affected either by the applause or the censure of men. Paul could say--"It is a small thing for me to be judged by man's judgment;"--so all-controlling was his regard for God's judgment, it left small scope for the influence of man's judgment. In fact who does not see that in the nature of the case it is of comparatively small account either way, whether man approves or disapproves; and a man who had proper faith in God and in spiritual things can never be greatly affected one way or the other by man's opinions. He will make this his main inquiry--Will this course please God? Who of you that have known by experience what it is to be drawn into deep communion with God, has not felt most impressively that the opinions of man are light as a feather? You have been lifted entirely above being affected by the applause or the frowns of men.

7. Decisive proof of the state condemned in our text is afforded when we suffer either the private judgment or public sentiment of men to restrain us from obeying God. In such case we may know that our regard for God is not supreme, and that it is impossible we should have faith.

8. Equally so when we conform outwardly to those duties which are popular with men, and neglect those which are not enforced by public sentiment. Often men will be punctual in duties sustained by public sentiment, but negligent in duties not thus sustained. For example, a man will violate the Sabbath in private, by reading books which he knows are unsuitable for that day, or in conversation which disqualifies the mind for the worship of God, when still he would by no means go abroad on the Sabbath, or in any way be known publicly as disregarding its sacred claims. Many will write such letters on the Sabbath as they would not have it known were written on that day, and many letters written on the Sabbath are dated either Saturday or on Monday. They are not ashamed to have God know their sins--only let it be hid from human view.

9. We evince the same state of mind if we refuse to avow ourselves the friends of God because such avowal would be unpopular with men. Persons may be in such circumstances that to avoid odium they will conceal the fact of their being professors of religion, or the fact of their holding some sentiments not generally popular; and this they do because they are far more afraid of injuring their popularity with men than with God. How wrong!

How deeply corrupt before God must such a heart be!

10. We evince the same spirit whenever we seek to connect ourselves with those families, churches, societies, or institutions which will increase our popularity with men and not with God. For example, in cities, on this principle men will go to the most popular churches. Students will go to the most popular institutions, and in both cases the question is not--Which course will most please God?--but, which will be the most popular with men? In the same way, men will seek to form connections with families so as to augment their popularity with men, not their acceptance with God.

On the same principle men will avoid connections and associations which will only raise them in God's esteem, and not in man's. Suppose God is building up a church and men are afraid to join it because it is unpopular. If you understand the case as it is, and choose to avoid unpopularity among men rather than incur odium and reproach for Christ's sake, how clearly do you show what spirit you are of? I knew the case of a man of a very aristocratic spirit, a member of the Presbyterian church, who became ultimately converted, and his conversion was a real turning. He came square round; would go to church among the poor, among the people of color, among the most despised classes of society, and among those only. He said to me, "Going among these classes I feel a great deal more in my place, and my worship of God is far sweeter to me there. It is my very life to go and try to elevate those classes. I love to help them--to encourage them and give them all the countenance and sympathy I can. I love to go, said he, to that colored congregation; there is a blessed revival among them, and there I find men looking in the simplicity of their hearts for the approbation of God. There is none of that stiffness there which encumbers me among the aristocrats of the city."

11. We show the same spirit when we have more regard to outward appearance than to the state of our hearts before God. Take for example, any person in this house who has more regard to outward appearance before men than to inward appearance before God. You have taken more pains in your morning preparation to commend yourself outwardly to men than inwardly to God; have spent more time before your mirror than on your knees; have looked more carefully to your person and your dress than to your heart; ah, you come into God's house as a mocker, to insult God! You

profess to worship Him, but in heart you worship the congregation, or perhaps, yourself! And must not this be an abomination to God?

12. Again, when persons have more regard to their manner and behavior in the sight of God, and the question with them is--not, what will God think of us, but what will men think? then all is corrupt in heart.

13. Also when men allow themselves to practice any secret sin which they would be ashamed to practice before men, they reveal their own hearts as loving the praise and fearing the censure of man more than God.

14. Again, if we do not sooner blush and hang our heads to find our hearts impure before God than we should to appear in the most disgusting exposure before men, we show that we have more regard to man's esteem than to God's. If we can be ashamed of anything which men disapprove, but can be backslidden before God and not be ashamed of it, we are certainly in a state in which we can not be saved.

15. When we feel the necessity of human applause to prompt us to the performance of any duty; as for example, if a wife needs the stimulus of a husband's applause to prevent her from neglecting her duties; or the husband needs his wife's applause to quicken him in his duties; or when a student needs the impulse of his teacher's praise to make him study, or the stimulus of commencement and of college honors to crowd him along so as to make even commendable progress; these cases and such as these evince that man's esteem is held before God's. When such stimuli are needed to induce proper application to study, all is wrong. When men need these or similar appliances to induce right action, where are they? What state of mind are they in?

16. When it is natural for us to conceive of action produced by such motives as right, we show ourselves to have entirely false views of the real nature of right and wrong. In fact if we can look upon such a state of mind otherwise than with loathing, we show that our hearts are far indeed from estimating things by the right standard. Suppose a student should come to me and I should see that he must have my applause or he would not study, could I regard him as a Christian? While I see that these are the considerations and appliances needed to prompt him along, and that he is influenced by applause only, can I have confidence in his piety? Can he

afford me any evidence that his heart is with God? Must I not disapprove, nay, even loathe his spirit?

17. So if we are in a state of mind in which we can think of securing any real good to others by such appliances; if we can suppose that by such a course we can either promote their piety or their real usefulness, we are ourselves entirely out of the way. Nothing could show more conclusively that we have missed the true idea of supreme regard for God.

III. While this state of mind continues faith is impossible.

1. This is asserted in the text. The question of our Savior implies the strongest form of negation. He could not more pointedly have said--It is impossible for you who receive honor one of another to have faith.

2. The state of mind implied in our text is the very opposite of faith. Faith commits the will to God and implies a supreme regard to God's views, opinions and applause. Of course it is as widely contrasted with the state of receiving honor from men rather than from God, as it can be.

3. The state of mind here described is a committal to gratify a propensity and must therefore be a state of total depravity. What less can you say of the man who prefers honor from men to honor from God?

4. It is therefore naturally impossible to believe, and yet indulge in this state of mind. The state which prefers human applause and the state of the true believer are fundamentally opposed to each other and can never co-exist in the same mind. There is therefore ample ground in the very constitution and nature of things for the strong negation implied in the question put by our Lord--"How can ye believe who receive honor one of another and seek not the honor that comes from God only?"

REMARKS.

1. This is one of the most common forms of total depravity. This giving up the mind to be influenced more by man than by God--more by man's opinions than by God's, is exceedingly common and the propensity to it seems to be amazingly strong. Therefore this propensity, more than any other, takes the control of the will. Hence few things will excite more pain or more pleasure than those which affect reputation. How many a young woman--professed Christians too--would

almost go deranged if she supposed her reputation were suffering, and yet she cares not for God's disapprobation! How many young men would almost die if they felt themselves disgraced; if they saw themselves expelled from the Institution; while yet they are very little, if at all affected by God's known displeasure! O what a state of mind is this!

2. Yet this state of mind is often regarded as scarcely one of depravity at all. So far from being thought to be total depravity, it is by many scarcely deemed a sin. Men will show by their language and conduct that they have more respect for the esteem of men than of God, and yet they think this quite consistent with a profession of religion. This is in their view altogether a venial fault if indeed it be a fault at all. They would be astounded if you were to assure them that such a state of mind disproves Christian character. They have never dreamed any such thing.

3. Multitudes who profess religion are totally blind in this matter. Some are given up to one form of self-seeking and some to another; but almost none of them attribute this to total depravity. Are they not totally blind in these things? How can men be religious while their will is given up to selfishness? Surely this state is precisely the opposite of religion.

4. How few know what it is to renounce the world in the sense of renouncing all undue regard to its opinions and its honors, and giving themselves wholly to God. We sometimes see a case of this sort in which a Christian does really break the yoke of sin and selfishness--but how rare! Yet in no other cases have we the proof that persons are truly religious.

5. Many of the most endearing and important relations of life are perverted by selfishness and thus become a snare to souls. For example, the marriage relation. Many women feel worse to lose the affections of their husband than to lose the love of God. They will wander far, very far away from God, and incur His certain and sore displeasure; yet it gives them scarcely the least possible anxiety or pain; but these same persons at the same time may be tremblingly alive to the opinions of their husbands! Oh, if they could only please their husbands? But you see no manifestations of strong desire to please God.

The same thing is often true of husbands towards their wives. So in all the various relations of life. They are abused and perverted by the selfishness of men. Designed by our Creator for our social happiness, they are so perverted as

to become a great temptation to idolatrous affection and regard; then of course, God is disesteemed and forgotten, and the most fatal effects of human depravity are the natural results.

I have often thought that we as a people in this place have greatly erred in the way of too much regard to men's opinions. We began here a small and unknown people. No sooner did we become in some measure known than our names began to cast out as evil. There were many reasons why we should be opposed, some of which were to us unavoidable. But into this subject I need not now enter. I cannot however forbear to remark that there has been a manifest desire here for a long time past to conform so far to the course of other institutions as to get back to popular favor. It cannot be denied that there has been such a desire manifested here, nor that it has been somewhat general. There has been a tendency to turn and tack, and haul up to the wind of popular favor so as to avoid being reproached by those whom we cannot regard as being God's people and in sympathy with God. Now so far as we would do this, we are backsliders from God--real apostates from the God we have professed to love and obey. We ought to know and consider that the world is no more friendly to God than it used to be. In this world, said Christ to His real disciples, ye shall have tribulation. If we will be His unswerving disciples and followers, we have no more right to expect that we can escape public odium than that Christ could.

I am not now saying that we should excite public odium causelessly, or recklessly; but we should seek God's approbation supremely, and then leave all results to His over-ruling providence.

6. In the light of our subject we see the great secret of the loss of piety among students. It is a notorious fact that students, instead of rising are apt to degenerate in their piety. I know there are exceptions, but they are only exceptions, and solitary ones too. James B. Taylor was one, and for this reason he was the butt of ridicule in his class. Just because he sustained and developed his piety, was he unpopular with his class-mates--though far indeed from being unpopular with God.

How shall we account for this fact of general declension in the piety of students? We cannot ascribe it to the nature of their studies. It cannot lie either in the mental exercise and discipline itself, nor in the kind of studies pursued usually in college. It must therefore lie in the motives under which study is pursued. The fearful fact is--students become ambitious. They have their eye on college

honors; indeed not only their eye, but their earnest heart. To deny this were to deny one of the plainest matters of fact. Who does not know that they often manifest this to an odious extent? There may be more or less of the appearance of piety manifested in various ways along with this strong manifestation of ambition, but what then? How can ambition and pure religion come into sympathy and union with each other? If those students were to study nothing but the Bible, and yet do this for the sake of making a great commencement speech to show themselves off superbly, who does not see that there would be no piety at all in this? Suppose they studied Hebrew or Theology for such an end, could you say they had profited much by those studies, pursued for such objects?

7. This same form of ambition is the ruin of many ministers. They get this spirit in college, carry it into the Theological Seminary, and out of the Seminary into their pulpit, and so on perhaps through life. And who does not know that an ambitious minister is the next-door neighbor to the devil? Who in all the earth does more of Satan's work than he, or does it up to better advantage for his employer?

Now why should not an ambitious life be the result of such a course of training through the college and through the seminary? Why should not such causes produce such results? Is it strange?

I do not by any means say that college honors were intended for this end, but I do say that these are the results naturally, usually, and most deplorably. No wonder these results should distress the truly spiritual portion of the church, and grieve the intelligent and pious patrons of literary institutions. I have good reason to know that they do. I can see why they should.

8. Everybody feels that it is a dreadful sin for a minister to seek applause. Who does not feel this? Who does not know that he should himself oppose a minister whom he had reason to believe ambitious? You see a man evidently preaching from ambitious motives, seeking honor from men more than from God; you mark him, and notice how his ambition works itself out everywhere--in the shape of his sermon, in his manner in the pulpit, and his manner out of the pulpit; in his remarks about himself and his inquires after praise;--seeing this and such things as these, you would cry out against him--Hypocrite! wretch! how can you desecrate God's sanctuary and altar by such a heart as yours!

But thou that condemnest another, beware lest thou also condemn thyself.

Seeking honor from man more than from God is just as bad in other men as in gospel ministers:--is just as wicked in other employments as in the gospel ministry. A man in any sphere who allows himself to do the same things is just as odious to God as the minister is, and so would be the woman also who should do the same, and possess the same spirit.

9. Many persons at great pains educate their children more for the sake of elevating them in the world than for raising them in the esteem and favor of God. Many educate themselves for the same end, on the same principles. How dreadful that persons should educate either themselves or their children for sin and for moral ruin.

10. As long as young men study ambitiously, we need not expect a thoroughly consecrated, self-denying, and God-honoring ministry. Education has too much power to admit of results so unlike its own tendencies. Train your men ambitiously during their years of study, and you can expect nothing better than an ambitious life.

11. Students so trained, come gradually to lose a sense of the wickedness of this state of mind. They cease to realize how wicked it is to be more influenced by man than by God. They come gradually under this influence; but when once it has gained the ascendancy in their hearts, they carry it with them to the last moment of commencement day; then they go right off with it to some theological seminary, and perhaps will select their seminary with special reference to their own ambitious ends, preferring that which will give them most _____. No wonder this spirit of ambition follows them from the seminary into the ministry, and through their ministry to their very grave!

12. When a student is seen to be in such a state, instructors ought to have their eye on him, and ought to bring influences to bear upon him to save him if possible before the strength of habit becomes too strong to be overcome--too rigid to be cured. Especially should councils and all bodies which exercise the function of granting license to preach, be peculiarly watchful if called to examine for licensure a candidate who is manifestly ambitious. No such candidate ought ever to be admitted into the ministry--no, never! Their influence in it cannot fail of being fearfully pernicious.

13. A great many persons it is to be feared are keeping up the form of religion before men, while they know themselves to have no communion with God. They

may attend worship in their families--but to be seen of men rather than to be accepted of God. They go through the forms of Sabbath worship--their eye on man and not towards God. If they are unblemished in their moral life, it is from regard to their own reputation, lest they should incur the censure of the church and be seen to be really wicked before men. Perhaps they will even pray in public for the sake of their reputation among men, while they know that God regards it as an abomination. Ah, sometimes such men go and pray when the very midnight of the pit is not blacker than their hearts! Horrible!

You can easily see why so many complain of coldness and unbelief. No wonder there is unbelief in your hearts. "How can ye believe who receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?" While you turn your back upon God, how can you expect anything better than that He will turn His face away from you? Could you even respect Him if He did not manifest self-respect enough to do this?

O then, cease ye from man! Cease to regard man as one whose opinions should affect you, and control your conduct or your heart. O how many are in bondage to public sentiment--a bondage fatal to their peace with God--fatal to their exercising faith in God--fatal--alas! in multitudes of cases to the final salvation of their souls!

[Back to Top](#)

Faith the Work of God

Lecture XIV

October 10, 1849

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--John 6:28-29: "Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."

In the preceding context Jesus rebukes the people for following Him, not

because they saw his miracles, and in his miracles the proof that He came from God, but for the sake of the loaves and fishes; and then takes occasion to exhort them to "labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth to everlasting life." Upon this they start up with the question--What is this "labor" of which you speak? What shall we do to secure this everlasting life?

To this Jesus answers in our text--"This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent."

In discussing the subject here presented, I shall

I. Notice the difference between the letter and the spirit of a commandment.

II. Show what is not the work which God really requires.

III. What it is.

IV. What is implied in it.

V. Notice some delusions into which persons fall on this subject.

I. Notice the difference between the letter and the spirit of a commandment.

The letter respects the outward doing--the executive act, or as sometimes called, the proximate act, (as being the last in the series,) as distinguished from the ultimate end or intention which in the order of nature comes first in the series.

For example, in the act of going to meeting; the mere external act of going is the last or proximate act, and may be obedience to the simple letter of the precept. If all is right, the proximate end may be to join in the singing, the prayer, or to participate in the instructions of the sanctuary; but the ultimate end will be to worship and glorify God. The letter of a precept says--Do this--Abstain from that; and yet every one knows that all acts do in fact proceed from some ultimate end to which the spirit of the precept refers. In the case of going to church, the letter of the precept respects only the outward going, and of course the outward going fulfills the letter of the precept. But the precept has also a spirit, and this refers to the ultimate intention of the act, and requires that this shall be right before God.

This distinction is not only a very plain one, but in morals it is altogether

fundamental. An act shall have a bad character, a good character, or none at all, according to its ultimate moral quality. For example: giving to the poor may result from a great variety of motives, and its real character can be determined only from its ultimate end.

God, therefore, not only requires the outward doing, but much more, and above all, the motives; so that a man would obey who had a right spirit even if prevented from the outward act. For example, the precepts requiring attendance on public worship and giving to the poor, would be obeyed in the mere intention, provided circumstances were such as absolutely to forbid the outward act. Yet it should not be forgotten that if the outward act is possible, the sincere intention will always require and secure it. Still it is true that if the intention exists, the deed, so far forth as its morality is concerned is actually done. If the intention be wrong, the command is disobeyed; if right, it is obeyed, whether the man is able to carry it out in external action or not. If the intention be not right, there is no obedience, how much-so-ever the letter may be observed.

II. What is not the work of God. That is--What does not constitute that obedience which is acceptable to God?

1. It is not compliance with the mere letter of any precept whatever. So far as the executive acts of the will are concerned, none of these are the work which God requires.

2. It is not doing any thing whatever with ultimate reference to please ourselves, or promoting our own self-interest. In other words, it is not any action determined by hope of personal good, or fear of personal evil. This can be no more doing God's work than a hired man would do his employer's work who should be purely selfish and aim to please himself only, instead of pleasing his employer. If he feels no interest in his work for his employer's sake, and is interested only to serve himself, his hands may turn off a little business in a poor way for his master; but where no heart is, there is no valuable service.

So, and much more, in religion. Unless a man goes out of himself for his end, he is really serving himself, and not God. Suppose he prays, or preaches, or goes to meeting; if his ultimate object be to secure some good to himself, he is not doing the Lord's work, but only his own. He is as really doing his own work as he who goes to California to dig for gold in its mines.

The moral difference does not lie in the business done, but in the spirit of the act. One goes with a spade and mattock to dig for gold--all for himself alone;--another goes to his closet or to church to do his religious services, and to work out his own salvation. If the latter be done as really for self as the other, and as truly without an ultimate regard to the will and glory of God, it is no more acceptable to God than the former. No matter what the course of life is, if self and self only be the end.

3. It is nothing done in obedience to custom. It is astonishing to see how much is done for no other reason than that the church does so. The usages and customs of the church are held and deemed as law. But obedience to this law is not the work of God to which our text alludes.

4. No obedience whatever to public sentiment is real religion. It is wonderful to see how much that passes for religion is done from regard to public sentiment. In places where the standard of piety as determined by public sentiment is very low, you will scarcely distinguish this class of persons from the most worldly men. But transfer them to other circumstances and relations where public sentiment requires much of them, and you will see their lives greatly modified. They will become very strict in their religious duties, and very careful to meet all the claims which the current public sentiment makes upon them.

It is not strange that in some situations these persons should seem to be very religious. Since I have lived in Oberlin I have conversed with hundreds who have told me how much their religious life had improved since they have been here. But this change may have been simply the result of external circumstances--no principle at bottom controlling their conduct except a regard to public opinion. Such persons are greatly in danger of misjudging their own character, and of becoming very self-complacent in the idea of their making great progress in holiness, while really they ought only to condemn themselves for being under the control of public sentiment rather than of faith working by love.

5. Nothing done in obedience to the commandments of men is doing the work of God. Human laws are well--in civil governments, in the school and in the family; but to suppose that obeying them is doing our whole duty to God is a great mistake. It is a part of our duty to God, no doubt, but it is not the great thing which God requires. And when regard to human authority is

the ultimate motive, and we go no farther than this, then plainly we render obedience simply to parents, and not to God--that is, if in this very obedience they have no regard at all to God, they render Him no obedience at all. To do so is not "obeying parents in the Lord."

6. Nothing done from sheer superstition. This is most obvious. If I had time I should like to point out various things done here which are real superstitions. Superstitions are not restricted to the Roman Catholics. They come down among Protestants also, in the form of traditions of the elders, with which persons are exceedingly careful to comply, and thus think to work out great and important righteousness.

7. Nothing done from a mere sense of duty, without faith or love. Every mere legalist knows what it is to do things from a mere sense of duty. In fact nothing is more common than for persons to act on this principle. They meet a demand of conscience, and conscience in some persons seems to be developed only in certain directions and in reference to certain things. Usually men who say they act from conscience have reference only to external acts. They say it is right for me to do thus and thus towards my neighbor; but in this they think only of the external act, not of the internal motive.

But listen to that man who acts from a mere sense of duty: "I have been to meeting twice today. I went because I thought it to be my duty." You did, indeed! And is this the spirit of God's requirements? Where is the faith and love of the gospel in this act! It is not there. There is not a particle of evangelical obedience in such doings. No man ever assigns as a reason for true love to God--I did it because I thought it was my duty! To be sure, a man who does right from love to God is conscious of conforming to his conscience; but he does not act because he is lashed up to duty by a scourge he dare not resist and can not endure.

8. No mere doing, whatever, without respect to the ultimate end, is obedience.

9. Nothing done to obtain a hope, or to support or revive an old hope, is doing the work of God. Many toil earnestly for these ends, but toil to no good purpose.

10. Nothing done to obtain comfort is real religion. If they had hope of success, they might toil and labor for this event in hell. The rich man praying for a drop of water to cool his tongue, might as well flatter himself that he is thereby doing the work of God, as they. How vain for persons to suppose that their labors to obtain rest of mind are really the work of God, unless those labors take the direction of faith and love. Intuitively the soul cries out,

"O where shall rest be found,

Rest for the weary soul."

Yet there is the utmost danger lest men seek it as an ultimate end, and otherwise than in the way of God. Men need a monitor to follow them about, crying evermore in their ears--Brother, sister, that is not the work of God. What, you say, perhaps,--what! does not God require me to pray? Yes; but with faith, not without faith. Does not God require me to give to the poor? Yes; but not without faith and love. O, how some men need an angel at their elbow continually to keep them from falling into the pit--they are so prone to make mistakes. Many need to be warned most earnestly and made to see that their great efforts to obtain exemption from agonies of mind, conviction and distress, are not really the work of God.

Indeed, no matter what the effort may be, though made in ever so exact conformity to the letter, yet it is not acceptable obedience unless made in faith. Nothing whatever which is not faith and love, or the spontaneous results of these exercises, can be deemed real obedience to God. This is most manifest, and needs to be thoroughly understood.

III. What is the work of God?

1. The text embraces all in a word--FAITH.

When Christ's hearers made this enquiry in our text, they had reference merely to executive or outward acts. They had fallen entirely from the spiritual apprehension of God's commands, and supposed their requisitions to lie merely in the external act. They understood God as requiring a mere external course of life. Christ, therefore, understood them as enquiring--Shall we sacrifice? Shall we give alms to the poor? Shall we make many offerings at the temple?

Christ understood their enquiry, and saw that they fell exceedingly short of the truth; therefore He for the time being left out of view, utterly and purposely, all which they called works. No doubt they esteemed this a most marvelous answer. To them his answer must have seemed equivalent to this: Do not anything at all. You ask, says Christ, what acts you shall do that you may work the works of God. I see that you have infinitely misapprehended the case. This is the work--that you believe God--exercise faith. "Faith? what is that?" they answer. "Do tell us what we shall DO!" Do none of those things which you have in your minds.

Yet we are not to suppose that Christ forbade the doing of any right external acts. He knew perfectly well as we also do, that if the heart could be got into the right state, all would be well. He therefore aimed at one blow to cut them square off from all their vain dependencies. "Do none of those things," said He, "as THE work of God; but believe." Suppose that they had replied, "We do believe already." Many hundreds have said so to me who yet were in a state similar to that of those Jews. We certainly believe, say they; and there is a sense in which they do; but it is not any such sense as involves obedience and love. It is only a purely intellectual assent to the truth; but this is not gospel faith.

2. Our text raises the great enquiry--What is the condition of salvation?

You will observe that we are not now enquiring into the grounds, but simply the conditions of salvation. Christ did not intend to teach that faith can be the meritorious ground of salvation; but simply that without which men can not be saved.

It is remarkable that Christ speaks as if faith comprehended all God's requirements. Obviously it is here spoken of just as love is where it is said to be the fulfilling of the law. In real love, we really fulfill the whole law; because love is connected with the whole circle of obedient activities and should be the moving spring of all our external actions. Faith sustains the same relations to all our activities that love does.

3. But what is this faith which is the work of God?

I answer,

(1.) It is not a merely intellectual conviction. It is not opinion, or any

set of opinions. It is not a mere speculation; nor a system of theology, however firmly or intelligently held; it is no merely intellectual state of mind.

(2.) But it is trust or confidence in the character of God. There can be no such thing as a rational belief of what God says, only as we believe him to be trustworthy. We never have confidence in the declarations of any being only as we pre-suppose confidence in his character. In faith therefore, we voluntarily cast ourselves upon and confide in the truthfulness, wisdom, love and power of God. Confidence in God is the same sort of thing as confidence in man. In exercising confidence in man, we really repose in the character of those whom we trust. Take for example the case of a student. He has no means of support. It is but natural, therefore, that he should be anxious, restive, and distressed lest he shall be obliged soon to abandon the pursuit of an education. To all human probability he must soon turn away from his books and his studies, and seek some means of livelihood in other pursuits. But tomorrow the mail brings him a letter from a friend--a man of great generosity, integrity and wealth. His letter says--"I have heard of your case, of your anxieties, of your embarrassments, and of your strong desire to go on with your education. It gives me pleasure to say to you that you may draw on me at sight for any amount you need."

Now suppose the student does not believe this--suppose he lacks confidence in the writer. O, he says, this looks very fair, but I am afraid he will fail in his business, or at least that he will change his mind. I don't believe I can rely on his promise. Now in this state of mind, he will not be at rest. Perhaps he will be as anxious as ever. But on the other hand, if he believes, he will be at rest. If he has all confidence in the character of his friend, he will feel as calm as evening. He can sleep as quietly as a babe. No longer will he let his bosom burn up with intense, wasting anxieties

So of all confidence in God's wisdom and power.

If any of you have ever been at sea in a fierce and dreadful storm, when every wave broke over you, every plank creaked as if it must be wrenched asunder, you know how anxiously you looked at the captain--how you watched his countenance, and studied especially his confidence in his

ship and in her capacity to weather the storm--and you noticed with what composure he saw his masts twisted almost double and bent up like withes, yet breaking not; then you had an illustration of faith. You trusted in the captain's judgment and skill; he trusted in the seaworthiness of his ship and in his own experience.

So of faith in God. You want faith that God loves both yourself and everybody else; for it you believed that He loves you, and yet did not believe that He loves everybody else, you might have trouble. So if you admit that He loves others but not yourself, you will find that more faith than this is needful before you can have universal peace.

You know how the little child feels towards his father. You may have an axe in your hand, or a sword;--the child is not afraid, for he knows you are a father. He will seize hold of it and play with it as with a feather, for he can not dream of danger or fear, so long as the instrument is in his father's hand. He believes that you love him; and knows that you will not hurt him, so that even a sword in your hand awakens no fear in his bosom.

So of God. You are no more afraid when God plays with the forked lightning than when he paints his bow on the vaulted sky in the stillness of approaching sunset. This is faith. It trusts God amid the storm as in the calm, assured that He is forevermore the same and always infinitely good and wise.

But you are sick;--yes, you are sick. What then? Suppose your mother could save your life and restore your health at any moment. You would feel very calm;--and why? Because you have so much confidence in her love. Ah, but you say--I have confidence in God's love; but perhaps God does not see it best to save my life. So your mother might not see it best to save your life; and if she were as good as God is, and as wise, she would do the very same thing. You may therefore now be just as peaceful as if your destiny lay in the hands of the kindest and wisest earthly parent, for you may know that you shall live or die just as infinite Love and Wisdom shall appoint.

Christ tasted death for every man;--consequently for both you and me. Now the faith that God requires involves the full belief of this. Faith

includes the confidence that Christ is ready, able and willing to save you. Suppose you are in the deep waters, and you seem just ready to sink--when suddenly you see a man just by, and you know that he is both ready, able and willing to save you. The fact that you believe this fully will make you quiet under any circumstances of danger. This confidence will make you as calm as if your feet were already on a rock.

(3.) Faith implies that you trust in Christ as sustaining to yourself all his revealed relations--as being of God made unto you wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption. You trust in the present sufficiency and fulness of his grace. You know it is adequate to meet and supply every want, and it is ready and at hand now. You see and believe that He can do for you all you need.

(4.) You also see in Christ provision made for all the future, so that you have no more occasion to be anxious for the future than for the present. In fact you believe in all his promises--taking every word of them as addressed to yourself, and as good for your present use. You yield yourself up to his providence, assured that he pledges himself to make all things work together for good to his people. To his disposal, therefore, you yield up yourself entirely and most quietly for time and for eternity. You know you can trust his wisdom, and you can cheerfully commit yourself to his safe conduct and preservation.

Some of you have seen the power of this faith illustrated in the dying saints of God. In talking with them you found it impossible to name a thing which gave them any anxiety. "God," said they, "will keep all in his hand of love." You speak to that dying wife and mother;--"are you going to leave your husband? How can you bear to go?" God will take care of him. "But how can you leave all your children?" God will take care of them. "But your youngest one--that dear feeble thing?" God will take care of that. "Are you not afraid that you may die under a cloud!" God will take care of that. "But you may dishonor God, and may sin against his name in the last struggles?" Aye, God knows how to take care against that. This is the universal answer. Everything is committed to God.

Press this dying mother yet farther. Say--you are to leave your children in a wicked world--a world full of temptations and snares. Your husband may marry badly and your children may suffer for want of a mother's

sympathy; you know not how many dangers and evils may befall them. What does she reply? God, she says, will take care of that. This is the antidote for all cares and anxieties. God's immutable character and promises are a great sheet anchor to her soul. Stayed upon them, she is not afraid to leap over hell itself--making the entire sweep over its burning crater.

This faith is no visionary thing--no mere speculation. Nothing has ever been more abundantly attested by living and competent witnesses.

But go to the speculative believer. There he lies, on his dying bed. "Are you near your end?" No doubt I am. "Have you any anxieties?" O yes, anxieties enough. I am afraid about my children, my wife, my property--a thousand things.

Now all this fear and anxiety is real unbelief.

IV. Several things implied in doing the works of God.

1. Having the same end with Him. You must sympathize with God in the great end He pursued. This sympathy will be a natural result of really loving Him. When in the spirit of real love you come to confide in his universal goodness, love and faithfulness, you can not fail to have a universal sympathy with Him in respect to all his course in his government.

2. Spontaneous obedience to the letter of his commands. I have already said that faith and love are connected naturally with the corresponding outward acts; hence the obedience of faith is perfectly spontaneous. How is it with the confiding wife? She has a perfect sympathy with her husband in respect to his ends and motives. Suppose that with a common object they set off upon a journey to realize this object. The wife knows perfectly that her husband understands best how to accomplish this end. Consequently she needs no command; she needs only an expression of his will, for the simple reason that she sympathizes with him in the common object and confides in his wisdom to effect it.

So in regard to God. When you have perfect confidence in his character and sympathy with his ends, you will need only to know his will and obedience will not be forced, but entirely spontaneous, not less so with you than with an angel, so far as you have real faith in God.

3. Absence of all fear that hath torment. You see this beautifully exemplified in the case of many saints on their death-beds, when you cannot name a thing which they do not cheerfully and sweetly commit to God, so as to have no anxieties remaining on their minds.

4. Dominion of the peace of God in the soul. This is the inevitable result of faith. God's faith in Himself, (if I may thus speak,) is the ground of his own peace. He has perfect confidence in his own integrity, and in all his attributes, both moral and physical. Having devoted these attributes to the great work of doing good with the assurance of success, He cannot fail of enjoying perfect peace of mind. Now let a Christian believe what God believes, and he will have the very peace which God has. God does not tremble through fear of the future, neither will he.

5. Calmness and equanimity of soul. By this I do not mean that there will not be inequalities in the state of the sensibility; there were in Christ Himself. Yet will the depths of the soul be calm, for the elements of calmness and equanimity are naturally there.

6. Satisfaction with present allotments of providence. Whether sick or health be your lot, all is well, all comes, you plainly see, from God, and you trust Him to do all things in the best possible manner.

7. A quiet state of mind in respect to all the future. All ignorant of the future though he be, yet the believer is at rest about it, and does not wish to cathechise the Omniscient One as if he could not wait for time to reveal coming events. He does not say--O that God would let me turn over the leaves of the future--that I might turn over the leaf of tomorrow today; it is enough to know that as the present, so all the future is in the hands of God, who evermore doeth all things well.

8. Divine cheerfulness of temper. This is the natural and inevitable result of faith, even as sourness and moroseness of temper are of unbelief. Before my conversion I could realize that if I had universal confidence in the present agency, wisdom and goodness of God, it could not fail to make me calm and cheerful under all circumstances. I saw that Christians were the only persons who had any right to be cheerful.

9. Universal sympathy with goodness.

10. Universal opposition to all evil.

11. What are called religious duties are spontaneities; as really so as the affection and the duties of a mother towards her offspring. She sits among her children, in the midst of love--never so much in her element as when she is catching their smiles and responding with her own. Are not her maternal duties and affections the spontaneities of the heart? Even so, are the Christian's when faith works by love and purifies the heart.

V. Delusions incident to this subject.

1. Many look only to the letter. They have substantially the Jewish notions of religion. All they think of is, doing, doing, without ever falling back upon faith as the main-spring of all.

2. The conscience of many is developed only in respect to the letter. They seem never to have developed their conscience in respect to anything beyond the outward moralities of religion. What a delusion is this! To have a conscience only in respect to the outward life, but one which will not convict of wrong in respect to faith--how wide is this from the doctrine of Christ! He said of the Holy Spirit--when He shall come, "He will reprove of sin, because they believe not on me." Did Christ say--He will reprove the world for not fasting twice in a week--for not giving tithes of all one's mint, anise and cummin--for lying, for licentiousness? Nay, verily; but for not believing on Him. Christ seemed to have their state perfectly before his mind, and therefore said, the Spirit, coming, should teach them a better lesson than to fast and to make long prayers in the street-corners to be seen of men; he would teach them the sin of unbelief.

How remarkable that men should have such a conscience! A conscience not developed at all toward the real things of religion; but all their ideas of right and wrong relate to matters in which there is not a particle of right and wrong whatever! Shall I call this a conscience? It is not worthy of the name; yet it may answer my present purpose to use the name, for this thing of which I speak supplies to them the place and executes the functions that conscience ought to fill and execute. The delusion often remains unshaken even to death, that religion refers to nothing more or other than to the outward life. For instance, a woman is absent from prayer-meeting because her children are sick, and her conscience is exceedingly troubled. What ails

that woman? O she has committed so great a sin! Does she not know that she may have committed more sin in her unbelief than she ever could commit under any circumstances in being absent from prayer-meeting?

An occurrence in my own personal history made impressions on my mind of the sin of unbelief which I can never forget. A friend of mine had manifested so great a regard to my personal wants, and so strong a determination to supply them, that when I came to notice its effect on my own feelings towards him, it struck me forcibly that I had not so much confidence after all in God as I had in that man. This thought came like a wave of death over my soul. Is it possible, said I, that after all the revelations God has made of his love to me, I have not trusted Him so much as I trust one of my fellow-mortals? And shall God never be able to gain my confidence? Shall my unbelief forever grieve his heart and bar me from his bosom?

This train of thought served to show me the greatness of my own sins of unbelief.

3. Many judge themselves more by their outward life than by their faith. They know very well that their faith does not correspond with the claims of God upon them; so they are averse to looking at that point. But their outward life comes nearer their own ideal. So with great pleasure they search that for some favorable testimony to support their hope.

4. Many compel themselves to obey the letter, and then satisfy themselves with this as if they had now done all their duty. What a mistake!

5. Many persons, becoming somewhat convicted, begin to feel dissatisfied with themselves, and then set themselves about right doing and right feelings, instead of believing. Some one says to them--Go and visit, and labor and pray for souls. Then you will get joy and peace. So they rush upon outward doings for relief and for rest of mind. Christ would say to such--Would you know what to do that you may work the work of God? This is the work of God--that you believe. But you say--"I do believe." What do you believe? And do you believe with all your heart? Do you heartily embrace the real gospel and the whole gospel?

6. Others mistake conviction for faith. They think that views of truth are really the same thing as faith. Whereas, one may have strong convictions of

truth, and yet be very far from yielding up the heart to the proper dominion of that truth.

7. Others resort to works to get faith. Yes, they go into a perfect effervescence of feeling and agitation to try to get at faith.

Now this all results from misapprehension of what faith is. Many seem not to see that faith is the simplest thing in the world. Little children understand it and exercise it every day. They have faith in their parents and friends, and it does not cost them a terrible struggle and a great fermentation of feeling to get it. It seems as natural to them as their very breath. Why should they not have confidence in their parents? Why not trust themselves implicitly to their parent's care?

8. Others rest in a perfectly spurious faith.

9. Others stumble through a partial faith. They do not embrace all the gospel. They seem to understand only a little of it. Hence their faith does not embrace Christ as a Savior from sin, present and future. They fail to embrace the fulness of the promises of gospel salvation, and go on ever more stumbling for the want of a fuller and larger view of gospel truth.

10. Many begin at the wrong end in their religion. They expend their efforts upon works first and not upon faith. Hence they are forever laboring and toiling up hill. They do not find the Spirit's aid to help them, for the good reason that they do not take hold of God's promises by faith for this blessing. Of course they drag along through life in their wretchedness, crying out as they groan along--"O Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death." In fact they live and die in the experience of Rom. 7. If they would at once believe and act as Paul did, how soon might they pass into the experience of Rom. 8. Let them only thank God through Jesus Christ, their Lord--then open their eyes to see that "there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus," and also to see that "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus may make them free from the law of sin and death;" and how naturally and speedily might they enter upon a new stage of Christian experience! In Rom. 7, Paul describes the case of one who begins at the wrong end, and labors hard up hill because he labors without faith.

11. Those who begin thus at the wrong end do not conceive rightly of a justified or gospel state of mind. Take the man of Rom. 7: what conception has he of a justified state of mind as described in Rom. 8? What does he know in his experience of that spontaneous faith and love, described so beautifully and so vividly in John 4 and 7? There Christ says of the real waters of life--"The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life;" and "out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." The love and the faith of the gospel, having taken root within, develop themselves spontaneously and pour out their gushing influences over all the outward life.

O when will Christians understand the difference between beginning outside as if they thought to work in their religion through the skin, instead of beginning with the heart and planting first of all its deep foundations there in faith and love?

12. One class of legalists have regard simply to the letter, and of course their religion is made up of perpetual doing, doing; while another class have caught a glimpse of the law, and are therefore dissatisfied with themselves, and groaning as in Rom. 7, under a body of sin and death, which they do not come with to Christ for relief and salvation. They have seen so much of the purity of the law and of the sin of their own hearts that they feel condemned; but not coming by faith to Jesus Christ, they remain under condemnation and uncleansed from sin. Occasionally they have seasons of better feelings, occurring perhaps in the hours of Sabbath worship or under some specially exciting circumstances; but ere long these emotions subside, and they are as much disgusted with their experience as ever.

Often it is the case that their class of persons are not only dissatisfied with themselves, but with everybody else. They look upon the religious state of their brethren through jaundiced eyes and see nothing as they think it should be. How is it, say they, that you can be satisfied with your present state, or have any peace of mind at all? I am in as good a state as you are, but I am not by any means satisfied with myself. I live as near right as you do, but I am surely far from being right. You must be altogether deluded. You think yourself nearly, or quite free from sin; but I know you are not, for if you are, I am too; but I know that I am not, and therefore know that you are not.

Now such persons do not seem to consider that the outward life is not always

an index to the inward, and that of two persons whose outward life is substantially the same, one may live by faith and walk humbly with God, while the other lives only by works and in the deepest guilt of unbelief.

REMARKS.

1. Christ speaks of faith as if it were the whole of religion. We have seen why he should. It is the natural root from which a religious life springs.

2. We may see why Paul says that faith establishes the law. It does so both because it embraces and honors God's system of atonement, and because it works by love and thus begets a spirit of sincere obedience to law.

3. The exact difference between a legal and a gospel life is this: the gospel life is a spontaneity of faith and love. A legal life is a spontaneity of selfishness. Sincere and hearty obedience flows naturally from faith and from love. It must be so, and always will be. Just as naturally does selfishness, when it aims to be religious at all, put on the type of legality.

4. Sinners look upon religion in a selfish light, and hence regard it as gloomy, cheerless; and its self-denials as a life of painfulness. Judging of its duties by their own state of mind and principles of action, they see it only repulsive and profitless. Since it does not promise them earthly riches, or earthly honor, or sensual delight, they see no beauty in it that they should desire it. Since it demands a reasonable subjection of those appetites which they delight to indulge, they think it a most burdensome system. If they would look at it, in a directly opposite point of view, they might see it as it is. Is it any self denial or hardship for Love to seek to please? There is real affection between that mother and her child. Now why does she make up a little nosegay and bring it in so cheerfully and sweetly to her little one? Is this a grievous act of self denial to the affectionate mother?

Or observe how the sea-captain gathers up the choicest things he can from the ends of the earth to bring home to the wife he loves. Is this a hardship? Does he drag out a miserable bondage in performing services of this sort for his beloved wife? If not, then you may know how to judge of the self-denials and hardships of the true Christian's life. It is not the gospel Christian, but the legalist, who is dragging his snail's pace up the hard hill of his religious life. Ah, his whole religion is nothing better than penance--a penance of such sort as God neither

asks nor accepts. Sinner, you misconceive of religion, and your misconception results from your selfishness. If in the place of selfishness you had true love to God, you would see far other things in religion than what you now see. Go and ask that young convert how all these waters of life taste to him. He will tell you that they are sweeter than the honey or the honey-comb. If you would know this, try it. O, when will you understand what religion is, and having understood it, yield your heart at once in obedience to its claims? Then should your peace be like a river, and your righteousness as the waves of the sea.

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

End of the 1849 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1850
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS
(only one lecture)

Lecture I. The Foundation, Conditions, And Relations Of Faith

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

The Foundation, Conditions, And Relations Of Faith

Lecture I

February 13, 1850

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Gen. 15:6: "And he believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for
righteousness."

"What shall we then say that Abraham, our father as pertaining to the flesh, hath

found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God. For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Rom. 4:1-5

The passage in Genesis 15, refers to Abraham--to the promises God had made to him--to his faith in those promises, and to the Lord's acceptance of that faith. These topics are first brought to our view in Genesis 12, again in Gen. 17, and thenceforward frequently in the course of Abraham's history. The case was highly instructive, and St. Paul could not fail to see its important bearings. Hence the free use he makes of it as an illustration, both of what faith, and of its results.

In treating this subject, it is important,

I. To notice the foundation of Abraham's faith.

II. Some of its conditions.

III. Its governmental relations.

IV. Its natural relations and results.

I. The foundation of Abraham's faith.

1. The foundation of Abraham's faith was not anything whatever in himself. It was not the fact, either real or supposed, that he had been himself converted. There is no intimation that he ever so much as thought whether he had been converted or not. His faith seems to have been exercised irrespective of any opinions or thoughts on this question.

2. Nor did his faith rest on the assumption that he was himself in a right state of mind. He did not, so far as we can see, assume this, and thereupon ground his confidence that God would do for himself what He had promised.

3. Nor did his faith rest in the confidence he might have had in his own integrity of character. There is not the least intimation of this.

4. But positively, his faith rested on God's veracity. It does not appear that Abraham took into view anything else whatever as a ground of his faith, except the simple veracity of God. He simply relied on what God had said, because it was God who said it. God met him and told him certain things; he believed them, although they were apparently impossible. It was enough for him that God had said so. He rested in God as a being of veracity.

II. Conditions of Abraham's faith.

1. It is a very common thing for the conditions of faith to be confounded with faith itself. This is a fundamental mistake. For example, the rational recognition of God's natural and moral attributes is a condition of faith, but is not by any means faith itself. Unless a man sees and knows that God possesses the moral attributes ascribed to Him, he can see no ground for rational confidence in Him. How could Abraham have had confidence in God, if he had not believed in his natural and moral attributes? He must have believed this; else he could not rationally believe that God would and could fulfill His promises.

2. It is especially to be noted that Abraham must have had confidence in God's moral attributes, as a condition of faith. He must have believed that God is good; for of necessity this attribute of the divine character must be intellectually apprehended before the mind can rationally believe that God will certainly fulfill His promises. Hence the distinction between the conditions of faith and faith itself is really fundamental. One might intellectually apprehend these attributes as clearly as an angel in heaven does, and yet not have gospel faith.

3. Another condition of faith is the promise of God. It could have been no virtue in Abraham to believe that God would grant him a son, or give his posterity Canaan, if God had never promised to do so. God first revealed His covenant with Abraham, and connected with it precious promises; then a condition was fulfilled for faith on Abraham's part--then, but not before. In the same way the covenant of grace, clearly apprehended, as revealed of God, is a condition of saving faith now. When God in any way reveals the substance of this covenant--whether through dim types and prophecies as before Christ came, or in the broad blaze of gospel day as when He actually came, then the way is opened for the intelligent and acceptable exercise of gospel faith. No doubt Adam and Eve received sufficient revelation from

God to lay a foundation for their faith. Eve obviously understood from the promise given in Gen. 3:15 that salvation from the power of Satan was to come through her posterity; for at the birth of Cain, the first born, she seems to have supposed that this was the promised seed. In this particular she was indeed mistaken; but not in her faith that God would bring salvation through her remote posterity. It is plain that both Adam and Eve received and believed at this time the revelations of divine mercy. The Lord was exceedingly kind towards them in His mode of convicting them of their first and great sin. How beautiful and how gracious that He should Himself clothe them to hide the shame of their nakedness! How significant too that this clothing should be of skins--of skins, which almost beyond question were taken from animals now for the first time slain for sacrifice! It seems most fitting that here for the first time the idea of sacrifice should be developed, and the race be taught in the person of Adam and Eve that "without the shedding of blood, there could be no remission for sin." A most expressive and beautiful type! What could more forcibly express displeasure against sin--grace towards the real sinner--and the substitution of an innocent victim in place of the guilty, as a ground for the grace shown the latter!

The covenant of grace to Abraham, God revealed yet more fully, thus expanding more distinctly His purposes of loving-kindness towards a sinning race, and making yet more distinct and definite this ground of saving faith.

III. The governmental relations of saving faith.

What relations did Abraham's faith sustain to the government of God?

1. Scripture answers by saying--"He counted it to him for righteousness." It was set down--passed to his account, as righteousness--as if it were perfect obedience. Business men will understand this phrase, so current in their pecuniary transactions. A credit passed to a man's account--a receipt in full--accounted as full payment of his debt. The obvious meaning seems to be that God accepted Abraham's faith instead of that perfect obedience which had been before required. All men having fallen into sin, and hence come under condemnation, God passes to their credit the righteousness of Christ, as if Christ had passed to their credit in the bank of heaven enough to cancel all their debt.

2. It should never be forgotten that the ultimate ground of the sinner's justification is God's great and pure love. In love alone, the whole scheme had its origin.

3. Another condition of this governmental justification is that the sinner believes. The simple belief of this record, the heart yielding itself up to the control of the truth believed--this is the condition on which the full blessings of Christ's work are conferred.

In the case of Abraham, faith gave him, as indeed it does all believers, the full benefit of all the work comprised in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. All that Christ has done for the sinner becomes his on condition of his embracing it by faith. This is the only condition. Abraham was to believe the promise before Christ actually came; all believers since Christ's death are to believe on Christ as actually come; in each case the condition is substantially the same; it is believing what God has said, and taking hold of His promise to rely upon it as truth.

4. The term righteousness, as used in this connection, denotes justification. This is its proper meaning. Abraham's faith, therefore, is accepted of him in the place of perfect obedience as the ground of his pardon. Thus pardoned, he can be treated as if he had not sinned. He had sinned, indeed, but under the economy of grace, he is treated governmentally as if he had not sinned. Governmentally, he is regarded as perfect. By this I do not mean that the law did not regard him as a sinner, for it did so regard him, and could not do otherwise. It could not blot from its tablets the record of his past sins, but it could, so to speak, pass to his credit the faith he had exercised, which is accounted to him for righteousness. On this ground the Law-giver can treat him not as sinful, but as righteous.

Yet here let it not be lost sight of, that, providentially, he may be and is still treated as a sinner. Under the providential, disciplinary government of God, he is regarded as a sinner--as yet imperfect, and needing discipline to improve his character and train him for heaven. Hence, while governmentally he is regarded as righteous and not doomed to hell, yet providentially, it is not forgotten that he has sinned, and that he still needs discipline to evolve and perfect the spirit and the habits of holiness.

IV. Its natural relations and results.

1. It is naturally connected with obedience. It stands related to obedience by its very nature. Faith is confidence in God's veracity. This naturally leads the soul to obey all God's requirements.

Cases sometimes occur in which we may get from our own observation, very striking and just views of the nature of faith, psychologically considered. You may sometimes see persons give themselves up to another so completely as to believe everything they say, and be entirely controlled by their influence. I was much struck with this in the course of the Second Advent discussions. Some then seemed most manifestly to have unbounded confidence in all Mr. Miller said and believed. Often they manifested a similar confidence in their sub-leaders. For example, I heard a man say--a man who I have reason to fear is a wicked man--"That woman will do just what I tell her to do, and I can make her believe anything I say." This was said in her presence, and I had but too much reason to think that it was literally true.

During the progress of these scenes, I felt constrained to say to one lady--"I am afraid you will go to destruction; you have given yourself up to be led anywhere, and I do greatly fear this will not end short of plunging you in absolute ruin. You believe the most utter nonsense as strongly and firmly as if God Himself had met you and told you to believe it."

This case may serve to illustrate the natural results of faith. Let one man commit himself to another as a leader and teacher, and the latter can lead him anywhere and anyhow he pleases. Let a soldier commit himself thus to his general; he can then be led right into the very jaws of death. So let confidence be cherished in another; its natural result will be to bring the confiding mind under the complete dominion of the mind confided in.

Such was the natural influence of Abraham's faith. We see him hanging upon what God said, just like a child upon its parent. If anything happened to try him, we see him coming forth from the trial in the utmost simplicity of character. How beautiful and how noble to see him stand firm as a rock while the storms of temptation dash around his feet! So it is with real faith always. Abraham's faith had in it nothing peculiar in character or in results. It was simple faith--nothing more.

2. Faith naturally results in joy and peace. The things believed are such that

the mind cannot but feel the highest joy and the most quiet repose. If you really understand and believe what God says, why not feel at rest? What more need He say to inspire confidence in Himself? Who does not know that confidence in One believed to be able to save to the uttermost must assuredly inspire the rest of sweet repose--the joy of unalloyed confidence and trust? Verily, God has said everything we need to have said to make us feel that His promised protection is round about us as the mountains are round about Jerusalem. Has He not told us that His everlasting arms are underneath us evermore? And can we ever sink, sustained by such supports? Who does not know that simply to believe in all this, naturally results in peace, quietness, and assurance forever? Who does not see that these results flow as naturally as any other results flow from their appropriate cause? Who can believe this good news, and not be greatly glad? Is not that joy both intense and abiding which springs from peace, deep and broad as a river, and from a righteousness which flows and rolls its mountain waves as the sea?

3. This faith overcomes the world. By this I mean that it overcomes the influence of the world upon the mind.

Let a man believe what is said of the future state; he will then deem it a small thing to be judged of man's judgment. But Oh! to stand right in the eye of the Great and final Judge--this will be his supreme concern. Let him only be assured of this, and all within is peace and joy. Let him only apprehend God's universal providence and put his trust in this all-present and all-controlling Deity; then all is peace and joy. Whether sick or well, it is all the same; nothing disturbs his peace; for he knows that under God's hand all things shall work together for his good. No matter whether he has much or little of earthly supply; he knows that he has just so much as is good for him, for the amount is wisely and kindly measured out to him by One who both knows and loves. He may enjoy honor, or dishonor; may have much learning, or none; all is well, if he knows that God has appointed all just as it is, and if he can thoroughly trust in all to be perfectly right. Be the circumstances what they may, he knows that what is infinitely wise and good is taking place and always will be. Now he has only to believe this, and it is all the same to him whether he have little, or much, or none at all of this world's good things. If he will only believe with unfaltering faith that all is wise and well, he has a key in his own bosom with which he can unlock all treasures.

Here is a professor of religion, under God's glorious government, fretting about a pin! Alas! what is the matter? He has lost a single pin! This is not the worst thing--he has lost his faith! I saw him one day in great trouble and anxiety of mind. It was a few days after his conversion, and then he seemed a bright and joyful convert; but he lost his way and fell into temptation. Alas! go and ask him now what is the matter. "I have lost my Jesus!" It is well that he knows it. Many do not seem to know it when the fact is most obvious to everybody else. Listen to the Psalmist, and mark the beauty and pertinence of his words. He sinks into the deep mire of the Slough of Despond; yet opening his eyes somewhat to his condition, he cries out--"Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him." He would excite his own soul to believe God, and hence he begins to arraign and catechise himself for his causeless unbelief. O, my soul, Why art thou cast down? Believe thou in God! Believe what? Believe in God. Believe that thou shalt still praise Him.

4. Faith naturally overcomes the flesh. If a man have faith, why shall he go about to gratify his appetites? Shall he make their gratification his chief good? Nay, verily. He will understand that the kingdom of heaven is not meat and drink. If you see a man given up to the indulgence of his appetites, you see an unbeliever. You see one who does not apprehend the great things of the eternal world as living and all-controlling realities. He is under the dominion of his flesh. But faith breaks up this dominion, and asserts its own in its stead. What has faith to do with sensuality? What communion is there between light and darkness? What concord between Christ and Belial? Just the same as between faith and sensuality. Faith overcomes Satan. One who believes God knows that Satan is a liar and the father of lies. Without faith, you are Satan's dupe, Satan's slave, Satan's drudge; but faith in Jesus emancipates the soul from the dominion of his lies.

REMARKS.

1. The faith of Abraham was purely a mental act. The apostle speaks of it curiously. "If Abraham were justified by works, he would have whereof to glory;" but now he has nothing of which to glory, and therefore he is not justified by works. Plainly he was not justified at all by works in the Jewish sense. It was not on the ground of certain external doings, but on the ground of his mental

faith, that he was justified. The purely mental act of faith was the condition, itself antecedent to all external manifestations, and the condition of them. This faith is accounted to him for righteousness.

2. Some confound the condition of faith with faith itself. Some just knowledge of God is doubtless an indispensable condition to the exercise of faith; but this knowledge--this intellectual apprehension of God, is not to be confounded with faith itself.

3. Some look to something within themselves as the ground of faith. Consequently they attend continually to their own mental states, instead of looking up to God. They are evermore looking within at their state of feeling for evidence upon which they are to believe. Believe what? Not believe in themselves, but believe in God. Under the pretense of self-examination, they are forever playing the fool with themselves, and looking down, as they suppose, into the depths of their hearts, to find evidence on which to believe. God announces to them a truth, and says, Believe. They reply--I can believe that, if I can only get the evidence that I am in a right state of mind. But what is a right state of mind? A state of faith. Believing is the right exercise; nothing else is right. The great piety of Abraham, when brought out in the Bible, is simple belief--trust; this constitutes a right state of mind. He believed what God said, not on the ground of having certain right emotions and feelings, but because it was God who had said it. What if Abraham had said--O, I could believe all God has said, if I only had the evidence--of what? Do you want evidence that God is true? No, but I want evidence that I am in a right state of mind. Abraham was not such a fool as to back out of God's light into the darkness of his own mind, and draw a vail of thick darkness over and all round about him. No, it was enough for him that God had spoken, and that God was true.

It would really seem as if God was unable to say anything to Abraham which he would not believe. God almost seemed to tell him lies, to try his faith; but yet Abraham would believe. The Lord told him he should have a son; but still he went on in His providence as if He never meant to fulfill His promise. After Isaac was born and grown, He told Abraham to take him far away to a specified mountain, and there kill him! O, what a scene was that! Yet Abraham believed God. He knew that God could even raise his Isaac from the dead; hence, why should he fear to obey God, even when He gave such a command? If this man of God were among us in our prayer-meetings, would he do as some now do--be

looking continually after his feelings? No; he would simply believe God.

Yet mark how sorely God tried him. "Take now," said He, "thy son, thine only son Isaac," (how every word sinks to the bottom of a parent's heart!) take him away from his loved home, and from his fond mother--forever! Set off on this dreadful expedition tomorrow. One night intervened. Did the tried father sleep quietly as ever that night? If he did, it must have been the rest of faith. In the morning he rose, said not a word to Sarah; he could not have her sympathy, for (probably) he could not trust her faith against her maternal feelings. His own faith stood apparently, unfaltering. The simplicity of his faith was the glory of his piety.

Yet Abraham had but few things to believe. If those full revelations made to us had been made to him, what a mighty, triumphant life he must have lived! In what a sunset of glory he must have died! Only a single ray fell from heaven upon his eye, yet his eye caught this one ray, and his heart believed. On that ray he kept his eye fixed continually. Oh, if he were to live now and among us, what would he think of our faith? What could he think of us, always prating over our unbelief as if we had not faith enough to keep us above the fear of hell!

4. What many Christians say is greatly calculated to stumble young converts. They seem not to have gone a step beyond babyhood. They are no more able to stand alone than a mere child, though counting the years of their Christian life, they ought for the time, to be men of adult age and of adult strength.

When a young convert sets out in the Christian life with a flood of emotions and these soon subside, it happens not seldom that he falls into deep trouble. Like a raw hand aboard ship, he shows but too soon that he is no sailor. A storm comes on, the mountain waves dash high--such a wind he never knew before--his knees smite together, and he cries out "Alas! I am lost, I am lost!" So the timid convert feels when he thinks he has lost his Jesus. The fact is he has only lost his faith. And perhaps this sad loss has befallen him because he was misguided by much older Christians, who should have strengthened his faith rather than weaken it.

How plain it is that God meant to confirm our faith and teach us to keep it always strong and earnest. Else why did He give us such a history as this of Abraham? Look at this man of living faith! See him pushing his way along with only one dim ray of light, yet firm as a rock amid the waves; steadfast, though all around be dark as death. But Oh, what a zigzag course many now pursue!

Faltering now, and now turning aside to shun the lions in the way; feeling their path along as if they could not trust the Mighty One who has said, "This is the way; go forward, and fear not, for I am with thee." How many such Christians would it take to promote a revival? Ten thousand of them would not promote one! In fact, the more there are, the worse for the cause of God; the greater the difficulties in promoting revivals where their influence is felt. O how weak and sickly they are! They need to be fed with a spoon like an infant. You might as soon march an army of invalids against Gibraltar, as lead such Christians out to conflict by prayer and faith in promoting revivals on religion. I can afford and endure to see infancy and weakness in young converts; but O, when I see old Christians still shut up to the diet and leading-strings of infants, it is so afflictive, so disheartening! To see them go round and round forever in a circle after their feelings, their feelings. What an abomination that they don't learn to walk by faith! A perfect state of the physical system doesn't make a man think much about his health. It leaves him to mind his appropriate business and seek the proper enjoyments of life. If his digestion is good, he never thinks of his stomach. Why should he? Perhaps he never knows from any sensations felt that he has any stomach. But if his digestion is bad, then alas! the poor man has enough to do in thinking of his troubled stomach. So of the sickly Christian. You see him perpetually troubled about his feelings, his feelings, like the invalid who runs to the glass to see his tongue! O when will such Christians learn to have faith, and be strong in the mighty God of Jacob.

5. That is a most unhealthy religion which is forever dwelling on views and frames and feelings. How is it in heaven? Are they thinking of their feelings and frames? No; they are so absorbed in the great objects before them that they are unconscious of the lapse of time. Perhaps a thousand of our years may pass over them and leave no consciousness of its having been a moment. Is this extravagant? No. Have you not been sometimes so engrossed that you could not mark the lapse of time at all? We mark time by noticing the succession of events. Have you not been so much engrossed as not at all to notice this succession? I recollect the case of a young convert in the northern part of New York State, who on one occasion prayed all night. When he came to consciousness of time and began to think what time it was, he was astonished to find it morning!

It is said of William Tennant that he rode all day in thought so profound that he never knew till he reached the end of his journey, that he had been bleeding profusely at the nose. Now in such cases, their own state is not the subject of

thought at all. Of course they are far indeed from studying and watching over their own feelings.

This latter is, as I have said, a most unhealthy state. He who is forever dwelling upon his own spiritual frames, instead of being absorbed in the objects of faith, is a poor, spiritual dyspeptic. This thinking of his own frames, is the very thing which destroys his religion.

Suppose I go to England and leave my wife at home. Far away from her, I set myself to examine my feelings to see if I love my wife. I turn my mind away from her, and fasten it upon my love. I make this love the only and the all absorbing subject of my thought. What will be the result? Who does not know that the affection of love is correlated to its object? In this case my affection is correlated to my wife, and can not spring up and develop itself, except in view of its object. Hence I must think of my wife, if I would make it possible for the affection of love to develop itself. Contemplation of the object is the condition of all manifestation of the affections. Consequently by turning my mind wholly away from the object, and then demanding that love to that object should manifest itself, I demand a natural impossibility. Let me do this and I might pronounce myself a stark hypocrite, and be as well employed as many Christians are who withhold their contemplations from God and all the proper objects of faith, and exercise themselves in scanning and trying to judge of their feelings. O what misguided efforts are these!

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology* (*LECTURE VII*). Also, "approbation of the character of its object.

Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

End of the 1850 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1851
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Lecture I. [The Loss When a Soul is Lost](#)
Lecture II. [Awaking from The Sleep of Spiritual Death](#)
Lecture III. [Jesus Christ Doing Good](#)
Lecture IV. [The Wicked Heart Set to do Evil](#)
Lecture V. [Repentance Before Prayer for Forgiveness](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

The Loss When a Soul is Lost

Lecture I
July 2, 1851

by Charles Grandison Finney

President of Oberlin College

Text.--Mark 8:36, 37: "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Ours is an inquisitive world, and the present especially is an inquisitive age. Particularly is this inquisitiveness developed in perpetual inquiries upon matters of loss and gain. Almost universally this class of questions agitates the public mind often tasking its powers to the utmost. Almost the whole race seem all on fire to know how they can avoid loss and secure gain. Assuredly therefore, this being the great question which men interest themselves to ask, it cannot be out of place for God to propose such a question as the text presents, nor for His servants to take it from His lips and press it upon the attention and the consciences of His hearers.

And let me here say it must be specially proper to propose it to the young men who are seeking good, and studying questions of profit and gain. Your souls thirst for happiness. How much, then, does it become you to ask whether these questions from the lips of your Redeemer may not give you a priceless clue to the secret of all real and permanent good.

The question concisely expressed, is -- What is a fair equivalent for the soul? For what consideration could a man afford to lose his soul?

To bring the subject fully before your minds, let me

I. Direct your attention to the worth of the soul;

II. To the danger of losing it;

III. To the conditions of saving it.

Admitted truths:

1. Whenever ministers enter the pulpit to preach, they always take many things for granted. All do this more or less; all must do it if they would preach with any effectiveness to the heart; and it is right that they should. This is true not of the gospel minister only, but of every teacher. Every teacher assumes that his pupils

exist; and that they know this truth; also that he exists himself.

2. Many other truths are assumed by the preacher. We must always begin somewhere. Generally we begin as the Bible does. The Bible assumes the truths of natural theology, and proceeds in its teachings as if all men knew at least these truths.

3. This congregation professes to be Christian, and I may therefore assume that at least nominally it is so. I shall not therefore address you as a heathen people, or as atheists, or even Universalists.

4. There are certain great truths admitted by almost all Christians; for example, that the soul is immortal. This is admitted so generally, I shall assume that you all admit it. You admit it to be true of both the righteous and the wicked. You admit that the bible teaches this, and I shall not therefore attempt to prove it.

5. It must also be admitted that from the very nature of mind, its capacities both of intellect and sensibility, will be always increasing. This increase is obviously a law of mind in this world, although from the connection of mind with matter, old age and disease seem to form an exception. This is indeed an exception to the common law, yet one which plainly results from the influence of physical frailty, and can therefore have no existence in a state where no physical frailty is experienced. It must be admitted that the exception does not result from any law of mind, but purely from a present law of matter.

6. The common law of mental progress is exceedingly apparent. Put your eye on the new-born infant. It knows nothing. It begins with the slightest perception, it may be of some visible object, or of the taste of its food. From a starting point almost imperceptible it goes on, making its hourly accessions of knowledge and consequent expansion of powers, till, like a Newton, it can fathom the sublime problems of the great law of the physical universe.

7. It is generally admitted that the capacities of men in the future state for either happiness or misery will be full -- absolutely full. That coming state must be in respect to enjoyment, not mixed like the present, but simple; -- unalloyed bliss, or unalleviated woe. Hence the soul must actually enjoy or suffer to the utmost limit of its capacity. You all admit this; or if not all, the exceptions are few and I am not aware of any among you.

8. Let us not forget to connect with this idea of progression the idea of eternity. It

is not only progress, but eternal progress. This is involved in the immortality of the soul. No doctrine is more plainly taught and more universally implied in the Bible; none is more amply confirmed by testimony drawn from the nature of the soul itself. It stands among the truths admitted by almost everyone who bears even nominally the Christian name.

Now what follow from these admitted truths?

I. The worth of the soul.

1. If men are always to progress in knowledge and capacity, then a period will arrive in which the least intelligence will be able to say -- I know more now than all the created universe knew when I was born. This must be true. Its truth follows by necessity from the truths we have admitted.

But even this is not all. For when he has reached this point of acquisition in knowledge, he has only begun. Eternity is yet before him. The time will come when he will know ten thousand times as much as all the universe did when he was born; nay not merely ten thousand times as much, but myriads of myriads of times as much. The time will arrive in the lapse of eternal ages when, if all the present created universe were tasked to the utmost to conceive or estimate how much this one intelligence can know, they would fall entirely short of reaching the mighty conception. And even this is only a mere beginning, for this vast intelligence is not a whit nearer the terminus of his progression than when he was one day old. To be sure all the universe have kept pace with him. They have all moved along together, under a law of progress common to them all. Each one can say the same and as much as he. The attainments of each and of all will forever fall short of infinite, although they are always indefinitely increasing.

2. Look at the happiness of the righteous. Always increasing; evermore swelling its deep and gushing tides, with no limit to their growth and no end to their progression. Who does not know that this must be so? Look at the little infant. It seems to have but the least possible capacity, and this is developed at first only in its physical powers. All the earliest germs of sensation and emotion pertain to the body alone. The little one is hungry and cries; then is nursed and is quiet; it opens its little eye and beholds the light and is pleased; by and by it comes to know its mother's presence and to love that beaming look of fondness and those soothing tones of love.

Here opens to that infant mind a new source of happiness; progress -- progress is the established law of our mental and sentient being. By and by that child late an infant, is a pupil in school and then a youth in college. On and still onward is his progress in knowledge.

3. Nor let us lose sight of the fact that the same law of progress obtains also in the department of the sensibility. A uniform relation is then maintained between man's intellectual and sentient faculties. Knowledge increasing gives scope for increased joys or sorrows. Thus the mind progresses through all the stages of its earthly existence, new knowledge continually opening new sources of enjoyment or suffering. Mark how much that man or woman is capable of enjoying, compared with the capacity of his or her period of infancy. Now he may be bowed down under an overwhelming weight of sorrow, or he may be lifted up in ecstasies of joy unspeakable and full of glory. And this progress, we should remark, is often made despite of very unfavorable circumstances. The law of progress acts with a positive energy that no ordinary circumstances can resist.

4. But let us now look into the next world -- the next state of our existence. Knowledge sustains still the same relation to the sensibility; what you know there serves no less than it did here to augment your bliss or aggravate your woe. All the powers of your being sustain the same mutual relation as ever. Just think then how vast the joys and sorrows of that coming state! Mark how they tower high above all that is experienced in this brief state! This is no poetry. It is more than poetry -- infinitely more!! It is too obviously and certainly true to admit of the least question. Its truth results from admissions you make and doctrines you hold as a Christian congregation -- admissions and doctrines common to all who are not atheists -- common to all who observe the laws of our present existence and who admit that these laws will follow our existence into our future state of being.

(1). Following out these admitted truths to their necessary results, we see that the time must come in the lapse of eternal ages when each saint can say -- I now enjoy more in a given time than all the saints in the universe did when I first entered heaven. For as with knowledge, so with happiness. It must of course come under the same law of progress. Its measure must sustain its established correlation to the amount of our knowledge, so that as the one stretches onward and still

onward with no limit to its progress, so also does the other. As therefore the time will come when no created mind can estimate the knowledge attained by the now feeblest intelligence, so will it also come when no capacity can estimate the measure of its happiness. The Bible says, God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we are able to ask or even to think. This will have its striking fulfillment in the future heights of bliss and glory to which He will raise His redeemed people. O, who can measure these heights of bliss and glory! Yet when you have fixed your eye upon their towering loftiness at any period along the track of endless ages, you have it to say then and there -- This man's happiness is only begun. He has only just entered upon his everlasting progress in knowledge and in bliss. And still so vast are his capacities at this remote period of his existence that if we could look into their amazing length and breadth and depth, and measure their magnitude, we should sink like dead men at the sight. See him drawing draughts of joy from God's own eternal fountains! Will he ever cease to quaff those draughts of joy? Never. Can they ever grow less? Nay; they must of necessity be forever increasing.

(2). Now see also the progress of the wicked. They too are moving onward. The law of progress cannot be arrested by any amount of sinning. Onward still their minds are progressing; more and more capacious for knowledge and of course for sin and suffering. And O! What then! What follows from these established laws of the human mind and of human existence? Let your reflections trace out the fearful results which accrue from these laws of eternal progression. When we get into the midst of these things, the mind becomes exhausted and overpowered; it sinks down and cries out with crushing emotion -- O what an eternity is this for the sinner, lost forever!! O look upon that sinner after he has passed along through millions of ages of his unceasing progress in knowledge and in growing capacities for sin and suffering. Hear him. He says, hell knew but little of sin and suffering when I came here, compared with what I suffer now! They all then sinned and suffered but little, even taken in the vast aggregate, compared with what I sin and suffer in my own single being now! Alas, I seem to have all hell in my own bosom! I sin and suffer enough with my vastly augmented powers to make an awful hell even if these

agonies were equally distributed among myriads of my fellow beings. How awful!! Sin, misery and ruin enough to make one awful hell, locked up in the agonized bosom of a single sinner!

If this were only poetry I should be glad, but all is true, and so much more is true that no language can express it; no modes of computation and no forms of estimate can reach its appalling magnitude. So much is true that to see the thousandth part of it must set your soul all a fire!

(3). Take any sinner here -- any young man or woman from this congregation. Follow him onward from this hour through a life of sinning, a death of darkness and horror, and then onward still as he falls in the agonies of the second death and moves onward age after age in the unceasing progress of a human mind expanding its intelligence, learning more and more of the God the sinner hates, and only hating Him forever the more, and only making himself the more immeasurably wretched by sinning with bitterer hate, and suffering with still enlarged capacities as the eternal years roll on! O young man! you will one day be able to say -- All that hell knew of suffering before I came here is nothing compared with what I now suffer! All is nothing to the aggregate of my sins and of my sufferings. And all I now endure is only a beginning. My miseries have only begun. This soul of mine has only begun to know how to suffer the real sufferings of the damned. Its keen sensitiveness to agony has only begun to develop itself. Yet at some period in the flow of those endless years of progression in sorrow, each one will say -- If all the universe at the moment of my death, had taxed their minds to the utmost to conceive the guilt and miseries that wring my heart, they could not even have begun to reach the appalling estimate!

Would to God this were only poetry! Alas, that it should be among the best established truths in the universe of realities! Young man, there is no axiom in mathematics more true than this. No problem you ever solved in algebra brought out its result with more certainty; no proposition of Euclid ever carried you more unerringly to its conclusion than our reasoning upon these known and changeless laws of mind in their progression onward through the endless cycles of eternity. Go onward and still onward; you must yet say -- after ever so many periods of largest

conception, I have only just begun. I am only entering the vestibule of this world of woe -- only counting off the first moments as it were of the eternal cycles of my existence!

To pursue this train of thought in its details seems utterly impossible! How the mind sinks beneath the overpowering view! O, the worth of the soul, progressing forever under a law as fixed as and as enduring as Jehovah's throne! The worth of a soul that must make progress in knowledge, and consequently in its capacities for bliss and for holiness, or for sin and for woe -- who can estimate it to the last fraction! Tell me, ye young men of mathematical genius -- ye professors in this science of certainties -- ye who think you have some knowledge of fixed truths and some skill in educating them from first principles; tell me, are these things poetry? You know they are eternal truth; you know they are verities that which none in the universe can be more sure. "What, then, shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

II. But what must be said of the danger of losing the soul?

1. This danger is exceedingly great, because men have only to neglect the soul and it is surely lost. It does not require attention and labor. You can lose your soul without the least possible effort made specially for this purpose. You need not go about to commit sin in order to ensure the ruin of your soul hopelessly and forever. You need only neglect its salvation and it is surely lost. You need only be as negligent as you have been heretofore. It is only necessary that you slide along in the same thoughtless, reckless manner as in your past days and the end will be "sudden destruction and that without remedy." As says the apostle; "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" There is none other name under heaven given among man whereby ye can be saved. And there is no salvation through this name but by a living faith which works by love and makes the heart pure from sin.

2. Men will lose their souls if they mistake the conditions of salvation. For these conditions require intelligent effort, and to misunderstand them makes it certain that your efforts will not be made intelligently, even if any sort of effort is made at all. There is therefore, most imminent danger in this quarter.

Again, there is the more danger because men are so little inclined to inform themselves respecting those truths which relate to the conditions of salvation. It is a most astounding fact that in matters so deeply interesting to everyone who is to be saved or lost, no man should incline to search after the requisite knowledge of the way to be saved.

3. There is also the more danger because men are surrounded with temptations to neglect the soul's salvation. It is the policy of Satan to surround men with as many temptations as possible to neglect this great subject. He gives them everything else to do; sets their wits at work to kill time and devise amusing and diverting occupations, and stave off all serious thought into some unknown future. Nothing delights or employs him more than to draw the sinner in and hold him fast in the snare of his infernal devices.

Again, there is the more ground to fear because you are in so much danger of practicing deception upon yourself, especially this deception -- that you can better attend to the saving of your soul at some other time. This is Satan's master-piece of deception. It has fixed the doom of damnation upon myriads of souls.

4. If I had time to enter upon these various dangers and expand them at length in view of the awfulness of losing the soul, how startling would be the fearful facts of the case! If all these countless dangers were seen in their real magnitude, and especially if they were seen in their bearings upon the loss of a soul, methinks it would rouse all mankind into excitement almost to madness in securing the salvation of their souls. How could they refrain from crying out in the very streets and within the very walls of their bedchambers -- What shall I do to be saved from such a hell? The danger is real although due sensibility to it is so rare. We have it from the lips of one that knew -- "Broad is the way that leadeth to destruction and many there be that go in thereat." And no fact is more open to observation than this. Everybody sees it; all may know it.

III. What are the conditions of saving the soul?

Here let it well be considered that the conditions are none of them arbitrary. All are naturally necessary. Each one is revealed as a condition because in the nature of the case it is and must be. God requires it as a condition because He cannot

save the soul without it. For example, you must be sanctified and become holy in heart and life. Why? Not because God sees fit arbitrarily to impose such a condition, but because it is impossible you should be happy without it; because it is impossible you should enjoy heaven without holiness.

So also you must be sanctified by faith in Christ, and saved in all respects by this faith, for the simple reason that no other agency can sanctify and save. There is none other name given among men whereby ye can be saved. No other Redeemer exists to be believed in; no other power but that of faith in such a Redeemer ever yet reached the heart to subdue it to submission, penitence, and love.

REMARKS.

1. There is nothing more wonderful and strange than the tendency of the human mind to neglect reflection and serious thought upon the value of the soul. The entire orthodox world admit the truths upon which we started, and admit substantially those other truths which are necessarily connected with them. Now it is most astounding that these truths should be dropped out of mind -- their bearings forgotten, and all their relations be overlooked as if they had no value, as if they were indeed only fictions and not facts. They are forgotten by parents, so that few indeed think of the bearings of these truths upon their children's well-being for eternity; they are forgotten by husbands and by wives, so that in these relations of life little is said, little felt, little done, for each other's salvation. In fact these great truths have come to be less regarded than almost anyone of the ten thousand things of this world. The least of these worldly matters is practically treated as of more value than the soul. Must there not be a strange delirium upon the human mind?

2. Nothing is so important to the Christian Church and to the world as that the Church should direct her attention to those great things till they arouse her whole soul -- till they awaken from spiritual lethargy every member of Christ's nominal church on earth. The primitive Christians of apostolic times pondered these truths until their hearts were on fire and they could not wish to do less than to lay themselves out for the salvation of the world. The same engrossing and soul-stirring attention to these great truths is needed to awaken the churches of the present day.

3. As these great truths of the soul are neglected, worldly things magnify

themselves in apparent importance. If men do not dwell upon eternity, time comes to be their only reality. If they do not dwell upon the great spiritual truths that relate to the eternal world, to heaven and to hell, if they do not pour their minds out upon these truths, the trifles of time will assume the chief importance. Men will become worldly-minded. Their minds become contracted in the scope of their views to the narrow circle of their earthly relations, and they come to live as if there were no God, no heaven, no hell.

4. You may see the nature of worldly-mindedness. It is real insanity. Suppose a man to act as if he had no relations to this world. Suppose he should act as if he had no more to do with it than most men seem to have with the other world beyond this. Let him act as if he had no bodily wants -- no occasion for food or for clothing. Of course he would be regarded as a mad man; his friends, or if not they, the civil authorities would hasten to put him in a mad-house. They would sue out a commission of lunacy against him to save his property, if he had any, for the benefit of himself and his family. For precisely this is real insanity -- overlooking real facts and acting as if they did not exist.

But what shall we say of those who treat these truths of eternity as if they were not truths? Is not this also real insanity? The man knows the great facts respecting the future world. He has a book well authenticated, containing all the facts, fully revealed; he holds all the important facts with the utmost tenacity and would deem himself slandered as a heretic if you were to intimate a doubt of the soundness of his faith; in fact his orthodoxy is his pride and his glory; but yet he lives as if he did not believe a word of it! Surely this man is practically insane. You cannot but regard such a case with horror. O, you say, if he had never known these things, he would not have incurred the guilt of this dreadful insanity; but alas! he does know them all. He has them all written down; all are embraced in the standards of his faith, and he would not be supposed to doubt one word of those standards for the value of his best reputation. Then is he not insane? Alas, the world is a complete bedlam! See their manuals of doctrines; read carefully their standards and see what they believe; then see how they live - - as if there were no heaven and no hell; no atonement, no Savior; nothing but this world and its good things! And are they not madmen? Does the Bible slander them at all when it declares -- "Madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead"?

5. How must the people of other worlds look upon the men of this! Particularly, I

ask, how must they regard those who live in those portions of our world where light blazes and every eye must see it? How are they astonished in heaven to see such exhibitions of depravity on earth! How must they look on with unutterable amazement as they mark the clear and blazing light which God pours upon the realities of the eternal world, and then observe how little this light is regarded even by those who see it most and best!

6. How many are struggling to secure anything and everything else but the salvation of the soul! And yet they know that everything else gained is worse than loss if the soul is lost. What egregious folly! And what is more, think of the appalling guilt? And of the coming account to be rendered for both the guilt and the folly! God will call you all to account -- you for the property you sought to the neglect of your soul, and chose at the cost of ruining your soul; and you for the education which you valued more than the salvation of your soul. What, young man, do you propose to do with that education which you have put before your soul and sought to the neglect and ruin of your eternal being? You may enter the eternal world an educated young man -- with all your powers developed and matured so that you can take your position in that world of woe in an advanced class -- as some young men come here prepared to enter in advance as far perhaps as the junior year; so you by virtue of your education, may enter among the more advanced minds in hell, ripe for drinking deeper draughts of remorse, your intellect enlarged for broader views of your relations, and sharpened for keener impressions of your guilt! O what must it be to take your starting point in that world of agonizing thought, in advance of your age and your time, ready to start off with more rapid strides in the dread career of progression in the knowledge -- in the sinning -- and in the consequent woes of the damned! Take such a mind as Byron's. How much more is he capable of suffering in one hour on his death-bed than a mind of only ordinary capacity! Sit down by his death-bed; mark his rolling eye -- his look of agony -- the reach and grasp of his capacious soul! See how keenly he feels every sensation of remorse -- how large his scope of view as he thinks of his relations to the God he should have loved but did not, and to the world he should have blessed by his talents but only cursed by his depravity! You may have often said -- If I were only as great and as talented as Byron; if I only had his power as a poet -- his genius -- his talent -- how glorious! I could ask nothing more.

You would then be as great as Byron! But what then? Suppose you were; what would you gain? What would it profit you to gain all he ever gained of mental

power, or earthly fame, and to lose your soul? O think of this; to be a Byron and to lose your soul! Would this be gain? Could you afford to devote your being to such an object, and having gained it, die and go to hell?

Or suppose you aspire to be a statesman. You climb the slow ascent of office; you rise in the confidence of your party, till step by step you ascend the tall acclivity, and see the summit of ambition only a little way before you; then down you go to hell! How much have you gained, even if you have reached the glittering summit, and then lose your soul?

7. In the eternal world there will be an entire reversal of position; the highest here are lowest there, and the lowest here are the most favored or certainly the least accursed there. The kings of the earth, highest on their thrones, will have the largest account to settle there, the heaviest responsibilities to bear and of course the most fearful doom. Here he sits in grand and lofty state; the subject must kneel before him to present even a petition; but death reverses the scene. Let this king on his throne but die in his sins; he tumbles from his rotten throne to the depths of hell! Where does he go? What is his position among the ranks of the lost? Down, deep in the lowest depths of perdition. Here his princely steeds and out-riding footmen have him the eclat of nobility, and if he abused his dignity to the feeding of earthly pride and to the crushing of the poor, he sinks deep below those once so far beneath him. Now they mark his fall like Lucifer, son of morning. Now perhaps they hiss at him and curse him, saying, How art thou fallen from the throne of thy glory! And thou art here, down deep in the infamy of hell! Thou wretch! How they hiss at all his plagues! The very fires of hell roar and hiss at him as he sinks beneath their wild engulfing billows. So the great ones of any country who sell their souls for ambition and earthly power; what have they gained? An office -- it may be, a crown; but they have lost a soul! Alas, where are they now? The most miserably guilty and wretched among all the wretched ones of hell! Hear what they say as they do down wailing along the sides of the pit! "So much for the folly of selling my soul for a bubble of vanity! For an hour I sought and chose to be exalted; how fearfully do I sink now, and sink forever! O the contrast of earth and hell!" Hark, what do they say? The man clothed in purple and fine linen lifts up his eyes in hell being in torments; he sees Abraham afar off and Lazarus, that old ulcerated beggar, is now in his bosom; and what does he say! He cries aloud -- "Father Abraham, I pray thee send Lazarus to me; let him dip only the tip of his finger in water and put it on my tongue; I can do without my golden cup; that's gone forever now;

but let Lazarus come with his finger dipped in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame."

But what is the answer to this agonizing prayer? Son, thou hast had thy good things, all of them, to the last dregs; and Lazarus all his evil things; now he is comforted and thou art tormented.

Let this illustrate what I mean in speaking of the wide but righteous contrast between the state of souls in time and in eternity; the strange reversal of condition, by which the lowest here becomes highest there, and the highest here become the lowest there.

8. Men really intend to secure both this world and salvation. They never suppose it wise to lose their own soul. Nor do they think to gain anything by running the risk of losing it. Indeed, they do not mean to run any great risks -- only a little, the least they can conveniently make it, and yet gain a large measure of earthly good. But in attempting to get the world, they lose their souls. God told them they would, but they did not believe Him. Rushing on the fearful venture and assuming to be wiser than God, they grasped the world to get it first, thinking to get heaven afterwards; thus they tempted the Spirit; provoked God to forsake them; lost their day of salvation and lost all the world besides. How infinitely just and right is their reward! Why did they not believe God? Every one of them knew that being saved through Christ, he would be infinitely rich, and being lost, he would make himself infinitely poor; and yet he rushed upon the fatal venture, and went down, despite of grace, to an eternal hell!

9. What is really worth living for but to save souls? You may think it is worth living for to be a judge or a senator -- but is it? Is it, if the price must be the loss of your soul? How many of our American Presidents have died as you would wish to die? If you should live to gain the object of your ambition, what would be your chance of saving your soul? The world being what it is, and the temptations incident to office and worldly honors being as they are, how great would be your prospect of saving your souls? Would it be wise for you to run the hazard?

What else would you live for than to save souls? Would you not rather save souls than be President of this Union? "He that winneth souls is wise." "They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars forever." Will this be the case with the ungodly Presidents who die in their sins?

What do you purpose to do, young man, or young woman, with your education? Have you any higher or nobler object to live for than to save souls? Have you any more worthy object upon which to expend the resources of a cultivated mind and the accumulated powers gained by education? Think -- what should I live for but the gems of heaven -- what but for the honor of Jesus, my Master?

They who do not practically make the salvation of souls -- their own and others, -- their chief concern, deserve not the name of rational; they are not sane. Look at their course of practical life as compared with their knowledge of facts. Are they sane, or are they deranged?

It is time for the church to give up her mind and her whole heart to this subject. It is indeed time that she should lay these great truths in all their burning power close to her heart. Alas! how is her soul palsied with the spirit of the world! Nothing can save her and restore her to spirit life until she brings her mind and heart into burning contact with these living energizing truths of eternity. The church of our times needs the apostolic spirit. She needs so deep a baptism with those fires of Holy Ghost that she can go out and set the world on fire by her zeal for the souls of men. Till then the generations of our race must go on, thronging the broad way to hell because no man cares for their souls.

[Back to Top](#)

Awaking from The Sleep of Spiritual Death

Lecture II

September 24, 1851

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Eph. 5:14: "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

This text and the subject it presents will lead me to discuss the following points, in the order stated.

I. What is this death?

II. Why is it called death; who caused it, and who was the occasion of it?

III. The nature of the resurrection spoken of; as agencies and instruments;

IV. The reasons for the appeal--"Arise from the dead."

I. What this death is.

1. This Epistle, chapter 2:1, gives us a safe and satisfactory answer. "And you hath He quickened (that is, made alive,) who were dead in trespasses and sins." This shows what sort of death is contemplated--a death in sin. The general scope of the Epistle shows that the apostle is conceiving of the state of lost sinners, fearfully depraved, as being dead; that is, he uses the term, death, by a figure of speech, to denote their terrible apathy on the subject of their guilt and danger, and their fearful condition as exposed to the curse of God. A careful attention to the scope of this epistle will show this most fully.

2. Let it not be understood that this death is a state of perfect unconsciousness--by no means; nor is it a state in which all power of voluntary action is destroyed or even suspended; but it is a state in which no right moral action takes place. It is death in trespasses and sins.

3. We may revert to Rom. 8:6, for a more specific description of this spiritual death. In this passage Paul says--"To be carnally-minded is death, but to be spiritually-minded is life and peace." The precise sense of the original is this; "The minding of the flesh is death;" the giving up of the mind to the demands of the flesh is utter ruin to the soul; because, says verse 7, "the minding of the flesh is enmity against God," and this enmity against God at once constitutes a state of spiritual death and must of course prove the eternal ruin of the soul.

4. Reverting again to the train of thought and illustration pursued in Paul to the Ephesians, we read;--"You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time passed ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of

wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ: (by grace are ye saved:) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus,"

5. This death, therefore, as we see, is a death in sin--not one in which the mind is sunk into utter inactivity--not a state in which no action is possible; but simply one in which the mind acts, and the individual "walks according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air"--the same Satanic agency which energizes in all those who are disobedient to God. It is a death unto God, and to His character and claims. The dead sinner is regardless of God and of God's rightful authority as one physically dead is unconscious of what passes around him; he is borne to his grave, but he knows not by whom;--so the spiritually dead are voluntarily insensible to the great facts of the spiritual world--insensible to God, to truth, and to their own relations to both. They may be intensely alive to the things of the natural world, to everything relating to earthly pleasure; but to God and duty, they are dead.

6. This state, then, is called death figuratively, and yet so accurately does it describe the sinner's real case that it can scarcely be called a figure.

II. I am next to inquire, Who caused this death; and what is its occasion?

The nature of the death spoken of, will readily answer both questions. By its very nature, it consists in being governed by the desires of the flesh and of the mind. It is being under the dominion of the appetites and passions. In language more strictly accurate, it consists in the mind's giving itself up to obey the demands of appetite and passion in opposition to the counter demands of reason, conscience, and God.

1. And now I ask, Who caused this death? If sinners are dead, who has killed them? Are they suicides, or has somebody else killed them? This is a vital question in our subject.

(1.) I am aware that sinners are wont to regard their depravity as their calamity and not their fault--but this point needs to be carefully considered, and thoroughly searched out. We shall have a clue to its real merits if we push the question--Who is it that has killed the

sinner?

(2.) And yet when this question is pushed, there are some who will say--No matter who killed me if I am really dead. But this is by no means true or just. No suicide can stand up before God and claim that it matters not who caused his death; that it must be overlooked as his misfortune and not regarded as his fault.

(3.) Now the sinner's death is clearly proved to be a case of suicide. For, by the very nature of his death, nobody else could have caused it--no agency in the universe can be the cause of it but himself. For the cause of the death lies in his own voluntary action. He of his own free choice yields up himself to the demands of his appetites. He himself voluntarily chooses selfish good before and instead of God and of the universe, which is the very death of which we speak. In this and in this only consists his death in sin. He has made this fatal choice of pleasing self and displeasing God, not only through all the past years of his moral activity, but is making it at the present moment. In other words, he not only killed himself when he first began to act morally, but he has been repeating his suicidal acts ever since, and is repeating them even now. Now, even today, his own moral activities are altogether suicidal, so that if he had never killed himself before, the voluntary sin of this day would be the murder of his soul.

2. The things I now affirm follow inevitably from the very nature of moral, voluntary action. No one compels a sinner to love himself more than he loves God; no one compels him to follow his own propensities, instead of obeying the voice of his reason and his conscience. No one man ever killed another in the sense of spiritual death; no man ever did or ever can sin for another so that his sin shall be the death spiritually of his neighbor. One man may entice another to sin; may tempt him--may lead him along into sinning; this is only being the occasion; and when we ask for the occasion of the sinner's spiritual death, much may be said about the agency of others. No doubt much is to be ascribed to the influences which occasion sin; but occasion and cause are entirely distinct and should never be confounded together. The cause is the acting agent who sins; the occasion may be any influence from other agents, acting upon the sensibilities of his being,

appealing to his appetites and passions, and presenting inducements to wrong moral action.

(1.) The cause of an event or act is the efficient power which does it. It always implies the exercise of force or power, adequate to the production of the effect. Now with this meaning of the terms before our minds, we see that the only cause of sin must be the sinner's own voluntary powers of choice. No other being can compel him to sin; if the thing were possible, the sin when committed would not be his own sin, but the sin of the compelling power. Just as in physical death, you may tempt your neighbor to suicide; if in his sane mind he commits it, though under your temptation, it is suicide; he has killed himself, and however great your guilt, he is still the guilty cause of his own death. So of all temptations to sin. They are the occasion of sin, and sin never takes place without occasion. There must be something presented to the sinner's mind as an inducement which leads him to choose selfishly. All sin is choice which the sinner makes and persists in--choice of the good hoped for in disobeying God before the good promised in obeying. These temptations are various. Adam's first sin became the occasion of great sin to his race--very great sin;--of this there can be no doubt. So all the intemperance that has ever existed has made the appetite more clamorous, for by a law of our physical constitution, the habits of the parent affect his constitution, and his constitution affects that of his offspring. Thus the effects of Adam's sin have passed over upon all his race.

(2.) Whether if Adam had not sinned, any or all of his race would have sinned, I do not know. Some men have thought themselves very wise on this subject; but the Bible states this fact, that Adam's sin has occasioned the sin of all of his race. This is all the Bible affirms on this point. It does not at all assume to show what would have been the course of things in our race if Adam had not sinned. The Bible has however taught us one other fact about sin, namely, that all sin is transgression of law, and of course it implies intelligence of law, and voluntary action in stepping over it. And indeed, our own consciousness affirms that all sin is voluntary action.

It can therefore be of no use to us to speculate upon Adam's sin, and upon

what would have been, or might have been, if Adam had never sinned. It is enough to know that all sin is voluntary--that temptation can only be an occasion and never a cause; and hence that however much culpability may attach to the tempter, enough of the guilt of sin will always rest upon the sinner himself to crush him under its fearful curse.

(3.) I repeat and wish it to be borne carefully in mind that this death is spiritual, not physical; and essentially consists in a voluntary subjection of the whole being to the demands of self-gratification. The voluntary agent gives himself up to the indulgence of self in just those respects in which God commands him to deny himself; that is, he goes into self-indulgence where the divine law commands him to please God and not self--or to benefit his neighbor instead of seeking to engross all benefit to self.

3. Now it is a radically essential element in this state of mind that it is voluntary. It can never be forced. It can never be the direct and proper effect of causation exercised by another being. If it were, we could not call it sin in the subject of such force. If any man could be made, despite of himself, to do acts which are in their own nature sinful, they could not be sin in him. This is too obvious to need proof. There is therefore no such thing as forced sin--sin done by me which another being caused and compelled, despite of my resistance.

Again, the death spoken of is not what some have designated original sin. Many old divines hold that there is such a thing as original sin, which however is not transgression of law--is not voluntary action of any sort, but is a certain sinfulness in the very substance of the soul. They hold that all the faculties, parts and powers of the soul are sinful; and this sinfulness they call original sin.

This however is not God's teaching, but man's. It is taught in human creeds and catechisms; not in the Bible. When the Bible comes to speak of man's death in sin, all is made plain, as in our context, and in its parallel passages. The whole of the matter is that man of his own free will gives himself up voluntarily to self-pleasing. The Bible fastens the guilt of this state and of all its moral activities directly upon the voluntary action of the sinning agent--not upon his created powers but upon his voluntary exercise of his powers--

not upon the substance of his soul as created, but upon his own responsible action after he has been created.

It is wonderful that man should have represented this death as consisting in original sin as I have described it, while the Bible so plainly describes it as a voluntary minding of the flesh,--and as a "walking after the course of this world." Everywhere the Bible fastens the guilt of sin upon man's voluntary rebellion against God's claims. "They have loved idols." "They will not frame their doings to turn unto the Lord." They say unto God,--"depart from us for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways."

Again, if the Bible had taught original sin as some divines have taught it, the human intelligence could never have received it. If the Bible had affirmed that this death is not voluntary, but consists in a created nature, no man could rationally admit it. What other position could an intelligent man take under this doctrine than that which a friend of mine once took. His mind had been filled with the notion that Adam's first sin had been imputed to all his posterity and to himself among the rest; and that consequently he came into existence with a nature itself sinful; -- What could he do therefore but reject these doctrines, even though he must reject the Bible with them? He was told that this original sin, committed not by himself but by Adam, became in him a death, in producing which he had no agency, and yet was condemned for it to an eternal hell. How could his intelligence admit this! He was told that from this death in sin he must rise at once, although he had no more power to do it than he had to move a world;--what could he do with such a demand!

I found him rejecting the Bible. I asked him why he should do this? He answered me--Because I know it is not true.

But said I to him--what do you mean? He explained. "The Bible says that man came into the world, all sin--every faculty sinful--the faculties themselves actual sin; and then it holds that God commands me to come out of this state on pain of damnation, although, at the same time, He knows that I have no more power to do it than to create a world. Now such being the teaching of the Bible, I know that the God who made my mind never made that book."

Such language will perhaps shock many of you, yet it is only the simple statement of facts. In reply, he was told that the notions he had justly deemed

so absurd were not God's teachings but man's. I assured him those things were drawn from human creeds and catechisms, not from the Bible. He was confounded, and thrown at once utterly out of his position of infidelity. He saw that he had been rejecting the Bible for reasons which had no basis in the real teachings of that book. In the issue of this reaction upon his mind you will rejoice to learn that on that very day he was converted to God.

4. And now, beloved, if you would reach the truth on this great matter of the sinner's spiritual death, you must compare scripture with scripture. You must resort to scripture to explain itself. Pursuing this method you learn that this death is a minding of the flesh, a walking after the flesh, and consequently a self inflicted death--a death of voluntary opposition to God because it is a voluntary consecration of self to sin.

III. The nature of the resurrection here spoken of, may be learned from the nature of the death to which it stands opposed.

1. It is arising from the state of death described. Of course the rising must correspond to the death. Since therefore the death in question consists in a voluntary devotion to sin, involving a moral stupor, and an intense dislike of God and of His claims; so the rising from such a death must be a voluntary rising of the mind to a sense of its responsibilities to God and a voluntary placing of itself under God's influence, in the attitude of obedience and submission.

2. As to the nature of the agency employed in this resurrection, the Bible refers much of it to the Spirit of God, and no doubt with the utmost truth. Yet this like many other truths has been woefully abused, for many, observing how much is ascribed to this agency, have maintained that this agent does all the work and man himself nothing. A writer not long since attempted to prove that the work of spiritual resurrection and regeneration is wrought of God. To this it was replied that this statement tells but half the truth; for the Bible ascribes this work to the influence of revealed truth as often and as fully as it ascribes it to the divine Spirit. The Bible also ascribes it to man, for instance to Paul, who himself says, "I have begotten you through the gospel." And finally, it ascribes the work to the sinner himself.

3. Now, what if I should adopt the same method of proof as the writer

alluded to, and try to show that this work is done by man himself and cite my proof texts and stop there. Or suppose I labor to prove that the work is wrought by the influence of other men, by gospel ministers, for instance;--cite my proof texts and stop there; or that it is done by revealed truth;--then cite my proofs and pretend that I have exhausted the subject, and stop there. Now plainly these methods of presenting the subject all stop, having given but a part of the truth in the case. They none of them present a full view of the Bible teachings on this subject. According to the Bible, there is always a combination of agencies, the Spirit, the truth, other men, and the agent or sinner himself.

4. The manner in which divine and human agencies cooperate in this spiritual resurrection we may never be able fully to explain, yet there are many things in the Bible which may throw light upon it. Take the case of healing the impotent man, Acts 3. Peter fixing his eyes upon the cripple said--"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk," Forthwith, the cripple begins to make effort; Peter takes him by the right hand to lift him up; his feet and ankle bones receive strength; then he, leaping up, stood, and then walked. Here was a real miracle--a supernatural exertion of physical power, yet with it, there was also an exercise of the mind and of the muscular powers of the subject. So when Christ came to the grave of Lazarus, and cried with a loud voice--"Lazarus come forth;" immediately there was motion where all was the stillness of death before. When this voice rang in his ear, he started up and came forth. These were indeed physical changes, but they may serve to illustrate the change that takes place when God says to a dead sinner, Come forth. Before this, God's servants could not get the sinner's attention. Every sense seemed locked up in the sleep of spiritual death. He heard not until God spake. When others spake to him he seemed to hear as a man will sometimes hear the cry of fire in his sleep, or the striking of a clock in his reverie, but no thorough impression is made on his mind. So in the case of the sinner; man may speak to the outward ear, but God only speaks to his mind. When the sinner hears God's voice, his ears are opened. God cries in his ear--Come forth;--then as if a peal of thunder rang in his ear, he starts up in terror and trembling. Still he sees not the bow of promise. He sees only that awful cloud of thunder and blackness. Sinking in terror, he cries out,--God has spoken to my soul and how can I rest? Then if he can only see that bow of

promise, spanning the cross of Calvary, and seeming to spread its wing of love over himself, then, O then, how he leaps up from the grave of his spiritual death! He hears God saying to him, "Awake thou that sleepest;" and does he rise? Yes, at once, and without delay, he puts forth the requisite activities and comes into real life.

5. Of instruments, I need only say that God usually employs some third person, of which we have a beautiful description in Ezekiel 37th.; the vision of the valley of dry bones. No doubt this was intended to represent God's manner of calling men out of the death of unbelief into the spiritual life of faith. When, as is there described, God's voice, through His servants sounds all abroad, then His power is felt.

IV. The reasons of this command which bids the sinner arise, next require our attention.

1. As this death is a voluntary suicide, men would be to blame for it even if they were unable to rise from it to life again. Yet if they lay under this absolute inability, God could not require them to rise. He might hold them guilty for the suicide, and yet not hold them guilty for not raising themselves to life again. The latter would doubtless be the case if they had no power to bring themselves to life.

2. But the sinner has this power. His death in sin is a voluntary state of mind, and is kept up by voluntary action. In fact so strong is God's appeal to the intelligence and conscience of the sinner, that he has to exert himself to keep himself dead. It often seems as if he would rise in spite of himself, like a cork pressed under water, struggling to reach the surface. Some of you know this in your own experience. How many of you have been almost persuaded to become Christians; the voice of God rang in your ears, and its powerful appeals to your reason and conscience pressed with mighty power upon your soul; His Spirit strove with you and you were scarcely able to resist; almost you were persuaded to forego your sins and all their pleasures; it might be said of you -- "He is not far from the kingdom of God" -- but you did not enter. You still held on to your beloved idols, and after them you would go. In fact, it is so far from being true that men have no power to rise from spiritual death, that they can scarcely summon power enough to keep themselves from rising. They can scarcely resist the appeal which God makes to their hearts.

3. Every man affirms to himself that he ought to rise from this state of spiritual death - ought to be and become a Christian. His own reason affirms to him that he has no right to remain in a state of voluntary spiritual death. He knows that the only reason why he does not rise at once out of this death is his own voluntary refusal to do so. Consequently, the sinner who listens to these affirmations of his own intelligence and conscience, can have no rational peace in his sins. Much of the stupid peace which sinners do enjoy in this state, is afforded them by those perverted notions of inability to which I have alluded. By the aid of these, the conscience relieves itself of obligation and the sinner finds a torpid quiet in his sins for which the real truth affords no justification whatever.

REMARKS.

1. Sinners are the worst of suicides. During my life I have seen but one case of physical suicide, nor would I wish to see another. I could never lose the impression of awful horror made on my mind by the spectacle. It shocked the whole community. It was indeed a most awful sight.

Yet what is physical suicide in its most awful form compared with destroying one's own soul!

There may be reasons which strongly urge a man to take his own life. There never can be any good reasons for a man's destroying his own soul. A man may labor under physical derangement, and under this influence may take utterly false views of things, which may lead him to physical suicide; but that a man should destroy his own soul -- what can be more shocking! How utterly inexcusable, especially after all God has done to save the souls of lost sinners!

2. We may see in what sense we are dependent upon God's Spirit. It is in this sense simply -- to induce him to do what he ought to do of himself. With no other light than God has given to all men in His word, they ought to see their duty, and duty being seen, they ought at once to do it. And yet they are dependent upon the light of the Spirit. Why? Because they will not admit to their own minds the light of God's word without the Spirit's extra aid, and because light seen is resisted.

Take a supposition. Suppose a man has made up his mind to commit murder. He reveals his plan to his wife. She does her utmost to dissuade him from his

purpose, but in vain. He still goes on in his preparations to execute his plan. She thinks of a friend who has such influence over her husband as may avail to save him. She rushes to him for help. He is successful.

Now this is a supposable case. All this might in fact occur. But in such a case as this, you cannot but see that though this man was dependent on his friend for his salvation, yet that his very dependence was his fault. He was dependent, not in the sense that he could not forbear to commit murder, but only in the sense that he would not desist from his purpose, under any influence short of this. He would have committed the murder but for the interposed influence of his friend.

So of the sinner. The Spirit's influence is needed only to make you do what you ought to do without it. Hence, so far from being an excuse for your inaction, it rebukes all inaction, and shows its damning guilt.

3. Hence the Spirit's influences are altogether gracious. They are in no sense a matter of merit on our part, or even of claim on the ground of our inability.

4. The gift of the Spirit being a matter of grace may be withholden or withdrawn at the divine option. You may expect the Spirit to leave you if you continue to resist and abuse His agency.

5. Death in sin no more involves an inability to become holy than death to sin does an inability to sin again. There is no proper inability in either case. The Christian dead to sin, has the power to return like the dog to his vomit; the sinner dead in sin, by an equally voluntary death, has the power to emerge from that stated death, by the voluntary efforts of his own mind.

6. Our text makes its pungent and personal appeal to sinners in their sins. Addressing you--all ye who are dead in sins, it cries--"Awake, awake, open your eyes and behold the light of truth; put forth your own agency and activity; come forth from that grave in which you have slept so long. And what do you say? Do you reply--Lord, I hear Thy voice--Lord, I come--I come to Thee? Then come forth to light and life forevermore.

But are you groping about after light? Or are you caviling and resisting? Do you talk of being so dead that you have no power at all to rise? Remember, you are your own murderer. You lie in your spiritual grave because you are resolved to have earthly and not heavenly good for your portion. And now do you want the light of God upon your sealed eyes? Open those eyes and welcome the light that

shines from God upon you. Feel your responsibility and meet it as becomes an accountable, immortal mind.

[Back to Top](#)

Jesus Christ Doing Good

Lecture III

October 8, 1851

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Acts 10:38: "Who went about doing good."

The entire verse of which the text forms a part, reads as;--"How God annointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed with the devil for God was with Him."

In treating of this text and the subject it presents, I propose,

I. To notice what is intended by the language of the text;

II. What is implied in the fact affirmed;

III. To show why Christ went about doing good.

I. The intended meaning of the language is obvious.

Jesus Christ went about promoting the well-being of men wherever He went. He did what He could wisely do for the bodies of men, healing the sick, supplying physical wants; but more especially He sought to promote the highest spiritual good of the people, teaching, warning, rebuking and entreating, as circumstances seemed to require, evermore intent upon promoting the highest human happiness by every means in His power. His history shows amply how He did this.

II. What is implied in His going about doing good?

1. It is implied that this was His business -- the thing He had above all

things else at heart. For this end He came into the world. He came to do good and not evil; to bless and not to curse; to fill the world with peace, love and happiness, so far as lay within the range of His influence. The good of man was the great object which He sought.

2. It is implied that Christ sought the happiness of mankind disinterestedly, in the sense that He valued their well-being, that He really loved it and enjoyed the efforts He made to promote it. He was truly and honestly benevolent. It was because He loved the happiness of men that He labored to promote it.

III. I am to speak of the reasons or motives of His conduct.

1. These may be considered as either objective or subjective.

(1.) The objective embrace the external object which creates a demand for benevolent action and becomes the exciting cause of internal benevolent purpose.

(2.) The subjective reasons or motives are no other than the internal reasons -- the grounds of benevolent action as they existed in the mind of Jesus Christ.

2. Negatively, the reason why He went about doing good was not His salvation. It was in His case no part of His object to secure or even use the means to secure the salvation of His own soul. There is no intimation that this was any part of His object.

Nor was He forced into this labor by a sense of duty. He did not move under the goading of conscience, pressing Him on in an up-hill business with the perpetual appliance -- you must do this -- you must do all you can. Not so did He labor. He went forward not because commanded; not because He feared any threatening: -- not because some dreaded penalty hung in terror over his head.

3. It is no doubt true that Christ had respect to the fact that the law of His intelligence and the law of God also, required of Him benevolence . But mark;--it was not law merely that pressed Him up to this--not merely any external law;--I mean, external to His own mind and apart from the ruling

purpose of His own will. The simple truth is, He had chosen benevolent action as the course of His life and as the law of His own voluntary existence. He determined to do this, and as I might say, He had voluntarily determined to love the doing of good to all beings, and thus had made this the governing law of His voluntary action.

4. Now we cannot exclude from such a state of mind the idea of duty. Every mind knows that such a state of mind is duty -- is what God requires, and what the demands of the external universe require. All moral agents, acting virtuously, act according to duty. Their inward purpose and their external acts, if virtuous, will correspond with God's rule of duty; and yet it is still true that a higher motive than a conviction of duty impels them onward. They pursue this right course of internal purpose and of external act because they have determined to be benevolent and to act benevolently, and because consequently they enjoy being benevolent, and not merely because God has formally required of them benevolence. A good man loves his neighbor as himself, and he knows this is duty and also knows that not so to love his neighbor would be wrong; but yet the internal law of doing good--made a law of his moral being by his voluntarily choosing it to be so, is the active principle from which in the last analysis his actions flow.

5. The benevolent mind regards the happiness of being as a great good. It seeks this good and voluntarily makes this seeking of others good the great business of its own existence. Now I have heard people say that they regarded the idea of benevolence as a pure abstraction. Let them go and talk in this strain to a mother. I wonder if the idea of benevolently seeking the good of her children, is a mere abstraction to her. Go and ask her if she really knows anything about devoting herself to her family. Tell her you believe that idea is nothing better than a respectable abstraction. Tell her it may sound well in talk and might seem somewhat noble and self-sacrificing if it were only real; but assure her that nobody can ever have the least confidence in its sincerity--that all the world knows that every man and every woman too are supremely selfish, and there is no such thing in reality as loving others as ourselves, or as devoting ourselves to others good except so far as we can see selfish good resulting for our motive and reward. Go and talk to some simple-hearted mother in this strain. Will you convince her that she knows nothing about devotion to the interests of her children?

I can understand how this subject may perplex some minds. A young man said to me today--"Does a selfish, wicked man understand what it is to be devoted to the good of others? Can he have any just idea of what this is?"

To meet this question, you may take that form of benevolence which we often see in ungodly parents. They know what it is to have their hearts bound up in the happiness of their children. Although in this very parental affection, their minds are in a perfectly selfish state towards God, yet this devotion to the happiness of their children is a positive reality to them--none in all the world perhaps is more so. Now just enlarge this idea; suppose this devotion which even ungodly parents feel towards their children were to expand the scope and range of its regards and embrace every neighbor--friend or foe; then all the men of one's nation; and next all the human family: would not this be essentially real benevolence?

Perhaps this mode of illustration may serve to explain the point in question as well as any that I can adopt. We all understand it to be a law of our being to love our offspring. This love is as truly natural in the human mind as self-love--the desire of one's own happiness. Now we can suppose this love of offspring to be enlarged so as to embrace others as well as our own children: nay, we can suppose it to be so much enlarged as to comprehend within its scope all the human family. Suppose we could unify all beings of whom we have any knowledge--comprehending them all within the grasp of our mind and the scope of our affection as if they were all but one person; then let us love ourselves, and we should have the idea of real benevolence is not abstraction.

Benevolence an abstraction? Who can so regard it? A mere abstraction is it to promote the happiness of others! Was it so in the case of Jesus Christ? If it had been, would He have made His cradle in a manger and His death-scene on the cross, for human welfare? Or is it an abstraction in the case of those who labor and suffer for others good? If you can understand anything, you can surely understand that benevolence is no abstraction. What do you think of Jesus Christ going about doing good? Was the idea of benevolence in his mind a mere abstraction?

If we can have correct conceptions of anything, we can have of enjoyment and suffering. Understanding these things, we can also understand what is meant by putting away sorrow from all hearts, and pouring joy into the souls

of all our fellow beings all around about us. What sort of a man must that be to whom this seems a very difficult thing to understand?

6. It is said of Christ--"Who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame." Observe, He had no special regard to His own personal happiness; this was not the direct object He sought; and yet He enjoyed doing good to others. He found a happiness in blessing others, which was not the direct object of His search. His doctrine was--"It is more blessed to give, than to receive." His state of mind was such that He enjoyed conferring happiness upon others, even more than they enjoyed receiving it. It was, in His state of mind more blessed for Him to give, than for those to whom He gave it to receive.

Thus when He met the widow at Nain--saw her sorrows; came up and touched the bier, and they that bare it stood still;--when in this affecting case He called this young man to life and restored him to his mother, although she enjoyed her restored son exceedingly, and could have gone dancing home with delight, yet he enjoyed it far more than even she did. The act met the demands of His own conscience and nature. He had given His heart up to the doing of good to others and consequently He felt more joy in doing good to others than they could in receiving it. Hence He could "endure the cross, despising the shame."

Again, there can be no doubt that Christ had a proper regard to His Father's feelings toward Him. Human fathers always enjoy seeing their children do nobly. When they send their children away on missions of love and give them the parting kiss, and their parting benediction, saying in the fullness of their souls--"God bless you and make you do good as long as you live;" and don't want to bring them back, though trials and toils betide them;--and the missionary himself says, "I know this labor I am doing will gratify my aged father and my praying mother;--I will write them all that the Lord has wrought by me, for I know they will enjoy it exceedingly;"--you all see in this case that the toiling missionary is sustained in part by the hope of enhancing the happiness of his parents by his labors; and why should not Jesus have the same interest in the joy of His Father? God always enjoys the labors of love wrought by His Son; He had them all in mind from eternity. So also did Jesus have all these things in His mind. He knew that His self-denying toils would gratify all His friends in heaven.

Ah, say the self-denying missionary, I will write back to my Christian friends. They prayed for me when I left my native land, and they have been praying for me ever since. I know they must enjoy the knowledge of what the Lord has wrought by me in answer to their prayer.

Now this is not selfish; it is not being proud. It is a simple regard to the happiness of those left behind.

So with Christ. He knows that in heaven they are prepared to appreciate such tidings. There may be few on earth to appreciate them, but many in heaven. There were patriarchs and prophets -- there were Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - - there were a countless host who had been waiting long ages for this glorious consummation, and when they came to hear what Jesus was doing and suffering on earth, did it not enhance their happiness? Yea, was not the happiness of heaven increased even more than that of Jesus Christ Himself? O, what joy must have thrilled the hearts of the holy in heaven, when they were told what Jesus was doing--how He was raising the dead, healing the sick, casting out demons, preaching the gospel to the poor, saying to many a burdened soul, "thy sins are forgiven thee--go in peace;"--when these glad tidings, swifter than on telegraph wires, flashed from earth to heaven, was there no augmented joy there? When it was told them, Jesus is preaching salvation--is planting the tree of life all over the barren wastes of earth, rebuking hell, is about to set wide open the blessed gates of mercy, so that whosoever will, may enter and find life and peace--O, then was there not joy in heaven unknown before?

Hence in going about to do good to others, Christ had regard not merely to the immediate good He might do them, but also to other and higher interests. And had you been on earth to see and know those deeds of love and to enter into the sympathies of those whom He blessed--then also, into the sympathies of His own gushing heart, O, how rich the scene for a benevolent mind to enjoy! Was it, think you, an abstraction to Him? So far from this, it stirred up all the warmest sensibilities of His being; nay more, so great was His zeal in this work that it literally ate Him up! It actually consumed the vital energies of His physical being!

REMARKS.

1. How very simple and intelligible is the nature of true religion. Every man

knows what it is to love to do good to some individual. Every person has some one or more objects of affection. Now suppose that selfishness were all put away--that we were to associate our own happiness most intimately with that of all our race, taking as much interest in each other person's well-being as in our own; could we not then understand this state of mind! This is real religion.

Devotion to other's good is a very simple thing. When our devotion to the production of happiness is not restricted to ourselves, but we labor for other's good, and love to promote the good of others not less than our own, this is an intelligible thing; and this is true benevolence--real religion.

2. You have revealed in our subject the state of mind to which the rewards of heaven are promised. These rewards by no means appeal to human selfishness; they were never intended to stimulate the selfishness of the human heart. God promises to reward those who live as He lives -- who labor for the same ends. Suppose a father should promise his estate to his children on condition they should live as they ought to. Would this mean--If you are careful and anxious to get my estate, you shall have it? No, but it would mean this; If you regard my will and happiness, and if you try in all things to do right; if you love me, and love all the family, with a single eye, and prove yourself to be in every respect a worthy son -- then you are entitled to my estate.

And would this be an appeal to their selfishness? By no means. No intelligent child could so understand it.

3. We can see to whom and to whom alone the rewards of eternal life are possible.

On this point selfish men are almost sure to mistake. They have erroneous views of what secures salvation. No man can be saved unless he enters into such sympathy with God as to find his own happiness as God finds His.

But what are these rewards of eternal life? Suppose a man makes a mistake and regards the whole matter of salvation as one of mere loss and gain, altogether a mercenary thing; is it not plain that he entirely misapprehends the subject? It were well that he should ask--What are these rewards? What were they in the case of our Lord? I answer--The joy of doing good--the joy of witnessing and enjoying the happiness of others, so that when He saw the results of His labors, they were their own reward and He could not but enjoy them.

Ere long all of us who have the Spirit of Christ and of Paul shall get home to heaven. Then we shall see Paul. Now, and of a long time past he has seen the thousands, converted under his own personal labors--the fruits of all his toils and groans and travail; he sees and has long seen their intense happiness in God and in Christ, and he understands that these are his spiritual children, whom he has begotten in his toils and labors, and does he not enjoy their joys? While here on earth, he was always rejoicing; but O, how much more is he always rejoicing now! Now, having gone home, his works have followed him; and what are these works? The fruits of his pen and tongue--of his labors in his correspondence and in his oral preaching.

But on what conditions can these fruits of his labors make Paul happy? These are the very results for which he labored. He has been a successful man--successful in all his enterprises of labor for God and for souls. As Christ sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied, so Paul. Both are happy because they have attained the object for which they labored. The fruits are being gathered in the great storehouse of the Almighty. Age after age, they come, and though a thousand ages shall pass away, each freighted with souls saved, yet still they come. And is not this reward enough? Say, young man, is not this an ample reward for all the sacrifice and toil endured by Jesus Christ and by his servant, Paul? See the missionary who has gone to Africa. He rolls back the dark cloud of moral death that hangs over that cruelly wronged and morally neglected people. Many are they that learn of salvation from his lips and catch the new song of praise and love. By and by he gets through his work and goes home. His works do follow him. Year after year he sees them coming up to cast their crowns at Jesus' feet; and is not his an adequate reward? They had sympathized with Christ all along during their labors; they sympathize with Him not less now in these rewards of their labor. Christ enters into their joy, and they into His. And is all this benevolence an abstraction in heaven? Nay, verily; let it be anything else--but not an abstraction!

4. It is wonderful to see the astonishing blindness of mind which often exists as to real religion.

Often before my conversion did I pause and wonder what I was doing and what object I was living for. The very end of my existence seemed to be to me altogether vague and indeed unknown. I had no conception of the ends for which a Christian lives, and truly I could see no other ends of life worth living for.

I am afraid that some among you do not know at all what it is to be constrained by the love of Christ to labor and to suffer for the good of others and to be a co-laborer with Christ in the great labor of this world--the redemption of souls that else must perish.

5. Religion, to truly religious persons, is never a burden. Those who think so, know nothing yet as they need and ought to know. Of old the prophets were wont to say--"The burden of the Lord"--"The burden of the Lord;"and many seem to regard every message from the Lord as a burden, and all the work He calls upon them to do, as a burden. Young people say, We must by all means enjoy life now, and religion is utterly unsuitable to our age and to our pursuits. But how is this: Cannot the hearts of the young be warmed to love? Is it only the aged that have such hearts as love can warm and holy zeal inflame.

Yet how passing strange are the views of many as to early piety? Said a woman in Troy--"It seems a pity that my daughter should become a Christian now. She has just reached an age in which she can enjoy society, and mingle with pleasure in young company? O what a pity that all her pleasures should be spoiled!"

When I was converted, my brother had but one word to say about it--"Charles," said he "is ruined!"

So, often, people think that religion is far enough from being a present good. Yet what can be a greater good than to give one's self up to that in which we shall find most congenial, permanent and supreme satisfaction? But those who do not give up their very hearts to the joys of benevolence, do of course find it altogether an up-hill business.

6. People who are truly religious have no other joy but this. I mean, that all their joys are mingled with their religion. They can enjoy nothing without religion. They want to meet God in everything; then they enjoy it. But without God and without a benevolent heart in sympathy with God, they could not enjoy either food, or society, or study. All would lack its appropriate appeal to their sensibilities. Their hearts would refuse to go into it. They have one great object connected continually with all happiness. Their religion consists substantially in sympathy with Christ--in having the heart absorbed in the same spirit which Christ had. Now if you read Christ's history and see how great, how deep, and how all-absorbing His interest was in His work, you will also see the real heart of all His true followers.

7. This is the religion of the saints of olden ages; of prophets, of apostles, and pre-eminently of Paul. He counted all things else but dross that he might win Christ and wear Christ's Spirit.

8. Those who do not thus devote themselves to the good of others deserve no good themselves.

How plain this is! One who knows the value of others' happiness, yet cares not to promote it; none who knows the miseries of his fellow-beings yet cares not to alleviate them, what claim has he upon either God or the universe for happiness? What could he do or enjoy in heaven? If he lives only for himself, what could he do there? Just think of him, carrying all his selfishness into heaven! A man once said on the floor of Congress-"The people in the North are so selfish that if they should hear of the river of life, their first thought would be to ask if there were any mill-seats on it!" How can minds so steeped in selfishness be happy even in heaven?

9. Some live to get and not to do good, and thus fail of the great object of life. If those who are living thus are not awake to their danger, they will get into so selfish a state that they will never enjoy anything--will never get anything to enjoy. If you live to get good, and do not try to do good, it will surely be your ruin! This truth should be reiterated again and again. It must be appreciated, or men will make shipwreck of their happiness forever.

10. It sometimes happens that persons who have been active and useful before they came into this place, suspend all active labors to do good when they get here. They say--"O there are men enough here to do all the good that need be done." Soon they tell us they can find nothing either to do or enjoy. They cannot enjoy nearly so much here as they used to elsewhere. This is the inevitable result of their course of life.

Young man, have you nothing to do for the spiritual good of your room-mate? Do you know his state of mind? "O, I presume," you say, "that he is in a good state." Do you know anything about it? O, you don't know. You have never asked him. Have you nothing to do? Look all round about and see. Will you reply, You are the minister and you can find enough to do; but what can I do? There is work for every man who will find a heart and a hand to do it.

Theological students sometimes make this great mistake. They expect to do

nothing here, but put off their labors for the good of men's souls till they get through their studies and into their field. They could scarcely make a worse mistake. Thank God, all have not made it. Some have made a path-way of light all along their course. You hear of them--you see their luminous pathway; God is with them, and they labor for Him not in vain. The man who goes upon mission ground, having been useful here will be useful there. But if he has not learned to labor to effect here, he need not expect to labor successfully there.

11. The benevolent live to make others happy. In a thousand ways they show that this is the object of their lives. They love this work. They are not misanthropic, complaining, fault-finding, censorious; but joyful in their work, taking a lively interest in everybody's happiness, enjoying all the good that they see great masses moving onward in the career of social and civil progress, ideas of civil and religious liberty developing, new channels and means of usefulness laid open, seeing these omens of progress, instead of taking somber views of things, they are hopeful and happy. They see much good already done, and in all this they rejoice exceedingly. They do indeed see some eddies in the mighty current of progress, and sometimes they see back currents; but yet Christ carries on His work, and confiding in Him, they still believe in ultimate success, and still hold on their way hopeful and rejoicing. Jesus their great Captain, they know is not on earth but in heaven; yet though in heaven, He has not ceased to labor and to pray for His own cause. Indeed He is there because He can labor there to better advantage than here.

Hence all their prospects are full of hope. They lift up their eyes and see whole masses moving onward, and in this movement they cannot fail to rejoice. They are not the men to turn away from such a sight and mope along in dull and misanthropic melancholy. They do indeed see wickedness enough; but glory to God, Christ reigns, and will reign till He hath put all His foes beneath His feet. Jesus reigns and the trumpet of His gospel is being blown in all the earth.

It is astonishing to see how stupid many professed Christians can be in this matter of human progress. If they awake, they would stand on tiptoe to see the tops of the great thoughts and ideas of the present age of progress.

Young men and young women, what do you say? What are you here for, and what am I here for? For what object did your parents send you here? And what are all these teachers here for? All, to do good; surely there is no other object that deserves an hour of our time and labor. Are there those among you who do

not know what this means? I am grieved and ashamed that men can live in Oberlin without having their hearts all on fire with the benevolence of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

[Back to Top](#)

The Wicked Heart Set to do Evil

Lecture IV

October 22, 1851

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Eccl. 8:11: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

This text manifestly assumes that the present is not a state of rewards and punishments, in which men are treated according to their character and conduct. This fact is not indeed affirmed, but it is assumed, as it is also everywhere throughout the Bible. Everybody knows that ours is not a state of present rewards and punishments; the experience and observation of every man testifies to this fact with convincing power. Hence it is entirely proper that the Bible should assume it as a known truth. Every man who reads his Bible must see that many things in it are assumed to be true, and that these are precisely those things which every man knows to be true, and which none could know more certainly if God had affirmed them on every page of the Bible. In the case of this truth, every man knows that he is not himself punished as he has deserved to be in the present life. Every man sees the same thing in the case of his neighbors. The Psalmist was so astounded by the manifest injustice of things in this world, as between the various lots of the righteous and of the wicked, that he was greatly stumbled, "until," says he, "I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end,"

It is also assumed in this passage that all men have by nature a common heart. One general fact is asserted of them all, and in this way they are assumed to have a common character. "The heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do

evil." So elsewhere. "God saw that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." This is the common method in which God speaks of sinners in His word. He always assumes that by nature they have the same disposition.

The text also shows what the moral type of the sinner's heart is; "fully set to do evil." But we must here pause a moment to inquire what is meant in our passage by the term "heart."

It is obvious that this term is used in the Bible in various shades of meaning; sometimes for the conscience, as in the passage which affirms, "if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart," and may be expected the more to condemn us; some times the term is used for the intelligence; but here most evidently for the will, because this is the only faculty of the mind which can be said to be set -- fixed -- bent, determined upon a given course of voluntary action. The will is the faculty which fixes itself upon a chosen course; hence in our text, the will must be meant by the term heart; for otherwise no intelligible sense can be put upon the passage. But in what direction and to what object is the will of wicked men fully set? Answer, to do evil. So God's word solemnly affirms.

But, let it be said in way of explanation, this does not imply that men do evil for the sake of the evil itself; it does not imply that sinning, considered as disobedience to God, is their direct object -- no; the drunkard does not drink because it is wicked to drink, but he drinks notwithstanding it is wicked. He drinks for the present good it promises -- not for the sake of sinning. So of the man who tells lies. His object is not to break God's law -- but to get some good to himself by lying; yet he tells the lie notwithstanding God's prohibition. His heart may become fully set upon the practice of lying whenever it suits his convenience, and of the good he hopes thus to gain; and it is in vain that God labors by fearful prohibitions and penalties to dissuade him from his course. So of stealing, adultery, and other sins. We are not to suppose that men set their heart upon these sins out of love to pure wickedness; but they do wickedly for the sake of the good they hope to gain thereby. The licentious man would perhaps be glad if it were not wicked to gratify his passion; but wicked though it is, he sets his heart to do it. Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit; why? Because they saw it was beautiful, and they were told it would make them wise; hence, for the good they hoped to gain, and despite of God's prohibition, they took and

ate. I know it is sometimes said that sinners love sin for its own sake, out of a pure love of sin as sin, simply because it is disobedience to God. With a natural relish, as wolves love flesh; but this is not true -- certainly not in many cases; but the simple truth is, men do not set their hearts upon the sin for its own sake, but upon sinning for the sake of the good they hope to get from it.

Notice particularly now the language -- "heart fully set to do evil." One man is avaricious; he sets his heart upon getting rich, honestly, if he can, but rich anyway; to get money by fair means if possible, but be sure and get it. Another is ambitious. The love of reputation fills and fires his soul, and therefore, perhaps, he becomes very religious--if religion is popular, but altogether selfish, and none the less so for being so very religious.

Selfishness takes on a thousand forms and types; but each and all are sinful, for the whole mind should give itself up to serve God and to perform every duty as revealed to the reason. What did Eve do? Give herself up to gratify her propensity for knowledge, and for the good of self-indulgence. She consented to believe the lying spirit who told her it was "a tree to be desired to make one wise." This she thought must be very important. It was also, apparently, good for food, and her appetite became greatly excited; the more she looked, the more excited she became, and now what should she do? God had forbidden her to touch it: shall she obey God, or obey her own excited appetite? Despite of God's command, she ate it. Was that a sin? Many would think it a very small sin; but it was real rebellion against God, and He could not do otherwise than visit it with His terrific frown!

So everywhere, to yield to the demands of appetite and passion against God's claims, is grievous sin. All men are bound to fear and obey God, however much self-denial and sacrifice it may cost.

I said that selfishness often assumes a religious type. In the outset the mind may be powerfully affected by some of the great and stirring truths of the gospel; but it presently comes to take an entirely selfish view, caring only to escape punishment, and make religion a matter of gain. It is wonderful to see how in such cases the mind utterly misapprehends the design of the gospel, quite losing sight of the great fact that it seeks to eradicate man's selfishness, and draw out his heart into pure benevolence. Making this radical mistake, it conceives of the whole gospel system as a scheme for indulgences. You may see this exemplified in the view which some take of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, which

they suppose to be reckoned to them while they are living in sin. That is, they suppose that they secure entire exemption from the penalty of violating law, and even have the honors and rewards of full obedience while yet they have all the self-indulgences of a life of sin. Horrible! Were ever Romish indulgences worse than this?

Examine such a case thoroughly and you will see that selfishness is at the bottom of all the religion there is in it. The man was worldly before and is devout now; but devout for the same reason that he was worldly. The selfish heart forms alike the basis of each system. The same ends are sought, and sought in the same spirit; the moral character remains unchanged. He prays perhaps; but if so, he asks God to do some great things for him, to promote his own selfish purposes. He has not the remotest idea of making such a committal of himself to God's interests, and having no interests other than God's to serve at all.

To illustrate this point, let us suppose that a parent should say to his children--"I will give you my property if you will work with me, and truly identify your interests with mine; and if you are not willing to do this, I shall disinherit you." Now some of the children may take a perfectly selfish view of this offer, and may say within themselves--Now I will do just enough for father to get his money; I will make him think that I am very zealous for his interests, and I will do just enough to secure the offered rewards; but why should I do any more?

Or suppose the case of a human government which offers rewards to offenders on condition of their returning to obedience. The real spirit of the offer goes the length of asking the sincere devotion of their hearts to the best good of the government. But they may take a wholly selfish view of the case, and determine to accept the proposal only just far enough to secure the rewards, and only for the sake of the rewards. The Ruler wants and expects the actual sympathy of their hearts--their real good-will; and this being given, would love to reward them most abundantly; but how can He be satisfied with them if they are altogether selfish?

Now a man may be as selfish in praying as in stealing, and even far more wicked; for he may more grievously mock God, and more impiously attempt to bribe the Almighty to subserve his own selfish purposes. As if he supposed he could make the Searcher of hearts his own tool; he may insolently try to induce Him to play into his own hands, thus may most grievously tempt Him to His face.

But the text affirms that the heart of men is fully set in them to do evil." Perhaps some of you think otherwise; you don't believe in such depravity. O, says that fond mother, I think my daughter is friendly to religion. Do you think she is converted? O no, not converted, but I think she is friendly;--she feels favorably towards religion. Does she meet the claims of God like a friend to His government and to His reputation? I can not say about that. Ask her to repent and what does she say? She will tell you she cannot.

How striking the fact that you may go through the ranks of society and you will meet almost everywhere with this position;--the sinner says--"I cannot repent--I cannot believe." What is the matter? Where is the trouble? Go to that daughter, thought to be so friendly to religion;--she is so amiable and gentle that she can not bear to see any pain inflicted;--but mark;--present to her the claims of God and what does she say? I cannot; no I cannot obey God in one of His demands, I cannot repent of my sin she says. But what is it to repent, that this amiable lady, so friendly to religion withal, should be incapable of repenting? What is the matter: Is God so unreasonable in His demands that He imposes upon you things quite impossible for you to do? Or is it the case that you are so regardless of His feelings and so reckless of the truth that for the sake of self-justification, you will arraign Him on the charge of the most flagrant injustice, and falsely imply that the wrong is all on His side and none on yours? Is this a very amiable trait of character in you? Is this one of your proofs that the human heart is not fully set to do evil?

You cannot repent and love God! You find it quite impossible to make up your mind to serve and please God! What is the matter? Are there no sufficient reasons apparent to your mind why you should give up your heart to God? No reasons? Heaven, earth, and hell may all combine to pour upon you their reasons for fearing and loving God, and yet you cannot! Why? Because your heart is fully set within you to do evil rather than good. You are altogether committed to the pleasing of self. Jesus may plead with you--your friends may plead; heaven and hell may lift up their united voices to plead, and every motive that can press on the heart from reason, conscience, hope and fear, angels and devils, God and man, may pass in long and flashing array before your mind--but alas, your heart is so fully set to do evil that no motive to change can move you. What is this cannot! Nothing less or more than a mighty will not!

That amiable lady insists that she is not much depraved. O no, not she. She will

not steal! True, her selfishness takes on a most tender and delicate type. She has most gushing sensibilities; she cannot bear to see a kitten in distress;--but what does she care for God's rights? What for the rights of Jesus Christ? What does she care for God's feelings? What does she care for the feelings and sympathies of the crucified Son of God? Just nothing at all. What then are all her tender sensibilities worth? Doves and kittens have even more of this than she. Many tender ties has she, no doubt, but they are all under the control of a perfectly selfish heart

Mother Eve too was most amiable. Indeed she was a truly pious woman before she sinned -- and Adam no doubt thought she could be trusted everywhere; -- but mark how terribly she fell! So her daughters. Giving up their hearts to a refined selfishness, they repel God's most righteous claims, and they are fallen!

So go through all the ranks of society and you see the same thing. Go to the pirate ship, the captain armed to the teeth and the fire of hell in his eye; -- ask him to receive an offered Savior and repent of his sins, and he gives the very same answer as that amiable daughter does -- he cannot repent. His heart too is so fully set within him to do evil that he cannot get his own consent to turn from his sins to God.

O this horrible committal of the heart to do evil! It is the only reason why the Holy Ghost is needed to change the sinner's heart. But for this you would no more need the Holy Ghost than an angel of light does. O how fearfully strong is the sinner's heart against God! Just where the claims of God come in he seems to have almost an omnipotence of strength to oppose and resist! The motives of truth may roll mountain high and beat upon his iron heart, yet see how he braces up his nerves to withstand God! What can he not resist sooner than submit his will to God!

Another thing lies in this text, incidentally brought out, -- assumed but not affirmed; -- viz. that sinners are already under sentence. The text says, "Because sentence is not executed speedily," implying that sentence is already passed and only waits its appointed time for execution. You who have attended courts of justice know that after trial and conviction next comes sentence. The culprit takes his seat in the criminal's bench. The judge arises - all is still as death; -- he reviews the case, and comes shortly to the solemn conclusion; -- you are convicted by this court of the crime alleged, and now you are to receive your sentence. Sentence is then pronounced.

After this solemn transaction, execution, is commonly deferred for a period longer or shorter according to circumstance. The object may be either to give the criminal opportunity to secure a pardon, or if there be no hope of this, at least to give him some days or weeks for serious reflection in which he may secure the peace of his soul with God. For such reasons, execution is usually delayed. But after sentence, the case is fully decided. No further doubt of guilt can interpose to affect the case; the possibility of pardon is the only remaining hope. The awful sentence seals his doom -- unless it be possible that pardon may be had, That sentence -- how it sinks into the heart of the guilty culprit! "you are now," says the judge, "remanded to the place from whence you came; there to be kept in irons, under close confinement, until the day appointed; -- then to be taken forth from your prison between the hours of ten and twelve as the case may be, and hung by the neck until you are dead. And may God have mercy on your soul!" The sentence has passed now -- the court have done their work; it only remains for the sheriff to do his as the executioner of justice -- and the fearful scene closes.

So the Bible represents the case of the sinner. He is under sentence, but his sentence is not executed speedily. Some respite is given. The arrangements of the divine government require no court, no jury; -- the law itself says -- "the soul that sinneth, it shall die;" "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all the things written in the book of the law to do them;" so that the mandate of the law involves the sentence of law on every sinner -- a sentence from which there can be no escape and no reprise except by a pardon. What a position is this for the sinner!

But next consider another strange fact. Because sentence is not executed speedily; because there is some delay of execution; -- because Mercy prevails to secure for the condemned culprit a few days' respite, so that punishment shall not tread close on the heels of crime, therefore "the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." How astounding! What a perversion and abuse of the gracious design of the King in granting a little respite from instant execution!

Let us see how it would look in the case of our friend or neighbor. He has committed a fearful crime, he is arrested, put on trial, convicted, sentenced, handed over to the sheriff to await the day and hour of his execution. The judge says -- I defer the execution that you may have opportunity to secure a pardon from the Governor. I assure you the Governor is a most compassionate man -- he

loves to grant pardons; he has already pardoned thousands; if you will give up your spirit of rebellion he will most freely forgive you all; I beg of you therefore that you will do no such thing as attempt a justification; -- don't think of escaping death otherwise than by casting yourself upon his mercy; don't flatter yourself upon his mercy; don't flatter yourself that there can be any other refuge.

Now suppose this man begins--" I have done nothing --just nothing at all. I am simply a martyr to truth and justice! At all events, I have done nothing very bad--nothing that any government ought to notice. I don't believe I shall be sentenced--(the man is condemned already!) I shall live as long as the best of you. So he sets himself to making excuses. He goes to work as if he was preparing for a trial, and as if he expected to prove his innocence before the court. Nay, perhaps he even sets himself to oppose and curse the government, railing at its laws and at its officers, deeming nothing too bad to say of them, indulging himself in the most outrageous opposition, abusing the very men whose mercy has spared his forfeited life! How would all men be shocked to see such a case--to see a man who should so outrage all propriety as to give himself up to abuse the government whose righteous laws he had just broken and then whose clemency he had most flagrantly abused! Yet this text affirms first this to be the case of the sinner, and all observation sustains it. You have seen it acted over ten thousand times; you can look back and see it in your own case. You know it is all true--fearfully, terribly true.

If it were in some striking, awful manner revealed to you this night that your soul is damned, you would be thunder-struck. You do not believe the simple declaration of Jehovah as it stands recorded on the pages of the Bible. You are continually saying to yourself--I shall not be condemned at last--I will venture along. I will dare to tempt His forbearance yet. I do not at all believe He will send me to hell. At least I will venture on a season longer and turn about by and by if I find it quite advisable--but at present why should I fear to set my heart fully in the way God has forbidden?

Where will you find a parallel to such wickedness? Only think of a state of moral hardihood that can abuse God's richest mercies--that can coolly say--God is so good that I will abuse Him all I can;--God loves me so much that I shall venture on without fear to insult Him and pervert His long-suffering to the utmost hardening of my soul in sin and rebellion!

Let each sinner observe--the day of execution is really set. God will not pass

over it. When it arrives, there can be no more delay. God waits not because He is in doubt about the justice of the sentence--not because His heart misgives Him in view of its terrible execution; but only that He may use means with you and see if He cannot persuade you to embrace mercy. This is all;--this is the only reason why judgment for a long time has lingered and the sword of justice has not long since smitten you down.

Here is another curious fact. God has not only deferred execution, but at immense cost has provided means for the safe exercise of mercy. You know it is naturally a dangerous thing to bestow mercy--there is so much danger lest it should weaken the energy of law and encourage men to trample it down in hope of impunity. But God has provided a glorious testimony in favor of law, going to show that it is in His heart to sustain it at every sacrifice. He could not forgive sin until His injured and insulted law is honored before the universe. Having done all this in the sacrifice of His own Son on Calvary, He can forgive without fear of consequences, only provided that each candidate for pardon shall first be penitent.

Now therefore, God's heart of mercy is opened wide and no fear of evil consequences from gratuitous pardons disturbs the exercise of mercy. Before atonement, Justice stood with brandished sword, demanding vengeance on the guilty; but by and through atoning blood, God rescued His law from peril--He lifted it up from beneath the impious foot of the transgressor, and set it on high in safety and glory; and now opens wide the blessed door of mercy. Now He comes in the person of His Spirit and invited you in. He comes to your very heart and room, sinner, to offer you the freest possible pardon for all your sin. Do you hear that gentle rap at your door? "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with Me." Look at those hands. Have they not been pierced? Do you know those hands? Do you know where they have been to be nailed through and through? Mark those locks wet with the dew. Ah, how long have they been kept without in waiting for the door to open! Who is it that comes? Is it the sheriff of justice? Has he come with his armed men to drag you away to execution? Oh no, no; but One comes with the cup of mercy in His hands; He approaches your prison-gate, His eye wet with the tear of compassion, and through the diamond of your grate He extends that cup of mercy to your parched lips. Do you see that visage, so marred more than any man's--and are you only the more fully set to do evil? Ah, young man! alas, young woman! is such your heart towards the God of

mercy? Where can we find a parallel to such guilt? Can it be found anywhere else in the universe but in this crazy world?

The scenes and transactions of earth must excite a wonderful interest in heaven. Angels desire to look into these things. O how the whole universe looks on with inquisitive wonder to see what Christ has done, and how the sinners for whom He has suffered and done all, requite His amazing love! When they see you set your heart only the more fully to do evil, they stand back aghast at such unparalleled wickedness! What can be done for such sinners but leave them to the madness and doom of their choice?

God has no other alternative. If you will abuse Him, He must execute His law, and its fearful sentence of eternal death. Suppose it were a human government and a similar state of facts should occur; who does not see that government might as well abdicate at once as forbear to punish? So of God. Although He has no pleasure in the sinner's death, and although He will never slay you because He delights in it, yet how can He do otherwise that execute His law if He would sustain it? And how can He excuse Himself for any failure in sustaining it? Will you stand out against Him, and flatter yourself that He will fail of executing His awful sentence upon you? Oh, sinner, there is no possibility that you can pass the appointed time without execution. Human laws may possibly fail of execution: God's laws can fail never! And who is it that says--"their judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not?"

REMARKS.

1. Let me ask professors of religion--Do you think you believe these truths? Let me suppose that here is a father and also a mother in this house, and you have a child whom you know and admit to be under sentence of death. You don't know but this is the very day and hour set for his execution. How much do you feel? Does the knowledge and belief of such facts disturb your repose? Now your theory is that the case of your children is infinitely worse than this.

A death eternal in hell you know must be far more awful than any public execution on earth. If your own son were under sentence for execution on earth, how would you feel? Professing to believe him under the far more awful sentence to hell, how do you in fact feel?

But let us spread out this case a little. Place before you that aged father and

mother. Their son went years ago to sea. Of a long time they have not seen him nor even heard a word from him. How often have their troubled minds dwelt on his case! They do not know how it fares with him, but they fear the worst. They had reason to know that his principles were none too well fixed when he left home, and they are afraid he has fallen into worse and still worse society until it may be that he has become a bold transgressor. As they are talking over these things and searching from time to time all the newspapers they can find to get, if they can, some clue to their son's history, all at once the door bell rings; a messenger comes in and hands a letter; the old father takes it, breaks the seal--reads a word and suddenly falls back in his seat, the letter drops from his hand;--Oh he can't read it! The mother wonders and inquires; she rushes forward and seizes the fallen letter;--she reads a word and her heart breaks with agony. What's the matter? Their son is sentenced to die, and he sends to see if his father and mother can come and see him before he dies. In early morning they are off. The sympathizing neighbors gather round; all are sorrowful, for it is a sad thing and they feel it keenly. The parents hasten away to the prison, and learn the details of the painful case. They see at a glance that there can be no hope of release but in a pardon. The governor lives near, they rush to his house--but sad for them--they find him stern and inexorable. With palpitating hearts and a load on their aching bosoms, they plead and plead, but all seems to be in vain. He says, Your son has been so wicked and has committed such crimes he must be hung. The good of the nation demands it and I cannot allow my sympathies to overrule my sense of justice and my convictions of the public good. But agonized parents must hold on. O what a conflict in their minds! How the case burns upon their hearts! At last the mother breaks out. Sir, are you a father? Have you a son? Yes, one son. Where is he? Gone to California. How long since you heard from him? Suppose he too should fall! Suppose you were to feel such grief's as ours, and have to mourn over a fallen son! The governor finds himself to be a father. All the latent sensibilities of the father's heart are roused within him. Calling to his private secretary, he says, make out a pardon for their son! O what a flood of emotions they pour out!

All this is very natural. No man deems this strange at all.

But right over against this, see the case of the sinner, condemned to an eternal hell. If your spiritual ears were opened, you would hear the chariot wheels rolling--the great Judge coming in His car of thunder; you would see the sword of Death gleaming in the air and ready to smite down the hardened sinner. But

hear the professedly Christian father pray for his ungodly son. He thinks he ought to pray for him once or twice a day, so he begins; but ah, he has almost forgot his subject. He hardly knows or thinks what he is praying about. God says, pray for your dying son! Lift up your cries for him while yet Mercy lingers and pardon can be found. But alas! Where are the Christian parents that pray as for a sentenced and soon-to-be-executed son! They say they believe the Bible, but do they? Do they act as if they believed the half of its awful truths about sentenced sinners ready to go down to an eternal hell? Yet mark--as soon as they are spiritually awake, then how they feel! And how they act!

What ails that professor who has no spirit of prayer and no power with God? He is an infidel! What, when God says he is sentenced to die and His angel of death may come in one hour and cut him down in his guilt and sin, and send his spirit quick to hell, and yet the father or the mother have no feeling in the case? They are infidels; they do not believe what God has said.

2. Yet make another supposition. These afflicted parents have gone to the governor; they have poured out their griefs before him and have at last wrenched a pardon from his stern hands. They rush from his house towards the prison, so delighted that they scarcely touch the ground; coming near they hear songs of merriment, and they say, how our son must be agonized with company and scenes so unsuited and so uncongenial! They meet the sheriff. Who, they ask, is that who can sing so merrily in a prison? It is your own son. He has no idea of being executed; he swears he will burn down the governor's house; indeed he manifests a most determined spirit, as if his heart were fully set on evil. Ah, say they; that is distressing; but we can subdue his wicked and proud heart. We will show him the pardon and tell him how the governor feels. We are sure this will subdue him. He cannot withstand such kindness and compassion.

They come to the door; they gain admittance and show him the pardon. They tell him how much it has cost them and how tenderly the governor feels in the case. He seizes it, tears it to pieces and tramples it under his feet! O, say they, he must be deranged! But suppose it is only depravity of the heart, and they come to see it and know that such must be the case. Alas, they cry, this is worst of all! What! not willing to be pardoned--not willing to be saved! This is worse than all the rest. Well, we must go to our desolate home. We have done with our son! We got a pardon for him with our tears, but he will not have it. There is nothing more that we can do.

They turn sadly away, not caring even to bid him farewell. They go home doubly saddened--that he should both deserve to die for his original crimes, and also for his yet greater crime of refusing the offered pardon.

The day of execution comes; the sheriff is on hand to do his duty; from the prison he takes his culprit to the place of execution; the multitude throng around and follow sadly along; suddenly a messenger rushes up to say to the criminal--You have torn in pieces one pardon--but here is yet one more; will you have this? With proud disdain he spruns even this last offer of pardon! And now were are the sympathies of all the land? Do they say, how cruel to hang a young man, and for only such a crime? Ah, no; no such thing at all. They see the need of law and justice; they know that law so outraged must be allowed to vindicate itself in the culprit's execution. And now the sheriff proclaims--"Just fifteen minutes to live;"--and even these minutes he spends in abusing the governor, and insulting the majesty of law.

The dreadful hour arrives, and its last moment--the drop falls; he trembles a minute under the grasp of Death, and all is still forever! He is gone and Law has been sustained in the fearful execution of its sentence. And all the people feel that this is righteous. They cannot possibly think otherwise. Even those aged parents have not a word of complaint to utter. They approve the governor's course; they endorse the sentence. They say, we did think he would accept the pardon! But since he would not, let him be accursed.! We love good government, we love the blessings of law and order in society more than we love iniquity and crime. He was indeed our son, but he was also the son of the devil!

3. But let us attend the execution of some of these sinners from our own congregation You are sent for to come out for execution. We see the messenger; we hear the sentence read,--we see that your fatal hour has come. Shall we turn and curse God? No, NO! We shall do no such thing. When your drop falls, and you gasp, gasp, and die--and your guilty, terror-stricken soul goes wailing down the sides of the pit, shall we go away to complain of God and of His justice? No! Why not? Because you might have had mercy, but you would not. Because God waited on you long, but you only became in heart more fully set to do evil. The universe look on and see the facts in the case; and with one voice that rings through the vast arch of heaven, they cry--"Just and righteous are Thou in all Thy ways, Thou most Holy Lord God!"

Who says, this is cruel? What! Shall the universe take up arms against Jehovah?

No. When the universe gather together around the great white throne, and the dread sentence goes forth--"Depart, accursed;" and away they move in dense and vast masses as if old ocean had begun to flow off--down, down, they sink to the depths of their dark home; but the saints with firm step yet solemn heart proclaim--"God's law is vindicated; the insulted majesty of both Law and Mercy is now upheld in honor, and all is right!"

Heaven is solemn, but joyful; saints are solemn, yet they cannot but rejoice in their own glorious Father. See the crowds and masses as they move up to heaven. They look back over the plains of Sodom and see the smoke of her burning ascend up like the smoke of a great furnace. But they pronounce it just, and have not one word of complaint to utter.

4. To the yet living sinner, I have it to say today that the hour of your execution has not yet arrived. Once more the bleeding hand offers Mercy's cup to your lips. Think a moment;--your Savior now offers you mercy. Come, O come now and accept it.

What will you say? I'll go on still in my sins? Then all we can say is that the bowels of divine love are deeply moved for you--that God has done all to save you that He wisely can do; God's people have felt a deep and agonizing interest in you and are ready now to cry, How can we give them up? But what more can we do--what more can even God do? With bleeding heart and quivering lip has Mercy followed you. Jesus Himself said--"How often would I have gathered you--O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! How often I would have saved you, but ye would not." Shall Jesus behold and weep over you, and say, "O that thou hadst known, even thou in this thy day--but now it is hidden from thine eyes." What, O dying sinner, will you say? Shall not your response be--"It is enough--I have dashed away salvation's cup long and wickedly enough--you need not say another word. O that bleeding hand! Those weeping eyes! Is it possible that I have withstood a Savior's love so long? I am ready to beg for mercy now; and I rejoice to hear that our God has a father's heart."

He knows you have sinned greatly and grievously, but O, He says--My compassions have been bleeding and gushing forth towards you these many days. Will you close in at once with terms of mercy and come to Jesus? What do you say?

Suppose an angel comes down, in robes so pure and so white; unrolls his

papers, and produces a pardon in your name, sealed with Jesus' own blood. He opens the sacred book and reads the very passage which reveals the love of God, and asks you if you will believe and embrace it? What will you do?

And what shall I say to my Lord and Master? When I come to report the matter, must I bear my testimony that you would not hear? When Christ comes so near to you, and would fain draw you close to His warm heart, what will you do? Will you still repeat the fatal choice, to spurn His love and dare His injured justice?

[Back to Top](#)

Repentance Before Prayer for Forgiveness

Lecture V

November 19, 1851

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Acts 8:22, 23: "Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity."

These words were addressed to Simon Magus. A revival of religion was in progress in Samaria, under the labors of Peter and Philip; many were converted to God, and among them Simon Magus also professed conversion. He had been a great man in that place and had deceived many by his magic arts. Seeing the greater wonders wrought by these Christian apostles, he was struck with surprise, and his ambitious spirit caught at the idea of augmenting his own power over men by obtaining this new secret. Hence he offers the apostles money to buy this new power. Peter saw his heart at once and nobly replies--"Thy money perish with thee; thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God." He then gives him directions as in our text: "Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee."

Following the order of thought as in the text, I will

I. Notice the principle here developed, in the light of which Peter saw this man yet in his sins;

II. Show what repentance is;

III. What is implied in repentance;

IV. Show why sinners are exhorted first to repent, and then to pray for pardon;

V. Dwell on the importance of following this example in all our dealings with men.

I. Notice the principle here developed, in the light of which Peter saw this man yet in his sins.

Peter did not profess to learn Simon Magus' character by inspiration. He had no such omniscience. Inspiration he doubtless had, but inspiration taught general truth, not individual character. Peter saw his heart to be selfish, and not at all in harmony with the gospel spirit. Simon still had his old spirit, and wanted power to give the Holy Ghost to whom he pleased for the same reason that he had before sought and valued his magic powers. Hence he offered money, as if the apostles were as sordid as himself. Peter saw that he was selfish and therefore blind, far indeed from understanding the subject of Christianity.

II. Hence Peter exhorted him to repent. What is repentance?

1. Repentance should always be distinguished from conviction for sin. The latter is an involuntary state of mind, and of course has no virtue in it. There may be as much of it as there is in hell itself, and yet no virtue. There is awful conviction in hell; but no genuine repentance.

2. Neither does repentance consist merely in sorrow. Indeed this is properly and strictly no part of it, for sorrow does not belong to the thinking department of the mind, much less does it appertain to the will, and to the department of voluntary action.

3. Nor again is repentance the same thing as remorse. Remorse, though it amounts to the keenest and most galling self-condemnation, does not necessarily imply repentance. There may be in it no change of mind

whatever.

4. Repentance is simply and precisely a change of mind. The original term denotes, a thinking again--a turning of the mind--as when one finds himself going wrong and turns about to pursue the opposite course. The term, when applied to evangelical repentance, means, not merely a turning of the mind, but a change of the entire purposes of action, change in the entire attitude of the will. Repentance, therefore, is not remorse, is not sorrow, not anything of this kind; but is the mind turning away from selfish attitudes to benevolent--from being selfish to being really benevolent.

III. What is implied in repentance?

1. Conviction of sin as a wrong committed against God. Without this there can be no rational repentance.

2. That the sinner becomes truly honest with God. He must honestly admit the truths affirmed by his reason and pressed on his soul by his conscience. Especially must he recognize God's rights--that he himself is God's property and belongs truly to God.

3. That he becomes just and equitable towards men--truly an honest man. Selfishness is the greatest dishonesty in the world. No man is radically honest who is selfish, unless a man can be honest in practically denying everybody's rights but his own. No; selfishness is the perfection of dishonesty. It is absurd for a wicked man to pretend to be honest. He has not a particle of genuine honesty, more than Satan has! What is honesty? Respecting all other men's rights and especially God's rights. How false their pretensions! They respect their neighbor's rights only for their own interests--only because in some way they expect to reap good to themselves from the respect they hypocritically show to their neighbor's interests. The fact is, men are totally deceived if they think themselves honest towards men while they are not really honest towards God. The heart of honesty is not in them. If they do not love their neighbor as themselves, they are not honest. No man has a right to say practically that his rights and interests are greater than his neighbor's. The practical assumption of this is both false and dishonest.

4. No man is penitent who is not an honest man in the sense that he renders

to God what is God's and to man what is man's. He must begin with restoring to God his stolen self. God has created him--has kept him alive--and has redeemed him; this threefold claim God has on him; and yet he sets himself up in opposition against God and has no sympathy with God whatever. No man therefore is honest till he repents towards God. The first step is to give himself back to God, and with himself whatever remains of his time, his talents, his property and his influence. It is always implied in true repentance that you make full restoration of everything you have not squandered and so squandered as to feel it beyond your power to restore it.

5. Repentance implies confession of sin to God and to all those whom you have injured. Let no man think himself truly penitent until he has made confession in all things where it is due. Some sins are known only to God, and some are committed only against God. These should be confessed to God. In some excepted cases, God holds men to the duty of confessing secret sins. This however is the exception and not the rule.

I cannot enter now into those discriminations which should be made on this subject. But obviously where restitution cannot be made without confession, as for example, where character is injured, there you persist in the wrong unless you confess. You have deceived many in respect to your neighbor, to his hurt, and this wrong which you have done him, you must undo, or you cannot suppose yourself to be really penitent.

6. But besides confession, restitution is always implied in repentance. Each man should make it to the extent of his power. This is always implied, because the penitent man is also benevolent. He loves his neighbor as himself, and therefore like Zaccheus he hastens to restore, and thinks it no hardship even to restore four-fold.

7. Repentance implies the entire abandonment of all courses of life and of business which are inconsistent with Christian character. Think you that a man, really benevolent in spirit, could pursue a business adapted to ruin instead of save men? No indeed! Shall a man who loves the well-being of others as he does his own, devote himself to traffic in human flesh? No sooner than he would sell his own flesh and blood--his own person into bondage, or the bodies and souls of his own wife and children!

8. Repentance also implies not only an abandonment of all selfish branches

of business, but of all selfish modes of transacting business, even of business in itself right. Selfish men often pursue a good business in a bad way--on most selfish principles and policy. This also repentance precludes, because repentance is a change of the heart and life from selfishness to real benevolence. It implies an abandonment of all selfishness.

9. Repentance implies a universal reformation of life,--a reformation extending to all forms of sin. Penitent men turn from all sin as sin--because they regard it as sin, and therefore can have no sympathy with it. All known sin therefore they at once abandon. And since to them nothing can be sin except what is known to be such, the forsaking of all known sin is really the forsaking of all sin. No man is truly penitent who allows himself to continue in some chosen sin, and who picks and chooses his indulgences. This is not repentance at all.

When I speak of abandoning sin, I do not imply that the penitent man never for even a moment relapses into it; but I imply that he sets himself against it in real honesty and earnestness.

10. Finally, true repentance implies confidence in God and in Jesus Christ. If a man truly repents of sin he will of course believe on Jesus Christ.

IV. What is implied in the consecutive order of duties, as enjoined by Peter--repentance before prayer for pardon?

1. He assumed that Simon Magus was totally depraved--totally alienated from God, and hence unwilling to give up his sins. Hence he could not exhort him to pray for pardon while yet in his sins. Peter knew full well that Simon would spring at the idea of being forgiven before he repented; but he meant to caution him in the strongest way against such a delusion. He knew that his sin consisted in cleaving to his selfishness, and therefore told him first to give up his sins and then to ask forgiveness. Peter assumed that his unwillingness to give up his selfishness was his great sin, first of all to be repented of and put away.

2. He assumed that God could not forgive him until he should put away his sin. Peter knew Simon's great difficulty--knew that he held on to his course as an ambitious and selfish man; and therefore assured him that mercy could come to him only after full repentance.

3. Peter did not regard Simon as having any right to ask or wish for pardon until he had repented. You will observe that Peter saw Simon impenitent and selfish. Hence he assumed that he had no right to ask or expect forgiveness while in this state of mind. He did not tell him to pray for repentance, because he knew he was unwilling to repent, and therefore such a prayer would only be mocking God.

Yet many direct the sinner to pray for repentance! Ah, do you want the sinner to mock God? Peter did not direct Simon to pray for repentance, for he knew that this would be only mocking God until he should himself be willing to repent; and he could not invite him to insult Jehovah.

4. It is also assumed that he was abundantly able to repent. Men sometimes teach sinners to pray that God would make them able to repent, and many even imply that the sinner is trying as hard as he can to repent, and therefore needs only cry unto God to help him repent, the only difficulty is his case being that God does not give him strength enough!

"Trying to repent" always implies two things--a willingness to repent, and a want of power to do it. Trying is making an effort to accomplish that on which the mind is set, and, if unsuccessful, implies that the failure results from lack of power.

Now Peter understood this whole subject. Peter knew that this man had free will enough and ability enough to repent if he would. Therefore he directs him first to repent, and then ask pardon. Asking forgiveness before repenting would only blaspheme God, and Peter could not advise him to do that.

5. Peter implies that he had conviction enough, and therefore need not wait for more. Hence, he did not tell him to wait for it, but at once to repent. This of course assumed that he had conviction enough. Many set sinners to praying for conviction just as if they needed more and desired to have it, neither of which are usually true.

6. Peter assumed that the sinner is without excuse for either his sin or his remaining impenitent. He insisted on repentance as the present duty of that man, which of course implies that in God's judgment it is the duty of every sinner to repent. Now it must be of the very first importance for us to know how God judges in this matter. It is a remarkable fact that both Peter and all

other inspired teachers concur in representing God as requiring sinners at once to repent.

V. It is of the utmost importance to follow this inspired example. For,

1. This direction to repent before asking forgiveness, and this only, is consistent with the facts in the case.

For what are the facts? Simply these. The sinner is a free-acting, voluntary agent. In this capacity he sets himself selfishly against the demands of God's law of love. Now what shall God require him to do? Change his course to be sure--in other words repent. Nothing can be plainer than that a voluntary agent who is voluntarily doing wrong should turn about and voluntarily do right. This, and this only, is consistent with the facts and with the right of the case.

But suppose you undertake to give direction to a sinner who is still selfish, that is, devoted to self-pleasing. First of all you set him to praying. Praying for what? That God would give him the desire of his heart? Of course if he prays without first changing the purpose of his heart, he will pray for what he desires--that is, he will pray that God would grant him the selfish desires of his heart. His prayer would be--O Lord, let me have heaven without holiness: Lord, pardon my sins, and yet let me live on in sinning, for I have no heart to repent!

Now can such mocking of God be of any use? Would you suppose it probable that the Bible would give such directions to awakened sinners?

If men are really willing to repent and forsake all sin, God asks no more of them, for the willing is essentially the doing; but there can be no greater mistake in this world than to assume that sinners are willing to repent and want to repent, before they actually do it.

2. The usual order in which inquirers are set at work is the reverse of that enjoined in the Bible, as if the sinner was ready and God not ready, and therefore the sinner needs to use means to make God ready and to urge Him forward to do his duty.
3. To set the sinner to praying for repentance is to assume that he is willing to repent but cannot, and therefore needs God's power to help him.

4. To direct sinners otherwise than God does in the Bible is to deceive them. Thousands have been deceived thus to the ruin of their souls forever. If you set them to pray for pardon before they repent, you leave them under the delusion that they are doing something they ought to do--are doing their duty;--whereas they are not doing their duty until they repent! What a horrible doctrine is this! Teach an impenitent sinner, still holding on to his sins, to pray for pardon! This would ruin a world of sinners. It would leave them all deceived and deluded in their sins and under God's wrath forever!

5. To tell the sinner to pray for the Holy Ghost is only the same thing in a slightly different form. Nothing can be more deceptive than to tell the sinner to pray for the Holy Ghost while you know he is only resisting the Holy Ghost, and while you allow him to go on, still resisting. "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost," says the word of God through one of its most faithful and truthful preachers. What does the Holy Ghost do? He takes truth and reveals it to the sinner in impressive aspects. This is his office-work as respects the sinner. As soon as the sinner yields to the truth as presented and enforced by the Holy Ghost, he is converted. Until he repents he only resists the Spirit. What avails it then to direct him to pray for the Spirit, so long as he is resisting the Spirit? What can his prayer be while pursuing this course, except mocking God? The thing he should do is not to pray for the Holy Ghost, but to yield to his influence as already exerted on his mind. The first thing and the only right thing for the awakened sinner to do in reference to the Spirit, is to yield his heart to the demands of God's revealed truth. Let him do this and he would be converted in a moment. He should be told that he does not feel his need of the Spirit, and therefore cannot pray intelligently for its greater influence on his mind. He should also be told that the only honest thing he can do in the first place is to cease to resist the Spirit.

Peter did not say to Simon--Pray for the Holy Ghost to strive with you, or to repent for you, or to make you repent, or even to help you repent; but simply, Repent yourself--repent first of all, and then ask forgiveness.

6. To direct a sinner yet in his sins, to pray instead of repenting, is to leave him under the impression that after he has prayed he has done his duty. You tell him to pray; he prays, and then says--now I have done my duty and why am I not converted? But if you tell him as Peter did, first to repent and then

to pray--if he follows your direction he is converted, and then his prayer can be acceptable to God.

The opposite course--that is, the reverse order, which puts prayer before repentance, virtually casts the blame of continued impenitence upon God. If you direct the sinner to pray first instead of repent first, you virtually imply that the difficulty in the sinner's way is one that God must remove--that the reason why he has not repented lies in God, not in himself. If the sinner follows your direction, he prays before he repents, and then having prayed, he says, Why am I not converted and saved? I have prayed;--God does not convert me;--the blame be on God and not on me! How horrible must the influence of this course be on the sinner's mind!

7. No inspired writer warrants any other course than this of the text. Search the scriptures from beginning to end, you find no directions to sinners different from this. You might well wonder in amazement if you should, for to bid the sinner go and pray first before repenting overlooks the very nature of repentance and of a sinning state of mind.

8. Every doctrine of scripture is consistent with the course of directions given in the text and with no other course. Every doctrine of scripture shuts the sinner up to the doing of present duty. The whole Bible urges him to do present duty and if he is in unrepented sin, it tells him that his first duty is to repent. Men have struck out for themselves a strange way that they should direct sinners to do something else than repent;--but the Bible holds steadfastly to the only consistent course--urging evermore on every sinner that first of all he should repent. John came crying in the wilderness of Judea--Repent ye;--and Jesus Christ followed him preaching the same thing and nothing different from this;--"Repent", says he, "for the gospel kingdom is at hand." So every prophet, and every apostle, each in his place, cried aloud--Repent, REPENT, as if there was nothing else they dared to say till this first duty is done.

This is the only rational course--the only course which is based upon scripture, upon reason, and upon the true science of mind. Every sinner knows that he is a sinner. You no more need the Holy Ghost to make you see yourself a sinner than to make you see that you exist. This shows why the Bible always faces the sinner down with the assumption--You are a sinner, and the fact needs no proof. Every sinner knows it.

9. Sinners are often very willing to pray, but not to repent. Only let him off from the heart-work of repenting, and he will gladly do many other things. A young man once said to me--"I would travel to any part of the world if I might thereby be saved." Yes, said I, but one thing you will not do;--give up your self-righteousness, and be saved on Christ alone, without doing anything meritorious yourself.

So with every sinner. Tell him to pray for conviction. O yes, he will pray for conviction, but he will resist conviction, until he repents. Tell him to pray for the Holy Ghost. O yes, he will pray for the Holy Ghost, but still he will perhaps resist the Holy Ghost continually. He is ready to do the outside work, but not the heart-work; he will readily cleanse the outside of the cup and platter, but the turning of his own heart from his sins and selfishness, that is the hard thing--the thing which of all others he is reluctant to do.

Sinners are wont to assume in self-vindication that it is impossible for them to control their own hearts. They admit they can control their muscles; if Jesus were on earth, they could come to him and bow their knees before him; but they cannot come with their hearts and bow their hearts to him. But what is the heart that you cannot control it? You are controlling your own hearts all the time, and the very thing God complains of is that you control it too stubbornly, so that his truth and his Spirit cannot move you--that you control it wrong and with so much obstinacy as to baffle all his efforts to save you. Therefore He cries--"Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?"

REMARKS.

1. But you ask--Should not a sinner pray? The answer depends upon what the question means and implies. If it means--Shall a sinner mock God? I answer, No. If you mean--Shall he truly pray, in sincerity and honesty? Yes. Shall he lie to the Holy Ghost? No. Shall he turn to God? Yes.

But the sum of all that need be said on this point is that the sinner should be told to repent and pray--not pray and repent. Let him observe the scriptural order--an order founded in reason and in the nature of the case.

2. This order of duties is eminently reasonable.

Suppose a sinner had stolen money. He knows that God is greatly displeased

with him for this, and he is also afraid of being detected and disgraced. Now he says--What shall I do? Shall I repent and then pray God to forgive me, or shall I pray first? Greatly disliking to confess, repent and restore, he says--I will do the other thing; I will pray. I will go alone and pray about it, and then perhaps I will repent. See him. He takes not his stolen money. He passes it from one hand to the other; I am greatly distressed he says, what shall I do? Shall I put it in my pocket and go and pray? No, sinner, no. Carry it back--repent first, and then go and pray. Don't go and pray for the Holy Ghost first: there is no need of that; the Holy Ghost is already convicting you of your great sin. Don't insult Him by refusing to yield to his persuasions, and by pretending to pray for his guidance and help!

Let this represent all sin. Stealing money is only one form of sin; let it represent all forms of sin. You, sinner, are fully committed to living for yourself. You have robbed God by wresting yourself away from his service. God says--Restore. Give yourself back to me and to my service. But you reply--What shall I do? Shall I not go and pray? God says--Restore first; give back the stolen goods first; then you may pray. What should you pray for--until you have restored what you have stolen? You surely will not insult God by praying for pardon before you have restored what you have stolen. You need not pray for the Holy Ghost unless you restore, for to pray and not restore is only resisting and mocking the Spirit of God.

But the sinner says--You talk as if I could repent. Yes, and so does God. God in his word always speaks as if you could repent, and as if you ought to know that you can. What if Simon Magus had said--But you don't expect me to repent, do you? You will observe he did not say any such thing. His own conscience neither suggested nor allowed such a defense, nor did the preaching of the Apostles encourage it.

But you say, Does the Bible always assume that I can repent? Yes, everywhere--in all its commands--by every prophet, every Apostle--by the lips of every forerunner of Christ--by the lips of Christ Himself. Every inspired command--every inspired direction, holds the same language and makes the same implication. You can repent and you ought to do it immediately!

3. When the sinner says, I can't repent, he virtually charges God with being a tyrant. For what can be tyranny if charging God with requiring you to do impossibilities is not?

4. But does not the Bible teach that God gives men repentance? Yes, and in the same sense as He gives you daily bread--which, however, you must yourself provide and yourself eat. God does not give you your daily bread, so long as you persist in starving yourself. So God gives you repentance by persuading you to repent--by drawing you--impressing truth on your heart and conscience. Indeed there is no other possible way in which He can give you repentance. It is only by bringing truth before your mind--impressing it by a thousand ways upon your heart and conscience. For, repentance is a rational, voluntary act--an act done by the sinner, because he sees that truth and reason demand it.

5. Every sinner should see and feel that immediate repentance is what God requires. He should see that he is shut up to this precisely and to nothing else.

Nor is there anything strange or absurd in this. Suppose a man had committed murder, and you should tell him to repent of this great sin. Is there anything mysterious in this? Or if you see a man engaged in any particular form of wickedness, and you exhort him to desist and repent: is there in this course anything strange or unreasonable? How then can there be anything unreasonable in requiring a sinner to repent of all his sins? Or of that which embraces the sum of all wickedness?

6. Some of you are so much afraid you shall repent, that you get a book, even under the most solemn preaching, and try to keep from thinking of your own sins; and even then you will pretend that you cannot repent, and would fain imply that you would repent if you could! Is not this beautifully consistent!

7. Many professors of religion are greatly backslidden from God, yet they pray in form, but don't repent. Many talk about praying as if they made up in prayer what they lack of pleasing God in sinning. I asked a young lady--Do you pray? Yes sir. When? On retiring to rest at night. What for? That God would take me to heaven if I should die before morning. Do you expect God would do so? No. You expect then to so on in sin. Now be so honest as to tell God just the truth. Say to Him--Lord, forgive my sins--give me strength by sleep and food that I may sin a little more; I have sinned all the day past--I don't intend to repent; I only want to be taken to heaven if I die, for I cannot bear to sink down to hell: Lord help me to sin on against thee as long as I live, and then take me up to heaven!!

You are shocked; but what shocks you? Your course, or my language?

There, see the sinner. He gets on his knees to tell God that he wants repentance, but he lies in saying so, every moment until he does in fact repent. And you, backslidden professor, lie to God in every word of your pretended prayer. Do you say--I will not repent--I don't intend to repent? If you say anything else than this you lie to God, for nothing else is true until you do in fact repent. The truth is, so long as you continue in your selfish, impenitent state, you don't mean to repent. Therefore, let him pray as he will, his true meaning is, I have no intention of repenting of my sins. This is always true, until he does repent.

But this praying of sinners in their sins when they do not mean to repent! Hear him, "O Lord, I beseech thee to search my heart." No, you don't mean any such thing; you are covering up your own heart all the time. "O God, come near to me." But you are pushing away from God every moment, and as you strive to get away, you only look back over your shoulder and cry to God to reveal his face and draw near to your soul! Hark, hear what the Bible says. "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination." And what is your course but this?

8. Let me tell you, God is infinitely ready to meet and bless you. He comes with pardons in his hands--pardons all sealed with blood. You need only renounce your sins and come to Him; then all will be well. The very first moment you come before God with a penitent heart, He will meet you with smiles of loving-kindness. His parable of the prodigal son, both illustrates and proves this. See, the wandering son comes to himself. Instead of staying away and trying to live on husks, he turns his face towards home, and comes with a confession on his lips, and tears of penitence on his cheeks. He is coming--and now see the aged father. He spies him in the distance; he recognizes his long-lost son. See how he leaps from his door, and rushes to embrace this returning son. O how ready! O how much more than merely READY!! O how ready is God in your case to meet you with the fullest pardon--and wipe all your tears away, and soothe down that aching sensibility!

Now, dear hearer, don't go away and say I told you not to pray. If I should tell you not to go into your closet, get upon your knees and swear, and blaspheme God, could you say with any truth that I told you not to pray? So I do not teach you not to pray; but I do teach you to be honest. I warn you when you pray not to mock God. I entreat you when you pray to give up your heart to God and repent

of all your sin. When I repented first, I did it on my knees and in the act of prayer. I knelt down an impenitent sinner, and rose up a penitent. In the very act of speaking to God, my heart broke; I yielded myself to God. This is the way. And do you ask--Can I believe God? Yes. Can I pray in faith? Yes. Can I give my heart to God in penitence? Yes. Why not you as well as Paul--as well as Peter--as well as any one of the myriads who have done this very thing, and in so doing have found mercy?

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence

of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject

of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

End of the 1851 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1852
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Lecture I. [The Child-Like Spirit an Essential Condition of Entering Heaven](#)

Lecture II. [The Fearful Results of a Spiritual Relapse](#)

Lecture III. [God's Love to Sinners as Seen in the Gospel](#)

Lecture IV. & V. [All Things for Good to Those That Love God-- All Things
Conspire for Evil to The Sinner- No.'s 1 - 2](#)

Lecture VI. [Guilt Modified by Ignorance](#)

Lectures VII. & VIII. [Salvation Difficult to The Christian- Impossible to The
Sinner-- The Salvation of Sinners Impossible- No.'s 1 - 2](#)

Lecture IX. [Paul and Felix, Or Preaching and Procrastination](#)

Lecture X. [Christ Tempted, Suffering, and Able to Succor The Tempted](#)

Lecture XI. [Election and Reprobation](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

The Child-Like Spirit an Essential Condition of Entering Heaven

Lecture I

May 26, 1852

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 18:3: "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Text.--Mark 10:15: "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."

The passage from Matthew stands in the following connection: The disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

"And Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Look at the question which drew forth this decisive remark from our Lord:-- "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Strange question this, for holy men to ask -- for men to ask, who had now been in the society of the Meek and Lowly One long enough, it would seem, to understand and to have imbibed His spirit. Our Lord wisely took advantage of the question, to propound one vastly important principle in reference to the nature of His kingdom and the consequent fitness for entering it.

In discussing the subject here presented, it will be important,

I. To state some of the characteristics of little children.

II. To show why this state of mind is indispensable to salvation.

I. To state some of the characteristics of little children.

It is important in the outset to consider attentively the fact that the case taken for

illustration is a little child; not a young man or a young woman; -- not one who had reached the period where little children, as they advance in age, are wont to lose the simplicity of little ones. Let it also be carefully noted, that the characteristics of the little child, to which the Savior refers, are not, as they appear in the very young child, moral, but only natural. They serve to illustrate the moral qualities of character which are indispensable conditions of salvation, yet they are not themselves moral, for the reason that they are spontaneous, and are not developed under the action of either the intelligence or the conscience. Until both these faculties are so far matured as to act responsibly, it is a great mistake to suppose that there can be either moral character or moral action.

The language used by our Lord plainly shows that He refers to analogous and not to identical qualities. "Except ye be converted and become as little children." He does not demand that we should become as ignorant as they--as void of enlightened conscience as they. No. Like Paul, He would say: "In malice, be ye children; but in understanding, be ye MEN."

Let us, then, trace the analogies between the characteristics of little children and those of Christian converts.

1. In transparency or guilelessness of character. This is a most remarkable characteristic of very young children. It has been said that "children and fools always tell the truth." The infant mind is a stranger to guile. It has not yet learned to practice duplicity; it has not learned what the thing itself is. Mark that little one; no dodging, no evasion of the truth; no desire to cover up; not yet the first idea of having anything to be covered up; -- how guileless and beautiful in his transparent simplicity! No wonder everybody loves such little children. You love them for the same reason, substantially, that you love holiness. It is intrinsically lovely. Their characteristics closely resemble those of the true convert -- those of the holy in heaven itself.

Do not forget that I am now speaking, not of a child who has grown forward into guile and deceit-- who has begun to violate his conscience, and of course has a motive for trying to appear what he is not; not of such does the Savior speak.

2. Next in the list of infantile characteristics, I notice humility. By this I mean, not a sense of sin, but a willingness to be known and appreciated according to truth. The little child is in this sense humble. He feels no

repugnance to being known as he is. He has not once thought of trying to conceal his real character. He is ignorant of almost everything, and he seems very cheerfully to assume that such is the fact. Hence, he asks questions of everybody and under any and all circumstances, never anxious lest he should expose his ignorance. Indeed he expects to expose it if he has it, and deems it no harm to do so. He seems to suppose that there can be no objection to being known according to the truth in his case.

It is often very striking and instructive to see how this spirit develops itself in quite young children. It often seems as if they should scarcely find time to sleep, so earnest are they to learn the meaning of the thousand new things which they daily hear and see. You see them asking their simple-hearted questions of everybody and everywhere. Even the little children of Queen Victoria will run into the kitchen and ask questions of the humblest servants in her household, and none are so low in station that they are ashamed to expose their ignorance before them. In fact, at this unambitious age of life, they seem to have no idea of aristocratic distinctions. They are free of heart to associate with any kind-hearted children, be their color or condition in life what it may.

How unlike all this is the condition of those who have advanced in years and in sin till they are ashamed to be known, and afraid even to know themselves! Then see how artful--how studious to keep their real character in the dark! How expert in framing disguises, and how intent on keeping up false appearances! If they are ignorant on any point, perhaps they will sooner remain so than run the risk of exposing their ignorance by asking a question. How strong the contrast between them and little children, in this respect of true humility!

3. Little children are also confiding. The spontaneous impulse of their minds is to believe everything they hear said, and to assume that everybody speaks the truth. Until they have learned by revolting experience that there is a vast amount of falsehood and deception in the world, their simple hearts are altogether unsuspecting and trustful. So should the Christian convert be, and so in fact the real convert is, I mean, in his relations towards God. He comes into a trustful spirit, and seems spontaneously to believe every word God says. He assumes that every promise of God is sure-- every declaration reliable. And this is a most striking as well as perfectly indispensable

element of true Christian character.

4. Little children are also affectionate. They seem naturally inclined to love. Treat them kindly, and you will not fail to win their young hearts. How easily and spontaneously their warm affections gush forth. All simple-hearted in bestowing their love, they need only see the manifestations of love towards themselves, and they give their hearts, returning love for love without stint or fear. You smile on them; they respond with full and unsuspecting hearts. So the soul of the young convert responds to all the affecting manifestations of the Savior's love, and it is his delight to mark the testimonies of God's loving-kindness, and to let his heart flow out in grateful and responsive love to such a Being!

5. The little child is willing to live by faith. In fact, he does live by faith altogether, and seems to think of no other way to live. He trusts his parents and friends for everything he needs, and trusts them so heartily that he has no anxieties, no solicitudes. He is not restive and uneasy lest somebody should prove false, or lest some of his hopes should fail. That little one trusts his parents implicitly, as if perfectly assured that they will provide for all his wants. He knows he can do nothing, or almost nothing, towards the care of himself and the supply of his own wants; yet he feels no solicitudes, but lives along day by day on simple faith.

How beautiful an illustration is this of the spirit of trustful dependence in which the young convert lives of his Savior! The Christian, as we all know, must have this spirit; he has no other way to live a real Christian life--no other way to enjoy peace of mind amid a world of wants and cares--no other way to go on from strength to strength, waxing more and more mighty through the might of Jehovah.

6. Yet another characteristic of the little child is a spirit of candor. He has no motive for wishing what is true to be false. Nobody cavils against the truth till he has an opposing heart. When his heart comes to dislike the truth, then he cavils. He raises senseless objections and tries to believe they have sense and weight in them. Scan his state of mind to the bottom, and you find it to be nothing else but hatred of the truth. He has an interest -- at least so he thinks -- in opposing the truth. But you see none of this uncandid spirit in the little child. He is easily controlled by the truth, and seems never to think of resisting it. So of the young convert. He opens his whole heart to the

truth and loves to see it revealed, let it out and condemn as it may. What has he to do with cavils against the truth? It seems to him like fighting against God Himself, and why should he be found fighting against God!

But it is time to break off from this enumeration of these beautiful and illustrative characteristics of the little child, and advance.

II. To show that a state of mind corresponding to these characteristics of the little child is essential to salvation.

"Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Let it be well considered, that the qualities of character which I have specified as common to little children, are not real holiness. These little ones may not have reached the development of any moral character at all. But their spirit so closely resembles, in some respects, the spirit of the true Christian that it affords a pertinent illustration, and it is only as such that our Savior uses it. And moreover, it stands in so strong contrast with the spirit of the sinner, who gives up his soul to sinning, who violates his conscience, and who of course becomes dishonest, proud and selfish, that it seems the fittest illustration that can be found of the marked difference between those who belong to the kingdom of hell, and those who enter the kingdom of heaven.

But why, let us ask, must persons be converted and become as little children, before they can enter heaven?

1. Because in any other state than this, they are not honest, but on the contrary, entirely dishonest.

Look carefully into these qualities of the little child, and suppose a case in which they are not present. Here is a man whose character is not transparent, but who studiously conceals his real heart. Is not he dishonest-- essentially, radically dishonest? How unfit, then, for a place in the kingdom of heaven!

Or suppose him proud, in the sense opposed to that humility which I have named as one characteristic of the little child. He does not consent, by any means, to be known as he truly is. His whole endeavor is to put on, and keep on, a false appearance. Is not this radically dishonest? And who does not know that God can have no sympathy or fellowship with a dishonest mind?

Or again, suppose a man aspiring and ambitious. How rarely can you discover in him anything that even seems like real honesty!

Or suppose him wanting in that confiding trustful spirit which is so prominent in the little child. If you search his character to the bottom you will find that he lacks the element of substantial honesty of mind, and has learned to be distrustful of others by observing that there is nothing trustworthy in himself.

In this way, you may take up successively each element of the spirit peculiar to the little child, and you will see that the absence of these qualities and the presence of their opposites evince a dishonest state of mind, and therefore a state utterly unfit for the kingdom of heaven.

2. But again, the beautiful simplicity of character which shines forth in the little child must be essential to prepare us for heaven, because it is so like the spirit that fills all heaven. Did you never consider that all heaven is full of little children? Christ Himself says -- "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." The kingdom of heaven is composed of such as they. Even the tallest archangels have the spirit of little children. You mistake them entirely if you think of them as high and lifted up in a vain notion of their dignity and self-consequence. On the contrary, no dear little child was ever more simple-hearted, more guileless, more transparent than they. On the testimony of our Lord Himself, we learn that whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Hence the more simple, confiding, trustful, and open-hearted, the more there is of the spirit of the heavenly world. And hence none can go there who have not these elements of spirit and character. Men must have the soul of heaven in them, or it is no place for them to dwell in. God will not mar heaven by admitting discordant elements there. Hence if we can learn what the spirit of heaven is, we learn what spirit persons must have here before they go there.

3. But a third reason is that this childlike state of mind is indispensable to being taught of God. The holy in heaven, and those who are becoming holy on earth, are all God's pupils. His Divine Spirit is their Great Teacher, promised and given in order to lead them into all truth. But how can God teach those who are not teachable--those who cavil against the truth--hate the light, and will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reprov-

Now we all know that the little child has a teachable spirit. He loves to be taught, and therefore his mind is all open to truth, and you can teach him anything you please. But if he advances onward to a state of mind all of pride and vanity, and withal, to a state in which his selfish and wicked heart opposes the truth, then how he changed! O, he knows so much now that you cannot teach him anything! He is wiser than any seven men, however skillful they may be in giving the reasons of things. There are some students who can never learn theology. They will forever stumble and flounder along; and the reason is, they are already too wise in their own conceits to become any wiser. Who has not had occasion to observe how surely fatal to the acquisition of knowledge is this spirit of self-conceit? How then can God teach men of such a spirit? I know God sometimes comes down to teach His people "by terrible things in righteousness," and that sometimes He does effect by hard discipline what perhaps could be done by no milder means; yet it is true as a general law of God's spiritual administration, that the "meek," and those only, "will He teach in judgement--the meek will He lead in His way." God makes His creatures bear the responsibility of maintaining a teachable spirit; and according as they do or do not maintain it may they expect to be taught or not taught of God. Hence the necessity of being converted and of becoming as a little child in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.

4. God cannot teach and cannot bless in any way those who will not confide in Him. God adapts the whole course of His discipline with His children to this world as a dark sort of state -- where little comparatively can be seen with the eye, and where most things must be received with faith in the veracity and love of our Father. Hence God cannot lead us along as His children unless we confide in Him. Jesus could not do many mighty works in certain cities, because of their unbelief. He could not afford to cast His choice pearls before swine. God cannot teach, as His children, any class of intelligent beings in earth or heaven, unless they will be simple-hearted and confiding.

5. In no other spirit but that of a little child are men truly submissive to God's will, as revealed in His word or His providence. This is too obvious to need illustration. Yet all must be thus submissive, else they cannot enter heaven.

6. This state of mind is indispensable to peace with God. Unless men are submissive, they are not satisfied with God's ways, and how can He be pleased with theirs?

7. It might also be shown most clearly, that such a state of mind is indispensable to mental and spiritual peace. No one can be at rest in his own spirit unless he is simple-hearted, honest, trustful towards God -- in short, unless he has in most decided moral development, those very qualities which in their natural form characterize the little child.

8. It scarcely need be added, in conclusion, that the state of mind of which I speak is indispensable to acceptance with God. This is made plain by the entire course of our illustrations.

I must therefore proceed to close with some

REMARKS.

1. This state of mind is always characteristic of young converts. If you see professed converts who have not this spirit, you may be very sure that are not converted. And even great men form no exception to this remark. The greatest men, when converted, are the most childlike. Scores of times have I heard the remark made as if with astonishment -- "Such a great man appears just like a little child." The reason was simply this: he had become truly converted, that is all. That had occurred in his case of which the text speaks: He had been converted and had become as a little child. I once heard a Doctor of Divinity spoken of as a great man--an eminently great man. I happened to know the man, and was therefore able to reply: "if you were to see him, you would find him just like a little child, as simple-hearted and as far removed from anything like vanity or pride. You might feel yourself perfectly at ease in his presence, for he does not put on airs as if he were above his fellow men."

Professed converts sometimes come out as they call it, in a state of great excitement, full of shouting and triumph, but are not humble and childlike. You may be almost sure there is some mistake in such cases. They have not entered by the way described by our Lord: have not been so converted as to become like little children. I once knew of a very proud man, who came into possession of this genuine gospel spirit. A friend of his who had known him in his life of sin saw him afterwards in a prayer meeting: "What! said he, would you believe it

possible? I saw that man, once so proud, on his very knees, down in the midst of some of the lowest class of society, just as if he were no better than they! He prayed and they prayed and nobody seemed to think of any difference in rank between them. That man, once so full of aristocratic pride is now among the lowest of men." Mark such cases! Christianity develops itself very rapidly too in such cases.

2. Selfishness in its moral and proper sense does not appear in very young children. They love their own happiness to be sure: What sentient being does not? But this is not the same thing as selfishness. If you would carefully observe the difference between the self-seeking of very young children, and the self-seeking of those whose moral agency is developed, you would discover it to be very great. The little one loves to be happy, but loves to have others happy also. He is altogether simple-hearted and guileless. But as soon as he gets away from his infantile simplicity, the fruits of sin and of guilty selfishness become apparent. Now he is all guileful. Like Adam and Eve, he hastens to sow up some fig-leaf covering and to hide himself among the trees of the garden from the searching scrutiny of both God and man. He has done something wrong; all wrong things are mean; he knows and feels it keenly; and therefore seeks to hide and cover up. Until this time he had never done anything which he wished to cover up. Now, therefore, his spirit of concealment and guile reveal his sin and selfishness. All full of fraud and treachery, he waxes worse and worse; conscious of wrong doing, and anxious to save appearances, his temptations to deceit and hypocrisy are too great for him to resist.

3. Selfishness is too false to be confiding. The selfish youth knows himself to be unworthy of confidence, and hence, judging others by himself, he does not naturally trust them. With no self-respect, it cannot be natural for him to trust his fellows. Unteachable also, he ought to expect to remain in ignorance. How often it happens that sinners get above becoming religious, simply because they become too self-sufficient and proud of their attainments or talents to understand a thing so simple as the gospel. They get into a state of mind in which they cannot learn the plain and humbling doctrines of the cross, and hence they are prepared for yet deeper self-deception. It would be easy to show that selfishness is the greatest self-deception. The selfish man seems to use his intellect only to deceive himself and to deceive others, his main business being to cover up his own true character and real motives. "A deceived heart hath turned them aside," saith the heart-searching word of the Lord; and nothing can be more true. It does

most truly turn men aside from integrity and truth. "Deceiving and being deceived," is another daguerrotype sketch of the selfish man's history. It is but a righteous judgment that he who gives himself up to deceive others should be caught in his own snares, deceiving himself just because there is no simplicity nor honesty in him.

4. If children die in real infancy and before moral agency commences, it is easy to see how naturally they pass into the kingdom of heaven. I am aware that some will be stumbled at such a sentiment, for there are some who maintain that even the very marrow, blood, and bones of the infant are altogether sin. But this is not Jesus Christ's teaching. He most fully recognizes the fact that the earliest developments of the infant mind closely resemble true religion. Hence He says all men must be so changed as to become as little children; else they cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Little children live in love and walk by faith; so must all who enter the kingdom of heaven. These are the two great elements of piety. Hence the natural adaptedness of little children, (taken at a period anterior to moral agency, sin and self-righteousness,) to be removed to another state where the discipline needful in order to evolve real piety may be brought into action. If they die before they have violated conscience, how naturally will they go right on in progress towards holiness and perhaps we might say progress in holiness. God takes away their body; no temptation therefore assails them from that quarter. They have the loving-kindness of the Lamb to lead them along and secure them from all spiritual dangers; what then shall hinder their being truly the children of God in their new abode?

Ye who have lost little children think of this. Dwell on what Christ Himself says--"Of such is the kingdom of heaven." Before they have developed the dishonesty and fiendishness of the selfish spirit, they go in all the simplicity and guilelessness of little children into the presence of their Savior. They will not, like Adam and Eve, fly from God; there is no reason why they should. If they were selfish; if they had trampled down their conscience; if they were intent upon covering up their real character, then they would have abundant reason for flying away from Jehovah's presence.

Precious little ones: How will Jesus gather them in His arms! How intently will He pluck the little flowers and transplant them, yet tender and lovely, into His better garden. A sense of guilt they never have had: happy for them that they are never to have it. All suddenly, from the sleep of death they awake into the

society and the scenes of heaven. What an atmosphere is this to wake in, from such a state as that of the infant mind on earth!

But let that child become a sinner before its transition from earth to the eternal state-- how changed the scene! Then the qualities of his character become unutterably revolting and shocking. All lustful, proud, impatient, distrustful; not one element of character fit for heaven. O, how dreadful to rush into sin and refuse to obey God! How dreadful to plunge into that gulf of depravity where nothing pure remains, but all is "earthly, sensual, devilish!"

5. Selfish beings are continually progressing into a state more and more offensive to God. As they come to know more of God, they become more intensely and more meanly selfish--more committed to evil, and more fatally opposed to good. Let a young man come here for education, as many have, young in years and not greatly hardened in heart;-- he enters the lower classes, comparatively humble in spirit; for a season he passes along quietly and pleasantly to himself; but by and by he becomes ambitious;--then you may see some of the most detestable features of selfishness developing themselves; and perhaps when the time arrives which is to test his standing and his ambition, you may see him angry, and almost mad, because he is not the first and foremost; almost a devil in spirit, he inwardly frets and rages, and outwardly he will often pour out the venom of his selfish and mortified spirit upon the whole surface of the society in which he moves. I have sometimes had occasion to say that I dreaded the influence of the Senior College Class. Do you ask me why? Because they are so testy, so sensitive and so ambitious. What's the matter? They have been in college till they have grown wiser in science but wickeder in heart!

This reveals one great reason why advanced students are so much less likely to be converted than those who have only just entered. The latter have much more simplicity of character, and are much less affected by that horrible ambition which is the bane and curse of so many students. My dear young men, do you know this? Are you aware that the earliest months of your residence in this school are altogether the most hopeful for your conversion,--and that as you go on farther and farther in your course, the difficulties increase, the temptations to sin multiply, and the probabilities of your conversion are exceedingly diminished! O, how does it become you to understand this, and be wise in time!

6. Just in proportion as persons have the spirit of little children are they hopeful subjects of converting grace. Those periods of life in which this spirit is most

prominent are the hopeful seasons. Then is the time to press home the truth and bring the mind to the full decision. If you can enlighten the minds of children quite early all the better, - no matter how early, for then the obstacles you have to meet are so much less. But if you leave them to go astray from the path of duty; if they begin to violate their consciences and harden their hearts, you will find that each day and each hour augments exceedingly the difficulties in the way of their submission to God.

It is sometimes said by way of objection to the work of grace, that conversions occur most frequently among children and youth, and in this Institution, among the preparatory and not the more advanced students. What is the reason of this fact? Is it because the more advanced in learning and wisdom have found that religion is all a humbug! No, indeed; but because the mind that persists in a course of sin while it is advancing in knowledge, must be dishonest with itself. I appeal to yourselves; what Sabbath passes over you, in which you do not play a dishonest part with yourselves and with divine truth! You hear the truth; you know it is truth; and you know it has claims upon you for your instant obedience to it; and yet you wickedly resist these claims. There is not one of you who, if he had but five minutes to live, would not cry aloud in anguish: "Pray for me, for I am a guilty sinner, on the very verge of hell!" Your cavils would vanish in a breath. I know the hearts of the young men who sometimes cavil against God's truth, for I have talked scores of times with half-fledged infidels. They know that God is holy, and that they are altogether sinful. They know these solemn truths as well as they know that they exist. It is all in vain that they try to deceive themselves or others in these matters. They cannot deceive God; and when the searching hour shall come, they will find that they have not even deceived themselves to any good purpose. They know too much, and the eternal truths of God are too well established to allow them to be at ease in their sin. I have never yet seen the first sinner, who, when about to die, needed any arguments presented to prove to him that religion is a reality--that he had broken God's law, and must repent or be lost. In that solemn hour, they all know these things too well to need any more light or reasoning on the subject.

Remember, therefore, that the reason why young persons; as they grow older and more learned, are more averse to the gospel is, not that they see more clearly the groundlessness of the Christian religion, but the reason is, they are more self-deceptive, are more dishonest, more ambitious and aspiring; that they lose the simplicity of their earlier years, and do not deal honestly with the truth which

they positively know. Go to them with a personal appeal to their conscience. Say to any of them--"Are you a sinner?" "Oh, yes, I suppose so." "Do you think it right and reasonable for you to live in rebellion against your Infinite Father?" "By no means." "Will you then repent and submit to God?" "No."

Now, such a mind is altogether dishonest with itself and with acknowledged truth. In the light of their case, let me ask you all, if you do not see good and sufficient reason why Christ should say, as in our text--"Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven."

There is a forceful pertinence and a searching power in this passage, which often develop themselves in a most striking manner in personal experience. I once knew a very proud woman, who occupied a high position in society and who meant to maintain it, but the power of truth began to reach her soul, and she began to tremble before it. She called on me at my room. I began to reason with her, hoping to aid the work which the Spirit had obviously begun. Gradually her pride began to come down. At length she fell upon her knees for prayer and humiliation before God. In my prayer for her, I was led without any particular forethought, to repeat the words of my present text. She instantly caught these words--they seemed so fitting to her case--and repeated them over after me in a whisper; then, she repeated them again and again and again, each time waxing louder and louder, until her whole soul seemed to be swallowed up in the sentiment--"Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven." I stopped speaking, looked round upon her,--and oh, what a change had come over her countenance! Her loftiness and pride had all come down; she was indeed a little child. Years afterwards, being in her society, I adverted to this scene. "O," said she, "that sentiment is the glory of religion. How beautiful and fitting! I could see myself the very opposite of this, but I saw how reasonable that I should become like a little child, and I there found how blessed it is to come down and honor God on His lofty throne."

And now, in the name of my Great Master, I say to you, "Come down and take your fitting place as children before your Great Father. Who of you will now come right down to the very spirit of a little child, saying, "I give up forever all my pride and folly, and put my trust forevermore in the name of the Lord my God?"

[Back to Top](#)

The Fearful Results of a Spiritual Relapse

Lecture II

June 9, 1852

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 12:43-45: "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation."

The immediate occasion of these words was the manifest and great backsliding of the Jewish people generally after the temporary awakening which was occasioned by the preaching of John the Baptist. It is obvious from the history that the nation had been extensively moved under John's preaching. Great multitudes flocked to hear him--indeed the historian says, "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan." Public attention was aroused and a solemn impression made. More still than this, it should be said that their minds had been specially directed to One who should come after him--far greater than himself--indeed the same whom the good men of their nation had long expected as their promised Messiah. Yet when the great Messiah came, the people were unprepared to receive Him. A great change had passed over the spirit of the nation. No sooner did Christ begin to preach than a strong opposition began to be manifested. There had evidently been a great backsliding. We must suppose that many who had been aroused under John's preaching were now bitterly hostile to Christ's doctrine.

When this fact became apparent, the Savior illustrated its guilt and danger in the language of our text, by a figure taken from the then common occurrence of demoniacal possessions. An unclean spirit has had possession in a man; he goes out; finding no rest elsewhere, he returns, and here finding all things so well

prepared for his reception, he is encouraged to get more company;--goes and gets to go with him, seven other spirits more wicked than himself; they all enter in and dwell there, so that the last state of that man is worse than the first. The poor man did not take advantage of the absence of the unclean spirit, and put himself at once in a position in which no such being could ever come near him again, but rather prepared himself the more for their reception. Consequently he soon had enough of them to make his last state worse than his first.

Thus does our Lord illustrate the case of the Jewish nation who had temporarily recovered themselves out of the snare and the power of the devil--had given heed to the words of life spoken by John, but had suddenly and woefully relapsed, rejecting their great Messiah, and now were seven fold more under the power of the devil than ever before.

But theirs was no unusual experience. It happens to all who relapse in like manner, rejecting the truth which they had begun to receive. Hence the text reveals a general principle.

In discussing this principle and bringing out clearly its present application, we must,

I. Consider what is represented by the departure of the unclean spirit.

II. That the state of things consequent on his departure cannot continue long.

III. Point out the dangers and results of a spiritual relapse.

I. The first and great thing represented by the departure of the unclean spirit is, the breaking up of the spell of sin.

Sinners who can live stupidly in sin are spell-bound. Sin has a charm--a power of infatuation over them. They don't see their sins nor at all understand their spiritual condition. They can even say--"I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing; but they know not that they are wretched and poor and miserable and blind and naked." Poor souls! They do not know the first thing about their true condition as they ought to and need to know it.

But the thing represented by the going out of the unclean spirit is, the breaking up of this spell of self-delusion. The man becomes troubled on account of his sins. He is convicted and begins to bestir himself. Perhaps he sets about some

external reformation, taking the greatest pains to make some clean spots on the outside of the cup and platter, yet leaving the inside full of all uncleanness. Pressed by conviction of sin, he comes towards the gate of mercy, yet pauses there and lingers long through indecision. He thinks; he prays some; he waits and deliberates on the very threshold of the kingdom of heaven. This seems to be precisely the state represented by the case of the man out of whom the unclean spirit has gone. There is a temporary suspension of the reign of evil; and a consequent opening for new relations with the good. The sinner might now have life, and he makes some approximation towards it; perhaps he does all, but the vital thing, viz., to close in finally and fully with the conditions of salvation. He is almost persuaded, does everything else but give his whole heart to God, yet failing of this, nothing is so done as to secure any permanently good results. The Jewish nation had gone so far that they seemed quite prepared to receive their expected Messiah--yet when He came, where were they?

This leads me to consider,

II. The fact that this state of mind, illustrated by the temporary absence of the evil spirit, cannot continue long.

1. The Spirit of God is soon grieved away. His convicting work is scarcely ever continued long unless His monitions are heeded and obeyed. With awful emphasis God has declared--"My Spirit shall not always strive with man." When a man resists God's efforts through His Spirit to convict and save his soul, he may expect to be left soon to the bitter folly of his own infatuation.
2. Restrained propensities, unless soon subdued by submission to God, will reassert their terrible sway, and if so, will do it with augmented force. They will not brook restraint long, unless grace comes and lends her strong arm for their subjugation. If the man will let Christ come into his breast and barricade his soul all around about to fortify him against all temptation, and withal, to become a fountain of strength within, then restrained propensities are brought under and victory is both sure and permanent. But not otherwise. It is all in vain for a convicted sinner to suppose that without divine help, he can keep his propensities long under such restraint as conscience and reason dictate.
3. The conscience soon becomes seared. It is found to be less and less

active--less quick and less vigorous in its rebukes. He who has one day found its fangs almost intolerable, finds ere long that its voice is almost entirely silent. This result of resisting truth is a law of mind. It must take place where conscience is unheeded and truth, seen, is disregarded. How often do we see this terrible law of mind exemplified!

But I must hasten to speak,

III. Of the dangers and results of a spiritual relapse.

Of its dangers how can we say less than that it is infinitely fraught with danger, of the worst kind. The worst forms of evil are sure to follow. Seven other spirits more wicked than the first are sure to enter in, and what is more, they go in to dwell there, little expecting to be ever ousted from their secure abode.

The sinner's dangers will be as numerous as his temptations, for probably each temptation will now get the mastery over him.

After the action of the mind in its convicted state, there naturally comes on a reaction, and this is generally fatal. When persons, having been partially reclaimed, have relapsed into any particular vice, there is small reason to hope they will come up again. How often has this been seen in the progress of the Temperance Reform? Thousands have been caught hold of by the strong arm of affection and lifted up to the edge of the awful quagmire; but unless they have themselves caught hold of the arm of Jehovah's strength, they have in many, many cases slipped from their treacherous footing and slumped back in to that awful Slough of Death--A Drunkard's Relapse. You have seen such things. They are developments of a general law of mind. Unless the effort of reform is backed up by grace, reaction will certainly ensue and its power will be terrible. Let the dykes once begin to give way and the current set across the breach--all is over. Relapse bursts these flood gates of death. The power of the mind to resist temptation seems to be broke down. The mind seems to have given itself up to be overcome, and the genius of evil is not slow to seize his opportunity of making his victim sure. Nor is there an encouraging hope of deliverance. The mind has once met the question--Shall I give myself wholly up to God and take hold of promised grace to subdue all future sin? It met this question, but failed to decide it right. It is henceforth averse to meeting the question again. A sense of shame perhaps forbids. A feeling of self-respect rises up and seems to demand that a position once taken shall be maintained. The mind is irked and vexed with

the perpetual recurrence of an unwelcome question, once set at rest. Hence there is small reason to hope that the mind will return to the subject and make a right decision, and thus secure the deliverance needed and provided.

All these influences combine to put the relapsed soul on an inclined plane, down which it glides smoothly and swiftly to the gulf of ruin. The house does not stand long, waiting to be filled; soon a seven-fold evil comes in, and comes to dwell there.

The case as given by our Lord illustrates a great principle. If the Jewish nation falls back from the moral elevation gained under John's preaching, temptations rush in again with their augmented returning waves, and the fearful crisis of its moral ruin hastens on apace. The individual soul that gives way again to temptation after a partial rescue has less power to resist than before; the mind becomes chafed and restive, or perhaps discouraged; it hates restraint more than ever, and sometimes seems to come all suddenly to the decision--"I will not be restrained any longer."

REMARKS.

1. Everyone acquainted with the history of the Jews knows how aptly this illustration meets their case. Who ever has read Josephus' history of the Jewish Wars, and of the ensuing destruction of their beloved city, will recognize at once the moral features of the likeness drawn by Christ in our text. The nation perished because it was too awfully wicked to live any longer. Who that has read of their awful corruption does not see the seven other wicked devils in undisputed possession, and the last state of the nation worse than the first--ah! with a vengeance! Retribution came, as it always must when the cup of iniquity is full, and none who saw it as it measured out its terrible judgments upon the doomed city and people could forbear to cry out--"Verily, the anger of their God is heavy upon them and there is no remedy!" When they pressed into Pilate's court and cried--"Let Him be crucified."--they recklessly braved if indeed they did not invoke the vengeance of Jehovah--"His blood," they say, "be on us and on our children!" How terribly did it fall on them ere long!

2. The same principle applies substantially to every reformation that has ever occurred. It has come with its hands full of blessings which some have received, and have found good, even to the extent of everlasting life; but others, rejecting these blessings, have become indefinitely worse. Their becoming worse is no

fault of the gospel itself, but is altogether their own. It is no more the fault of the gospel now than it was in Christ's own age and under His preaching. Then as now, some rejected the counsel of God against their own souls, and as a consequence what came from God to bless them they turned into a terrible curse and cursed themselves with it for eternity.

Thus seasons of reformation in every age of the world are set for the fall and for the uprising of many in Israel--for the fall of many never to rise again; and for the uprising of many to life and blessedness eternal. The reformations are themselves faultless and may be conducted unexceptionably: but he who repels their influence will soon find his soul beyond the reach of good in this or any other world. There can be no good to those who scorn God's means of conferring it. How rapidly they go down to moral destruction when once by resisting truth they have lost the bottom of their minds, so that hence forth they hear truth only as a tub without a bottom holds water!

3. The passage before us and the principle it illustrates should be compared with that fearful declaration of God which speaks of those that "perish, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved," and of whom He says--"for this cause God shall send upon them strong delusion that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not all the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness." Discarding and hating the truth which God reveals in love to their souls, they were suffered to embrace errors more and more destructive. They chose darkness rather than light; what therefore could a God of light and truth do for them more? What else should He do but make them beacons to warn other sinners against the rocks on which they made shipwreck of their moral natures and hence of their eternal well-being? Time was in their case when the evil spirit went out of them also, but they utterly failed to improve their opportunity for God; the spirit came back, found all things to his mind; took seven spirits indefinitely worse; they all take up their abode in that sinner's heart; then follow infatuation and swift damnation.

4. We see the danger incurred by churches and families, if they fail to "know the day of their visitation."

The fearful woes which fell on the Jewish nation came on them, said their offered Savior, "Because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." They had a visitation of mercy; God came near as He could to bless them; but the mass saw not, or at least heeded not His coming; practically they "knew not the day of

their visitation." They ought to have known it. It was more their fault than their misfortune that they failed to know it.

So of churches and families in our day, to whom God comes graciously near but who fail to notice His presence, or are not quite ready to greet His coming, until He is gone! Alas! How many such cases occur both in churches and in families! They see not their hour of mercy till it has past. They are not in the secret counsels of the Most High--do not abide so near the Lord as to know His near approach. A few individuals may have such communion with God as to feel His special presence; but their testimony may be wholly unknown, and if known, may be unheeded by their brethren. Many such churches have I seen, which seemed in many respects just on the eve of being blessed with great power; but the cloud of mercy broke and passed off with only a great wind; Satan came back and with him legions of evil spirits, and their last state was seven-fold worse than their first.

5. From this point of our subject, we can see the great guilt of those who "come not up to the help of the Lord against the mighty," until the strength of the few who are in the battlefield is spent. In all cases where the Lord comes near to bless a people, many laborers are needed to co-operate in His work. If they are not on hand, the work flags, and soon the Spirit of God is withdrawn. This is the more certainly the case if the lack of laborers is the fault of God's professing people. If it should occur without their fault, the fact would not offend God and would not be necessarily a reason for the sudden withdrawal of His Spirit.

But as the cases commonly occur, the lack of laborers is wholly attributable to the spiritual apathy of professed Christians. All appearances indicate that God is about to work mightily through and by His people; a few observe these tokens and enter with all their strength upon the work of the Lord; but the many are not ready for the sacrifice and effort called by the tokens of Jehovah's presence; they do not come up to the help of the Lord against His mighty foes. The angel of the Lord sends down His curse upon them. "Curse them bitterly," says He, because in the hour of need they would not help in the work of the Lord!. God called, but they came not. The crisis came, and the crisis went: they moved not: now therefore the wrath of the Lord waxes hot against them for their fearful disobedience to Heaven's high command.

6. Reaction is disastrous in proportion to the extent of the partial reformation. It was obviously so in the case of John's preaching. Those who learned from him

most fully the way of salvation and who when Jesus came rejected Him were most deeply guilty and most awfully cursed by the returning power of other unclean spirits.

We who are parents may see what you have to expect if you allow this spiritual relapse to come upon your children. Perhaps you will not realize their danger and will fail to press them to the final and full decision for Christ until the precious season is past: until the unclean spirit returns and legions more, yet worse, come in and dwell there. Depend upon it, you will find the illustration given in our text but too fearfully true. Just in proportion to the light sinned against and to the nearness with which the kingdom of heaven is brought to their hearts, will be the terribleness of their relapse and the uncertainty of their being ever again brought even so much as near to Christ's kingdom. O how fearful a thing for a Christian parent to suffer a child to slip past the sealing time, and go on his broad and easy way towards remediless woe. How carefully should they watch the hour when the unclean spirit is gone out, and bar the door forever against his return! For, once returned and admitted--once reinforced with the presence of seven other more wicked spirits, the state of one who is even a child of praying parents becomes fearfully perilous. Let parents think much of their responsibility to seize now the favoring moment. Never wait till sin gets entrenched in the heart. Take care against even one relapse from a convicted state into unconcern and stupidity. You can scarcely conceive how terribly one such relapse augments the difficulties in the way of sound conversion ever afterwards.

7. The relapse is usually more or less sudden, always more or less obvious and apparent, according to the tone of general influence which prevails in the place. For under a strong moral influence, the most hardened sinners are often kept morally decent for a long time. But go into a place where sin takes to itself free scope and ranges at will; there you will see the legitimate workings of a spiritual relapse. There you will see how terrible is the tendency of sin to drag its victim downward, downward, to the very depths of hell. You can there mark the fearful reaction which follows deliberate rejection of offered mercy, especially if done despite of the powerful action of divine influence, seeking to persuade the sinner to repent. If you have never seen these developments in so strong a light as I have represented them, you need only go where external restraint is chiefly or wholly withdrawn, and you will surely see it, and will say the half had never been told you.

8. How terrible, therefore, must be the moral state of those who profess to be religious, but who yet have relapsed entirely in heart and are only kept in moral decency by the force of involuntary habits or that of public sentiment. How appalling is their danger! Every physician knows what a relapse is in his patient; he has seen them till he has reason to dread them as his most dangerous adversaries. He thought the crisis of danger was nearly past--all seemed to be doing well; hope had sprung up in his bosom and become almost settled into assurance, when suddenly the awful fact of relapse--flashes upon his eye! Ah, now there is peril! Now let medical skill do its utmost; there is scant hope at the very best. There is scarce a more fearful event in the whole range of medical practice than this of relapse. The system has perhaps rallied itself to its utmost strength to throw off disease and it seemed about to conquer; but now, its powers exhausted, its enemy charges again as with fresh forces and the conflict if not fatal is at least terrible.

Not less so is the conflict between the seven-fold forces of sin and the retreating and half-crushed moral energies that remain after a spiritual relapse. Alas, how many have found the conflict short and feeble, and the issue forever fatal. My dear hearers, it is a fearful thing to suffer a deep moral relapse. Woe to those upon whose backsliding souls it shall fall!

What then will you do? What will you do today? Are you aware of the state of things among yourselves, of the degree in which the Spirit's power is manifested here even among you? If you were fully so, you must see that this is no time for spiritual trifling. You would see a stronger emphasis than ever you have seen before in the language--"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation." From many of you the unclean spirit has gone out, and in the deep calm which ensues, you might with hopeful ease, escape the snares of Satan and place yourselves under the shadow of the Savior's wing; will you do it? If still you are tempted to linger,--I say unto you, beware of those seven other spirits, more wicked than the first, for they need only this very lingering of yours to be their signal for returning with more awful power to take such a possession of your soul as your efforts, thenceforward faint and feeble, will never avail to disturb.

[Back to Top](#)

God's Love to Sinners as Seen in the Gospel

Lecture III

June 23, 1852

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The subject of this great love is God. It is no other than God who is here said to have so loved this world. Hence God is not a mere intellect, but is a being capable of loving.

This declaration about God's love is not a mere figure of speech accommodated to our apprehension, and hence perhaps not meaning nearly so much as it seems to mean. No, this is no accommodating figure, but a statement of fact,--of fact substantiated by what God has actually done. God loved so much that He gave up His only Son--for sinners. Hence we know that God really loves, and as much more intensely than any creature as He is greater than any.

Who is the object of this love? God we have seen is the lover: but who can be the object loved? The great God loves somebody!--Who is it? Who is the favored object of Jehovah's love? Whom is He here declared to love?

Sinners are apt to think that God is an infinite abstraction, infinitely above themselves, and quite indifferent as to their welfare: but this text declares that God has most surely and most intensely loved this world. This world it says, meaning not this globe--not this round ball of solid matter, but its people--the living, intelligent, moral, yet sinning race that live and have their being here.

But we must look at the nature of this love. What sort of love is it?

Now we know that sinners hate God: and yet here we are told that God loves them. We must therefore ask--With what kind of love? For on this point it is of the utmost importance to make the proper discriminations, lest we should be led to suppose that God's love to sinners is mere good nature--a soft and spontaneous feeling which has no regard to character. It should be well

understood that God's love towards sinners is no such thing as this.

God's love to sinners is not a love of complacency, for this form of love fastens upon the character. It is simply delight in character; and who does not know that in regard to their character, God can have no delight in sinners? Their characters are altogether loathsome to Him. Hence God's love for sinners cannot be a love of their characters; and can be only a love of them as sentient beings capable of happiness and misery--i.e. a sincere regard and an earnest desire for their well-being. Parents sometimes have very bad children, and yet they love them, bad though they be. They love them in the sense of desiring their welfare and delighting to do them good. The prodigal son was greatly beloved, although by no means lovely in character. Many a son of such a character has been the object of yearning affection on the part of his parents. They have cheerfully suffered anything that human nature could bear, in order to promote the real welfare of their wayward son. Of this we have a most striking illustration in the case of David and Absalom. Absalom had artfully and maliciously seized his father's throne, dishonored his father's bed, and sought his father's life, yet when David marshaled his little band of yet faithful men to take the field against this base usurper, his heart yearned over the base monster and he besought his generals, saying, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom." And when the unnatural son was brought back a corpse, his grief was inconsolable. He refused to be comforted. So strong were his expressions of sorrow and grief that Joab was afraid of its influence upon his army, and solemnly rebuked his king for giving indulgence to such feelings in such an emergency. "Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants who have this day saved thy life, in that thou lovest thine enemies and hatest thy friends, for thou hast declared this day that thou regardest neither princes nor servants; for this day I perceive that if Absalom had lived and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well."

To this rebuke David could only answer--I have only given scope to the outbursting of a father's heart. And indeed it was only the deep yearnings of a pious father's heart that sought expression in such words and groans, "O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom, would to God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" An ungodly son dies in his sins, and a pious father bemoans his awful death in such language as this! We rarely find anything in history that so forcibly illustrates God's love to sinners as does this lamination of David over Absalom. Under the influence of his strong affection, David seemed almost to overlook the public danger, for when his army went out to battle and

the issue was still in dark suspense, he bade his officers deal gently for his sake with the young man Absalom. Now God does not and cannot overlook the public danger, through His great love for sinners, and yet He ventures to pardon and forgive under circumstances which may look as if He did. O how truly is Jehovah's love for sinners the love of a father towards a wayward son! Many suppose that such language as this in our text has no meaning. Oh, how little they understand the facts of the case! It has a meaning deep and sincere, and is no figure of speech by any means. When in language so like that of David, the most High God cries out--"How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." We cannot but see the honest heart-yearnings of one who loves the race and who is moved to the very depths of his great heart by the pressure of a stern necessity to inflict punishment. See the heart of a father standing out in the tears and compassionate tones of the king! He would not suffer one hair to fall from the head of his guilty son if he could wisely, safely, spare him; He longs to save your forfeited life; and when in the very act of rebellion you fall and He is obliged to drive the chariot-wheels of His government over your prostrate body, he mournfully laments your fall!

Again, this love reaches every individual member of the race. The declaration can mean nothing less than that God loves every human being--all without any exception. What a thought is this! And how difficult for sinner to persuade themselves of its truth--especially of its absolute truth in reference to themselves in particular. Did you ever try to realize this? Did you ever ask yourself--is it indeed true that the great God has a deep personal regard for my happiness, like that which an earthly father has towards his son? Can I believe that His love for me is so great that He finds His happiness even in heaven in unwearied concern to secure my personal salvation? Such is the fact.

The great difficulty with sinners is that their unbelief as to God is so great that this conception does not get into their minds at all. Yet is it none the less true, and is a truth that sinners greatly need to understand and take home to their hearts.

Again, this love of God to sinners is a patient love--patient even to the extent of long-suffering--long-enduring the most grievous provocations. If any of you, now living in your sins, had any just sense of your sin against God, and of your great provocations of His wrath, you would cry out, "How can it be possible for

God to have any tender regard for me? How can He but think of me only as an enemy of His, to be crushed before Him as a guilty rebel!"

You speak sometimes of the forbearance of parents towards wayward, vicious children, but how far does this fall short of God's forbearance towards sinners! Suppose you are a wicked child towards your parents, so wicked that you have never obeyed them in a single instance. You have always done as bad as you could--have invariably pursued a course of persecution, opposition, and utter hostility: if such had been your course and character, would you expect forbearance from human parents? Oh no, none but God can be expected to have forbearance equal to such an emergency.

I beg you to look at this case fairly. Suppose a young lady were to enter this school, and it should be truly said of her when she came that she had always been a trial and a torment to her parents--had never been known to obey them or to do anything to please them, what would you say of her? What would you think of her? If you learned that notwithstanding all her parents had still forbore and loved and sought only her best good, would you not admire their spirit as something more than human? But the daughter or the son that has so abused his parents you would feel was not fit to live. Your spontaneous indignation would cry aloud--Let him be spewed out from all human society! There is no fit place for such a wretch beneath the light of the sun!

Now, sinners, I entreat you to apply this honestly to yourselves. You have done nothing else since you had a being, but oppose God! You have not yet done the first thing, however small, from a sincere desire to please Him! You know that's the truth! And yet God holds you up in existence--holds you up from dropping into hell! He represents Himself as holding your feet from sliding, as they stand on the slippery places of the sinner's pathway. Ah, how long He has done this very thing! You have regularly abused all the manifestations of His love, and trampled under foot all His commandments. God says, "all this hast thou done, and I kept silence." But though silent, He has not forgotten. Yet love will wait in its long-suffering patience till it can wait no longer.

Mark also the lowliness of this love. See how low it stoops. Of the great Impersonation of this love it was said, "He took on Him the form of a servant, and made Himself of no reputation." He was meek and lowly of heart. Such was the condescension of the Son of God! Scarcely if at all less was the condescension of the Infinite Father. Think at how great expense He provided

the means of your salvation. Think of the self-denial to which He submitted. Do you ask--what did He do? Gave up to death His only Son. Gave Him, freely, not for money but for love. When Abraham called of God, went forth to offer up Isaac, and when he had freely shown his purpose of heart to obey God and trust Him if need be to raise up his slaughtered son from the dead, God said to him, "Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, therefore have I sworn by myself that I will greatly bless thee, and will greatly multiply thy seed, even as the stars of heaven." It was a strong point in Abraham's case that he did not withhold his only son. So also, God did not spare His only Son, but freely gave Him up for an offering. In the case of Abraham, he only brought his only son to the altar and drew his knife--there God's angel caught his arm and pointed out a ram for the real offering. But when God gave up His only Son, the demands of justice against the sinner took their course upon his substitute, and the innocent victim was brought to the slaughter. Nailed to the cross, He bled, agonized, languished and died! Was ever love like that?

Again, this was love towards enemies--towards those whose carnal mind was enmity against God. This circumstance "commends the love of God towards us, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

This feature in the state of the divine mind is not easily conceived by minds as selfish as ours. Even the best of men are hardly an exception to this remark. How often do you hear them pray that God would bless all their friends. Now in some respects it is quite proper that we should pray for our friends, but we should pray not less for our enemies. Christ prayed for His friends, but so He did for His enemies also. If we were in the practice of praying with all our heart, for our worst enemies, we could better understand how Christ should die for His enemies.

Many sinners say, "O, if we were truly converted, God would love us." True; He would then love you with the love of complacency. Now He loves you with the love of compassion. Yet even this you scarcely realize at all. You find it very hard to conceive how God should put His Son in the hands of wicked men, and let them murder Him, in order that the murderers might be saved! O surely He would convince you if He could, that in His deepest affection He loves you! He would make this impression so strong on your heart, that even when you come to see your great sin, you will still hold on to the strange truth that God has so loved your soul as to give up the life of His Son for its salvation.

Yet again, this love of God for sinners is a spontaneous love. It was self-moved. None of the race of lost men asked for it. God did not find the world on its bended knees in imploring supplication, but on the contrary, found them all in rebellion--rebellion strong and stern, fiercely struggling to get quite away from God's authority. Yet even so, His love gushed forth towards them in infinite compassion.

This was also a persevering love. It was not a love which after a few abortive efforts falls back and gives over the struggle to save. It was not like the love of some Christians for the impenitent, who after a few prayers and efforts, give up the endeavor, especially if they meet with opposition. But God's love for the lost in sin is a persevering love, not easily exhausted--a love that many waters cannot quench nor floods drown. O how well for the sinner that it is all this!

It is also a holy love. If it had been otherwise, it might have sought to save by means that would have put in jeopardy the interests of His government. It was a critical and difficult undertaking--this effort to rescue the sinner over whom the violated law was posing its thunderbolts. By some means, the demands of Law must be satisfied and yet the sinner be spared; but it must be in such a way as will make an impression of the awful guilt of sin--of its great wickedness, and especially of the purity and holiness of the great Magistrate of the universe. It will by no means answer to do anything that shall misrepresent His character. On this point there will be the greatest danger when He comes to set aside the execution of His law, and throw the doors of mercy wide open, and invite every sinner to come forward and enter in. But all this danger has been guarded against most fully in the sacrifice of His glorious Son. It was a love blended with holiness and purity that took these precautions. The necessity was felt of making some demonstrations, which all beings in heaven, earth and hell should see. God must write it out in such characters as all can read--engrave it as it were on the everlasting rocks, so that through all coming ages, every mind in the universe may have the demonstration all present to its view, showing how much God hated sin, and how sacred He holds His holy law. He made this impression when He gave up His Son to die in the sinner's stead. There, too, He demonstrated the purity of His love for the sinner. He showed that it was not mere good nature that would save sinners any how, and cared not for the consequences to the stability of His kingdom. There He made the truth stand out in strong and bold relief, that He loved His kingdom not the less because He loved the lost sinner. The welfare of the holy, of the yet unfallen, must not be put in jeopardy in order to save the

guilty.

God's love for sinners is also a wakeful, solicitous love. It pities its objects, and sets the heart most intently on blessing those it loves. You may have seen Christians in revivals, after their hearts had been brought into deep sympathy with Christ for souls. You observed how wakeful, how anxious, how burdened their hearts were. Perhaps they could scarcely eat or sleep through their great solicitude for the salvation of souls. What made Jesus Christ spend whole nights in prayer? Ah, He was sent to redeem a lost world, and the burden of souls lay heavy on His heart. It was but plain language without a figure when His disciples applied to Him the passage, "The zeal of my house hath eaten me up." A zeal for God had thrown upon His heart such a burden of care and solicitude as wasted His mortal frame away. The prophet foresaw this when in a vision he said of Him--"his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." How strange his aspect!

Old age sat on His faded brow ere he had scarce reached thirty. An old man in His very youth--for the "zeal of God's house had eaten Him up." O the depth of His compassions for the lost whom He came to save! Hear what He says: "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" O that baptism of suffering which for months and years hung heavily on His heart in the solicitude of anticipation; and yet love falters not.

Do you understand this? Do you know from any similar experience of your own what this state of mind is? The fact is, those who have never entered into sympathy with this deep benevolent solicitude for poor lost souls cannot understand the love of God for sinners. To all but those who have had some experience it is a dark and unknown state of mind. But when you come into sympathy with God in this thing, when you pour out your life and soul for sinners, then you begin to have some just conceptions of what the state is and then you can begin to understand the nature of God's great love for sinners.

This love moreover is fully of pity. Under its deep emotions, God is represented as being greatly moved. Hear Him break out in the depth of His feelings--"Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore My bowels are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." My feeling was stirred up by his provoking sins and I spake against him that I would soon cut him down; but presently parental affection rises up--a father's heart earnestly remembers him

still. Such is the pity of God for sinners. If God had not such pity as this, how could we account for His conduct in sparing sinners so long? How could we explain it that He has not long since hurled every sinner down to hell?

But I must pass to notice the end sought in this scheme of love. God gave His Son to the end that "whosoever would believe on Him should not perish, but should have everlasting life."

It seems to me passing strange that Mr. Storrs and those who hold with him, should seize upon such expressions as this and make them teach the annihilation of the wicked. They hold, as perhaps you know, that "perishing" means annihilation, and hence that the end to be secured by Christ's death is no other than to save sinners from annihilation and give them an immortal existence. I find by conversation with them that they are led to this belief by their notions of literal sense. They hold that all the language of the Bible must be construed literally, and that the literal sense of the word--perish--is annihilation. But in both these views they are entirely mistaken. Not to dwell at present upon the former, let us consider for a moment the latter. The literal sense of the word perish, is not annihilation. When matter is said to perish, it only changes its form and mode of existence; it is not annihilated. Indeed matter so far as we can see knows nothing of annihilation. So that Mr. Storrs fails utterly in applying his doctrine of literal sense, even if the doctrine itself were true. Besides, perishing is here put in contrast with everlasting life. But this everlasting life is not a mere existence, prolonged forever--by no means;--it is eternal fruition--everlasting blessedness; and hence its opposite must be everlasting misery.

Moreover, if annihilating the wicked would have answered all the purposes of penalty for the transgression of law, and all things considered, God had seen it wise to punish sinners in this way, He could have done it in a moment, and could have created another world of holy beings with only saying--Let it be! All would have been easy and soon done. But we cannot see any good reason why it should be needful for Christ to die on the cross, solely for the purpose of saving sinners from the doom of annihilation.

Hence we see that the object of Christ's death for sinners is to bring them back into fellowship and harmony with God and holiness--to make them obedient sons again in His great family.

The means of effecting this change in the moral attitude of sinners towards their

great and good Father are especially the full revelations which God makes of Himself before the very eyes of men through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Christ came in mortal flesh to live, to labor, to speak and act among men as a man, that He might reveal the true character of God to our race. Hence Christ is called the Word of God, because He reveals God to us, as words reveal thought from mind to mind. This is not the only object of Christ's incarnation, but it is one object and a great one.

Let it then be understood that Christ came in human flesh to reveal before our eyes the great love of God, and to make us understand indeed all the great moral attributes of God. He gave His only Son to come among men and live among them as a neighbor. Some of you are mechanics; Christ wrought among his neighbors as a mechanic, to teach men what a mechanic should be. He wrought as a son during His minority, to teach what a dutiful son should be. Then He appeared in public life, showing what men should be in this relation. In all these respects He sought to unfold His true character, so that as a model and more particularly as an exemplification of the true God, He might make His abode among men of the utmost possible service. It was one of the great objects of the incarnation to reveal God so that men should renew their confidence in Him. Sin brought with itself doubt and unbelief respecting God, and this doubt and unbelief must be counteracted before the sinner can be saved. Men whose hearts indulge enmity always try to vindicate and justify their enmity by believing evil of the party hated. Enmity, no matter how causeless and wrong, leads to suspicion and slander. The mind, troubled with the consciousness of wrongdoing, seeks relief by self-justification, and to gain this relief, is compelled to think and believe evil of those it has unjustly wronged. In precisely this relation do mankind stand towards God. They are enemies for no reason whatever and are thus thrown upon the necessity of some means for impeaching the King they causelessly hate. Hence the need of making such revelations of God to man as shall melt his hard heart under the manifestations of divine love.

As another great means of accomplishing the end in view, Christ must needs atone for sin, so that it can be freely forgiven. This He did most effectually. In Christ both parties in this great controversy are represented. Human nature was there and also the divine. God in human flesh met all the exigencies of the case and satisfied every demand of the emergency.

On our part faith is the great condition of being saved. The longer I live, the

more clearly I see that faith refers especially to the divinity of Christ, embracing practically His power to save and fully admitting that the case is one for which no power short of divine is adequate. "Believest thou that I am able to do this?" Do you believe that I can raise your dead, heal your sick, cast out your devils, remit your sins? Do you believe all this? Then if so, cast yourself on My power to save. The substance of faith then is this--believing in Christ as the true God, and confiding in Him as such. Faith confides in Him as to all He professes to be and to do. It is presupposed that the mind apprehends the nature and design of God's love, and then faith receives this as truth, believing that in very deed Jesus Christ loved me, gave Himself for me, died for me that I might not die but live. Thus each believing soul for itself meets God in Jesus Christ and yields itself up to God in reliance upon His promises. A full, unreserved submission seems none too much. With all the heart, the man commits himself to Christ to be used, and governed--to be sanctified and to be saved.

Many treat Christ as if He were a hypocrite. I do not mean that they say so, but in their heart they think so, and what they think determines their treatment of Him. They really feel as if they could put no confidence in His professions of friendship.

Let me put this point to test with you. Have you ever realized that Christ came to save YOU, as truly as if you were the only sinner in the universe? Have you met Him in this relation, as if you understood that He actually came to save you, yourself alone! But this is the true idea of faith. It believes Christ's word of promise and of proffered mercy as applying to your own individual soul.

Faith implies a full renunciation of selfishness. Such renunciation is fully involved in the idea of self-committal to God.

Another element of faith should command our particular regard. It not only believes the history of the past respecting Christ, but also embraces especially all that it finds revealed of His present and future relations. Sinners often believe the past without believing unto salvation, for they do not believe the present and the future. They say--No doubt Christ once lived and ultimately died, but all this took place a great many years ago and a great way off. After His resurrection, He went to heaven--and there the scope of their faith comes to an end. There is nothing fresh and new in it--nothing that touches the great interest of the soul in its own salvation. It is taken up and thought of as any other fragment of ancient history.

But real faith comes nearer home--much nearer. It takes hold of a present Christ--a Savior living now--yea, ever living at God's right hand and ever making intercession there. Did you ever realize that you have been kept out of hell thus long by Christ's intercession? He Himself has illustrated the case in the parable of the barren fig tree. Spare the sinner, he cries; don't cut him down yet; save him, let Me bring him once more into the house of God and under the sound of the gospel; it may be he will repent; if not--if every hopeful effort fails, then let him be cut down, but not before. Then let none of you sinners suppose that Christ has lost His interest in you; far from it. He still prays for you, and still holds you up from sinking into hell. You lay down on your bed last night and slept sweetly; yet the only reason you did not sink down quick into hell, was, not that you prayed but that Christ prayed. Jesus Christ, when your heart was all prayerless, lifted up His voice in your behalf and cried, oh, spare him yet once more--I will carry him up to the house of God again; if this fails, then cut him down!

Once more only,--true faith not only expects forgiveness for all the past, but grace for all the future. Its trustful voice says--"His grace shall be sufficient for me as He has said."

REMARKS.

1. Faith is a natural condition of your salvation. By this I mean that it is in the very nature of the case an indispensable condition. If you will not credit what Christ says of Himself and of the offers of salvation, all else that you may do is of not the least avail. So says our text. God gave up His Son, not to save all men unconditionally--not to save the rich, not the titled, not the learned, as such; not to save the externally moral, or the socially amiable, as such; but to save just all those and none others but those who should believe on Him. Of course this settles the question and shows conclusively who will and who will not be saved by Jesus Christ.

2. Your selfishness is that which makes it so difficult for you to conceive aright of these things. You never loved your enemies: you never make any sacrifice of your own ease or pleasure for their good--but God does. Hence you find it difficult if not impossible to understand God's benevolence--it is so unlike your own selfishness.

Christ prays for you--has done and still does--and yet you are cruelly slow to believe it. But consider how He beheld Jerusalem and wept over it. He had been among them and knew their malignity towards Himself. He saw the whole city becoming deeply excited--sharpening their weapons to slay Him; yet now as He was coming in for the last time--in the nearest view of the final catastrophe, His heart was deeply moved with pity and compassion. He well knew how much they hated Him and yet He cried out, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem; thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thee as a hen does her brood under her wings--but ye would not." Another Evangelist says--"He beheld the city and wept over it." He seemed to forget their awful wickedness as if it had never been.

But how can you realize such a state of mind as His? Your selfishness is so great and so controlling that you never have any such feelings yourself towards your enemies. And when you are called on to relinquish your enmity and selfishness, you plead that you can't do it. Hence you are sadly crippled in respect to meeting the condition of faith intelligently. Just as it is one of the most difficult things in the world to make a great liar believe your word however trustworthy, or just, as you cannot persuade a great scoundrel or knave into the course of duty. They don't understand the proper force of the motives you present, and more than all, they do not love to admit sound moral truth home to their heart and conscience. So a thief always suspects others of theft. And on the same principle it becomes sternly difficult for a wicked man to have confidence in God's sincerity and goodness. He may admit it in theory, but still he doesn't believe it and bring it home to his own bosom as a reality.

Now look at the case. See what God has done to provide for your salvation, and also see how much He has said and done to lead you to believe it--but alas, your heart is still heavy as lead with unbelief! What more can God do to make you realize it? O tell me, what more? Sinners will stand and look on the cross itself, and still say--"I cannot realize that this is all compassion for me--I cannot believe that all this came of love for my soul." How then can God persuade you to believe in His loving-kindness?

3. Faith in Christ will give you peace. Of this you need not and methinks you cannot have the least doubt. Are you then willing to receive the intelligence, that God gave His Son for you as individuals? So His own word declares. "God, having raised up His Son, Jesus, sent Him to bless you in turning away every

one of you from his iniquities." Therefore make no delay. Rouse up all the energies of your soul to this work--at once.

4. Sinners are not apt to distinguish between Christ given and Christ received. Christ given is one thing; Christ received is quite another. God has in great love given the donation: have you accepted it? It avails you nothing until you do. Believing on Him is accepting Him as given. Of a long time you have known that the offer of Jesus as your Savior has been made you. Have you cared anything about it? Have you had one feeling of gratitude to express to God for His unspeakable gift? Have you ever uttered one word of gratitude? Have you ever come before God with the first note of thanksgiving? How does your ingratitude look even in your own eyes? And if you are ashamed of it yourself, how must you suppose it appears in the eyes of your Savior?

Suppose Jesus Christ were to come into this house while you are sitting here. You know by the halo of glory about His head that it can be none other than the Lord of glory whom you have so long rejected. He shows you the prints of the nails in His hands and feet--the wound of the spear in His side, and coming near where you sit, He asks you with a look of tenderest compassion,--Is all this nothing to you? Do you know who I am? Yes, Do you know what I want of you? Yes. Am I worthy of your confidence? I suppose so. Then, will you give yourself up to Me, trusting My word and grace to save you and devoting yourself heartily to My cause? O, you answer, I don't feel enough. But He replies, I have come to save you. This matter has been debated long enough, and it is time you should tell Me honestly what your final decision is. We must conclude this matter now, and whatever your decision may be, I shall write it down and put the judgment seal upon it. And now, under these circumstances, what will you do? Will you say--Go Thy way for this time? But if I do for this time, I return no more to bless you. I shall pray for you no more. All your day and scope for mercy will pass away. You know I have dealt in all honesty with you to save your soul if I can. I have sought to show you your enmity of heart against Me, and have implored you to put it all away and give Me your heart--will you do it even now, though it be your eleventh hour of mercy?

Sinner, do you understand this appeal? Doubtless you do. Christ is trying to win you--He would fain persuade you to save your soul. Will you be persuaded? Will you decide the momentous question this hour? If you knew that your present decision would be final, how would you make it? Let me tell you, it MAY be

final;--therefore take care what you do! "There is a point beyond which forbearance is no virtue"--beyond which even God cannot forbear, for virtue forbids it. Remember that this is the dispensation of the Holy Ghost, and if you sin willfully against Him, He may never forgive you. But do you say--The Holy Ghost is not now with me. Beware what you say! Has not some influence, other than your own mind, convinced you of sin? Must you not admit that by some means, you have seen your sins as you have rarely done before, and have been pressed to come to Christ for pardon? Then now is your time. You ought to consider that this may be your last time. Why then will you not cry out--O Jesus, take my heart; O take it wholly, and seal it Thine forevermore!

[Back to Top](#)

All Things for Good to Those That Love God-- and All Things Conspire for Evil to The Sinner- No.'s 1 & 2

Lecture IV & V

July 7, 1852

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

You will observe that the apostle speaks with all confidence. He does not say--we expect, or we believe or we conjecture that all will be well for God's friends,-but he says--we know. There is no doubt about it.

Let us then,

I. Inquire, what does his language mean?

II. Show how the result of good to all that love God is secured.

III. Notice some particulars as illustrations of the general truth.

IV. Show how we know it to be true.

I. What is the apostle's meaning?

Here the great question is--Shall his language be interpreted as strictly universal?

In terms, he announces a universal proposition. All things, he declares, work together for good to those that love God. But does he mean to affirm a proposition strictly universal?

Not all universal language should be taken in a strictly universal sense. In the scriptures we not infrequently find it necessary to modify universal language. There may be things in the text or context which forbid the universal sense; or there may be declarations in other parts of the Bible which preclude it, or the nature of the case may render the universal sense either violently improbable, or perhaps absurd, and hence may demand some modification. It should be remembered that the language of the Bible is the language of common life, and everybody knows that in the language of common life we often affirm in the form of universal proposition when we really mean something much short of this. For example, it is common to say of a well known fact--"Everybody says so"--but our "everybody" is by no means intended to embrace all mankind.

But the language of our text I do understand to be used in the strictly universal sense, meaning that absolutely all things, present and future--all things, above and beneath--in heaven, earth, and hell--do and will conspire to the ultimate blessedness of the saints. The Bible obviously teaches this doctrine, and I know of no facts in the universe that militate against its universal application.

II. How does this come about? How is this result secured?

In order to see this matter in its true light we need to consider that the happiness of moral agents is conditioned on their holiness and results from it. The holy will of course be happy, and have real enjoyment in proportion to the degree in which they are holy. Still further, let it be considered that the holiness of moral agents is conditioned upon their knowledge. Every moral agent is more or less holy according as he knows more or less and is more or less conformed in heart and life to what he knows. I speak now particularly of the knowledge of God, whether obtained through His word or through His works.

Now all events are matters of knowledge, and not only all events that occur under God's government, but God Himself is also an object of knowledge.

According to the Bible, all events will ultimately be known to the saints, for the judgment day will bring them all to light. Hence we learn that ultimately the entire history of all God's doings will be known to all His creatures. All He has ever done or shall ever do--whether in this world or in other worlds, will be open subjects of knowledge to His creatures, and will be known as fast and as far as their limited capacities will admit.

Now it is very plain that if all things, embracing all events and all the works of God, are matters of knowledge, and if moreover knowledge is a condition of real holiness, then all the knowledge which the saints attain will be at once available to their happiness. It will go to enhance their real blessedness. Especially will this be true of all their knowledge of God and of His countless works and various ways. All things, the saints will then see, are parts of one great plan--both those which God Himself performs by His direct agency, and those which are done through His permissive agency by His creatures. It will then be seen that all things are arranged and planned for the good of His obedient children, and when this great all-controlling principle in God's administration comes to be seen in all its bearings, the knowledge of this truth cannot fail to be a source of ineffable blessedness to all the holy. God's infinite grace as the great and good Father of all His loving children, will be so revealed as to show that He makes all things work together for their good.

III. Let us now turn our attention to some particulars as illustrations of the general truth.

It is generally supposed that what we call mercies and blessings, and what we recognize by name as God's good gifts to men, are really good things to those that love God. We can see that they are, and men universally recognize them as good.

The same is equally true of what we call judgments, and chastisements--the rebukes of God; for all these too are means of grace, and are blessed of God for the spiritual good of His children. Their only design as they come from our Father's hand is that they may work out God to His saints. He does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men from caprice or from any pleasure in their pain, but only and wholly for their profit, that they may the more deeply "partake of His holiness." Under this broad principle, we know that all the losses and crosses which befall the saints--all their burdens of care and responsibility,--and all their infirmities, shall be overruled for their good. All these things will

conspire to teach the saints more of God and more of themselves. By the aid of such revelations they will be able the better to appreciate God's character and plans of discipline and their own infinite obligation to His manifold grace.

Nor from the "all things" of our text can we except the sins of God's people. They are indeed altogether blame-worthy for all their sins and none the less so for the good which God educes from them by His overruling agency. The sin of Peter was overruled of God for his good. He was a more humble and a better man as long as he lived. He better knew his own weakness, and better appreciated Christ's tender compassion. He felt the force of the admonition--"When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren," and there was none among all the original twelve to whom Christ said more emphatically--"Feed My sheep"--"Feed My lambs."

This sin of Peter brought him into great peril. "Satan desired to have him that he might sift him as wheat,"--and if Christ had left him to himself, he would doubtless have fallen fatally into the snare of the devil. But Christ did not leave him in this hour of his need. "I have prayed for thee," said He, "that thy faith fail not." Christ kept His hand and eye on him, and soon plucked him from the destroyer's grasp. In this scene Peter learned more of the length and depth of his Savior's grace than he had ever known before.

This is only a single case, yet it was by no means a peculiar case, and therefore it serves to illustrate the general law of God's administration over His people.

Similar was the case of David. No thanks to him, but all thanks to God, that his sin was overruled, so as in the issue to make him a more meek, humble, penitent, and holy man.

Not only are the sins of the saints overruled to their good, but the sins of others, of sinners, and even of the most wicked. All the mistakes of our associates--their infirmities--the thousand nameless things that try us among the "all things," which God makes subservient to the good of His people. There is a woman whose husband is a bad man. His temper is uncomfortable--his ways are adapted to make his intimate associates unhappy, and hence he causes his wife many sore trials. Yet if she loves God and makes Him the Refuge of her soul, all these little trials shall certainly work out her good both in this world and the next.

Not less so of the husband who has a bad wife. Not less so of those unhappy

families in which the husband and the wife are great trials to each other. So of parents and children. Parents may be a source of trial to their children, and it often happens that children are a source of the greatest trial to their parents. But howsoever the trials occur, the great principle of our text applies to them all. To those that love God, they shall all work together for good.

The principle also reaches and applies to all the temptations of the devil. Let him poison his darts with demoniac skill and hurl them with hellish malice, they will not ultimately harm those that sincerely love God.

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower into which the righteous run and are safe." The Christian has a panoply complete, wherewith he may be able to withstand all the fiery darts of the devil. And what is more to our present purpose, though wounded by these darts he shall not be slain,--though cast down he shall not be destroyed, for there is a healing, overruling hand under whose agency even the wounds that Satan inflicts shall be wrought into better health and more spiritual vitality than the saints enjoyed before. God knows how to foil Satan with his own weapons and make even his apparent temporary success react in terrible defeat and disgrace upon his own head. God knows how not only to rescue His saints but to do much more than simply to rescue them: He imbues them with new vigor and sanctifies to them their most bitter and humiliating experience.

Yet further, all events are designed to illustrate God's true character. The whole creation is only a revelation of God, and all events that occur in it only serve to reveal more and more of God to intelligent beings. "The heavens declare the glory of God--the firmament showeth His handy-work." How many lectures upon God are read to us by the silent stars! How many lessons are repeated to us day by day by His rising suns and nightly dews and timely showers! Where in all the works of God, whether in nature or providence, is there a thing that does not speak His praise and bear some testimony which He can bless to the souls of His saints?

IV. We know that all things work together for good to the saints.

So says Paul. How did he and his brethren know this to be true? Perhaps they knew it by revelations already made in God's word; or it may be that his mind rested this truth upon the general knowledge of God enjoyed. It is a matter of revelation. The Bible amply affirms this truth. And it is also a plain dictate of

reason. When we come to understand what God's attributes are as affirmed by the reason, we shall see that such a God can suffer nothing to occur which shall not in some way result in good to His friends. This must be so, if it be true that God loves His friends, studies to promote their highest good--has all events under His control--had His choice in the depths of a past eternity among all possible events and could determine to cause and suffer to exist such only as should subserve the ends that lay near His heart.

It is often a matter of experience and observation in this world that things which seem freighted with destruction turn out to be full of life and salvation. For a time, all looked dark and desolate, but light and joy came out at last. Look at the case of Job. You can scarcely think of one form of grief and sorrow, which did not blend in the throng that rushed upon him as if to crush him: but he lived to see all these things work together for good to himself both for time and eternity. So in general, I remark that observation and experience will often show that this doctrine applies even to the present life and has its exemplification even here. Yet the apostle did not mean to affirm that God's plans have their full development in the present world. His affirmation contemplated a future world in which results but partially unfolded here can have their full and everlasting development.

REMARKS.

1. Saints will in eternity blame themselves for what they cannot on the whole regret. Seeing the results which God has educed by His overruling agency, they cannot wish they had never done those wicked things; yet surely they will none the less blame themselves for their own sins. As to the blame of sin, no matter how much good may come from our wrong-doing, it never can affect the question of our guilt, nor its measure. Take the case of Judas. No thanks to him that his infamous treason was one of the agencies which provided a Savior for a ruined world. The good which accrued from the death of Christ changes not the intrinsic character of his sin; cannot in any measure make it less mean, less sordid, less revengeful. Hence he must blame himself as much as if no good but only evil had resulted from his betrayal of Christ. It was God alone by His own infinite wisdom and power, who overruled this sin to great good. All praise therefore to Him, and none the less blame to Judas the traitor.

2. Our subject shows how the saints can be perfectly happy in heaven to all eternity. For there is in many minds a point of obscurity in this matter which

needs explanation. The saints will see all their past sins in heaven's clear light, and they cannot but blame themselves for every sin they ever committed. How then can they be perfectly happy?

The answer is, they will see how their sins have been overruled for good, and they will rejoice in this good which God brings out of their iniquities. In this exercise of joy, they will be deeply humble, as indeed they will have all reason to be, and their joy will be purely a joy in God, blended with everlasting adoration and praise that He had both the power and the heart to bring much good out of their own wrong doings. Every view taken by a saint in heaven of his past sins will redound in praise to God, but in deeper humiliation to himself. Yet this humiliation will by no means conflict with the saint's happiness--for he enjoys being humble--he enjoys giving all glory and praise to God.

3. God blames a multitude of things, but has no regrets. He has often expressed Himself as we do when we feel regret, but these forms of expression are shaped in accommodation to our modes of speaking, and when used by God should be interpreted in accordance with His known character and known relations. It cannot be that on the whole, under all the circumstances of the case, He really regrets the occurrence of anything that takes place. He blames the guilty author, He condemns the sin; but it has not taken Him by surprise; it is no new thing to Him, and it has not in any wise frustrated His purposes and plans for the government of the universe. Before this sin was committed, or its author existed, God saw how He could over-rule it for good, and for so much good that on the whole He judged it better to let its author come into existence and commit this sin rather than prevent either the one or the other. Yet He blames every sin as much as if no good could be educed from it. The sinner is none the better for this development of good, through God's overruling agency. To God alone belongs all the praise, for both the good intention and the good results are His alone. But for His good hand interposing, all the results would have been evil, and the sinner's intention is of course all evil and only evil continually.

Yet while God blames both sinners and saints for all their sins, He freely forgives the believing penitent and accepts him as a son. Then He so overrules the sin as not to be agonized by anything that occurs.

We sometimes see results corresponding to this in the earthly discipline which parents exercise over their children. The parent sees that his child has sinned; at first he regrets the thing exceedingly; but having in the fear and help of God

done his utmost to reclaim and improve his child, he sees his efforts crowned with the divine blessing, and he says--That sin of my dear child almost killed me, but now I see him so much changed for the better that I can no longer regret the means which have resulted in so much good.

4. From this it does not follow that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good. For if under the very circumstances in which they sin, men would obey rather than disobey--do right rather than wrong--then yet greater good might accrue than accrues from God's overruling of the sin. But God prefers His own course to any other which He can take. Under the circumstances He always does the wisest and best thing possible to Him, and hence He has no occasion for regret. He brings out the greatest good possible to Himself. If His creatures who do in fact sin, would be persuaded to do right instead of wrong, their agency for good, concurrent with His, would educe a still augmented good.

For illustration; a father commands his son to perform some certain work. But he has good reason to believe that the son will not do it unless he himself stays at home to control the son by his presence. Yet it is so important for him to go away that he decides to go, though at the hazard of his son's disobedience. In case the son disobeys, he trusts he can subject him to such discipline as shall bring out some good, and the good to be secured by his own presence elsewhere is too great to be sacrificed. The greatest good possible can be secured only by the concurrent agency of father and son. The father can secure the greatest good possible to himself by going away, even though his son should disobey in his absence.

5. But if sin were overruled so as to be at last the means of the greatest good, no thanks to the sinner. Suppose it were the case that the whole world would have been damned if Judas had not betrayed Christ, so that his sin secured the salvation of the world--no thanks to Judas for such a result, for he meant not so, neither did his heart think so. He intended no good to the world, nor to any being in it except himself. His act of betraying his friend would be none the less mean, sordid, and revengeful, for the good which in the case supposed would ensue. The good wrought out would be wholly attributable to God.

6. It is naturally impossible to sin benevolently. There can be no such thing as a benevolent sin. To sin with design to do good is an absurdity in terms. To say therefore that we do evil that good may come is absurd and impossible. To do evil for the sake and with the motive of securing real good is a self-

contradiction. For the doing evil implies a wicked intention, and the having a good end in view implies a good intention. But to have both a good intention and a bad intention at the same instant, each determining the same act, is surely a self-contradiction. If a man intends good by his act, it is not sin. No man ever sinned in order that it might redound to the glory of God. No tyrant ever persecuted the saints of God that it might do them good. Suppose a wicked man were to say--My wife is a good woman; let me plague her now for her good. It will only make her a better woman, so let me torment her all I can. There is no way in which I can do her so much good.

He can't do any such thing! It is naturally impossible that a man should be honest in trying to do good by wickedness. This sinning benevolently is a natural impossibility.

7. Saints should always be in a position to fall back upon God in all their trials in this life. They should stand in such relations to God that they can rationally and naturally trust Him to shape and control all events even here so as to make them work out good in the highest degree. If they walk humbly before God, they may know that all things shall be made to conspire for their good. Only let them truly love God and trust Him; then they need not fear the issues of any events whatever that may occur. None can occur without God's permission, nor independently of His direction. They may therefore be assured that God will shape all their bearings for the good of those that love Him.

But if professed Christians are living in sin, they have no claim on this promise and no right to expect its fulfillment to themselves. But if they are not in sin, they may like Micah cry out triumphantly--"Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me."

8. This truth affords ground for strong consolation to the saints. Why should they ever be sad? Suppose all things do not apparently work well now. Let them still have faith in God and rest in His promises. Has He not said that all things shall work together for good to His loving friends? No wonder saints are often seen smiling through their tears, for joy lies deep in their souls, though sadness may overcloud their face. Joys and sorrows are often strangely blended in their bosom. Calamities, disappointments, bereavements befall them as they do other men, and these things are not for the present joyous but grievous; but their faith in God assures them that all will yet be well. Many things will befall them in life

that burn and agonize their sensibility; but deep within are trust and faith in God and a sweet leaning upon His promises--for they know that the ground of their consolation is firm and strong as the pillars of the universe!

9. We may rejoice in whatever befalls any of God's real children; whether ourselves or others. Parents may rejoice in whatever befalls their godly children or friends. Many things may occur which cause tears now--yet as Christians our watchword should be--It will surely be well for them in the latter end. The things which give the severest shock will do most good, and those which seem most afflictive, when God has brought out all their results, may be found to be most blest to His saints. Those fearful events which seemed to come with a crash as if they would break down all the pillars of your foundation--Oh how sweet to see even those strange things so strangely overrule for the good of the saints!

10. Very few Christians can live a single week or even day without needing the consolation which this truth affords. Hence they ought to hold it fast, to keep it treasured in their memory--lying near their hearts--ready to be applied for consolation and for strength in every emergency.

This truth may well reconcile the saints to any and all events of divine providence. They can afford to be submissive, while they know that their Father will make all things work together for their good. They can afford to have travail and suffering, for even their most intense sorrows shall all conspire to work out good to their souls. Therefore let not unbelief deprive us of this consolation. Apart from the light of faith many things will occur that are inexplicably dark, but faith illumines and explains all.

How wonderful are God's marvellous works. Well may it be said of Him--"He is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." Results may lie hidden long, but they will come out at last in glorious sunlight, showing that God's hand has guided events to their results with unerring wisdom. In the light of eternity if not in the light of time, they shall see it all, and seeing it shall wonder and adore. God, they will shout aloud, hath done all things well! Then, do not allow yourselves now to be deprived of this great consolation.

But do you say--ah, if I only knew that I am a child of God, if I only knew that I really love God, then I could receive this consolation legitimately. Then I could feel that it belongs to me. Then I could say--Let come anything that God is pleased to send, for I am anchored in His love and on His promise.

Now you may be very guilty for these doubts, for surely you may be free from them altogether; but still if with all your doubtings, you are really God's child, they shall all be overruled for your good, so that in heaven you will have it to say--How wonderful are God's ways! That He should bring me out of a region, so dark and desolate, and then make all my doubts and darkness subserve some useful ends to my own soul and to His glory--that out of such materials He should bring out any good at last--how wonderful!

Finally, we can see that the volumes of glory and praise to God must be to all eternity continually accumulating. Fresh revelations each hour of His wonderful wisdom and love must evolve from humble and holy hearts fresh accessions of praise and honor to His blessed name. Is it not delightful to think that such a God shall be thus praised and honored through eternity!

LECTURE V.

July 21, 1852

ALL THINGS CONSPIRE FOR EVIL TO THE SINNER--No. 2

Text.--Isa. 3:11: "Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him."

Text.--Ps. 92:7: "When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed forever."

Text.--Deut. 32:35: "To Me belongeth vengeance, and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste."

Text.--2 Pet. 2:3: "Whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not."

From the bare reading of these passages you will see that they present a direct contrast to the great truth of our morning discourse. [This was published in our last issue.] In that it was shown that all things work together for good to those that love God. In this our text leads to the opposite truth in regard to the sinner. All things conspire together for their ruin. All tends to complete and aggravate their destruction.

This awful truth is taught throughout the Bible in a great variety of forms. I have

read to you a few of the passages which affirm it; I might read many others but it cannot be necessary.

Obligation is imposed on moral agents by the light of truth. To know truth respecting duty is the condition of obligation. When moral agents are able to understand it, then the value of the Good to be sought measures the obligation to seek it. All are bound to be benevolent--in other words, to seek the good of all beings. To know that any beings need some particular form of good, and that under existing circumstances you are capable of securing to them this Good, imposes on you the obligation to secure it, which obligation is the greater by how much the greater is the good in question. Hence as knowledge increases, so does guilt increase. The more you know of your duty and of the interests that depend upon faithfully doing it, the greater your guilt if you refuse to do it. On the supposition that the moral agent remains is sin--refusing to do known duty, then the more his knowledge increases, the greater must be his guilt.

As all events are to be made public under God's moral government, it is for His own interests as well as for the interest of His creatures that He should apprise them fully of His character and of the principles of His government, and to make all clear to finite minds, it is important that He should spread out before them somewhat fully the details of His moral administration, so as to leave nothing involved in darkness or doubt on any important subject, to any honest mind. It seems essential to the well-working of God's moral government that He should at least ultimately, illustrate His own acts so fully as to leave no ground of cavil, that every mouth may be stopped, and every candid mind in the universe be satisfied in regard to all His works and to every point in His vast administration. Who can doubt that the Great Government of the universe will vindicate His own conduct? Who can suppose that He will leave one dark point unexplained?

Hence, as all events are to be made known, both for the vindication of God's character and for the instruction of all moral agents, it follows that the destruction of the wicked will be aggravated by every accession of light to their minds. Every new revelation of God's works or ways which is made to them must conspire, (1.) to enlighten their minds; and (2.) by consequence, deepen their guilt and enhance and aggravate their doom.

This is beyond question the truth in respect to the sinner's relation to God and to His government. It presents the subject however in an abstract form. Let us therefore proceed to notice some of the particulars which illustrate this truth.

1. Men will be held responsible for mercies abused. Hence those things which most please sinners, and which they call their good things, are charged to their account, and they must be held to the strictest accountability for their use or abuse of all their good things. The sinner is charged in God's book with every breath he breathes,--with every meal he eats,--with every draught of God's water that he drinks,--with every day's health that he enjoys, and with every night's rest. He is indeed welcome to all these good things, if he uses them as he ought to; but if he will use these blessings in the devil's service, he must give account thereof to God. Why should he not? The Bible most abundantly teaches this truth. It assumes that wicked men rob God, and that for this guilt they must be held to a strict account.

If these are facts, then sinners are getting deeply in debt. As a man who in his business never pays but runs himself more and more deeply in debt, so sinners are constantly swelling their black account with their great Benefactor. The rain and the sunshine He sends them; the food and the friends He grants them; every one of these things, used in sin and for sin, spent on their lusts and with an ungrateful heart towards the Giver, must all pass on to his book of account to be settled in the great reckoning day.

Everything therefore that now pleases the sinner so much will swell the mass of things that shall agonize him at the judgment day and throughout his eternal existence. Why do not sinners consider that a day of reckoning will come, and that one of the most fearful things then to be canvassed will be the long catalogue of abused mercies? These things are good in themselves, yet it is better you should never have had them, than that you should pervert them to purposes of sin and self-indulgence and ingratitude. Ah, it were better for you that you should never have been born, than that you should pervert the powers God gives you, to make yourself a guilty rebel against your Maker. Better that you should never have health than that you should use it in sin. Many of you bless yourselves that you live while others die; but if you abuse life, it were better that you had died long ago--yea better that you had never been born. Take heed how you deem yourself fortunate for having so much health; you cannot afford to have any health at all, if you abuse it in sin and lay up a fearful account to render for every hours comfort. How can you afford to live, while every hour's life swells your fearful debt and makes you worse and worse a bankrupt, on the great books of the final day!

Not only all these countless mercies, but all the particulars embraced under them and connected with them are to come into your account. All will prove a great curse to you if selfishly abused.

The same principle applies to the entire course of God's discipline towards you, embracing the various rebukes of His providence. The Lord, for purposes of discipline may smite your property or your person. He may give wings to your riches and a blight on your strength. Losses may check the scene of your long prosperity, or by pain and weakness the Lord may seek to impress your soul with a sense of dependence on an almighty arm. All these are measures taken for your good, but if you will not improve them they will only work out your deeper ruin. There is a sinner who has been brought down to the verge of the grave by sickness. His Heavenly Father sought by this means to induce serious thought and true repentance, but He sought in vain. The heart was made no better by this affliction. The sick man recovered through divine mercy, and he blessed himself for his restored health, but it cannot be said that he blessed his great Benefactor. He blessed himself, and thought of his good fortune, but Oh! how much better for him to have gone quick to his grave than that he should rise from his sick-bed only to have a harder heart and a blacker account to settle through all eternity with his insulted Benefactor.

Perhaps the deluded man said to himself on his recovery--Now God has punished me all I deserve and I have no more punishment to fear for my sins. Far otherwise! He has not been punished at all. These trials on earth are only chastisements, intended for moral discipline. God sent them as the most hopeful means for doing you good, but you have utterly resisted and defeated His intention; you have only converted into a curse what your Father sent upon you for a blessing.

How marvelous that wicked men should suppose that these light afflictions are the proper punishment of sin? No; these are only God's means of discipline, employed here in this life for the good of men's souls. Instead of being themselves the retribution due for sin, they are only the guarantees sent on before-hand by the Great King, involving His pledge that He will punish sin unless He can secure repentance. They imply God's holy abhorrence of sin; they are the incipient manifestations of the great truth that He can never overlook transgression. What! sinner, do you think God can by any means, and under any circumstances, fail to notice your sin? If He could, then you might find Him

neglecting the means of moral discipline. But if on the contrary, you find Him ever wakeful to the work of discipline, you may know that--this failing of its object,--there is another kind of notice to be taken of sin.

Suppose a parent--a father, should chasten his son with a grief that seemed to tear his very heart and deeply wound his spirit, but all is in vain; would not even you affirm that such a son ought to be punished and much the more for the pains his father has taken to save him, and for the wicked stubbornness that would not be subdued to love and duty? See that mother, wearied and worn; she has chastened her daughter, but it avails nothing; the deep agony of her heart is crushing her to the grave, and her soul weeps over the cruel abuse of a wayward daughter; now tell me, shall all this stubbornness and abuse towards a faithful and fond mother be passed over, and not be heeded?

So, sinner, of all the things for which you deserve to be punished, this is the chief. God has taken so much pains to bless you; His very heart has been moved to the center of His being, and once and again He has cried out--"How can I give thee up?" And now, all effort and pains-taking having failed, shall no account of the stubbornness and guilt which has frustrated the toil of infinite love, be made?

That sickness which your Heavenly Father sent upon you did not reclaim you from your sins. Ah, it will cost you too much to abuse not only God's mercies but His chastisements also. To your surprise and sorrow too, you will find that God has not done all this for your good, that, when abused and resisted by you, it should go for nothing. You have not seen the end of these things yet. You came up from your sick-bed did you? Yes. And then forgot all your sick-bed vows and solemn promises of amendment? Yes! And, on you went, in your sin till you became ten fold more hardened than ever! Ah, you cannot afford to be thus chastised and to have it all result in waxing worse and worse, and in becoming only the more ripe for perdition.

All your infirmities and all your sins; also the sins of those who live near you so that you can see the course of God's dealings with them--indeed the whole history of sin in the universe so far as known to you--all conspire to heighten your responsibility and aggravate the guilt of your sin. For, all these things serve to show you the real evil and wrong of sin; they serve to reveal God's hatred of sin and to assure you that He must and will punish it. Both the good and the evil deeds of all moral beings in the universe so far as you can know them, have an important bearing upon your responsibilities as a moral agent, because they

affect the amount of your knowledge of sin and of God, and hence of your own personal duty.

I am aware that sinners are prone to overlook this fact. They often say--We are held responsible only for our own sins and not for the sins of others; but mark--the sins of others increase your knowledge both of God and of duty, and hence increase your moral responsibility and heighten your guilt, if in the face of so much knowledge you still persist in sinning. The good and the evil of all beings within your knowledge serve to augment your responsibility. These things are continually pouring light on your mind. So also does the entire course of your own history and experience as a sinner under God's government. You cannot eat or drink; rise up or lie down--you can be nowhere and can do nothing without having a continual stream of influence poured upon you which heightens your responsibility because it increases the knowledge of God, of sin and of duty, under which and against which you sin. All your religious privileges belong to the same class, and bear pre-eminently upon the point of your moral responsibility and consequent guilt. Did you ever own a Bible? Has some kind Christian friend given you a copy of that blessed book? Your own Bible! You might read it at your pleasure. It is God's own message from heaven to your soul. But Oh, how you have slighted it! Other friends have sent you messages and letters, but you have treated none of them so! You have always at least read their letters and have commonly treated their expressed wishes with due respect. But you have insulted God by treating His letters with almost total neglect! O, what will that neglected Bible testify against you! Perhaps your mother gave it to you. Her careful hand laid it safely in your trunk when you prepared to leave the home of your childhood. God was in that mother's hand, and through it He placed a copy of His word under your eye, and threw on you a double responsibility to heed it well. You said then--"I am glad that I have got a Bible." So am I--if you use it well. If you study candidly its precepts and heed them in the fear of God, tis all well; but if not, all will go ill with you, and that neglected Bible will follow you up to the judgment, fore-casting your doom and crying out, Anathema! ANATHEMA!! Let the despiser of God's word be ANATHEMA, forever!

And you know this would be only simple justice! You can see that it ought to be so!

REMARKS.

1. I said in the morning that all things work together for good to the Christian, and that ultimately, when he comes to see how all things have had this result, he will regret nothing he has ever done, although he may greatly blame himself for all his sins. It is often the case that Christians here learn lessons of deep experience under their sins. They are deeply affected when they see how God overrules even their sins for good to themselves and to others.

But nothing of this sort happens to sinners. They are not of those that love God, and they have no reason to expect that God will make all things work together for their good. Hence they must both blame themselves and also regret everything they have ever done. They must feel both self-blame and regret that they ever had a Bible; that they ever had a friend; that they ever had health--that they ever had existence! Alas, they will say, alas! that I was ever born! Alas! that I lived so long! Alas! that I ever had one mercy from God to abuse so guiltily! Woe is me that I had a pious mother! Ten thousand woes on my guilty soul that God ever sent me His gospel! Ah me! how have I treasured up wrath against the day of wrath!

2. Sinners have never any good reasons for joy. You recollect the 73rd Psalm. The Psalmist had been struck with the fact that the wicked were so prosperous and so happy. It puzzled him sorely. Long time he could not understand it, and was thereby thrown into great perplexity. But when he went into God's sanctuary, then he says, "I understood their end. Surely Thou didst set them in slippery places; Thou castedst them down into destruction." Let the sinner only see his own case in the light shed from God's word in His sanctuary and he too will understand that he has no occasion for joy. He will see how insane are all his rejoicings. What! and shall he rejoice in that which will only work out his deeper damnation? Can any but an insane mind do this?

Some one of our children may be prosperous, but yet in sin. If so, he is only abusing the blessings God sends him, and surely this can be no matter of joy either to him or to his parents. He cannot afford to have any of these blessings--to use in sin! Ah no! for he must pay for them at last in the bitterness of eternal yet unavailing regret. If you therefore have unconverted children or if I have, we have no occasion for joy in them, however prosperous they may be.

3. Sinners procure this result to themselves. It all comes, sinners, from your own wickedness--from your own voluntary and persistent impenitence and unbelief. If you would turn about and love God, all would be well for you. But if you will

abuse His grace and reject His authority, all is wrong and all will work ill to your soul.

In a spirit not the most honest, you may say--Why did God give me existence at all? He knew how I should abuse it and only bring a curse on myself and curse my own existence.

You ask such questions as these perhaps, and yet you know how impious they are in their implications against your Maker? You ask, Why did God give me existence? That you might use it to His glory and to your own perfect blessedness. But you reply--What? when He knew how I should only curse myself by sin instead of blessing myself by holy obedience? Yes, certainly, none the less so, because of His foreknowledge of your course. Has God's knowledge of the course you would take at all lessened or changed your moral responsibility--the perfect freeness of your choices -the radical, essential guilt of your sin!

God gave you voluntary powers, that, on your own responsibility you might use them for your own welfare. He gave you His Son and in Him an offered salvation, that you might lay hold of everlasting life. He gave you a Bible--that you might read it and become wise unto salvation. He gave you these and a thousand other blessings, that they might be improved, and certainly you do not need to be told that if you will not improve them, you have no right to complain to God.

4. Sinners need not be stumbled by any calamities whatever which befall God's real children. A Christian is sick; well, what of that? Is not the Savior's arm all round about him? But he is going to die! Well, what of that? Is not heaven just before him, and his God with him all through the dark valley of the river of death? He is going to lose all his property, is he? What then? He has got no real property except God--for long ago, his heart made a choice of God for its portion forever.

Sinners often talk as if they were stumbled to see so many calamities befalling the people of God. Let them not trouble themselves about this matter. The Lord knoweth them that are His, and they shall never lack His constant care.

5. All events that transpire in this world or the next, will only make the great gulf fixed between saints and sinners the deeper and the broader--will only make the

saints more holy and more happy--the sinners more sinful and more wretched. The widening space between them in character and in relations to God's throne will of necessity constitute a gulf which none can ever pass over.

6. What an infinite folly is it to judge of things only by their relations to this life! To feel and to think of them only in view of this narrow and limited relation! Looking at things in this light only, we could not rejoice in the Christian's case; we could not pronounce him happy because he has the Almighty God for his friend. Viewing things from such a stand-point of observation, we should find everything dark and perplexing. But in the light of God's sanctuary all comes out clear. See those political, money making men, scrambling after power or wealth; suppose they get it--what then? The more they get, so much the more have they to answer for; so much the deeper will their responsibilities, if not honestly met, sink them in perdition. Christians therefore have never any reason to envy sinners for their earthly prosperity. If they are ever tempted to do so, let them go into the sanctuary; there shall they learn the sinner's awful end. Coming forth from the house of God, they will say:

"Now I'm convinced the Lord is kind

To men of heart sincere,

Yet once my foolish heart repined,

And bordered on despair.

I grieved to see the wicked thrive,

And spoke with angry breath,--

"How pleasant and profane they live,

How peaceful in their death!"

But having searched God's word, he sings:

"There, as in some prophetic glass,

I saw the sinner sit,
High mounted on a slippery place,
Beside a fiery pit.

I heard the wretch profanely boast,
Till at Thy frown he fell;
His honors in a dream were lost,
And he awoke in hell."

One of our texts affirms--"Their feet shall slide in due time and the things that shall come upon them make haste." Another declares--"Their judgment now of a long time lingereth not and their damnation slumbereth not." "Sudden destruction cometh upon them as pangs upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape."

7. God's conduct in all this is just and righteous altogether. Who can object because God holds the sinner responsible for the Bible He gives him, or for the existence with which He has endowed him? Dare you say or even think that God does wrong to hold you responsible for the Bible, for the Sabbath, for the Gospel and for all the knowledge of duty which He has placed within your reach? Is He not bound by the eternal laws of right, to hold all His creatures responsible according to the measure of the blessings He has conferred upon them? Could His moral kingdom be safe on any other principle of administration? Would the holy beings around His throne endure any deviation from these eternally and intrinsically righteous principles? Do you not see--for yourself--that if you persist in abusing His mercies, God will bring you to account and must do it, or cease to be a righteous God? It were a mal-arrangement, and a mal-administration if God were to deviate at all from the principle of holding every moral agent to the strictest accountability for all his moral conduct, according to the light he has enjoyed.

How long, sinner have you lived? During all these years, what have you done? How have you used your life up to this hour? Is it not time that you should pause and take an observation?

In the past pages of my own personal history I can see where God summoned me to answer these solemn questions. I had spent all my early life in new settlements, had enjoyed only the most scanty means of religious instruction--had never heard a prayer in my father's house,--yet one night I most vividly remember I lay a long time awake, and I asked myself--How old am I? How have I lived up to this hour? What have I done towards determining the future condition of my existence? These were questions I had never heard before; but God put them home to my soul in a way that made my flesh quiver and my bones quake. I had spent half my life--for I looked then upon the age of forty as the limit of my earthly days; I had lived out half my life, yet what had I done for God or for my own eternal well-being?

Have you, sinner, ever taken such a reckoning? Sailing along unknown seas in the voyage of life, have you ever paused to take in sails, get out your instruments, and take your bearings? Have you ever stopped, as every wise mariner does, to get out your instruments on some fair, sunny day, to find where you are and which way you must steer to gain the haven of peace and rest? Oh, some of you have never made one careful, thorough, observation to find your course and your actual position. The fair sunny days God gives you, you are too reckless to improve for so needful a purpose. Oh, sinner, there are fearful rocks of damnation close under your lee! The darkness of the tempest is gathering fast upon you; soon you will feel the mountain waves tossing your trail bark and the storm-blast will howl through your shrouds to shriek the requiem of a lost spirit! How will the vivid lightnings gleam down your masts and the thunders break in peals like the judgment trump!

Ah sinner, why did you not take your observation before your bark made these rocks of damnation, and before the storm-king was out in his fearfulest terrors, to dash your soul upon the breakers of final ruin? How can you afford to live in such mad recklessness of your soul's well-being? How can you afford to live content in sin amid such perils of damnation? O to think of your case! When I pass you in the streets, sometimes I rejoice in your joy, for you seem to be happy; but more often I weep, for I see you in your sins, treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. Yes, here you are in your sins, getting an education, doing the very thing which above all other things must augment your responsibility and aggravate your guilt if you will not repent. Ah, you cannot afford to live so. Dear youth, how can you afford to go to the judgment with all the heightened responsibility of an educated sinner? Why will you make your

very existence and all the mercies with which God has blessed this existence, a living and an eternal curse?

It need not be so. You may change the whole current of your future destiny. It may be done by simply changing the current of your present life--by simply giving your heart to God and your whole being to His service. Will you do this? How many times you have been called to decide this question--and alas! called only in vain! O, come now and make one thorough observation. See where you are and what is before you. And will you refuse to do a thing so reasonable? Ah, what a dark night is coming on! How will the dreadful tempest roar and howl around your miserable soul--the tempest of divine wrath that must break on the head of the despiser of saving mercy! And must you be thrust into prison and not be released till you have paid the uttermost farthing? Must the doom of the damned be your eternal portion? It will be so if you choose. "They that hate Me," saith the voice of offered mercy, "love death."

8. What a contrast is here! All things work good to the saint. Although he weeps along his pathway of life with mingled tears of penitence and joy, yet soon he passes beyond all his pains and trials. Up, up, he soars, high above all sorrow, high aloft from this vale of tears. But the sinner dances along, gaily laughing and sporting his way--God calling, rebuking and entreating; saints weeping in grief over his madness and his impending doom; all creation in agony for him, but he dashes on. See, mark the contrast! Note how it widens continually. Saints ascend upward- mounting up, up;--but sinners descend, going down, down, along the sides of the pit, amid the wailings of eternal despair.

Do you say--enough, enough, I have heard enough; you have said enough; I am persuaded, and I am ready to come; I will no more abuse my Savior--no longer slight His offered love. Come, then, you prodigal, come back to your father's house; for there is bread enough and to spare and you need not perish with hunger. Come back with your free hearted confessions of folly and guilt; come and beg for a pittance of the crumbs that fall from his table. Now is the day and the hour of mercy--now is the accepted time!

Need I press again on your attention the wide and awful contrast between saints and sinners? They live together here; the same roof shelters them; the same table spreads for them their daily bread; the same sun rises and pours its blaze of light and joy over all; the same clouds come freighted with waters of summer and distill their precious drops for all; but Oh! how unlike is the scene that lies

beneath! Underneath the surface God marks in one a heart of gratitude and penitence; in another a soul tainted with selfishness and mad upon its lusts and its idols. Of course the one must go up, up, rising in the perfection of its holy character; and the other down, down, sinking under the depraving influence of its own headstrong appetites and its will, opposed to God and goodness.

And where will be the end of these courses? You know, full well! You have no need to know better than you do.

The fatal thing with you, O sinner, is that you don't make up your mind to do known duty. I thought I should, you say, but I did not. I half resolve, but fail to do it. Scores of precious opportunities you have let slip, and each one left you only the more hardened. One opportunity came and waited on you--you were not ready to embrace it, and it passed away; another came and tarried--then rose up and went its way; and yet another and another; and what shall be the end of these things? Satan loves to beguile you; and he it is who is playing this game with you, seducing you to delay till each and every opportunity shall have gone past, hopelessly and forever. Will you let him ruin your soul? You see his hand, winding his fatal chain about your neck; O how long can you be quiet under this operation! How long will you consent to be led captive by Satan at his will, when you know his object is to plunge your soul quick into the depths of hell!

[Back to Top](#)

Guilt Modified by Ignorance

Lecture VI

August 18, 1852

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Acts 17:30: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent."

This passage is part of Paul's sermon at Athens. In discussing it I shall,

I. Show what it means.

II. Apply its principles to some of the great moral movements of the present age.

III. Show what is implied in repentance.

IV. Show why men should repent and reform now.

I. Show what it means.

Paul is speaking of those places and times where the gospel had not been. It was concerning moral actions performed then and there that Paul said, "God winked at" them. This affirmed a plain and well-established truth, viz. that men are held responsible morally according to their light. Speaking of times when men were but imperfectly enlightened, he did not say men were then absolutely guiltless, but only comparatively so. Their sins were a matter of comparative unimportance. When we use this language -- wink at a thing -- we mean, let it pass with slight notice, let it go. Such must have been Paul's meaning. The principle assumed is as I have said, a well-established one -- that men are guilty, or not guilty, or as the case may be, are more or less guilty, according to the knowledge they have or do not have, of their duty.

II. Apply its principles to some of the great moral movements of the present age.

Applying this well-established principle, which all men hold and must hold, I remark, that since my recollection, a vast amount of light has been thrown on many great moral questions, and consequently the conduct of men in reference to the points they involve has assumed very different shades of moral character.

For example, the question of Temperance. I can well remember when ministers used to drink before they went into the pulpit and drink after they came out of it. The same practices still continue in other countries. Then they thought it no wrong, unless they drank to excess, and beyond their own convictions of right. They measured their ideas of its harm by their own standard. But now so much light is abroad that the moral character of rum-drinking is essentially modified. In those very places where men drank without much guilt, they can no longer drink at all without great guilt. Then men were often advised to drink by their physicians. They thought they ought to drink for the sake of health. But this apology is available no longer. Why not? Because men have learned that health

does not demand rum-drinking. They now know that it is wrong to use ardent spirits as a beverage, and that very rarely indeed does it need to be used as a medicine. Of course they cannot use the article as of old without great guilt -- without losing every particle of their piety.

So on the subject of Slavery. For a long time this subject was scarcely discussed at all. Slavery was abolished so quietly and gradually in the Northern States, that but little general discussion was excited. Yet the manner of its abolition in the North left the impression that Northern men had nothing to do with its abolition in the South. The work having been achieved by state legislative action, and without much of any foreign influence of any sort, it was not unnaturally assumed that other states would abolish slavery in the same way. Indeed so little attention was given to this subject by Northern men, that they did not notice the gradual encroachments of the slave power upon the general government.

But this state of things has greatly changed. Now men generally understand the relations of slavery to the national government. The startling fact is but too apparent that our Union is virtually a slaveholding state, and that Congress have seriously undertaken to make the entire domain of our country a slaveholding land. They enact their Fugitive Slave Bill into so-called law, and then send their commissioned agents into the free states, upon free soil, to compel free men, whose souls abhor slavery, to become slave-catchers, and to deliver up unto their masters or claimants, the servant that has escaped -- in the very face of God's own command to the contrary, not to say also in the very face of every dictate of humanity. When the Northern states set their own slaves free, they had no thought of ever being dragged thus into the support of slavery. They expected, and were authorized to expect that the example of emancipation would be followed by the Southern states. But instead of this, what do we see? Laws enacted by Congress which people all the free states with commissioners authorized to seize men as slaves -- which leave them only the miserable mockery of the forms of trial, and which then, under heavy pains and penalties, compel us to sustain all this iniquity, and aid in dragging the arrested victim into hopeless bondage.

I do not want to rail -- you who hear me preach so often know full well that I am not; nor do I mean to rail on the worst of men or the most oppressive of their measures now; but the question what we, as Christian men shall do under this monstrous oppression is really momentous. The question now has taken this

form; shall we individually and personally aid in making men slaves?

This makes a solemn issue. I feel it to be such. So must all Northern men and Northern Christians. It is a new issue. We did not expect when we entered into this Union, that we were to be dragooned into the business of slave-hunting. We did not calculate then to become the tools of the slave power, to help make men found on free soil slaves. We must make up our minds how we will act under this new issue.

This whole subject presents some curious questions pertaining to political action, the pulpit, and the duty of Christian men. Before and during the American revolution, there was much more political discussion in the pulpit than there is now, or perhaps than there has ever been elsewhere. Indeed the great questions of the revolution were all discussed in the pulpit and with signal ability. As some writer has said, "The pulpit thundered and lightened on the subject of liberty." The consequence was the true ideas of liberty were understood, and came to have a living development in the public mind. The tallest statesmen of the land heard the gospel of liberty proclaimed from the sacred desk. Who needs be told that ministers then met their responsibilities to the state and to the public weal, fearlessly and boldly? Who does not know that all these questions were then blended with prayer, and civil liberty was hailed as a boon from heaven?

But ministers in our day have become afraid to stand forth and speak as honest, fearless men on this subject, and political men have become fearful and sensitive lest the pulpit should utter its voice for freedom. But why this sensitiveness of politicians? And why this timidity in the heralds of the gospel? Have not all Christian men political duties to perform? Ought they not to search out these duties, and settle in the fear of God all the great questions they involve, and then meet their political responsibilities in the fear of God and for the welfare of the nation?

It is not generally considered that neither of the two great political parties can manage this question of slavery at their option. It is a great blessing to have two great parties. They correct each other's errors, watch each other's movements, and if either party should swerve essentially from the right path, the good men of this swerving party would go over to the other, and quickly turn the scale.

At the South, both parties are united on the subject of slavery, and will not for a moment diverge from the line of strictest fidelity to its interests. Each of the two

great parties have, or rather had their other issues; now all other issues have fallen into comparative insignificance, and the matter of controversy between them turns no longer upon principles, but upon men, and the spoils of office. But the thing I would say is, that neither of them can control the subject of slavery. Hence when the united South take their stand firmly, and irrespective of party, say -- "So far will we go and no farther," then each party must meet them on their own ground, or lose their support, and with it all chances of success as a party.

Both parties therefore concede to the South all they ask. For example, they both accede to the Compromise acts, Fugitive law included, and affirm this law to be "a finality." This done, they cry, Drop the question of slavery -- let all be quiet as the grave on this point, and let us each carry our other questions if we can. This is just the issue now made. Drop the question of slavery, and no longer make it in any degree a political issue. This is the demand first of the whole South; next, of the two great political parties. Shall the Christian church accede to this? Shall we let this entire subject alone, and go in for contention of the other issues as if they had any importance worth naming in the comparison?

Until matters assumed their present form, a multitude of Christians acted conscientiously with one or the other of these great parties. Both of these parties have promised Anti-Slavery men pretty largely. For example, the Whig party promised to keep out Texas, and to prevent a war with Mexico; and many did believe, honestly too, that one party or the other would do something to withdraw the support of the general government from slavery. So long as they could reasonably indulge this hope, and honestly did so, I cannot condemn these Christians for their adherence to their parties. Many conscientious men thought that they could do most good in that course, and hence we ought not to complain of them for it.

But now it is not so much as pretended that any good results will ensue from acting with either of the great parties. Not even a bait is now held out to allure conscientious and good men into their support. Nobody contends that under the control of either of these great parties, there is, at present, the faintest hope of repealing or even modifying the Fugitive Slave Bill, or getting one good thing for truth or righteousness. Therefore, I ask, can any good man hold on to either of those parties -- for no good object whatever -- not even the promise of any good to the cause of the slave being held out as an inducement?

So of the church. Of old it was often said, What have we to do with slavery? Men did not see that Congress had any particular responsibility on this subject, and hence they could not see that as Christian men, or as a church, they could have any special responsibility in regard to slavery. But now the world is saying, What are ye Christians doing? Are you with us in the support of our great party? O yes. Now this may please the men of the world, but it certainly can never secure their respect. It never can do honor to the firmness of Christian principle. Do you ask, What ought Christian men to do? Doubtless they ought to use all their legitimate influence against the Fugitive Slave Bill, and against all the political aggressions of slavery upon our free land and government. Doubtless they ought to vote for freedom as against slavery, and speak out in no mistakable words and tones, till the nation shall hear and shall purge itself from all national patronage of this horrible system.

The same should be said of the responsibilities and duties of the great benevolent societies. Time was when great ignorance prevailed in these societies, touching their relations to slavery. When I entered the ministry, not a word was said about the relations of the American Board to slavery, or of the Bible Society, or the Tract Society. But ere long the question came up in regard to the relations sustained by each of those societies to slavery. The Christian public ask, What is the true position which those societies sustain towards slavery? What is their duty? What are they in fact doing? Does their influence go to sustain the foul system? They all claim to be disseminating a pure Christianity, and of course they profess to bear a pure testimony against every sin, and especially against all great public iniquities. Are they in fact doing so? They should consider that increased light begets augmented responsibilities, and that they cannot pass along now, treating slavery as if it were no sin -- however conveniently they might have done so in those times of ignorance which God winked at. There is too much light now on the sin of slavery, and on its multiform relations to the church and to the nation, to admit of neutrality in regard to it, or to allow the assumption that it is not to be regarded as a great sin.

III. What is implied in repentance?

Repentance is turning the heart to God, and abandoning selfishness. The work of repentance belongs to the heart or will. Of course it must be the function of the voluntary or moral department of the mind's powers.

But especially let me remark, that whole repentance is genuine, there will be and

must be external reformation. Men may have emotions of sorrow, with no change of purpose; but this is not real repentance.

IV. Why should men now repent and reform?

Because as soon as we get light on any former practice which shows us that it is opposed to God's will, we cannot persist in it without greatly augmented guilt. For example, the case of intemperance. As soon as increasing light on this subject showed the extent of its mischiefs, and the absence of any and all redeeming good, the practice of using intoxicating drink as a beverage came to be seen at once as the murder of a man's own body and soul, and as a fatal temptation to his neighbor. Then, how could any man persist longer in its use without damning sin?

So of slavery. As soon as light prevails on this subject, men can no longer go on in the same course of sustaining the system, without the greatest guilt. It will not answer to substitute evasions, and dodging and side issues in place of real repentance and true reform. To evade the claims of truth thus serves not to acquit the soul before God or man, but only to strengthen depravity and harden the heart.

For an illustration of this principle take the case of the Jews. Before Christ came among them, great moral darkness reigned. When Christ came among them, preaching the kingdom of God and illustrating its true import in His life and spirit, in His miracles of goodness and finally in His death on the cross, they could not but "see a great light." Therefore, when they resisted this light, and resorted to their lies to evade the evidence furnished by His resurrection, their consciences became exceedingly hardened. After all this light, could they go on rejecting their known Messiah without greatly augmented guilt? Nay, verily. The same principle applies to the nation as a whole, and to all its individual members before whom this gospel light shone.

Refusal to repent when light reveals sin and duty, must hasten the destruction of any nation or people under heaven. How long did the Jews continue to prosper after Christ had come and had been rejected? Terrible was their hardening under so much light, and equally fearful was their doom! History records no case of more fearful destruction, or of more black and inexcusable guilt. When the hour of their retribution at last came, God poured out the cup of His indignation upon them without mixture, and bitterly did they drink it to its dregs! So must it be

with every nation that shall refuse to repent when light breaks in and duty stands revealed, and yet they refuse to do it.

The governments of the earth, if they resist the light that breaks in upon them, are sure to be destroyed. Who has not looked with admiration upon the English government, and marked its course when pressed by public sentiment to adopt demanded reforms? Their history for centuries is a series of triumphs achieved by the growing intelligence, firmness and wisdom of the people, calling for reforms in government or in the social condition of the masses. We can, all of us, remember the agitation long and deep which preceded the glorious act of West India emancipation. If the government had withstood that appeal and refused to emancipate, I believe the refusal must have crushed the very throne itself. The people demanded the reform. The pulpit thundered and lightened -- the whole public mind rocked as with the upheavings of an earthquake. The only safety lay in yielding to their demands.

No Christian nation since the world began has been able to stand against the united prayers and testimony of God's church. No one has had strength to resist any reform which God's people have unitedly demanded. If they were seriously to determine on resistance, they would find God Himself arrayed against them. O how would He drive His judgment-chariot, axle-deep in their blood and bones! Let His people stand on His side and do His work; they may expect His interposing arm for their support, crowning their toils with glorious victory. This must be so, by a law as undeviating and unfailing as the veracity of Jehovah!

This principle applies to all organizations, benevolent or ecclesiastical. If they resist reform when growing light demands it, God will be against them, and His chariot will grind them to powder! What does He want of a church or a benevolent society that resists reform when light and truth demand it, and sets itself in array against the progress of His cause? He knows how to use them for beacons of warning if they refuse to be used as instruments of progress in doing good. Therefore if any people or associate body will not receive and obey the light, their ruin is sure. The best of all possible reasons for repentance is, that it is God's good pleasure. What! if the expression of God's will -- if the manifestation of His wishes to this effect cannot move men to repent, what can? What would you think of a child who should say, "No matter what my parents think -- who cares for their feelings or their wishes? It is no reason at all for my conduct that my father or mother desire me to do as they say." What, I ask,

would you think of such a child? Can anything be more monstrous than such a trampling underfoot of the most tender and sacred obligations?

Is it then no reason for you who are before me here today that God now commands you all to repent? Nay, more, that with tenderness He invites and entreats, and cries out, "How can I give thee up?"

REMARKS.

1. When light breaks in upon men, it is awful, and even terrifying if they only resist and rebel against it, gathering up their utmost strength like the ancient Jews, to oppose the claims of truth and of God. This is true of governments when they resist the light, oppose reform, and raise for odium's sake the senseless cry, fanaticism! FANATICISM!

2. But the occasion calls on me to apply these principles to the course pursued by some of the great benevolent societies of the day. We wait to know what they have done and are doing in regard to the great reforms of modern times. The American Tract Society is a great organization acting under a charter which allows them to publish only such matter as is approved by a publishing committee composed of six men, one from each of six leading evangelical denominations. All these are Northern men now, and I believe have always been so. If we inquire for the special circumstances under which they now act, we find that since the agitation of the slavery question at the North, the people of the South have become exceedingly sensitive lest some Anti-Slavery truth should come in among them in Northern books, and thus reach their slaves. They became jealous of the entire mass of Northern literature. The Tract Society, dreading to incur their jealousy, and anxious to make their publications acceptable to Southern people, have been in the practice of expunging Anti-Slavery sentiments wherever found in the volumes they thought best to publish. A great many choice books came before them, too valuable to be discarded, and yet some few pages or paragraphs of an Anti-Slavery truth raised a question which they met by expunging the passages. At first they did this without giving the public any notice of the fact. But when the fact came to be known, it was felt by very many to be great injustice to the authors and a fraud upon the public. They became alarmed and protested against the course. They exposed the obvious error of the Tract Society in mutilating books without giving notice of the fact. The result has been that the Tract Society were compelled to modify their course, so far as to advertise the public of the omissions they had made,

whether the subject were baptism, slavery, or any other moral or religious question. But in one important respect they have continued on as before. They have taken particular pains to strike out every Anti-Slavery sentiment, whether in psalms and hymns, or in any other books.

Now some have stigmatized the Tract Society's committee as Pro-Slavery, but I do not believe they are Pro-Slavery in the sense of aiming to sustain slavery. They aim I suppose to be neutral on this question, and especially they mean to print nothing which would offend the people of the South or their Northern friends. This I take to be their policy. I believe it to be a wicked policy, but I do not know that they sin in pursuing it. They may think they are doing God service.

But I need not pursue this subject farther. The policy is one which we do not approve, which no good man ought to approve, but it is one which prevails in a great many of the pulpits in our country -- I cannot say to their honor, or to the augmentation of their moral power.

3. What shall we do with men who being enlightened upon their duty, do not repent? By one who spoke in behalf of the Tract Society, you have been warned to be on your guard against the force of the sentiment of justice, and perhaps not without some occasion. Many are ready to cry out for fire to come down from heaven upon the men who seem not to keep pace with the demands of truth. But this is never the best way to reform abuses and bring sinners to repentance. God acts on the principle of the greatest possible forbearance. He forbears as long as He wisely can. He beseeches and entreats, and thus labors to secure the desired repentance and reform.

What then shall we do with offending nations, and with our own government when they impose upon us fugitive laws? Of course we are to set about their reformation. Do you ask, how? The way is open. The Christian church has it in her power to reform this nation. She has long held the balance of political power, and she holds it still. Let all Christian men say, "We will not sustain slavery; the men who are in league with it cannot have our votes." -- and the thing would be done. Let all Christian voters be united in this, and they could just as certainly elect the man of their choice as there should be another election. Let them try it. They have the consciences of men on their side, and they would find strength and help rising up where they did not expect it. If they did not succeed in the next election, they surely would succeed soon. Ere another election came round,

politicians would say, "We must honor and please the church," just as they now say, "We must honor the South."

But the way to do this is not to turn slaveholders ourselves, and force our opinions down men's throats, and cast them from the church if they do not vote our ticket. The right way is to enlightenment on the subject -- to treat them kindly and yet with great fidelity, and to try to bring them over to the truth and the right by reasoning and persuasion. Substantially we should pursue the same methods of labor and influence that we adopt when we would change men's position on any moral question, the same as when we would convert sinners from sin to God.

In regard now to the Tract Society, shall I excommunicate them all at once? Would this avail anything? Shall we not rather attempt to persuade them as to what we think their duty? Shall we not try to convince them of the great mistake in their policy? What right have we to excommunicate them until we have expostulated?

But some of you say this has been done already. I ask if it has been done both kindly and earnestly, and with all the perseverance that the case demands?

But again the question returns, what shall be done by the church to abolish slavery? I answer, Let all her organizations speak out with decision and firmness. Let the Congregational Conference recently organized in Ohio take their stand and bear their solemn and earnest testimony. Let them send a commission bearing their fraternal exhortations to other bodies of Congregationalists -- to Iowa -- to Wisconsin -- to New England, -- wherever they can gain a hearing. But let us not cast off and condemn the Tract Society without a hearing. Who does not believe that it is in the power of the great Christian organizations of our country to reform that society?

4. There is another society formed for the dissemination of moral truth in its due proportions, not avoiding its bearings on the great sins of the times. No one can deny that it is always right to supply any defects in the labors and influence of the great American societies by constituting another society to do the whole work, as it should be done. This is one of the proper means to correct the evils of which we complain. We can support the new society, and this will be of itself a testimony against the objectionable course of the old. Hence if I were to give anything to the old, I would give much more to the new, both because I would

have my donations bear a testimony for righteous principles, and because the new society will have for some time yet to come, few friends and patrons, while the old will have many.

5. Another question is often asked, which has an important bearing upon the subject of church communion. Shall we commune with an offending brother while we are laboring with him to reclaim him from his sin?

In my view the answer depends upon his relations as an arraigned man. I must make no man a sinner by construction. I must not assume that he is wrong, but wait for the proof of the fact. The common doctrine of law and justice is that I must assume my brother to be innocent until he is proved to be guilty. On this principle, the question of treatment should obviously be determined, embracing, of course, the question of church communion.

6. It is always wise to avail ourselves of the admissions of our opponents. If on the question of Slavery they concede that all good Northern men abhor it, let us admit and use this concession. It will be a powerful weapon in our hands.

7. It is always impolitic to represent our opponents to be farther from us than they really are. For example, it would be the height of folly for me to say -- The whole North American Church is for Slavery, defending and sustaining the system. If this were true, how greatly would the fact relieve the conscience of the South! Slaveholders would surely feel that the Christian sentiment of all those who were in a situation to judge in the case is in their favor. And if the fact were not true, it were much better I should not affirm it to be so. My affirming it will have much the same influence on Southern mind that the actual truth would have. Let me take care how I represent the church to be more in favor of Slavery than she is. Rather let us say, if the facts will sustain us in it, that we, Christian men of the North, are all agreed that Slavery is a great sin.

8. But there is yet another reason for the largest charity towards our Northern brethren. The want of charity serves to provoke rather than to convince or to convert. Suppose I meet a Northern brother, and accuse him of being pro-slavery, and try to make him a slaveholder by construction. If his judgment is not carried by the obvious justice of the charge, I am doing him to good. If he thinks himself innocent, he will of course feel himself wronged, and all my efforts with him are worse than useless.

Uncharitable measures never succeed. If even the Apostles, with all their miracles and tongues, had gone out with a bad spirit, they must have labored in vain. God suffers His own cause to experience a temporary defeat, rather than give success to men of a bad spirit. I have no doubt that in many cases the anti-slavery cause has been thrown aback by the bad spirit of its advocates. If we have erred in this matter, we must repent. We can never hope for the blessing of God until we do.

Before I went to the Mediterranean, I had taken the stand in my congregation in New York city that no slaveholder could come to our communion. In that vast congregation some slaveholders of professed piety were almost always present, and the rebuke was being solemnly felt. The example was exerting a decidedly good influence. But when I came back, I soon found that a strange state of things had come about. Everything was hot and fiery. I felt bound to tell them plainly that they were casting out devils through Beelzebub, and by getting his spirit were really doing his work. This would never do. The cause of love and of human well-being could not be built up by uncharitableness and hate.

If, now, our General Government needs reform, (of which I have no doubt,) then let us forthwith employ all constitutional means and measures for its reform. Of the wisdom of doing all this no one can for a moment doubt.

So of the Tract Society, they have done good; let them have all due honor for what good they have done. Some of you may have been converted through the agency of their publications and labors. I cannot say that any man of you is a hypocrite because I find you giving your money and your prayers to the Tract Society. If you choose to give to that Society, do so. The opportunity will be afforded by every man to give to whichever Society he pleases.

As for voting for either of the two great party candidates, on a strongly pro-slavery platform, that question is in my mind easily settled. I can do no such thing. Sooner shall I cut off my own right hand than suffer it to drop a vote for such men, standing on such platforms.

It would be interesting and useful too, if there were time, to show how all great reforms naturally throw men into three great classes, viz. the Conservatives, the Radicals, and the Moderates. It were easy to show the philosophy of this classification, and how it results from the laws of mind and the action of men in society. It were still more important to inquire what are the mutual duties of

these three classes towards each other. Scarce any topic more needs to be discussed and well understood at the present time. But my hour is more than spent now, and I must not enlarge.

In some respects I am sorry, and in some respects I am not sorry to be called on to say so much on this subject of slavery -- its issues, and the duties of Christians in regard to it. There is the greatest need that these things should be investigated and well considered. The public mind will and must act on these questions, and the action taken is continually affecting the honor of Christianity and the welfare of the church and of souls, most fundamentally. It cannot, therefore, be amiss to bring this subject into the pulpit. Let it engage your serious attention, and move your hearts to seek divine wisdom in prayer.

My only regret to occupy your time on this subject lies in the fact that so many among us are all wrong, and need to be urged today to repent of all sin and yield up their hearts at once and forever to the service and fear of the Lord their God. For them, I fear it may be an evil to have their attention diverted, even for one Sabbath, from those great things that pertain to their present and everlasting peace.

[Back to Top](#)

**Salvation Difficult to The Christian- Impossible to The Sinner-- and The
Salvation of Sinners Impossible- No.'s 1 & 2**

Lectures VII & VIII

September 15, 1852

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 Pet. 4:18: "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly
and the sinner appear?"

LECTURE VII.

From the connection of this passage, some have inferred that the apostle had his eye immediately upon the destruction of Jerusalem. They suppose this great and fearful event to be alluded to in the language, "For the time has come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God?" This may refer to the destruction of the city and temple of God's ancient people, yet the evidence for the opinion does not seem to be decisive. A reference to the event is possible and even probable. We know that when Jerusalem was destroyed, not one Christian perished. They had timely notice in the signs Christ had already given them, and perceiving those signs in season, they all fled to Pella, on the east of the Jordan, and hence were not involved in the general destruction.

But whether Peter refers to this particular event or not, one thing is plain: he recognizes a principle in the government of God, namely, that the righteous will be saved, though with difficulty, but the wicked will not be saved at all. It is plain throughout this whole chapter that Peter had his mind upon the broad distinction between the righteous and the wicked--a distinction which was strikingly illustrated in the destruction of Jerusalem, and which can never lack illustrations under the moral and providential government of a holy God.

The salvation of the righteous, though certain, is difficult. Though saved, they will be scarcely saved. On this basis rests the argument of the Apostle;-- that if their salvation be so difficult, the sinner cannot be saved at all. His salvation is

utterly impossible. This is plainly the doctrine of the text. It had a striking exemplification in the destruction of Jerusalem, and the passage, as I have said, may or may not have reference to that event. All students of the Bible know that this great destruction is often held up as a type or model of the final judgment of the world. It was a great event on the page of Jewish history, and certainly had great significance as an illustration of God's dealings towards our sinning race.

In pursuing this subject, I purpose to show,

I. Why the salvation of the righteous is difficult;

II. Why the salvation of the sinner is impossible;

III. Answer the question of the text--Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

I. Why the salvation of the righteous is difficult.

The difficulty in the salvation of either the righteous or the wicked turns not on any want of mercy in the heart of God. It is not because God is implacable and hard to be appeased: this is not the reason why the salvation of even the sinner is impossible.

Again, it is not in any lack of provision in the atonement to cover all the wants of sinners, and even to make propitiation for the sins of the world. The Bible nowhere raises the question as to the entire sufficiency of the atonement to do all that an atonement can do or need do for the salvation of our race.

But, positively, one difficulty is found in the nature of God's government, and in the nature of free agency in this world. God has so constituted man as to limit Himself to one mode of government over him. This must be moral, and not physical. It must be done by action upon mind as mind, and not by such force as applies legitimately to move matter. If the nature of the case admitted the use of physical force, it would be infinitely easy for God to move and sway such puny creatures as we are. That physical omnipotence which sweeps the heavens and upholds the universe could find no difficulty in moving lumps of clay so small and insignificant as we. But mind cannot be moved as God moves the planets. Physical force can have no direct application to mind for the purpose of determining its moral action. If it should act upon mind as it does upon matter,

we certainly know there could be neither moral action nor moral character in such beings as we are. We could not have even a conception of moral conduct. How then could the thing itself possibly exist?

Men are placed under God's government with such a created constitution and such established relations to it that they must act freely. God has made them capable of controlling their own moral conduct by the free action of their own wills, and now, He expects and requires them to choose between his service and rebellion. Such being the case, the great difficulty is to persuade sinners to choose right. God is infinitely ready to forgive them if they will repent; but the great problem is to persuade them to do so. They are to be prepared for heaven. For this, an entire change of moral character is requisite. This could be done with the utmost ease, if nothing more were needful than to take them into some Jordan stream and wash them, physically, as if from some external pollution, and God should be pleased to employ physical power for this purpose. But the change needed being in its nature moral, the means employed must be moral. All the influence must be of a moral character.

Now every body knows that a moral agent must be able, in the proper sense of this term, to resist every degree of moral influence. Else he cannot be a moral agent. His action must be responsible action, and therefore must be performed of his own free will and accord, no power interposing of such a sort or in such measure as to overbear or interfere with his own responsible agency. Hence the necessity of moral means to convert sinners, to gain their voluntary consent in this great change from sin to holiness, from disobeying to obeying God. And hence the need that this change be wrought, ultimately, by moral means alone. God may and does employ physical agencies to act morally, but never to act physically. He may send sickness, to reach the heart, but not to purge away any sort of physical sin.

There are a great many difficulties in the way of converting sinners, and saving them when once converted--many which people are prone to overlook. Hence we must go into some detail, in order to make this matter plain.

One class of these difficulties is the result of an abused constitution. When Adam and Eve were created, their appetites were doubtless mild and moderate. They did not live to please themselves and gratify their own appetites. Their deep and all engrossing desire and purpose to please God was the law of their entire activities. For a time, therefore, they walked in holy obedience, until

temptation came in a particular form, and they sinned. Sin introduced another law--the law of self-indulgence. Every one knows how terribly this law tends to perpetuate and strengthen itself. Every one knows the fearful sway it gains so rapidly over the whole being when once enthroned in power. Now, therefore, the beautiful order and subordination which in holiness obtained throughout all their active powers, was broken up and subverted under the reign of sin. Their appetites lost their proper balance. No longer subordinate to reason and to God, they became inordinate, clamorous, despotic.

Precisely in this does sin consist--in the irrational gratification of the appetites and passions. This is the form in which it appeared in our first parents. Such are its developments in all the race.

Now in order to save men, they must be brought back from this, and restored to a state in which God and reason control the free action of the mind, and appetite is held in due subjection.

Now here let me be understood. The want of balance--the moral disorder of which I speak--is not this, that the will has become enslaved, and has lost its inherent power of free moral action. This is not the difficulty, but the thing is, that the sensibility has been enormously developed, and the mind accustoms itself to yield to the demands it makes for indulgence.

Here is the difficulty. Some have formed habits and have confirmed them until they have become immensely strong, and it becomes exceedingly difficult to induce them to break away. The rescue must be effected by moral, not by physical means, and the problem is to make the moral means powerful enough for the purpose.

Again, we must notice among the difficulties in question, the entanglements of a multitude of circumstances. I have often thought it well for Christians that they do not see all their difficulties at first. If they did, its discouraging effect might be disastrous. Coming upon the mind while it is poisoning the elements of the great question--a life of sin or a life of holiness; or after conversion, falling in their power upon the mind while yet its purpose to serve God is but little confirmed, the result might be not only greatly trying but perhaps fatal. But the ways of God in this as in all things are admirable. He does not let them see all their future difficulties at first, but lets them come up from time to time in succession as they have strength to meet them and overcome.

The great difficulty is, living to please self rather than God. It is wonderful to see how much this difficulty is enhanced by the agency Satan and sin have had in the framework of society. It would seem that a bait is held before every man, whatever his position and circumstances may be. One cannot but be astonished at the number of baits provided and laid in the habits and usages--we might perhaps say, in the very construction and constitution of society. See how men are interlocked in the relations of life, partners in business, associates in pleasure, attached in the more endearing and permanent relations of life, husbands and wives--lovers and loved, parents and children: how many influences of a moral sort, and often tempting to sin, grow out of each, and O how many, out of all these complicated and various relations! Youth of both sexes are educated--perhaps together--perhaps apart--yet in either case there arises a host of social attractions, and in the history of the race, who does not know that often the resulting influences are evil? The troubles and cares of business--how often do they "like a wild deluge come," and overwhelm the soul that else would "consider its ways and turn its feet unto God's testimonies." How complicated are the sources of irritation that provoke men's spirits to ill temper and ensnare them thus into sin! Many times we marvel and say--what amazing grace is needful here! What power, less than Almighty, could pluck God's children from such a network of snares and toils, and plant them at last on the high ground of established holiness!

There is a man chained to a wife who is a constant source of temptation and trial to him. There is a wife who sees scarce a peaceful moment in all her life with her husband;--all is vexation and sorrow of spirit.

Many parents have children who are a constant trial to them. They are indolent, or they are reckless; or they are self-willed and obstinate; their own tempers perhaps are chafed and they become a sore temptation to a similar state of chafed and fretted temper in their parents. On the other hand children may have equal trials in their parents. Where can you find a family in which the several members are not in some way a source of trial to each other! Sometimes the temptation comes in an appeal to their ambition and pride. Their children have some qualities for the parents to be proud of, and this becomes a snare to parents and children both. O, how complicated are the temptations which cross and re-cross every pathway of human life! Who but God can save against the power of such temptations?

Many children have been brought up in error. Their parents have held erroneous opinions and they have had their moral constitution saturated with this influence from their cradle and upwards. How terrible such an influence must inevitably be!

Or, the business of their parents may have been such as to miseducate them--as the business of rum-selling, for example, and who does not know how terribly this kind of influence cleaves to a man even as his skin and seems to become a part of him by pervading the very tissues of his soul!

When the mind gives itself up to self-indulgence and a host of appetites became clamorous and impetuous, what a labour it must be to bring the soul into harmony with God. How many impulses must be withstood and overcome; how great the change that must be wrought in both the physical and moral state of the man. No wonder that the devil flatters himself that he has got the race of depraved men into his snares and can lead them captive at his will. Think how many thousand years he has been planning and scheming--studying human nature and the laws of depravity, that he may make himself fully master of the hellish art of seducing moral agents away from God and holiness. The truth is, we scarcely begin to realize how artful a devil we have to encounter. We scarcely begin to see how potent an adversary is he who, "like a roaring lion, goes about seeking whom he may devour," and who must be resisted and overcome, or we are not saved.

Many are not aware of the labour necessary to get rid of the influence of a bad education. I speak now of education in the broad, comprehensive sense--embracing all that molds the habits, the temper, the affections, as well as develops the intellect. Oft times the affections become unhappily attached, yet the attachment is exceedingly strong, and it shall seem like the sundering of the very heart-strings, to break it off. This attachment may fasten upon friends, wives, husbands, or children; it may make gold its god and bow down to such an image. Sometimes we are quite inadequate to judge of the strength of this attachment, except as we may see what strange and terrible means God is compelled to use to sever it. O how does He look with careful, tearful pity upon his entangled and endangered children, marking the bands that are coiled around their hearts to bind them to earth, and contriving how He can best sunder those bands and draw back their wandering hearts to himself. We know He never does afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men--never his people but for their

profit that they may partake of his holiness; yet who does not know how often He is compelled to bring tears from their eyes; to wring their hearts with many sorrows; to tear from them many a fond and loved object of their affections--else He could not save them from their propensities towards sin and self-indulgence. O what a work is this which Christ undertakes that He may save his people from their sins! How strange and how complicated are the difficulties! Who could overcome them but God!

Again, the darkness of nature is so great and so gross, that it must be an exceedingly great work to save them from its influence, and pour the true light of God through their intelligence. It is by no means sufficient to know the mere theory of religion, or to know all of religion that the human mind, unenlightened by the Divine Spirit, can know. Indeed Christians never know themselves except as they see themselves in God's own light. They need to see God's character in its real nature, and then in view of what God is, they can see and estimate themselves rightly. This is one important part of the truth on this subject; and another point is, that God himself by His Spirit becomes the teacher of the humble and trustful, and so enlightens the understanding that divine truth can be seen in its real colors and just proportions. And now do you say--O God, show me what I am and make me know my own heart thoroughly? Did you ever find yourself in doubt and perplexity about your own state, and then, crying for help and light unto God, has He not answered your prayer by first revealing Himself and his own character, so that in the light reflected from his character, you saw your own, and in the light of his principles of action you saw your own, and in the light shown you as to his heart you also saw your own? You do not see your own state of mind by simply inverting your mental eye and looking within, but by being drawn so near to God that you come into real and deep sympathy with Him. Then seeing and knowing God, you see and know yourself. You cannot help seeing whether your heart responds in sympathy and aim with his, and this very fact reveals your own heart to yourself. It is wonderful how much the Christian learns of himself by truly learning God. And it is not less a matter of wonder and admiration that Christians should experience such moral transformations by simply knowing God and by being drawn into sympathy with Him the more as the more they know Him. The great difficulty is that Christians are shy of God--shy--especially as soon as they relapse into the spirit of the world. Then they find an almost resistless inclination to keep off, to hold themselves aloof from anything like close communion with God. Hence God is

compelled to draw them back, to discipline them with afflictions, to spoil their idols and dash in pieces their graven images. Always awake and on the alert--so the Bible represents it: "He that keepeth Israel shall never slumber or sleep." By day and by night He watcheth, and "keepeth them as the apple of his eye!" How wonderful is such condescension and loving kindness!

Finally, the greatness of the change requisite in passing from sin to real holiness--from Satan's kingdom into full fitness for Christ's, creates no small difficulty in the way of saving even the converted. It is difficult, nay impossible, to make men see this all at once. And indeed if the Christian were to see it all at once, it would not unlikely overwhelm him in despair. Hence God wisely lets him see enough to impress strongly his need of divine aid, and enough to make him cry out--"Who then can be saved?"

REMARKS.

But I must make some remarks in application of the subject so far discussed, and reserve the consideration of our remaining points to another time.

1. We see why the scriptures are so full of exhortations to Christians to run, RUN, and especially to run by rule. He that striveth for the mastery must by all means strive "lawfully," i. e., according to the rules in such cases made and provided. So let the Christian be careful not only that he runs, but that he runs the right way and in the right manner.

2. We see also why the Christian is exhorted in like manner to fight, grasping the sword, buckling on the shield, putting on the helmet of salvation, preparing himself in all points for a warlike march through an enemy's country, where fighting must be looked for day and night.

3. Coupled with this is the fitting exhortation to stand fast--to plant his feet firmly and brace himself with all his strength as if the enemies' hosts were about to charge with the deadly bayonet. Stand fast, their Captain shouteth; play the man for your king and for yourselves, for the enemy are down upon you in strength and in wrath!

Agonize too, struggle, for fierce will the conflict be. It is no contemptible foe whom you must face. The scriptures represent that only the violent take this kingdom of God, and they do it "by force." What could be more expressive of the energy to be put forth by Christ's people if they would win the victory and

wear the crown?

We see why Christians are represented as wrestling, like men in personal struggle for the mastery. They have a personal enemy to fight and to subdue.

They must however give all diligence. A lazy man cannot get to heaven. To get there costs toil and labor. For his will must be sanctified. The entire voluntary department of his being must be renovated. It is remarkable how the Christian warfare develops the will. Not an obstinate will--not a self-will, do I mean, but a strong and firm will. The man, disciplined in the Christian conflict, cries out, I must and I will believe; I will trust.

The Christian is also commanded to watch--not to close his eyes for a little more sleep and a little more slumber. His condition is one of hourly peril, and therefore, what Christ says to one, he says to all--WATCH. We can see the reason for this in the light revealed from our subject.

We see also why the Christian is to pray always, as well as to agonize and watch. It is not all to be done by his own unaided exertions. In fact, one of his chief exertions should turn upon this very point--that he pray always, "watching thereunto," lest any thing draw his heart down from the throne of his Great Helper.

We may also see why Christians are exhorted to separate themselves from the world. They are told they must hang the old man upon the cross. To this there are no exceptions. Whoever would be saved must be crucified--that is, as to "the old man and his deeds." The crucifixion of Christ is an emblem of this, and serves, therefore, in a measure, to show what this must and should be.

Does any one suppose that the whole intent of Christ's crucifixion is to meet the demands of the violated law? Not so; but it was also to be an emblem of the work to be wrought upon and within the Christian's soul. Its old selfish habitudes must be broken up and its powerful tendencies to evil be slain.

Mark also why Christians are exhorted to spend the time of their sojourning here in fear, and to walk softly and carefully as before God, through all the meanderings of their pilgrimage. In all holy conversation--so reads his book of counsel--being steadfast, immovable, always abounding in work--the work, too, of the Lord, as knowing that so his labour will not be in vain in the Lord. Every weight must he lay aside--must not encumber himself with many cares--must not

overload himself with gold, nor even with care and effort to get it--must be watchful most diligently on this side and on that, remembering, for both his quickening and his comfort, that Christ, too, with his holy angels, watches evermore over him, saying, "I am determined to save you if I can, but I cannot unless I can first gain and then retain your attention, and then rouse up your hearts to the utmost diligence, coupled with the most simple-hearted faith." O what a conflict there must be to rescue each saved sinner from the jaws of Satan and from the thralldom of his own lusts, and finally bring him home, washed and holy, to his home in the heavens! No wonder the Bible should speak of the Christian as being saved only through much difficulty.

Again; sinners, if they will only exercise a little common sense and philosophy, can readily account for the faults of Christians. See that husband with a pious wife. He treats her badly, and day after day annoys her by his ill-temper and little abuses. The children, too, trouble her, and all the more for the example her husband sets before them. Now he may very likely, in some of his moods of mind and temper, drop some reflections upon her piety, and upon the gospel she professes; but in his more rational moments he will be compelled to say--"No wonder my wife has these faults; I have never helped her at all; I have only hindered her in all her Christian course, and I know I have been a continual source of vexation and irritation to her. No wonder she has had faults. I am ashamed that I have done so much to create and multiply them, and so very little ever in any way to improve her character."

When candid men come to consider all these things--the human constitution, the tendency to unbelief, the impulses towards self-indulgence, and the strength of temptation, they cannot but see that there is abundant occasion for all those faults in Christian character and conduct which they are wont to criticize so stringently. Yet often, perhaps commonly, wicked men make no allowance for the faults of Christians, but assume that every Christian ought to be spotless, while every sinner may make so much apology for his sin as quite to shield his conscience from conviction of guilt. Nothing, therefore, is more common than for impenitent men to triumph, devil-like, over any instance of stumbling in a professed Christian. Why don't they rather sympathize with their difficulties and their great work--as real philanthropists? That brother who has a Christian sister, does not help her at all, but, on the contrary tries to ensnare her into sin. He should rather say--"I will not be a stumbling block to my sister. If I cannot directly help her on in her Christian course, at least I will not hinder her." Let the

impenitent husband say--"My dear Christian wife, I know something about her difficulties; God forbid that I should play into the devil's hands, and try to help the devil on in his devilish work." Sinner, why don't you abstain from ensnaring your Christian friend? There is One above who cares for him, who patiently toils for his salvation, and watches day and night over his progress, and who is pledged to save him at last. And can you hope to gain the favor of that Holy and Just Being, by trying to ensnare and offend any of his little ones?

LECTURE VIII.

September 29, 1852

THE SALVATION OF SINNERS IMPOSSIBLE--No. 2

Text.--1 Pet. 4:18: "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

I said in a former sermon--that the doctrine of the text is that the salvation of the righteous is difficult and that of the sinner impossible. In that sermon I discussed at length the first part of this subject, showing how and why the salvation of the righteous is difficult. I am now to take up the remaining part and show how and why the salvation of the wicked is impossible.

Here let me premise in general that by the righteous is not meant those who have never sinned. It could not be difficult to save such as had not sinned against God. They are in fact already saved. But these righteous ones are those who having been sinners, now come to exercise faith in Christ, and of course become "heirs of that righteousness which is by faith." Vitally important to be considered here is the fact that the governmental difficulty in the way of being saved, growing out of your having sinned, even greatly, is all removed by Christ's atonement. No matter now how great your guilt, if you will only have faith in Jesus and accept of his atonement as the ground of pardon for your sins.

Hence the difficulty in the way of saving sinners is not simply that they have sinned, but that they will not now cease from sinning and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. The salvation of sinners is therefore impossible,

1. Because it is impossible for God by any means He can wisely employ, to

persuade them to desist from sinning. They are so wicked and so perverse that they abuse to greater sin the very best means God employs to bring them to repentance. Hence God cannot wisely save them.

When I say it is impossible for God to convert them, I do not imply that God lacks physical power to do anything which is the proper subject of such power. On this point there can be no question. But how can physical omnipotence be brought to bear directly upon mind and upon the heart?

Again, let us consider, that it may not be wise for God to bring all the moral power of his universe to bear upon the sinner in this world. If this were wise and practicable, it might avail--for ought we can know;--but since He does not do it, we infer that He refrains for some wise reason.

Certain limitations are fixed in the divine wisdom to the amount of moral influence which God shall employ in the case of a sinner. It is in view of this fact that I say--God finds it impossible to gain the sinner's consent to the gospel by any means that He can wisely employ. He goes as far as is really wise and as far as is on the whole good. This is undoubtedly the fact in the case. Yet all this does not avail. Hence it becomes impossible that the sinner should be saved.

2. Again, the sinner cannot be saved, because salvation from sin is an indispensable condition of salvation from hell. The being saved from sin must come first in order. Every sinner knows, and on reflection and self-inspection, he must see that his state of mind is such that he cannot respect himself. The elements of blessedness are not therefore in him and cannot be until he meets the demands of his own moral nature.

He knows also that he does not want to have anything to do with God--is afraid of God--both dreads and hates his presence--is afraid to die and go so near to God as death bears all men. He knows that all his relations to God are unpleasant in the extreme: how certainly then may he know that he is utterly unprepared for heaven.

Now the sinner must be saved from this guilty and abominable state of mind. No change is needed in God, neither in his character, government, or position towards sin; but the utmost possible change and all the needed change is requisite on the part of the sinner. If salvation implies fitness for heaven, and

if this implies ceasing from sin, then of course it is naturally and forever impossible that any sinner can be saved without holiness.

3. The peace of heaven forbids that you should go there in your sins. I know you think of going to heaven; you rather expect you shall go there at last; your parents are there--as you hope and believe--and for this reason you the more want to go, that you may behold them in their glory. O, say you, should I not like to be where my father and mother are? And do you think you can follow them, in your sins? What could you do in heaven if you were there? What could you say? What kind of songs could you sing there? What sort of happiness, congenial to your heart, could you hope to find there?

Your pious mother in heaven--O how changed! You heard her last words on earth--for they were words of prayer for your poor guilty soul; but now she shines and sings above, all holy and pure. What sympathy could there be between you and her in heaven? Remember what Christ said when some one told him that his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to see him. "Who," said he, "is my mother and who are my brethren? He that doeth the will of my Father, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." The law of sympathy therefore in heaven turns not on earthly relationship, but on oneness of heart--on the common and mutual spirit of love and obedience towards their great common Father.

Do you then expect that your mother would be glad to see you--that she would spread her mantle over you and take you up to heaven? Oh, if she were told that you were at the gate, she would hasten down to say--O my sinning child, you cannot enter heaven. Into this holy place nothing can by any means enter that "worketh abomination or maketh a lie." You cannot--no, you cannot come!

If it were left to your own mother to decide the question of your admission, you could not come in. She would not open heaven's gate for your admission. She knows you would disturb the bliss of heaven. She knows you would mar its purity and be an element of discord in its sympathies and in its songs.

You know it need not have been so. You might have given your heart to God in season, and then He would have shed his love abroad in your soul, and

given you the Holy Ghost, and made you ripe for heaven. But you would not. All was done for you that God could wisely do; all that Christ could do; all that the spirit of God could consistently do: but all was vain: all came to naught and availed nothing because you would not forego your sins--would not renounce them, even for everlasting life. And now will heaven let you in? No. Nothing that worketh abomination can by any means go in there.

4. Besides, it would not be for your own comfort to be there. You were never quite comfortable in spiritual society on earth; in the prayer meeting you were unhappy. As one individual said here: "O, what a place this is! I cannot go across the street without being spoken to about my soul. How can I live here?"

Let me tell you--it will be just as bad--nay much worse for you in heaven. That can be no place for you, sinner, since you hate worst of all things on earth, those places and scenes which are most like heaven.

5. The justice of God will not allow you to participate in the joys of the saints. His relations to the universe make it indispensable that He should protect his saints from such society as you. They have had their discipline of trial in such society long enough: the scenes of their eternal reward will bring everlasting relief from this torture of their holy sympathies. O how will God, their Infinite Father, throw around them the shield of his protection upon the mountains of paradise, that lift their heads eternally under the sunlight of his glory!

His sense of propriety forbids that he should give you a place among his pure and trustful children. It would be so unfitting--so unsuitable! It would throw such discord into the sweet songs and sympathies of the holy!

Besides, as already hinted, it could be no kindness to you. It could not soothe, but only chafe and fret your spirit. O if you were obliged to be there, how would it torment and irritate your soul!

If then, the sinner cannot be saved and go to heaven, where shall he appear?

The question is a strong negation. They shall not appear among the righteous and the saved. This is a common form of speaking. Nehemiah said--"Shall such a man as I flee?" No, indeed. This form of question is one of the strongest forms of negation that can be expressed in our language.

Where then shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? In no desirable place or position--certainly. Not with the righteous in the judgment, for so God's word has often and most solemnly affirmed. Christ himself affirms that, when all nations shall be gathered before him for judgment He will separate them, one from another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats. This separation, as the description shows, brings the righteous on the right hand and the wicked on the left. And it should be considered that this statement is made by Christ Himself and that if any being in the universe knows, it must be He to whom is "given authority to execute judgment." He says He will separate them one from another according not to their national relations, or their family connections, but according to their character as friends or enemies to God.

O, what a separation must this be in families and among dear earthly friends! On this side will be a husband--on that a wife; here a brother and there a sister; here one of two friends and there the other--parted forever--forever! If this great division were to be struck between you today according to present character, how fearful the line of separation it would draw! Ask yourselves where it would pass through your own families and among the friends you love. How would it divide College classes--and O, how would it smite many hearts with terror and consternation!

III. Answer the question of the text--Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

It is asked, where shall the ungodly appear? I answer, certainly not in heaven, nor on the heavenly side. But they must be in the judgment, for God has said, He would bring all the race into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. All are to be there, but some are on the right hand and some on the left.

1. The ungodly and the sinner will appear in that day among the damned--among lost angels, doomed to the place prepared of old for their eternal abode. So Jesus has Himself told us. The very words of their sentence are on record: "Then will He say to them on his left hand--Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." This is indeed the only place for which they are prepared; and this the only society to which their hearts are congenial. They have of choice belonged to Satan's government on earth: at least in the sense of doing precisely what he would have them do. Now therefore, after such

a training in selfishness and sin, they are manifestly fit for no other and better society than that of Satan and his angels.

Let it not surprise any of you to be told that the amiable sinners of earth are preparing themselves--(remaining enemies to God and radically selfish)--for the society of the arch spirit of evil. Just observe what restraints are thrown around sinners here. Mark how obviously they feel restrained, and show that they are restive and ill at ease. It may be read out of their very hearts that they would be glad to be vastly more wicked and selfish, that is, in their external life--if they might. It is wonderful to see in how many ways God's providence has walled around the sinner's pathway and hedged him in from outbreking sin.

But let these walls be torn away; let all regard to his reputation among the good perish forever from his soul; let despair of ever gaining God's favor take full possession of his heart, and rivet its iron grasp upon him: then what will he become? Take away all the restraints of civil society--of laws and customs--of Christian example, and of Christian society; let there be no more prayer made for him by pitying Christian friends--no more counsel given, or entreaty used to persuade him towards the good,--then tell me, where is the sinner? How terribly will sin work out its dreadful power to corrupt and madden the soul! Bring together myriads of desperate wretches, in the madness of their despair and rage and wrath against God and all the good, and O what a fearful world would they make! What can be conceived more awful! Yet this is the very world for which sinners are now preparing, and the only one for which they will be found in the judgment to be prepared.

2. As this is the only world for which the sinner is prepared, so is it the only one which is appropriate and fitting, the case being viewed in respect to his influence for mischief. Here only, here in this prison-house of woe and despair, can sinners be effectually prevented from doing any further mischief in God's kingdom. Here they are cut off from all possibility of doing any more harm in God's universe.

In this earthly state one sinner destroys much good, Each and every sinner does much evil. God looks on, not unconcerned, but with amazing patience, He suffers a great deal of evil to be done, for the sake of securing an opportunity to try the power of forbearance and love upon the sinner's heart. You are abusing his love and defeating all its kind designs, but still God waits, till the point is reached where forbearance ceases to be virtue. Beyond this point, how can God

wait longer?

Here you find ample room for doing mischief. Many are around you whom you influence to evil and urge on towards hell. Some of them would be converted but for your influence to hold them back and ensnare their souls. If this were the place, I could name and call out some of you who are exerting a deadly influence upon your associates. Ah to think of the souls you may ruin forever! God sees them and sees how you are playing into the devil's hands to drag them down with you to an eternal hell. But ere long He will take you away from this sphere of doing evil. He will for ever cut off your connection with those who can be influenced to evil, and leave around you only those associates who are ruined, despairing, and maddened in sin like yourself. There He will lock you up, throw away the key, and let you rave on, and swear on, and curse on, and madden your guilty soul more and more forever! O what inmates are those in this prison-house of the guilty and the lost! Why should not God fit up such a place for such beings, so lost to all good, and so given up to all the madness and guilt of rebellion?

There alone can sinners be made useful. They refused to make themselves useful by their voluntary agency on earth; now God will make use of them in hell for some good. Do you ask me if I talk about sin being made useful? Yes, to be sure I do. God never permits anything to occur in his universe, but He extracts some good from it, overruling its influence, or making the correction and punishment of it a means of good. This is a great consolation to the holy, that no sinner can exist from whom God will not bring out some good. This principle is partially developed in society here, under civil government. The gallows is not the greatest evil in the world, nor the most unmixed evil. Murder is much worse. States prisons are not the greatest earthly evils. Government can make great use of those men who will not obey law. It can make them examples and lift them up as beacons of warning to show the evil of disobeying wholesome laws. A great many men have had strong and useful impressions made on their minds as riding through Auburn on the Rail Road, they have marked those lofty frowning walls and battlements which enclose and guard the culprits immured within. Many a hard heart has quailed before those walls, and the terrors of those cells behind. If the outside view does not avail to awe the spirit of transgression, give them the inside view and some of its heart-desolating experience. These things do good. They tame the passion for evil-doing and impress a salutary fear on the hardened and reckless. If so under all the imperfections of human government, how much

more under the perfect administration of the divine!

God cannot afford to lose your influence in his universe. He will rejoice to use you for the glory of his mercy, if you will; O yes, He will put away your sins far as the East is from the West, and will put a robe of beauty and glory upon you, and a sweet harp in your hands, and a song of praise on your lips, and the melody of heaven's love in your heart, all these, if you will;--but if you will not, then He has other attributes besides mercy that need to be illustrated. Justice will come in for its claim, and to illustrate this He will make you an example of the bitter misery of sinning. He will put you deep in hell; and the holy, beholding you there, will see that God's kingdom is safe and pure, and in their everlasting song they will shout, "Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thy judgments are made manifest."

This is the only way in which God can make you useful in his kingdom, if you will not repent. He has tried every means of bringing you to repentance, but all in vain; He cannot get your consent. Of course there is no alternative but to make you an example to deter all other moral agents from sinning.

There is no other way for God to meet the demands of the public weal, but to make you an example to show his abhorrence of sin. God is most thoroughly economical of his resources. He husbands every thing to the very best account. Every thing must, under his hand, be made conducive in some way to the general good. Even of your misery He will be as economical as He can, and will carefully turn it all to the very best account. Every groan and every throb and pang of your agonized soul will be turned to use. Yes, rely upon it, all this agony, which does you no good, but is to you only unmingled and unalleviated woe, will be a warning beacon, under God's hand, crying out in tones of thunder--Stand away! stand away! lest you come into this place of torment; stand afar from sin--fear this awful sin--watch against it, for it is an awful thing to sin against Jehovah. I have tried it, and here I am in woe unutterable! O what a testimony, when all hell shall roll up one mighty accumulated groan--a groan, whose awful voice shall be--Stand in awe and sin not, for God is terrible in his judgments upon the guilty.

O sinner, think of it. God wants you now to cry out to every fellow-sinner, and warn him away from the brink of hell. Will you do it? What are you in fact doing? Are you preparing yourself to go out as a missionary of light and love

and mercy to the benighted? Are you pluming your wings as an angel of mercy to bear the messages of salvation? O no! you refuse to do this, or anything of the sort. You disdain to preach such a gospel and to preach it so! But God will make you preach it in another way; for as I said, He is thoroughly economical of the resources of his kingdom, and all must do something in some way for his glory. He will have everything preach--saints preach and sinners preach; yea, sinners in hell must preach for God and for his truth. He will make your very groans and tears--those "tears that ever fall, but not in Mercy's sight"--they will preach, and will tell over and over the dreadful story of mercy abused and sin persisted in, and waxing worse and worse, till the bolts of vengeance broke at last upon your guilty head! Over and over will those groans, and tears repeat the fearful story, so that when the angels shall come from the remotest regions of the universe, they shall cry out--What is here? What mean those groans? What mean those flames, wreathing around their miserable victims? Ah! the story told then will make them cry aloud--Why will God's creatures sin against his throne? Can there be such madness in beings gifted with reason's light?

These angels know that the only thing that can secure public confidence in a ruler is fidelity in the execution of his law. Hence it is to them no wonder that, there being sin to punish, God should punish it with most exemplary severity. They expect this, and seeing its awful demonstrations before their eyes only serves to impress the more deeply on their souls the holiness and justice of the great and blessed God.

REMARKS.

1. From this standpoint we can easily see what we are to understand by the doctrine of election--a doctrine often mis-stated, and often perverted to a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. The simple and plain view of it is, that God, foreseeing all the future of your existence as perfectly as if all were in fact present, determined to deal with you according to your voluntary course; determined to offer you the gospel, and on your refusal of it, to give you over to the doom of those who deny the Lord that bought them. Election is no new or different plan of divine administration, aside from and unlike what the Bible reveals as the plan of saving men through the gospel. It is this very plan of which the Bible is full, only that it contemplates this plan as framed by the divine Mind "before the world began."

2. If you will now consent to give your heart to God, you can be saved. No

election will hinder you. The doctrine of election is simply the fact that God sends forth his Spirit to save as many as by the best system of influences He wisely can save; and surely this never can hinder any sinner from repenting and gaining salvation, for the very good reason that this plan contemplates saving and not damning men, as its object, and is in fact the sinner's only hope.

Come then, repent and believe the gospel if you would be saved. No election will hinder you, and neither will it save you without your own repentance unto life.

How then shall the case turn with you? Almost all who are ever converted are brought in, early in life. Not one in a hundred is converted after the age of forty. The old among the converts are always few--only one among a host--one in a long space of time; like scattering beacon lights upon the mountain tops, that the aged may not quite despair of salvation. But God is intensely interested in saving the young, for He needs and loves to use them in his service. O how his heart goes forth after the young! How often has my soul been affected as I have thought of his parental interest for the salvation of this great multitude of youth! They come here from pious homes, freighted with the prayers of pious fathers and mothers,--and what shall be the result? What has been the result, as thus far developed, with you? Has any thing been really secured as yet? Is any thing fixed and done for eternity? How many times have you been called to decide, but have decided wrong--all wrong? You have been pressed earnestly with God's claims, and many a time have prayers and groans gone forth from the Christian heart of this whole community; but ah! where are you still? Not yet safe; ah, in greater peril than ever. Often reprov'd, hardening your neck; and what next? Suddenly destroyed, and that without remedy. Suppose even now the curtain should drop--you are dead! And whither, then, goes the undying, guilty soul?

3. How great the mistake made by Universalists, that all men will be saved, when the Bible holds that even the salvation of the righteous is difficult, and that of the sinner, impossible. How strangely they misread the whole Bible! Go not in their ways, O ye youth of Oberlin!

But what are you doing? Do you flatter yourselves that the work of salvation is all so easy that it may be safely and surely done during a few of life's last moments? Will you presume, as the man did who said he should need but five minutes to prepare to die? Hear his story. What was the result of his system? Disease came on. It smote him with its strong hand. Delirium set in. Reason

tottered and fell from her throne, and so he died! Go on, thou young man; drive on, headlong and reckless; make a bold business of sinning, and bear it on with bold front and high hand; but know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment! Consider what tidings we hear of our former pupils who once sat as you now sit, and once heard the gospel as you may hear it now. There, one is dead; and now another--and now another. In rapid succession they drop from the stage of mortal life--and what next? What more? Soon we shall meet them in the fearful judgment!

Brethren, what will the universe say of us, if we neglect to labour for the salvation of these precious youth? What will the parents of these dear youth say to us when we shall meet them at the Saviour's bar?

I have spoken to you of the difficulties and the struggles of the Christian--more and greater far than the ungodly are usually aware of;--those agonies of prayer, those conflicts against temptation; out of all which it is only great grace that can bring him forth, conqueror and more than conqueror. If he is saved with so much difficulty, how does it become you to strive to enter in at the strait gate? Are you aware that the smooth sea of temptation bears you on to the breakers of death? Were you ever at Niagara? How smooth and deceitful those waters, as they move along quite up above the draft of the suction from below. But lower down, see how those same waters roar, and dash, and foam, and send up their thick mists to the heavens above you. Yet in the upper stream you glide gently and noiselessly along, dreaming of no danger, and making no effort to escape. In a moment you are in the awful current, dashing headlong down; and where are you now?

And what should you do? Like Bunyan's Christian pilgrim, put your fingers in both ears, and run, shouting, Life! life! eternal LIFE! How many of you are sliding along on the smooth, deceitful stream, above, yet only just above the awful rapids and the dreadful cataract of death! What if, this night, delirium should seize upon you? Or what if the Spirit should leave you forever, and it should be said of you, "He is joined to his idols, let him alone?"

What do you say? Do I hear you saying, "If salvation is possible for me--if by putting forth the whole energy of my will I can ensure it, O let me do so! Help me, O ye ministers of Christ's gospel! Help me, ye Christians, who pray between the porch and the altar! Help me, O ye heavens of heavens, for this is a thing of life and death, and the redemption of the soul is most precious!"

Surely, O ye sinners, it is time that you should set down your foot in most fixed determination, and say, "I must and I will have heaven! How can I ever bear the doom of the damned!

[Back to Top](#)

Paul and Felix, Or Preaching and Procrastination

Lecture IX

October 13, 1852

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Acts 24:24-25: "And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season; I will call for thee."

Paul, on a visit to Jerusalem, had been seized by the bigoted and hostile Jews. A conspiracy was formed against him to take his life. Several men had madly taken a solemn vow not to eat or drink till they had slain him. This came to Paul's ears--was by him communicated to the Roman officers; and in consequence of this a strong guard removed him from Jerusalem to Cesarea, the residence of the Roman governor. Here Paul lay confined, awaiting trial. The history describes the commission of Ananias the high priest, with the elders, and an orator named Tertullus, to appear against Paul before Felix the Roman governor--their charge and plea, and Paul's defense. All these you can read at your leisure in Acts 24. They present a beautiful specimen of Roman justice, developing the principles of law, then in current practice, and especially that celebrated usage of their courts, whereby the accused were allowed to answer each for himself. It was in pursuance of this usage that Paul as in our text was brought before Felix and there permitted to plead his own cause.

On this memorable occasion Paul appears before us, not absorbed in the interests of his own individual case, though this involved personal liberty if not even life;-

-but we see him true, as he had long been, to his work as a preacher of Christ's gospel and intent chiefly to save souls. He preached "concerning the faith in Christ." "He reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." On these points he spake with such power that Felix trembled, and answered--"Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."

In pursuing my remarks upon this wonderful defense, I remark,

I. That it gives us a clue to the apostolic manner of preaching salvation through Christ.

II. Let us next notice the effect of this method.

III. I next observe that we have in our text a specimen of the manner in which sinners reject the gospel and evade its claims.

I. That it gives us a clue to the apostolic manner of preaching salvation through Christ.

You will observe that, it is said that he preached concerning the "faith in Christ." This was made in those times, the great question. The Jews had long held that salvation is to be obtained through works. Paul speaks on the subject as if salvation must be only by faith in Christ. Here then was the issue as between the self-righteous Jews and the apostles.

Now observe Paul's manner closely. What did he preach? Our text is explicit. "He reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." And he so reasoned on those points that Felix trembled. The narrative begins with saying that Felix "heard him concerning the faith in Christ;" but you will observe that as it progresses to the details, it specifies that he "reasoned of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come." Did he, then as some seem to suppose, preach Christ, Christ, nothing but Christ? Did he begin with an unenlightened uninstructed sinner--a sinner who had no just sense of his sins, and preach only Christ, with no allusion to that sinner's guilt and need of such a Savior as Christ Jesus? We can easily see how it was. Paul carried his appeal at once to the conscience of his royal hearer. It mattered little whether this king was or was not familiar with Jewish law; Paul did not care. Paul knew he had a conscience, and that upon this conscience his appeal would take hold with convincing and condemning power. He therefore made this his first effort. He first appealed to

the conscience of Felix on the great law of right--brought up to his own notice the life and conduct of the man--the sinner, and set all his past deeds in array before his eyes, and as they stand forth in the light of a judgment to come. Whatever good works Felix may have supposed himself to have done, were not brought into the account at all. Indeed we must presume that this sermon left him no room to think of his good works at all. Probably it threw them all utterly out of view and showed him that he labored under the greatest mistake if he supposed they were of the least conceivable value. The method adopted by Paul compelled Felix to seek salvation elsewhere than the heathen seek it, for it showed him that they can find no salvation adequate to meet the case of a lost sinner. It held him to his obligations to a life of righteousness and temperance as in view of a coming judgment, and thus made him feel his need of such a Savior as Christ. Paul knew well that this reasoning must condemn the entire life of Felix, and that the only hope of ever doing him any good lay in an attempt to force conviction upon his conscience. Hence his policy.

Another thing. It does not appear by any means from the history that Felix had ever heard the evidence to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was the true Messiah. Be this as it may, it does not appear that Paul tarried a moment on this point on the present occasion. Instead of setting himself to array and substantiate these evidences, he goes at once before the conscience of his auditor, by one powerful appeal shutting him up at once to the necessity of having such a Savior as Christ. He talks to him of a judgment to come; shows him from the laws of his own moral being that there ought to be such a judgment and that from the righteousness of God's throne, there must be. Such was the strain of his appeal.

II. Let us next notice the effect of this method.

It is told in few words. Felix trembled. Conviction of guilt flashed upon him. Although the preacher was before him, a prisoner in chains, yet an arrow had pierced his conscience and it made him quail on his throne of state. He saw that there was a King on a higher throne, before which himself stood arraigned and guilty. He saw there must be a judgment to come and that the great God must surely judge him there. He saw that Paul spoke only the words of truth and soberness, for his own conscience affirmed and endorsed every charge which the preacher made. Hence when Paul appealed to his conscience about law, sin, and a coming judgment, he was shut up and condemned, and hence prepared to enquire whether there can be any way in which God can be just and yet justify

the sinner who believes in Jesus.

III. I next observe that we have in our text a specimen of the manner in which sinners reject the gospel and evade its claims.

We see how apostles preached Christ; how, beginning with the law and making its appeal to the sinner's conscience, they shut men up to the gospel and compelled them to flee to it for refuge if they would have any refuge at all; but how did sinners then evade this duty? How escape, or at least try to escape the pressure of this appeal?

We can readily see. Felix did not and could not deny the truth of what Paul had preached. He saw and in some degree felt the fearful truth as to his own sin and guilt, and righteous doom as a sinner. He must moreover have seen his remedy. The gospel was before him in its greatest plainness and simplicity, no doubt, and therefore he knew that he might have Christ now as his own Savior, if he would. Yet though so convicted before the chained apostle as to tremble on his very throne of judgment, he did not bid this gospel welcome. He was still so selfish that he sought to make this matter of personal salvation a thing of convenience. "When I have a convenient season, said he, I will call for thee." The subject agonized him and he wanted therefore to dismiss it for the present at least. Besides he managed, as most sinners do, to work in another quite incidental question and give it an entirely undue influence. Shall I sympathize, said he, with a man who is a prisoner before me, and take sides with a despised Christian against the whole Jewish nation? What effect would such a course have on my popularity?

He could not say--I will never accept the gospel, I will never have anything to do with it. No; he knew too much of its truth, and too deeply felt his own need of it, to allow him to turn off the matter thus. In fact, he was in precisely the position of thousands in our own land; entirely convinced of the truth of the gospel, yet by no means ready to embrace it. Political motives restrained and embarrassed him, and under their influence he could readily believe that he could yet have this salvation at some quite convenient time when he should be prepared to attend to it and embrace it. He held it to be an offer that he could accept at his own convenience, and therefore, though he deeply felt its great importance, and though his nerves trembled and he could not rest, yet he could at least delay; and this he resolved to do. In this decision he did not stand for what was right as between his soul and his offered Savior: nor did he heed the influence of his

example, nor consider his responsibilities as affecting the salvation of hundreds besides himself.

Moreover, he did not purpose to reject this gospel offer finally and forever; by no means; he still hoped to be saved at last. But, here was a door open to get some money; and this hope ravished his selfish soul. He hoped Paul or his friends for him, would offer a bribe for his release, and therefore--to get some money--not to get salvation--"he sent for him the oftener and communed with him." But with the hope of a bribe in his eye, how could he come down in the spirit of a little child, self-emptied and self-condemned, and embrace the pure and self-humbling gospel? He did no such thing. It does not appear that he made any advances in this direction, even after the first fatal hour, when he said--"Go thy way for this time." Beyond this the descent was precipitous and no power could retard his rushing speed to ruin. He never found the convenient time to close up this concern by giving his whole heart to Jesus, and bidding welcome to his needy soul the offers of free salvation.

REMARKS.

1. It is worthy of notice that the inspired teachers always assume the true philosophy of mind, and hence the true way of teaching it and controlling its decisions. True, the Bible does not intend to teach mental philosophy in a scientific way, nor indeed in any direct way yet by inference the Bible does teach mental science most clearly and most fully. If any man will give his mind to this subject and ask--"What does this command imply as true in regard to the mental constitution of those to whom it is addressed?" he cannot fail to arrive at the correct answer. He must see that a command imposed by a good Being, implies the possession of power to obey it. So let him take up also the promises and put the same question, asking, what is assumed to be the moral state of those to whom such promises, are addressed? There can be but one answer, and that will reveal just principles of mental science. See how Paul approached and appealed to this heathen man. Did he assume that this heathen had a conscience before which he could make and lodge his appeal? Most clearly he did, and acted promptly upon this assumption. He knew that however dark his mind might be as to revealed religion, or how ever sophisticated by false reasoning, it would still cry out, Amen, AMEN, whenever God's truth came clearly before his intelligence.

It is curious to observe also that the true philosophy of conversation is always

implied by the apostles in their modes of effort to secure this result. Understand this subject practically, they always made their appeal, not to the sensibility, but to the intellect and through this to the conscience--bringing men first to see the truth--then to feel its moral pungency and power: and then to obey it. Thus and only thus did they attempt to subdue the will. Now in the effort to change the entire moral position of the will towards God and holiness, it makes all the difference in the world whether the appeal be made to the sensibility, or to the conscience. If it be made to the sensibility alone, then as soon as the excitement subsides, the mind falls back again to its old position.

It deserves special notice that Paul appealed to the common life of Felix. He reasoned before him of those very sins of which he knew him to be guilty. Of these intemperance in the general sense of incontinent indulgence of appetites and passions, was one. Yet not this alone, but we must suppose that the preacher overhauled his entire life of sin, and if he did not say out openly--You have done this, he at least made his meaning unmistakably plain. Paul wielded a sharp sword, which cleft its way to the heart and the conscience and made its thrusts most sensibly felt. Else the proud king had not trembled on his throne and before his courtiers. Paul laid open to view the guilty life of the king and then assured him that a fearful judgment was coming. This doubtless was the manner of Paul, not only with Felix, but with all other sinners: and not only the manner of Paul, but of Peter and of other apostles. They made sinners see first of all, that they were lost; and then showed them the way of rescue and of life. The course opposite to this is utterly unphilosophical and unreasonable. It is like offering a remedy to a man who feels himself well and believes he has no disease upon him. Not unlikely, he takes it as an insult. Those who feel themselves whole, never apply to the physician. Sinners unconverted are certain never to embrace an offered Savior.

Convicted sinners generally suppose they need to have great feeling before they can repent. They assume that they must act under the influence of feeling--than which a greater mistake can hardly be made. One is amazed to see how strangely they talk and think of this subject. Do they not know that God expects them to act intelligently, and according to the decisions of an enlightened conscience? And yet they will tell you they cannot come to Christ because they have not feeling enough. They must wait for more feeling.

A short time since, I conversed with a young lady who had been brought up

under religious influences, but yet remained unconverted. I soon caught a glimpse of the true difficulty in her way. She fancied that she should become a Christian at once if she felt right. Have you tried to become a Christian? said I. Yes. What have you done? I have tried to get right feelings.

It is wonderful to see how common this mistake is--to think that religion consists in right feelings, or at least that if they could only get up feeling enough, it would certainly move the will and secure conversion.

This is the exact way in which thousands fail to being truly converted. Instead of looking at the truth, and becoming deeply convinced under its power that they are all wrong and God wholly right, so that under this conviction they can intelligently turn right about, justify God and condemn themselves, and then turn their whole souls to God; instead of this, they try to get feeling; but as this course does not succeed, what feeling they have soon subsides, and they fall back fatally and forever.

In this way many of you have been waiting, and waiting and waiting--but wholly to no purpose. The right way and the only right way, is to study the truth, to learn what it is, and what its claims upon yourself are, and then meet those claims and perform those duties. Then truth being known, act in all things according to its demands as seen in your intelligence, and inferred by your conscience.

There is no end to the errors into which men fall through failure to understand this simple idea, of obeying the truth. A man came to me with great solicitude, saying--"I think I am not a Christian, for I certainly have not all the feelings that I expected to have. Indeed I do not know about my experience at the time I thought I was converted. I was acting rationally all the time; I seemed to understand my own relations to God and my duty towards Him clearer than ever; I knew the reasons of my conduct at every step, and never was more calm, and never seemed to myself to see duty more clearly. Now how can such an experience as this be real conversion?"

But, said I, is your heart changed? That is the great question. "I don't know, said he, I thought the Holy Ghost was to change my heart if it were ever truly changed; but at the time referred to, I seemed to change it myself. How can this be genuine conversion?"

Men seem to think they shall see the Holy Ghost as it were with their very eyes,

if He comes. They have exceedingly vague and often mystical notions about His work. You will observe that Jesus said of the Holy Ghost, that when He should come, "He should not speak of Himself," but should only "bear witness of the truth." He should come to "reprove the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment." Sinners don't seem to see that the Holy Ghost is in the preaching of truth from the minister's lips, and that, thus coming, He conceals Himself and shows only the truth, it being His only object to present and enforce the truth so that sinners shall be made deeply sensible of sin and shall be persuaded to renounce it. The sinner, thus convicted, sees the truth and is not conscious or at all aware of seeing anything else. The Holy Ghost is indeed there, else this sinner would have no such conviction of truth; the Holy Ghost is there and at work, doing His appropriate business, yet wholly unseen. Therefore you should no more wait for the Holy Ghost to change your heart than you would for me to do it if I were trying to persuade you to turn yourself at once to God.

True conviction is apt to produce a kind of trembling and a tearless agony of soul. I can well recollect the time when I first went to an enquiry meeting. I trembled so that my very seat shook under me. At that time I had never received such instruction as I needed; for if I had, I should have been converted at once. But in my darkness of mind as to what I had to do, I was in great agony, for I knew full well that God's wrath was upon me and that I was living on the very verge of hell. No wonder therefore that my soul was in great agony--tearless agony, for I could not get the relief of a single tear, and yet my whole being seemed to tremble and quake to its center. I was not at this time under particular and special conviction, but only a general conviction of being all wrong. Such I have reason to suppose are not unfrequently the convictions of awakened sinners.

The convictions of Felix were wholly ineffectual. Convinced that Paul was innocent and with ample power to set him at liberty, nay more, under the most sacred obligation to set an innocent man at liberty, he yet closed his administration leaving Paul bound, and this for no other reason than to do the wicked, malicious Jews a favor. Alas, how far was he from the kingdom of God!

There are few sinners in this house who have not sometimes had a strong and deep conviction that you ought to be Christians, but you, like Felix, have dismissed the subject until it should be quite convenient. Like him, you have been convinced, and perhaps you have even trembled under those convictions,

but less and less affected, after seeing your Paul repeatedly, you at length dismiss the matter forever. Perhaps like Felix you could even turn away and leave the Christian cause in the hands and at the mercy of its foes. You find in your experience even now that truth affects you less and less, as it did Felix, and with a growing reluctance to its presence and claims, you are glad of any apology for turning it away. In the case of Felix, we hear nothing about his trembling, after the first interview; that point once passed, he became careless, and managed for a season to live without trembling.

But now always could he live without trembling, for the judgment to come awaited him and he is long ere this gone before God to meet his doom.

This first interview with Paul was the crisis in his history. While he sat there and the chained apostle stood and preached Christ before him, the crisis hours were passing. Then and there he might have had salvation; beyond that point, it was virtually impossible.

So you have your crisis-period. As it was said of some, "they came and went from the place of the holy," so it may be said of you. Often have you come and gone from the place where the saints worship; but alas, no better in heart after the end of all than before the beginning. Says the inspired one--"I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy;"--wicked still, and none the less so for having frequented the place of God's saints. So with some of you. We shall soon bear some of you away to yonder hill--wicked till you die and then "driven away in your wickedness," to the place of the wicked forever. Now you sometimes tremble and sometimes are stupid; and with some of you the crisis is already past. With every lost sinner there must be some place where the crisis is turned. Most sinners pass the crisis just as Felix did. Like him they settle the question--by simple procrastination. Few say, I never will attend to this subject again. Commonly they dismiss it with--"Go thy way for this time." If the devil should suggest to them to take a solemn vow--"I never will have Christ--I never will even think of the subject seriously again"--it would startle them quite too much. Satan is too cunning for such imprudence. Therefore he only says--Let it pass for this time. This answers all his purpose abundantly. Hence this is the very way in which most persons pass the final crisis. There is no need of anything more than this to make damnation certain. It would startle you to go the whole figure at one leap and solemnly swear--"I have done with the gospel of Jesus and with heaven, henceforth and forever." Therefore Satan is

not wont to put you up to so daring a step as this. It is quite sufficient for all his purposes if he can persuade you to say--"Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will close up this matter as it should be."

But Oh, this fearful crisis-point! Have some of you passed it already? Have some of you quenched the Spirit quiet and grieved Him wholly away? Have you settled down in moral hardness--with no interest in these things? It is not difficult for you perhaps to recall the time when God's Spirit pressed the truth upon your conscience, but you resisted and delayed doing your known duty! Your conscience smarted under the sting of truth, forced home by the Spirit of God; but you resisted--you repelled the Dove of heaven and where are you now?

Some of you may be about to take this fatal step today. Oh will you madly rush on your own certain damnation? Will you say--I mean to be a Christian at some future time, but not now! Ah, when God says NOW--do you reply to Him, not now? Then there is no hope that you and God can agree! You need not expect His Spirit to co-operate in the renewal of your soul to holiness--for how can two work together except they are agreed?

[Back to Top](#)

Christ Tempted, Suffering, and Able to Succor The Tempted

Lecture X

October 27, 1852

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Heb. 2:18: "For in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted."

The connection, commencing back with the tenth verse of this chapter, presents Jesus as one of the brethren among His people and assigns reasons for His assuming human nature into union with His divine. Because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself took part of the same, to the end that by His own death He might destroy Satan who had power to make death

terrible, and might so deliver His people from the fear of death though otherwise under its bondage their lives long. For indeed, of the race of angels Christ did not take hold, to save them; but He did take hold of the race of man. The former, falling by sin, sank to hell, unredeemed; the latter, tempted and fallen, the Son of God rushed to rescue and save. Hence the necessity of putting on their nature, since He had undertaken to rescue and save them. Therefore He must be made in all things like them, "that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people; For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted."

The subject presented in our text, if discussed fundamentally will embrace the discussion of several points.

1. The first respects the nature of sin.

Many seem to assume that temptation implies the presence of sin. They think no being can be tempted unless there be sin in his heart or constitution already, to which temptation makes its appeal. Now if this view be just, it follows that Jesus Christ had sin in His heart or constitution; a conclusion which I need not say is utterly unscriptural and revolting to reason and to fact. Hence we must look into this point.

What then is sin?

- (1.) It is not something which belongs to the very nature of man -- something mysteriously incorporated into his very being, so that nature is itself sinful. To assume this is the greatest nonsense. What is sin? Is it a created substance? What sort of a substance can sin be? And who must bear the blame of sin if it be a created substance? On this supposition, is it possible to avoid the conclusion that the blame of sin must attach to that creative agency which gave it existence?

- (2.) Sin does not consist in any involuntary state of mind. It does not belong to the substance of the mind, nor to any activities of the mind, apart from the will. It does not pertain to any involuntary state of the mind, nor to any state or action of either its thinking or its feeling faculties. Mind thinks and mind feels; yet in neither of these, strictly speaking, does sin inhere and to neither does sin primarily belong.

When the Scriptures say -- "The thought of wickedness is sin," the language is used only in the same sense in which it is said that muscular action is sin -- that, for example, the muscular action of the arm wielding a club to kill a neighbor is sinful; it is simply the development of a sinful state or act of the will. The mind's intention or will, is the sin in the case. This sin belongs to the muscles of the arm in no other sense than that those are made the instruments of sin. So the plotting and devising of the intellect to accomplish murder are only the instrumentalities which serve a depraved will or intention to murder. The sin lies not in the intellect, but in the intention.

(3.) Sin is very clearly explained in the Bible; and if it were not, we should know what it is, for our reason and conscience would teach us. Ten thousand Bibles could not make it plainer than our own reason and conscience make it to every reflecting mind.

Sin is violation of law, and law of course has respect to voluntary action, and to this only. The Bible does not tell us what color our hair should be, or our skin. It never assumes to legislate on such points; nor does it decree what powers of mind we shall have, or ought to have, but only how we should use them. This is the legitimate province of law, and to this the Bible confines itself -- with no deviation.

Duty must be known in order to become duty. It is the greatest nonsense to affirm that anything can become duty before it is understood by the mind. Prof. Stuart said, "Sin is violation of known law." But we need to go somewhat farther back and show what this "violation of law" is. Law prescribes the rule of voluntary action, and prescribes this rule of course to the will, or voluntary faculty. The will is the law-obeying or law-disobeying faculty. In the action of the will therefore must all sin, properly speaking, lie. Sin therefore always lies back of the external acts and back also of proximate violations.

The law of God requires that the will of His subjects be given up supremely to the doing of His will. This is precisely what the law requires and what it expresses in the language -- "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind."

Sin is consecration to self -- a state of mind that cares supremely for self. This is sin and this only. Muscular action is not itself sin. Strictly speaking, nothing is sin but this state of mind. Muscular action is only the development of sin in the external life.

2. We come next to the question of temptation. What is it?

Sin consists in self-interest and in the soul's voluntary committal of itself to secure self-interest at any cost. A mind in this attitude is powerfully attracted by any object which excites its sensibilities to selfish good. This attractive power we call temptation.

Temptation is not sin, though often confounded with it. Christ was really tempted. If then the question be asked, "What is temptation?" we must answer, all those states of excited sensibility which tend to draw the soul from God.

Take the case of Eve. Her first temptation found her in a holy state of mind. It consisted in an excited appetite and in the presence of beautiful food. Yet neither of these was sin; they were only temptation. Satan moreover suggested that this food was highly useful -- "a tree to be desired to make one wise;" and he more than insinuated that God had prohibited this fruit through mere jealousy, lest Adam and Eve should become wise as Gods, knowing good and evil. As if he had said, "Are you aware that God has forbidden you this fruit lest by eating it you become as wise as He is Himself?" Then he brought it near that she might see its beauty and perhaps that she might smell its fragrance; and then he extolled its mysterious virtue to make one wise, and she had been longing for wisdom. Thus she is tempted and thus she falls! She is under the charm of the devil; is really in a charmed state -- all excited, so that she scarcely knows what she is doing. Her sensibilities are effervescing most intensely -- and what does she do? All this excitement of her sensibilities is not itself sin; but the steps that followed were sin. When tempted thus, she resolved to violate God's command and take and eat the forbidden fruit, then she sinned.

The Apostle said, "Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being deceived was in the transgression." From this testimony and from the history it appears that the deception was practiced on Eve only, and then that she became Adam's tempter. Satan took advantage of her acute sensibilities and

played upon them till his point was gained. He acted the part of a cunning devil. He knew that God had made woman a bundle of susceptibilities, and therefore he approached her on her weak side, and in the absence of her husband. Now I want you all to notice this case and study it closely, for here you may learn the nature of temptation. There stood Eve -- in the presence of the forbidden fruit, her appetite for it powerfully excited; her curiosity to know if it would make her wise stimulated to great activity, the fascinations of the devil acting upon her to charm her soul into yet more burning excitement -- Adam absent and she too much excited to wait for her return; there in the fatal moment she ate and fell. Strange to say she is so much excited that she has no sooner tasted than she runs after Adam to find him and give it to him that he may eat. The thought of guilt for her act seems not yet to have entered her mind.

Now mark this. The law addresses itself to the will; but the will is reached through the sensibility, and this is excited to intense action by temptations. Yet temptation is not sin. No matter how great the temptation if the will resists and refuses to gratify the demands of the excited sensibility.

Let it then be understood, that nothing is temptation until it awakens a sensibility which allures the mind along into, or at least towards sin. If the mind is aware of this tendency towards sin, then there is sin in the very act of indulging the heightened sensibility, for it must be wrong to give indulgence to an excitement which we know tends to draw us into sin. But we cannot suppose that Eve had this knowledge of a tendency to sin in any form of indulgence, because to suppose this implies that she had already had some experience in sinning.

3. Again let it be considered, that temptations to sin are countless. On the one hand flattery; on the other abuse; for flattery tends to make us think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, and abuse irritates the sensibility and provokes to anger. Poverty tempts men to repine against God's providence, while wealth tempts to pride. Honor bestowed excited to ambition, but dishonor stirs the feeling of resentment. All the little trials which occur in the family or in the class-room, myriads in number and endlessly various in character, are temptations, but they are not sins. If the feeling is controlled and the will refuses to yield; if the soul stands firm, steadfastly bearing up against the inducement to sin, then all is well. So

long as the soul stands steadfast, immovable, holding on firmly to the arm of the Lord, there is no sin.

4. The Bible abundantly represents Christ to have been greatly tempted. We might infer that He must have been so, from the very fact of His having human nature. Especially strong in this inference when we consider that He assumed human nature for the very purpose of being tempted, that He might know how to succor them that are tempted.

A careful study of His actual history confirms this view of His case. How often do we see Him abused in a manner which must have tempted Him to anger. No one can read His history without seeing how great His temptations often became.

Among His sorest temptations was that in the garden of Gethsemane. This awful scene of struggle came not upon Him without forewarning. He clearly anticipated its approach. He conversed about it with His disciples; before it came on it would seem that He did so for several days; and we are distinctly informed that as the dreadful agony came upon Him, He warned them of the danger and besought them to pray and watch with Him at least one hour. Some time before this, He had said, Lo, "the prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me." He knows that I shall do my Heavenly Father's will.

The dread hour came on. He hastened to the garden whither He had been wont to resort for private prayer in the hours of His trial. Turning to His accompanying disciples, He said, "Tarry ye here and pray, while I go and pray yonder." He went Himself to the loved retreat and there poured out His soul in most earnest prayer. Here His agony became intensely great. It is recorded that an angel came from heaven to strengthen Him. Wonderful to tell; He who could command twelve legions of angels is now in agony and weakness, and one from those angelic legions comes in sympathy to sustain Him under the crushing weight of His burdens. O the man of sorrows! How does His heart sink under the awful agony of His temptation! Here it was that His "sweat became as it were great drips of blood, falling down to the ground."

It is perhaps impossible for us to tell precisely what this form of temptation was, but we know it must have been most fearful and terrible. It was a tremendous struggle.

Think of the illustration it gives us of the fearful power of Satan. An angel needs to come to resist the devil and give the tempted sufferer strength to overcome.

The Apostle evidently refers to this scene when he said, "Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears, unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared." Heb. 5:7.

5. The Bible informs us that one great object in Christ's being tempted was to teach Him by experience how to sympathize with human flesh and frailty. He would have myriads of tempted children to care for and shield against the power of temptation. How desirable then that He should Himself know what sore temptation means by experiencing Himself the same. This was the divine plan, to make Him a sympathizing and compassionate High Priest, fitted in every respect to be the refuge and the strength of His suffering saints. In fact He needed to know all those trials and temptations which men experience who are greatly tempted, yet without sin.

If the Bible had said no such thing as our text affirms, in respect to Christ's being tempted and His learning thereby how to sympathize and to succor His tempted children, even then we could not but know that God must sympathize with His suffering sons and daughters in their temptations, and so would Christ also. Every parent knows what this feeling of sympathy for a suffering child is. When they see their children suffering, how do their hearts cry out, O that I could suffer those pains myself and take them off by this means from the child I love! Now, from the very nature of benevolence, Christ must feel all this towards His children. He must feel it not only because He is benevolent but also because of the peculiar relation into which He enters with them as His redeemed children. Think how He has mingled Himself as it were with them and His interests with theirs. Is it not said, "And we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones"? No fellowship has He with their sins; but with them, as His redeemed sons and daughters He has a most intense and wonderful fellowship. To redeem them from all sin and to guard them most perfectly against it -- these objects lie inexpressibly near His heart. O, if He could die for us, and suffer so much under Satan's fiercest temptations -- all for our sake, -- no wonder He should sympathize with us most intensely when He sees us in anguish. He feelings

must be keen and intense just in proportion as He sees us under the agonies of trial and temptations, and His sympathetic sorrow for us must be according to the strength of His benevolence and the depth of His great sympathy for His beloved people.

He knows now how to succor those that are tempted. From experience He has learned how succor comes to the tempted. Having been Himself strengthened in the hour of His agony, He knows how to strengthen others.

6. We can confide in those who have had experience, when we know the fact. In such cases, nothing is more natural than to expect sympathy and to repose confidence.

In the domestic relations, one who has never had a wife cannot sympathize with one who has had but has lost the sharer of his deepest sympathies. The anguish of the bereaved husband no man can understand by a merely theoretic investigation. No man can tell his neighbor so that he shall be able to understand from the description merely, what this sorrow of heart is. Hence when one professes to sympathize with us, if we know he has had no experience of the sort, we know he does not understand our case. How can you, young woman, understand the sorrows of that mother who holds on her lap her dying child? You must first be yourself a mother and hold on your lap a dying child; then you can know what these heart-sorrows are, and can sympathize with those who endure this sorrow.

The same law is developed everywhere. The young convert knows that unconverted sinners cannot understand his state of mind and the trials he experiences. If he falls under the power of temptation, he knows that one who has not experienced such temptation can by no means sympathize with him. He would not go to him for sympathy, nor for counsel and aid. None except those who have known the Christian's hopes and sensibilities and temptations can enter into them with true sympathy.

In view of this great principle, we can see how fitting and beautiful is the divine economy in making Jesus our great High Priest, familiar with the Christian's trials by experience. He placed Himself in circumstances like ours that He might know what sorrow is and what sore temptations mean. He has Himself endured temptations, excitements, sorrows and persecutions. He knows in His own experience what the assaults of Satan are. The Bible says

that one great object of this plan was that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in behalf of a suffering and tempted people.

7. Who does not know how natural it is for us to seek sympathy from those who are known to understand our case by experience. Young Christians naturally do this. They fly to those who can appreciate all their trials and enter deeply into their sympathies. This is true not only of all Christians but of all men, under all circumstances of life.

This principle in our nature gives a rich and heightened beauty to all Christ's earthly experience. When we see Him passing through all the various trials of mortal life and understand why He subjected Himself to all this, we cannot fail to see a manifestation of benevolence and a proof of His most abundant fitness for His work -- such as would charm our souls into love and trust, and away from all unbelief. Think how He endured the trial of being unpopular, and also of being popular; how He was both caressed and commended on the one hand; slandered and condemned on the other; how with patient step He trod the varied paths of human life, toiling and suffering even more than falls to the lot of most men -- breasting the storms of affliction; closing in with every form of conflict; joining battle with the world and putting it down beneath His feet; resisting Satan's assaults and foiling him at every step. Thus onward He moved through the scenes of earthly trial, tasting each cup of human trial and sorrow, till He should know them all in their extremest form -- that He might be able to succor those that are tempted.

8. Let us notice next some of the ways in which Christ gives succor to His people in temptation. He does this,

(1.) By assuring them of His presence. O what a wonderful charm and power there is in this! What a safeguard against discouragement, for whose heart can ever sink within him while he is conscious of his Savior's presence? In their seasons of sorest trials, Christians are wont to feel a thick and almost sensible darkness round about their souls; but the light of the Savior's presence scatters this away: for how can it be night to our souls when Jesus reveals His presence? When He manifests Himself as one who sympathizes with us in our trials, what a blessed charm is wrought upon us! How strong we feel to bear our

burdens; how powerfully sustained under all our trials! O how congenial to every feeling of the heart! It becomes a pleasure to endure for Jesus' sake.

"I can do all things or can bear,

All sufferings if my Lord be there."

(2.) Christ sustains us by reminding us of what He has done and suffered for us. He brings before us the scenes of His agony, and thereby not only assures us of His true and actual sympathy with us, but also of His suffering on our behalf. I recollect being present when the limb of Mrs. C. was amputated.

It is well known here that she was extremely weak and great fears were entertained that she would not survive the operation. Efforts were made to render her insensible to pain by means of mesmeric influence, but all in vain. The hour came and the work must proceed. I sat down by her bedside, and began to talk to her about the sufferings of Christ her Savior. He suffered, said I to her, far more for you than you are suffering now. The effect of this consideration upon her mind was truly wonderful. As long as it could be kept before her, it acted like a charm. She scarcely felt her physical pains. The surgeon said that this was better than mesmerism.

So the whole system may be in the extremest agony, but if the eye of faith can look through its tears and see Jesus, and realize how He suffered, it charms the soul away from its sorrows, and bathes it in an atmosphere of peace and joy.

(3.) Christ breaks the power of temptation by revealing the hatefulness of sin. If He can only get the mind's attention, and bring Himself and His deeds of love before its view, then sin is made to appear exceeding sinful and the temptation vanishes away.

Some of you know how this principle was illustrated in the case of Bro. H. and his pipe of tobacco. He had been long addicted to this indulgence, and had often resolved to break away, but to no purpose. At length as he was musing on the matter, pipe in mouth, the thought flashed on his mind: "Did Jesus die to purchase for me such a filthy indulgence as this?" In an instant the power of temptation was broken, and away went pipe

and temptation together. Neither ever returned again. The charm had gone, the snare was broken, and the bird escaped on wings -- to be imprisoned no more. In that one thought, Christ came with power to the soul and burst its fetters asunder.

How often is the mind in agony under the power of its temptations! It groans out in a tearless agony, as if there could be no deliverance and no power to endure much longer -- till suddenly Christ comes, the soul bursts its fetters and is at peace. Then she sings of victory! victory! through Jesus Christ her Lord.

REMARKS.

1. Temptation, or at least, a strong tendency towards it, may be constitutional and probably often is so. Probably ever since the fall of the first human pair, there has been in the human constitution an increased excitability towards temptation. By this means the race are exposed to strong temptation, some more strong in one direction and some in another; one to licentious indulgence, another to ambition, another to the abuse of power. Yet let it be strictly observed, all this tendency to temptation, however strong, is not itself sin. For however great these temptations and tendencies are, yet if they are resisted and steadfastly opposed, all the more does the soul soar aloft in the triumphs of victorious grace.

If these temptations are firmly resisted, they are not to be regarded even as calamities. Take the case of a man born with a strong tendency in his constitution towards the excitement of intoxicating drink. If he resists this temptation, he grows in moral strength and in true moral elevation of character, with every successive resistance. The original tendency is more a blessing than a curse to him.

2. One great design of God in sending these temptations upon us, is to augment our moral strength. Who does not know that under the discipline thus obtained, men become ten thousand times stronger than they would otherwise be? The Bible teaches us that saints in their future inheritance of glory are to be raised above most other orders of beings. Hence they are tried and proved here for the very purpose of becoming fitted for their exaltation there. Apostles begun this career of discipline, to fit them for what awaited them in the world of their exaltation. Forth abroad they went, through perils by land and sea, perils of robbers, perils of persecution, perils of scorn and hate and malice of wicked men

-- all this to test their fidelity to their Great Master, and prepare them to be chief officers in the future church of God, to sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Often did our Lord inculcate this principle of His government: "He that is faithful in the least, is faithful also in much." "Thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things."

Following in their footsteps, see that great company of struggling, toiling saints and martyrs. They wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb. In every age the work goes on, and myriads are being trained and disciplined under the providential agencies of earth for the corresponding rewards and glories of heaven. Kings and priests shall they become under the exalted reign of their Lord.

Let none of them, therefore, complain of trials and discipline though they pass through ever so much temptation and sorrow here. You will go up at last, praising God that He gave you a sympathizing High Priest, under whose sustaining hand, every trial was borne triumphantly and every sorrow endured with patience. As you move along the eternal hills, your brow bathed in the sunlight of heaven, and your hand bearing one of those golden harps, you will not regret that your pathway on earth lay through the fires of tribulation.

Will these young men and women be there? Shall we see you mounting those glorious hills, and sounding forth the melodies of heaven, on harps of gold? And must some of you go in the very opposite direction, hiding your heads for shame, and crying to the rocks and to the mountains, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him that sits upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb"? Alas, that any of you should choose such a doom when you might have the joys of the blessed just as well, if you would!

3. The sympathy of Jesus can never be over-estimated. Aye, never, NEVER. How deep must I let down the lead and line to fathom the depth of your sympathy for your children? A long line it must be, doubtless. But suppose you cast your line into the great deep of Jehovah's love; where will you find its bottom? Who can mount up to its heights, or go down to its mighty depths? Had you an angel's powers, this effort would be all in vain. And are you then in danger of over-estimating the love of Jesus Christ and His sympathy for His people? O, you have only thought as a child and formed conceptions as a mere pigmy does -- yea, though your heart be all dissolved with sympathy and responsive affection.

4. To lack confidence in the sympathy of Christ is utter ruin to the soul. Let this confidence be wanting and suddenly you are driven away and dashed on the rocks of ruin! You have let go your anchor, and away you drift, dashing and plunging -- like a ship on a lee shore and breakers close ahead under her bow.

But if your pilot is on hand, true to his work, and all is made safe through his skill and care and your confidence in him, then you may laugh at all these terrors. They can be no terrors to you. So if ye who are Christians, professedly, fail to believe in Christ, Satan will surely drive you upon the rocks, and triumph over your eternal ruin.

5. Faith often needs encouragement. Christ understands this perfectly. He knows that although His people believe in Him somewhat, and of course must have some faith in Him, or they cannot be His people at all, yet they often greatly need encouragement to greater faith. He knows that they need to have their hearts powerfully penetrated with the love of God and brought under the full impression of this great truth. When this impression is fully made on the heart and you come to see how much is meant in God's infinite love to lost souls and to His redeemed people, then, O then, what a wonderful relief comes to the troubled soul! Then faith finds an everlasting rock on which it may repose. The effect on the mind is as when old ocean, long tossed with the tempest and thrown into the utmost commotion, is hushed all suddenly, the clouds dispersed and the winds falling to a dead calm. Then how the old ocean sinks to rest. So does the soul when God's love is seen and faith finds its firm footing on God's everlasting promises, and those promises are seen to emanate from His unbounded love.

6. If Christ did not sympathize with sinners, when would they ever be converted? Sinners often get the impression that though Christ has much sympathy with His converted people, yet He has none for themselves. He may have sympathy, they say, with those who already love Him, but I am a sinner, and how can He care for me? But see. Look at the case of those very saints with whom you admit Christ now has sympathy. I put to you this simple question: Did Christ's care and compassion for them begin after their conversion, or before? If you say it began after their conversion, then I ask you, how they ever came to be converted at all? How came they to be saints? Surely you must admit that Christ sought them while they were in their sins; else they had never been found and brought into His fold. Will you not then believe that Christ cares for you, though He knows you are yet in your sins? He knows that you are lost,

condemned, unable to save yourself; totally, utterly unable to make any atonement for your sins, and hence unable to rescue yourself from the terrible ruin into which your sin has plunged you. He knows too all your natural aversion of heart to come to Him for pardon; and He understands perfectly the kind of dependence on Him which you have on this account. And now, does He not care for your soul? Yes, ten thousand times more than you do for your own. Infinitely more ready is He to pour out His soul for you than you are to shed one tear for yourself, and O how much more ready to die for you than you are to lift a finger for Him! Before your very eyes He takes His stand, with His bleeding heart all gushing out before you in love and sympathy for you, and yet you scarcely ever see it! And even now, what are you doing and of what are you thinking? Do you fall back in your seat and say to yourself -- "This is a long and tedious sermon; how little interest I find in these things!" Alas, alas! that the things of salvation should be so unmeaning to you, that they should awaken so little thought or care! O, if it were possible, after you have reached your final abode and after the gates have been closed on you forever; if after that dread hour it were still possible that you might hear a voice, saying, Go back to Oberlin for one more Sabbath; once more for a single day you may take your place there among God's people and hear the choir sing, and bow your soul in prayer for mercy and listen to the gospel offers, once more occupying the position of a sinner under reprieve with offers of mercy held out before him; if I say, all this were only possible, and it might be your privilege, would you not shout for joy and welcome it? Do you not today believe most assuredly that you would consecrate such a day of mercy most solemnly to the work of repentance, making sure of salvation with all your might? No doubt you would, and no doubt you now believe you would. Then why not do so now? Now you have that privilege. Now the door of mercy is just as really open to you as it could be if you were to come back from hell for one more day's grace. But you know that the supposition I have made is utterly impracticable. You know that no sinner since the world began has ever come back to take his place again even for one hour in the house of God to seek and secure his own salvation. You know therefore that now, not then; that here, not there, is your accepted time and your day of salvation.

What, therefore, do you say now? Will you come to meet Jesus now? He reaches down His hand; will you put your hand in His, saying, I give Thee my heart? Am I entirely mistaken in assuming that some of you do say this today -- that some sinners are ready to cry out, Yes, Yes, YES: thou sayest, "Seek ye My face; my

heart replies, Thy face, Lord, will I seek."

Now I want you should tell me whether you will deal honestly and truly with Jesus, my master, or whether you will not? Let me know what you will do, and what you will not do. Will you come to Jesus Christ today?

[Back to Top](#)

Election and Reprobation

Lecture XI

November 24, 1852

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Jer. 6:30: "Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them."

Text.--Matt. 22:14: "For many are called, but few are chosen."

Text.--1 Pet. 1:2: "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father."

From these texts you will perceive that I have chosen for my subject ELECTION AND REPROBATION. In discussing it, I propose

I. To define the terms.

II. Show what the scripture doctrine really is.

III. State the reasons for Election and also for Reprobation

IV. Show how, as a general fact, we may determine to which class any individual belongs.

First of all, let me admonish you not to be frightened at the terms, Election and Reprobation. They are Bible terms, and therefore need not alarm any but those who contend against the truth. They are Bible terms, yet have been greatly abused, so that my first business must be to define them, and then in my

subsequent remarks, to illustrate them, in order to remove the stumbling-blocks occasioned by their abuse.

I. "Elected" means chosen.

It means precisely this--neither more nor less. A "reprobate" thing is a thing rejected or cast away. To reprobate is to reject, to disapprove, and hence to set aside. It is the counter-part of elect. Such is the meaning of the terms.

II. What now is the Scripture doctrine?

Briefly this: God has chosen to salvation a part of mankind, and has also made up His mind to cast off a part. The whole doctrine is embraced in this: God's mind is made up as to what He will do in the matter of saving or not saving the individuals of our race. His mind, I say, is made up; of course it is if it ever will be, for He has no new mind, and cannot ever have any new views, new knowledge, or new plans. All things are present to God from the beginning. To deny that God has made up His mind as to what he will do in this matter is to deny the essential attributes of God, for both the beginning and the end are both alike known to Him. With perfect and infinite knowledge ever present to His mind from all past eternity, it is impossible that His mind should not be made up, as to what He will do in the matter of human salvation.

III. But God has good reasons for all He does.

He never makes up His mind without having good reasons, and never otherwise than in accordance with those reasons.

The elect, therefore, are those whom God has, for the best of reasons, determined to save; the reprobate, in like manner, are those whom, for infinitely good reasons, He has made up His mind to cast off for perdition.

What are these good reasons?

1. Not any arbitrary sovereignty on God's part, a sovereignty which has no good reasons for its foundation. God is indeed a Sovereign, but only in the good sense. He judges and decides alone, unaided by the wisdom of any created being; and this, not because He is above taking counsel, if there were any being whom He could wisely consult. God's acts of sovereignty, therefore, are all infinitely wise and benevolent. They are determined on

and fixed, only because they are infinitely right and reasonable, and because he sees the reasons for them with perfect clearness, and feels their force so strongly that He cannot do otherwise than act accordingly.

2. The elect are not chosen on account of their own desert or righteousness. Mark what I say; not because they are by nature any better than others. They are not by nature any better than the reprobate, for they had nothing in the constitution of their being better than others had.

3. Nor was it because their sins were any less in number or aggravation than the sins of those whom God will cast away; but it was because he saw that he could save them under the wisest possible administration of government. He saw it possible to secure their salvation without departing from His chosen system of moral administration. He could secure their confidence in Him and their assent to His scheme of salvation. Yet let it be observed, not for their concurrence in this gospel scheme, considered as a thing of merit, a thing which in justice claims salvation. God could so arrange His government as to secure their voluntary consent.

4. The reprobate are cast off for their foreseen rejection, not on condition of their future wickedness, but for it. The elect are chosen on the condition of its being possible to secure their confidence in Him and their assent to the scheme of salvation.

5. When I say God foresaw, I use the term, not as when it is used of men. We do not foresee as He does. God sustains no such relations to time as we do. He dwells in time absolute. With us, events transpire, but not with God. Before Him all things are present.

The things which are always present to God, become known to creatures only as they transpire--only as they develop themselves in time. The things always known to God, become known to us only as they develop themselves in their occurrence. They were a secret from all eternity in His bosom. In the lapse of time, they come forth, boiling up before the eyes of creatures.

God's knowing future things does not make them occur. His omniscience no more controls our conduct than our knowing how men will act controls their action. The acts of free agents may be certain, in the sense that God knows with certainty what they will be, yet are they none the less free and

voluntary.

6. In the case of those who are chosen to salvation, all the facts in view of which God made up His mind, will come out before the view of the finite minds of His creatures. On the other hand, all the reasons in the case of the lost will come up to view. All will pass in full review before the universe in the solemn judgment, so that all intelligent beings of the universe will say, God could have done no otherwise than He has. They will see that the elect were chosen and finally saved on the condition that God could win them, and that the wicked were reprobated and lost because of the fact that God could not win them to give up their sins and accept of salvation.

7. Now, mark what I say: A great deal is said about God's sovereignty--a great deal of nonsense too. But mark this--it is not so much the sovereignty of God as the sovereignty of man, on which this question turns. No man can deny his own freedom, and to act freely is to exercise, in this respect, the attribute of sovereignty. Man is free, for how can he either promise or purpose anything without freedom? If he is not free, he can no more promise or purpose than a wind-mill can. Go up to a wind-mill, accost it by name, assuming its sovereignty and free independence, and ask it if it will please turn so and so, and with such and such velocity. You stand rebuked in your folly, for that is a wind-mill, not a man--a wind-mill acting without free agency, and not a man, conscious of freedom.

Man always assumes his own liberty and freedom. He can no more deny it rationally than he can deny his own existence. the fact is, every man knows himself to be free, and in this sense a sovereign.

God puts man upon his own character and responsibility; holds him to his responsibility, and cannot righteously do otherwise. He places before him law; this the sinner rejects. Then God presents the gospel, and having exerted such influence as he wisely can, leaves him ultimately to his own responsibility. God can do no more than to place before him motives to induce right voluntary action. If God should attempt to convert him in any other way than by acting upon his free mind, by means of truth, it would avail nothing. Some suppose that God takes hold of a man and changes his nature, the very constitution of his being. But this would not convert him unless it changed the voluntary state of his mind. A change in the voluntary attitude of the mind is primarily all that is needed. This, and nothing else or

other than this, is conversion. God never acts on man otherwise than upon a moral being. Hence, man's own sovereignty must determine his destiny.

IV. The destiny for men for eternity is in general very plainly indicated in their lives.

For if men are ever saved by the gospel, they must be savingly influenced by it while yet they live on earth. If they are ever lost, it will be because they reject the gospel. Now, therefore, if we see that the gospel is taking effect on any mind, we see reason to conclude that that individual will be saved, for he is being saved already. The gospel is already renewing his soul and saving it from sin. We have therefore the appropriate evidence that he is elected unto salvation.

But if we see that an individual is being cursed by the gospel--if it only serves to harden his heart and make him more obstinate, more wicked, more the child of hell than before, we see conclusive marks of his reprobation.

Hence if we would know whether men are elected or reprobated, we must watch. We must notice how the gospel affects them, and what attitude they take towards it. This we may with considerable certainty foresee their destiny--and in like manner our own.

How then may it generally be known whether or not any individual is elected to salvation?

It is not always possible for us to judge accurately in this world. Sometimes things are working deep in the mind which we do not see. Sometimes men seem to be going in the wrong direction with alarming certainty, but at length they turn, unexpectedly to us, and we find the gospel asserting its due power over their minds. So on the other hand, some seem to be running well for a time, but by a sudden turn they take the way of death, and crush all our fond anticipations.

Yet these are only the exceptions; the Bible teaches us that as a general rule we may judge who are reprobates. It requires us to prove our own selves and gives us the tests whereby we may know whether we are reprobates or not.

I therefore proceed to notice some of the indications by which men may know whether they are or are not reprobates.

I do this for two reasons,

(1.) It is due to all the saints that they should have the consolation of knowing that they are among the chosen.

(2.) It is of great importance that saints should know the marks as they appear upon others to show whether or not they are elected. it is also well that sinners should be able to see as in a glass their own coming destiny, that being warned of their peril they may escape while yet salvation is possible. Yet let me say again, I do not imply that these marks are infallible. They are approximate indications--probable signs, sometimes amounting almost to certainty; but nothing more.

Those who are elected to be saved attend to the means of salvation. This is plain, because if they are ever to be saved, it must be through their attention to those means by which God saves men. Men are saved if at all by the agency of these means. God cannot save by merely physical influence; the nature of the case forbids it. Moral and physical government are entirely distinct and contrasted. The planets are not moved by motives, nor free minds by gravitation. Matter requires one form of moving power--mind another. It is simply absurd to confound the distinction between the two.

The elect, then, will attend to the truth--will hear, and having heard will think. They will, if they can, attend the places of religious worship and instruction I do not assert that every man who goes to meeting will be saved, or that all who sometimes stay away will be lost, but I speak of the general law that obtains in this matter and of the general influences that stand connected with men's salvation or damnation. As a general thing, the elect will go to meeting--will search for truth. They are indicated by their attention to these means of grace, and the non-elect for the same reason by their neglect of these means.

A personal and permanent interest in gospel truth must be awakened in the minds of the elect, for they are to be saved through the influence of this truth.

I have preached in many hundreds of congregations. I have seen hundreds of persons of whom observers could say as they saw their aspect in the house of God--"That man's ears are opened; he is attentive and solemn;--pray for him--he will be converted." Soon he is converted.

But some of you come here, all inattentive, with no serious thought or concern about God's truth or the relation which your souls bear to that truth. Such

persons are reprobated--with almost an entire certainty,--reprobate for the very reason that they would not attend to the truth and would not think on their ways. Have I not touched the case of some among you? You come into the house of God, but you treat the truth of God presented here as a reprobate would--as one whom God cannot save because He cannot get your attention. You say, "O I hope God won't send me to hell-- why should He"! What else can He do with you? He cannot get your attention when He speaks to you. Of course he cannot reach your heart, for He cannot even arrest your thoughts and put you upon noticing what He has to say.

But you say--"What is it that I have done so very bad?" What have I done, do you say? If your professor should speak to you in the recitation--and speak again, no answer--and speak again--ten times repeated, yet you deign not one answer, but go on with your amusements, reading your book or otherwise diverting your mind, treating him with the utmost contempt, could he teach you and thus do you any good? And would it be quite proper for you to ask as if in amazement--What have I done?

So are you doing, sinner, in your abuse of God by utter inattention to what He has to say to you.

A candid state of mind is a hopeful indication. It is both a fit state of mind in itself, and also an essential condition of arriving at the knowledge of the truth and of being benefited by it. Hence you may safely set this trait of mind down as one of the marks of the elect.

But the reprobate are cavilling and captious, full of subtle reasoning and sophistry. At least this is the fact with many of them.

And how is this with some of you? Are you candid and honest, or are you cavilling and captious? You know in the depths of your soul how this is, and you ought to know what these traits of mind indicate.

Again, the elect are too much taken up with the plain things of a sermon and the great duties inculcated, to be stumbled at what they do not understand. They are so much engrossed in what is good, that they naturally overlook what is objectionable.

But the reprobate will do the very opposite. They overlook the good and seize on the objectionable; they overlook the plain things because they teach unwelcome

duties, and set themselves to cavil at the mysterious things. How often are they found stumbling at the doctrine of the Trinity, wresting and misrepresenting the scriptures!

And are not such men reprobates? Of course they are--unless they speedily repent. Of course this must be a mark of reprobation, because men are reprobated for these very things. In time they manifest their evil captious hearts, just as God foresaw they would.

Now how is it with you? When you hear a sermon, are you so much taken up with its great and good thoughts and its useful things that you have no heart to think of its defects; or does your mind fasten on the defective things, to the neglect of all that is useful and good? There are two classes of hearers;--one class hear as critics; the other as Christians. One class are wholly engaged in criticism and cavil; being part scholars in grammar, their attention is all arrested by some slip of the tongue or some inadvertent violation of syntax, so that they can think of nothing else through the balance of the sermon. Some read the Bible just so. They will ask--not how much of Cain's sin ought to lie on their own conscience for having hated their own brethren, but, Where did Cain get his wife? This and a thousand other caviling questions they ask just as reprobates naturally do, because it is for these every things that they are reprobated. They come sometimes to the house of God, but they take their seat far back--a great way off--perhaps in the window with their eyes abroad, or with book in hand so that they can readily divert their mind. There they read or play or whisper in the most perfect indifference and carelessness. Truth preached is to them as seen sown by the way side--trodden under foot and forbidden to vegetate.

Are not some of you not applying these things to yourselves, as already true in your own experience? Thus far in the moral pathway of your life, you have gone in the road of the reprobate, nor have deviated from it by one single step.

Another mark of the elect is this; they search for truth, while reprobates search for error. They love it and therefore must search for it, it being a demand of their hearts. This must be a distinguishing mark, for the elect must of necessity believe the truth, else they cannot be saved; in order to believe, they must know and in order to know they must search--search in candor and as for hid treasures. Some are so earnest for the truth that they really dig and mine the bible in search for its treasures. But the reprobate are uncandid when truth is presented before them, and as for searching it out, they are much more likely to be on the scent

after some foul, long rotten error. The beauty of truth has no charms for them; but you cannot say the same of the ugliness of error.

Again, the elect will believe the truth. Having studied and understood the truth, they are sure to believe and embrace it. They do so because they mean to be candid. But the reprobate may be known by the readiness with which they believe lies and the very great difficulty they find in believing any valuable moral truth. I recollect that I received a pamphlet some years since, full of mesmerism and its monstrous absurdities. I could not read it without being greatly affected with the testimony it bore to the moral state of the writer. Is it possible, said I, that such a man, of such education, of such intelligence and good sense, can get into such a relation to great moral truth as to believe this nonsense! Is it possible that he can believe such fooleries as these and yet reject the gospel as not fit to be believed!

Some men will believe anything they please. In the line of lies they can believe with great ease that Jonah could swallow a whale; but in the line of truth they cannot even believe that the whale could swallow Jonah! They cannot believe the most simple things in the gospel, however well sustained by evidence, but they can believe mesmerism and all similar nonsense, or any other absurdity which men of perverse minds and reprobate as to the truth are palming off upon our age.

Of the two classes of people morally divided on the point of being saved or not saved, the one have no time to attend to the faults of other people;--the other class scarcely find time for anything else; the one are too much engrossed in studying and obeying the demands of an enlightened conscience to be easily diverted, while the other class are tenfold more inquisitive about other people's conscience than about their own, and commonly are quite ready to take upon themselves to keep the conscience of all the church and of the world besides--so much taken up with picking a hole in the hedge to peep at the weeds in a neighbor's garden that the weeds in their own grow unmolested till they utterly swamp their owner. O how many men of this stripe help to compose our Christian communities!

One class are so much engaged in self-improvement that they get no time to look after other people's faults, while another class are so familiar with other's faults, that they commonly hear sermons chiefly for the benefit and rebuke of their neighbors. O how long their necks become while they sit and reach over and

around to see how their neighbors receive the merited castigation!

One class receive what condemns as well as what justifies; with equal readiness what exposes their own wrong as what commends the right. Not so with the other--the class of reprobates, for they receive of a sermon what seems to them to commend, but set aside promptly what does not.

The elect are often found condemning themselves even more severely than anyone else condemns them; often they are more searching, severe and straightforward in applying the truth to themselves than others in giving it such application. The reason of this often is that they are honest and know their own faults and defects better than anybody else does. You will find them peculiarly unwilling to take credit to themselves. They say--"O my soul, come forward to this light--come up to this strong and clear light and let all thy sins be set in order before thine eyes." O how his soul sweats with agony! He is determined to be thorough and searching in his application of the truth. He sees so much more to condemn in himself than in others that he wonders at the favorable estimate which others are wont to make of him.

Exactly the opposite is true of reprobates. They have an excuse for every offence. When they cannot actually make out anything in real defence, they yet toil hard for apologies. Instead of coming down to their knees and pleading there for mercy, they resort to special pleading in self-vindication and thus ruin their own souls.

The elect give themselves thoroughly and with great jealousy to understand the spirit of God's requirements, fearful lest they shall not admit the claims of God fully to their hearts. It by no means satisfies them that the external is blameless;-they must go deep to the heart and know that all is right there, asking continually at the door of the heart--What is thy motive?

Right over against these are the reprobates--reprobated because they take the opposite course. Their self-application of truth never goes beyond its letter. They say--"If I do about what is honest, God will accept me and I can rest on His justice"--albeit they take this term honest in a very loose and superficial sense. Hence though the outside of cup and platter are made to look decent, yet within are dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

The elect renounce and abhor their own righteousness as any ground of

acceptance with God whatever. "What!" their hearts exclaim, "am I to be saved upon my own righteousness? I have no righteousness to be saved upon! Impossible that such a mode of salvation should ever reach my case!"

In truth nothing can be more abhorrent to their deep convictions. They would not trust their salvation on the goodness of the best hour of their lives.

But the reprobate are always blind--perversely and madly blind to the true spirit of God's requirements. They don't want to see their own hearts, nor would they like by any means to understand too well the spirituality of God's law.

You will see the elect most earnest and sincere to renounce themselves and their spirit of self-seeking--all their own will and their own way. They will not depend at all on their own repentance, their own righteousness, or their own faith; most utterly do they renounce self and all that pertains to it.

The reprobate cleave to their own self-interest as if it were the only possible good and this the only wise way to win it.

The elect will seize the present moment and not put off duty forever, or indeed, at all; but procrastination is the everlasting law of the reprobate.

I ought to have paused on each one of these many points, to ask you solemnly how the count stands in your own souls. Will you answer it now in the silence of your own reflection, and let conscience render an honest verdict!

The elect become honest with themselves, with God and with all men. Else they could not be saved. Without this, they must be reprobated.

The elect cry out--"Search me, O God, search me all out most thoroughly"; but do you ever find the non-elect doing this? Notice that elect child. The scaling tears flow down his cheeks; his heart is tender and full of many fears lest in the hour of temptation he should sin against his God. But here is another man; long and in vain has the Lord sought and labored to draw his soul into an honest state and bring him to self-searching.

You will find that if the elect at any time fall into mistakes and errors they are ready to renounce them. At once when they suspect they may be in the wrong they pause and say--"I will surely aim to look at the truth and search it all out. I have no fear of truth--nor dread of seeing my duty."

But the reprobate are distinguished by their pride and self-committal. You may know them by their fear of being laughed at for doing right after having done wrong. You will see them persist in their errors and evil ways and never give them up till they go down to the depths of hell.

The elect are duly actuated by fear of God--not a servile but a filial fear, well aware that it is rational to stand in awe before the great and holy God. They do not think it becomes them to be above acknowledging that they are afraid of God's judgments and terrors.

But the reprobate lift up their heads on high and disdain to be influenced by fear of punishment or fear of God in any form.

The elect are duly affected by the mercy of God. It has a deep and melting influence on their hearts. On the other hand the reprobate are for the most part unmoved by this influence. You will recollect I said some Sabbaths since that some are so hardened that the mercy of God has no power on them. Instead of bowing under God's mercy, affected to penitence and tenderness thereby, they become only the more bold and presumptuous.

But the elect have the utmost fear to sin. It is not merely or chiefly the fear of being punished; they are afraid to grieve their Heavenly Father--just as a dutiful child fears to add one pang to the griefs of a mother's heart.

The reprobate, however, if they are compelled to admit the truth of the gospel, only abuse it and make the utmost use of it as an occasion for more and bolder sin.

The elect you will be likely to find in the way and use of special means of grace and favored seasons of divine influence. How many times have I seen persons who in seasons of revival, when the clouds grow big with promised rain, must be off. Away they go on some hastily projected journey, or some newly got up plan for business. In the hours of ingathering, they will not be there. Publicans and harlots will crowd into the kingdom, but not they. They are out of its way. Or if they stay at home you will mark that when a mighty shower of divine effusions descends on the congregation, the sermon that was blest to scores and hundreds will be unblest to them. They do not hear as for their lives. They hear after a sort, but they go their way, and it is as if they had heard nothing at all.

It is in view of all these facts, foreseen in the divine eye, that His mind is made

up. He sees that He can do nothing with them but give them over to a reprobate mind and to its inevitable results.

The elect can never be made to rest in an unsanctifying hope. They know and feel that they must have a self-purifying hope, like that of John as he describes it in his epistle--"He that hath this hope purifieth himself even as Christ is pure." If they find they have a hope that does not induce them to purify themselves, they say at once--"This is not the hope for me"!

But the reprobate will be satisfied with the least possible evidence. The least that will suffice to allay their fears of hell will answer all their purpose. they live with little self-examination;--know that their hope is not one that purifies the heart--knows it does not lead them to break off from sin--yet since so many are seen or supposed to be in the same condition, they make up their minds to it with little difficulty.

The elect are greatly afraid of delusion; they dread it exceedingly as a real and a great evil. The Bible says of some delusions, they are so subtle that if it were possible they would deceive the very elect, assuming that this is not possible. If so it must be because through grace they can be kept watching and prayerful against every delusion. but the reprobate court it. mark how they rush into every new form of self-delusion. Averse to the truth through hatred of heart against it, they almost pray for delusion. O how greedily they hail whatever new light in the shape of mesmerism and rappings afford a place of retreat from the unwelcome blaze of Bible truth.

The elect will be on their guard against bad company. This is one of the dangers against which they must be willing to watch, or they cannot be saved and could not have been elected. I think now of the case of a young man who began to form acquaintance with another--an acquaintance at first hopeful, but ere long something occurred which aroused his fears and soon something else of the same indication, yet more startling. Suddenly my young friend paused and said--I must cut your acquaintance at once, for how can I trust myself in your society! Such a step required moral courage. It also indicated that that young man was in the way of saving his own soul, and therefore might be presumed to be one of the elect.

Right over against this I remember the case of a young man traveling with his father and other friends. I could not but notice how the father watched that son.

"I must do so, said he, for I know that he is continually rushing into bad company. The moment he sees any of that class of society, their attraction becomes to him almost resistless.. He seems to love the society of young men who will debauch his principles and deprave his morals. It seems to me often that he will ruin his own soul in spite of the utmost care I can take of him."

The elect will be afraid of bad habits, and ever on their guard against them. If at any time they have fallen under the power of temptation in this direction, they will try to recover themselves at once from the snare.

Right over against this stands the case of the reprobate, easily known by the fact that they are not afraid of bad habits, but are easily led into them, as God knew they would be, and therefore was compelled to give them over to a reprobate mind.

The elect are afraid of bad books, but the reprobate are not, but rather relish them and indulge in their perusal.

You see one class, betaking themselves to a prayer meeting, while another class wonder why anybody should go there. The latter will say, "If I have not religion enough to seek my own gratification, what's my religion good for?" About as reasonable as if the drunkard should say, "If I can't get drunk, and get safely out of it again, what's my religion good for?"

The reprobate walk evermore in a worldly way, and not in God's ways and God's counsels. The ways of the world are the ways of their choice. The elect are not satisfied with merely amiable qualities, they must have the deep fountains of the heart broken up, and it's Augean stables cleansed. The reprobate satisfy themselves with the smoothest and most plausible forms--anything that will prepare them to slide down on a glass rail road to the depths of hell.

The elect seek to mortify their pride, and often do things for this very purpose, just to crush down the hated thing, saying--I will not bear it nor spare it; I put my heel on the very head of the serpent and it shall live no longer.

But the reprobate abhor such a course, and even cultivate their pride.

In times of revival, an elect man will say--Now is my time, I must not delay a moment longer. I must seize my opportunity while yet it is called today. But the reprobate contrive ten thousand excuses, often self-contradictory and always

senseless and vain. In point is the case of a young man in Rochester many years since, who, when the revival commenced, and he was pressed with the claims of the gospel, replied--"Shall I make myself a laughing stock among the youth of this city? Do you expect me to be so singular as to set off for the Celestial City all alone?" Ere long the masses were melted and moved. Then, pressed again with the claims of the gospel, he replied--"What! shall I go with the rabble? Do you expect me to connect myself with the masses of merely common people?" Soon the dreadful cholera came--it smote him, and in three short but dreadful hours, took him from the earth, and hurried him before that God, whose claims he had so frivolously and lightly set aside!

So with the reprobate, when the great gospel trumpet is blown, waxing louder and louder, they will not hear. Their hearts are sealed against the truth, and their doom, for this very reason, sealed for the awful judgment. They are reprobates, because they would play the fool, and, because no wisdom could be welcome to their souls.

The elect, moreover, are striving for sanctification. The reprobate, let their profession of piety be as it may, have no heart to become holy as God is holy.

The elect will persevere. Not so with the reprobate, for they are distinguished by a short-lived piety, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away. Like a boat in the Niagara, above the mighty cataract, the elect will strike firmly, and ply their oars with their might, and bear away in safety; but the reprobate, give a few feeble strokes, and then give way to the furious current, and are borne along with dashing speed, over the dreadful precipice, down, down, to ruin. Perhaps they set out in their religion, only to make a little experiment, and see how they liked it. Need I tell you, these experimenters are shortly stumbled, and when the sun is up and waxes hot, they wither away.

The elect will have more and more conscience. Mark them when and where you will, they are becoming daily and yearly in their moral course, more and more conscientious, pure-minded, strict, upright, kind and generous. In their early stages, the natural qualities of character may predominate and chiefly obscure the spiritual, but as time rolls on, and the appliances of providence and grace have time to do their work, you see them more and more ripe for God's service, till at last they melt away into heaven.

But in the reprobate, you will see less and less that is hopeful. The blossoms that

in early times seemed to promise fruit, will sicken, fade and drop, and soon the tree itself grows pale and sickly, and ripens for the burning.

The elect, will show sooner or later, that they are saved. You will see that the power of sin in their hearts is broken, and that every grace is thriving and flourishing exceedingly.

"Great is the work, my neighbors cried,
and owned the power divine."

They will not be stumbling about the doctrines of the Bible, but on the contrary will see more and more of beauty and fitness in all those great things which God has revealed of Himself and His plan of salvation. To the reprobate it falls to stumble forever at the plain truths of God's word, and the plainer and the more precious the truth, the more grievous and fatal is their stumbling. What could be a more decisive mark of a reprobate than this?

REMARKS.

1. Men truly decide in time their own election or reprobation. Now do not misapprehend me. Mistakes on this subject are far too common. Some suppose that God has decided man's destiny, as absolutely, and fatally, as if He had nailed it down with iron nails, and man had no power to determine or change it. Whereas, the fact is, that man as really decides his own destiny, as if God had known nothing about it.

2. It is simply absurd to say--"A man elected, will be saved, do what he may," for he never can be saved but by doing his duty.

3. It is a mere absurdity to make election a stumbling block, as many do. Suppose that God and yourself were to commence existence today, together. There is no past with either, and no actions done in the past, therefore, which can in the least affect the future. Now, God determines your destiny, according to your actual conduct, and your entire voluntary activities. Would it not be absurd for you to complain of His election as interfering with your final destiny, or rather, with your power to determine it by your own free choices?

If so on this supposition, then is it so as the case actually stands, for God really determines your destiny solely upon your voluntary conduct,--solely and actually

as if He had never thought of it before you began to live and to act.

4. Ministers whose hearts are set on doing their work, cannot help watching the course of things, to see the indications that show who are the elect, and who the reprobate. If their hearts are really on saving souls, of course they will watch with most intense solicitude. Like a faithful physician who sees his patient in peril, he nerves are on the rock, his lips quiver and turn white, for his soul is full of unutterable sympathy and anxiety; or as the lawyer with a case on hand in which life trembles in the balance, and his sympathies are wrought up to agony: so the honest man of God, who labors for souls as one who must give account, has the sympathies of his heart taxed to their utmost depth, and cannot but watch every indication, that at last his account for each or any soul will be with joy and not with grief. As he sees the evidences of election developing themselves here, or of reprobation there, his soul swells with the varied emotions of hope and of fear; and as those evidences ripen to their maturity, and he stands by the bedside of the dying Christian conqueror, why should he not shout, "Glory to God in the highest!"? The destiny of one more soul for heaven, always known to God, is now made manifest before his eyes, and why should he not give utterance to his devout thanksgivings to all conquering grace?

5. The evidences on both sides are oftentimes so manifestly clear that the wickedest man must confess to their sufficiency as evidence. "That man," they will say, "is certainly fitting for heaven." "That other man is surely on his way down to the depths of hell."

6. The more thorough the application of means, the more decisive will these developments become. When Christ traveled with His own gospel among the people of His time, working miracles and pouring the light of truth in mighty floods up on all the land, how rapidly did some develop their character as reprobates! And on the other hand, how readily did some come to the truth, to the saving of their souls. So in these days, when the means employed are full of power, and the influences are strong and earnestly applied, and men are compelled to decide one way or the other, the work of sealing destiny and of developing its evidences, goes on with utmost terrific rapidity. There is a young woman. She scarcely sets her foot down in Oberlin before she says, "This is a holy place, and God has sent me here to secure the salvation of my soul. It must be done!" But another shall come in at the same time, and come under the same influences but sets herself against the truth from the very first, and only becomes

the more rapidly and terribly hardened in her sins.

7. We see what an inquisitive world this ought to be, to know, not who is first in office or foremost in wealth, but to see who develops the character of the elect and who the reprobate. With what amazing interest would angels study these indications, if human character and conduct were as open to their inspection as to ours! These things may be more patent to their eyes than they can be to our own.

We see why Peter said, "Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure." How reasonable that all men should! For consider, you have the same to do, and as much to do, in determining the eternal destiny of your own soul, as if God knew nothing about it.

Again, you see the meaning of that portion of my text--"For many are called but few are chosen." The many, God calls, but few will answer. Long and loudly does He call, and they will not hear. Of course, God could not choose them to salvation.

How does the case stand with you, my hearers? You have some new evidence developed to your view this day, showing, one way or the other, what shall be your final destiny. Do you take warning, and apply the truth to yourselves? Do you find that the gospel is saving you in the sense of saving your hearts from the power of sin?

Generally the early years of life give the cast to moral character and determine final eternal destiny. The masses who are converted at all are converted early, so that you do not need to wait long for developments which are in the main decisive. Early they strike into the path which, followed through after years, lands them at their journey's end in paradise or in perdition. Mark that young man, that mere boy. Has he a conscience? Is it becoming more and more an element of power in his character? Does he fear God and hate evil? Is he attentive to the great questions of religious duty and truth? Then you may predict, almost with certainty, his future manhood and his final destiny.

But on the other hand, if you see him indisposed towards religious truth and its claims, and only waxing more and more hardened and fixed in his aversion, you cannot help saying, "Reprobate silver shall men call them because the Lord hath rejected them." The Lord rejected them because he saw that they would turn

away coldly and scornfully from every appeal He could make to either their conscience or their sensibilities. Yes, even when Jesus Christ came down to throw His arms of lovingkindness all round about you, you evaded Him and would not be embraced in His loving arms. Then you sealed your final doom as a lost sinner.

Another said, "I must bid Jesus welcome to my heart--I must and will rush to the wide arms of His offered embrace, crying "Life, Life, ETERNAL LIFE!" and so doing, he "made his calling and election sure." And did he, think you, pay too dearly for his soul's salvation? Will he regret it when, in the light of the judgment, he shall come to see what such a salvation is actually worth?

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of

His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in

conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE III).

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE XXXIV).

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE XXXVIII).

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE LV).

End of the 1852 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1853
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Lecture I. [Prayer and Labor for the Gathering of The Great Harvest](#)
- Lecture II. [Men Invited to Reason Together With God](#)
- Lecture III. [The Saviour Lifted up, and the Look of Faith](#)
- Lecture IV. [The Sinner's Excuses Answered](#)
- Lecture V. [God's Love for A Sinning World](#)
- Lecture VI. [Alive Without the Law, Slain Thereby](#)
- Lecture VII. [The Essential Elements of Christian Experience](#)
- Lecture VIII. [Death to Sin Through Christ](#)
- Lecture IX. [The Rich Man and Lazarus](#)
- Lecture X. [Losing One's First Love](#)
- Lecture XI. [Jehovah's Appeal to Sinners and Backsliders](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Prayer and Labor for the Gathering of The Great Harvest

Lecture I

January 5, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 9:36-38: "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest."

In discussing this subject, I propose,

I. To consider to whom this precept is addressed;

II. What it means;

III. What is implied in the prayer required;

IV. Show that the state of mind which constitutes obedience to this precept is an indispensable condition of salvation.

I. To consider to whom this precept is addressed.

Beyond question, the precept is addressed to all who are under obligation to be benevolent; therefore to all classes and all beings upon whom the law of love is imposed. Consequently, it is addressed to all human beings, for all who are human bear moral responsibility, ought to care for the souls of their fellows, and of course fall under the broad sweep of this requisition.

Note the occasion of Christ's remark. He was traversing the cities and villages of his country, "teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people." He

saw multitudes before him, mostly in great ignorance of God and salvation; and his deeply compassionate heart was moved, "because he saw them fainting and scattered abroad as sheep without a shepherd." Alas! they were perishing for lack of the bread of heaven, and who should go and break it to their needy souls?

His feelings were the more affected because he saw that they felt hungry. They not only were famishing for the bread of life, but they seemed to have some consciousness of the fact. They were just then in the condition of a harvest field, the white grain of which is ready for the sickle, and waits the coming of the reapers. So the multitudes were ready to be gathered into the granary of the great Lord of the harvest. No wonder this sight should touch the deepest compassions of his benevolent heart.

II. What is really intended in this precept--"Pray ye the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest?"

Every precept relating to external conduct has its spirit and also its letter, the letter referring to the external, but the spirit to the internal; yet both involved in real obedience. In the present case, the letter of the precept requires prayer; but let no one suppose that merely using the words of prayer is real obedience. Besides the words there must be a praying state of mind. The precept does not require us to lie and play the hypocrite before God. No one can for a moment suppose this to be the case. Therefore it must be admitted that the precept requires the spirit of prayer as well as the letter. It requires first in value a praying state of mind, and then also its due expression in the forms of prayer.

What then is the true spirit of this precept? I answer, love for souls. Certainly it does not require us to pray for men without any heart in our prayer; but that we should pray with a sincere heart, full of real love for human welfare--a love for immortal souls and a deep concern for their salvation. It doubtless requires the same compassion that Jesus himself had for souls. His heart was gushing with real compassion for dying souls, and he was conscious that his own was a right state of mind. Therefore He could not do less than require the same state of mind of all his people. Hence He requires that we should have real and deep compassion for souls, such compassion as really moves the heart, for such most obviously was his.

1. This involves a full committal of the soul to this object. Christ had committed his soul to the great labor of saving men; for this he labored and

toiled; for this his heart agonized; for this his life was ready to be offered; therefore he could do no less than require the same of his people.

Again, an honest offering of this prayer implies a willingness on our part that God should use us in his harvest field in any capacity He pleases. When the farmer gathers his harvest, many things are to be done, and often he needs many hands to do them. Some he sends in to cut the grain, others to bind it; some gather into the barn, and others glean the field, that nothing be lost. So Christ will have a variety of labors for his servants in the great harvest field; and no men can be of real use to him unless they are willing to work in any department of their Master's service, thankful for the privilege of doing the humblest service for such a Master and in such a cause.

Hence it is implied in honest prayer for this object that we are really committed to the work, and that we have given ourselves up most sincerely and entirely to do all we can for Christ and his cause on earth. We are always on hand, ready for any labor, or any suffering. For, plainly, if we have not this mind, we need not think to pray to any good purpose. It would be but a sorry and insulting prayer, to say--"Lord, send somebody else to do all the hard work, and let me do little or nothing." Everybody knows that such a prayer would only affront God and curse the offerer. Hence sincere prayer for Christ's cause implies that you are willing to do any thing you can do to promote its interests, in the actual and absolute devotion of all your powers and resources for this object. You may not withhold even your own children. Nothing shall be too dear for you to offer on God's altar.

Suppose a man should give nothing--should withhold all his means and suppress all efforts, only he says he will pray. He professes indeed to pray. But do you suppose that his prayer has any heart in it? Does he mean what he says? Does he love the object more than all things else? Nay, verily. You never could say that a young man does all he can for Christ's harvest if he refuses to go into the field to work, nor that an aged but wealthy man is doing all he can if he refuses to give any thing to help sustain the field-laborers.

III. What then is implied in really obeying this precept?

1. A sense of personal responsibility in respect to the salvation of the world. No man ever begins to obey this command who does not feel a personal

responsibility in this thing which brings it home to his soul as his own work. He must really feel--"This is my work for life. For this I am to live and spend my strength." It matters not on this point whether you are young enough to go abroad into the foreign field, or whether you are qualified for the gospel ministry; you must feel such a sense of responsibility that you will cheerfully and most heartily do all you can. You can do the hewing of the wood or the drawing of the water, even if you cannot fill the more responsible trusts. An honest and consecrated heart is willing to do any sort of toil--bear any sort of burden. Unless you are willing to do any thing you can successfully and wisely do, you will not comply with the conditions of a prayerful state of mind.

2. Another element is a sense of the value of souls. You must see impressively that souls are precious--that their guilt while in unpardoned sin is fearful and their danger most appalling. Without such a sense of the value of the interests at stake, you will not pray with fervent, strong desire; and without a just apprehension of their guilt, danger and remedy, you will not pray in faith for God's interposing grace. Indeed you must have so much of the love of God--a love like God's love for sinners, in your soul, that you are ready for any sacrifice or any labor. You need to feel as God feels. He so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever should believe in him might not perish. You need so to love the world that your love will draw you to make similar sacrifices and put forth similar labors. A love for souls, the same in kind as God had in giving up his Son to die, and as Christ had in coming cheerfully down to make himself the offering, each servant of God must have, or his prayers for this object will have little heart and no power with God. This love for souls is always implied in acceptable prayer that God would send forth laborers into his harvest. I have often thought that the reason why so many pray only in form and not in heart for the salvation of souls, is that they lack this love, like God's love, for the souls of the perishing.

3. Acceptable prayer for this object implies confidence in the ability, wisdom, and willingness of God to push forward this work. No man can pray for what he supposes may be opposed to God's will, or beyond his ability or too complicated for his wisdom. If you ask God to send forth laborers, the very prayer assumes that you confide in his ability to do the work well, and in his willingness--in answer to prayer, to press it forward.

4. The very idea of prayer implies that you understand this to be a part of the divine plan--that Christians should pray for God's interposing power and wisdom to carry forward this great work. You do not pray till you see that God gives you the privilege, enjoins the duty, and encourages it by assuring you that it is an essential means, an indispensable condition of his interposing his power to give success. You remember it is said--"I will yet for this be inquired of by the House of Israel to do it for them."

Again, no one complies with the spirit of this condition who does not pray with his might--fervently and with great perseverance and urgency for the blessing. He must feel the pressure of a great cause and must feel moreover that it cannot prosper without God's interposing power. Pressed by these considerations, he will pour out his soul with intensely, fervent supplications.

Unless the church is filled with the spirit of prayer, God will not send forth the laborers into his harvest.-- Plainly the command to pray for such laborers implies that God expects prayer, and will wait until it be made. The prayer comes into his plan as one of the appointed agencies, and can by no means be dispensed with.-- Doubtless it was in answer to prayer that God sent out such a multitude of strong men after the ascension.-- How obviously did prayer and the special hand of God bring in a Saul of Tarsus and send him forth to call in whole tribes and nations of the Gentile world! And along with him were an host. "The Lord gave the word, great was the company that published it."

5. That this prayer should be in faith, reposing in assurance on God's everlasting promise, is too obvious to need proof or illustration.

6. Honest, sincere prayer implies that we lay ourselves and all we have upon his altar. We must feel that this is our business, and that our disposable strength and resources are to be appropriated to its prosecution. It is only then, when we are given up to the work, that we can honestly ask God to raise up laborers and press the work forward. When a man's lips say--"Lord, send forth laborers;" but his life in an undertone proclaims, "I don't care whether a man goes or not; I'll not help on the work," you will of course know that he is only playing the hypocrite before God.

By this I do not imply that every honest servant of Christ must feel himself called to the ministry, and must enter it; by no means; for God does not call

every pious man into this field, but has many other fields and labors which are essential parts of the great whole. The thing I have to say is that we must be ready for any part whatever which God's providence assigns us.

7. When we can go, and are in a situation to obtain the needful education, then the true spirit of the prayer in our text implies that we pray that God would send us. If we are in a condition to go, then plainly, this prayer implies that we have the heart to beg the privilege for ourselves that God would put us into his missionary work. Then we shall say with the ancient prophet, "Lord, here am I, send me." Do you not suppose Christ expected His disciples to go, and to desire to go? Did He not assume that they would pray for the privilege of being put into this precious trust? How can we be in real sympathy with Christ unless we love the work of laboring in this gospel harvest, and long to be commissioned to go forth and put in our sickle with our own hand? Most certainly, if we were in Christ's spirit we should say--I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished? We should cry out--Lord, let me go--let me go--for dying millions are just now perishing in their sins. How can I pray God to send out others if I am in heart unwilling to go myself? I have heard many say--O that I were young; how I should rejoice to go myself. This seems like a state of mind that can honestly pray for God to send forth laborers.

The spirit of this prayer implies that we are willing to make any personal sacrifices in order to go. Are not men always willing to make personal sacrifices in order to gain the great object of their heart's desire? Did ever a merchant, seeking goodly pearls, find one of great value, but he was quite willing to go and sell all that he had and buy it?

Moreover an honest heart before God in this prayer implies that you are willing to do all you can to prepare yourselves to accomplish this work. Each young man or young woman should say--God requires something of me in this work. It may be God wants you as a servant in some missionary family; if so you are ready to go. No matter what the work may be--no labor done for God or for man is degrading. In the spirit of this prayer, you will say--If I may but wash the feet of my Lord's servants, I shall richly enjoy it. All young persons especially, feeling that life is before them, should say--I must devote myself, in the most effective way possible, to the promotion of my Saviour's cause. Suppose a man bows his soul in earnest prayer before God,

saying, "O Lord, send out hosts of men into this harvest field," does not this imply that he girds himself up for this work with his might? Does it not imply that he is ready to do the utmost he can in any way whatever?

Again, this prayer, made honestly, implies that we do all we can to prepare others to go out. Our prayer will be, "Lord, give us hearts to prepare others, and get as many ready as possible and as well prepared as possible for the gathering in of this great harvest."

8. Of course it is also implied that we abstain from whatever would hinder us, and make no arrangements that would tie our hands. Many young Christians do this, sometimes heedlessly, often in a way which shows that they are by no means fully set to do God's work, first of all.

9. When we honestly pray God to send out laborers, and our own circumstances allow us to go, we are to expect that He will send us. What! does God need laborers of every description, and will He not send us? Depend on it, He will send out the man who prays right, and whose heart is deeply and fully with God. And we need not be suspicious lest God should lack the needful wisdom to manage his matters well. He will put all his men where they should be, into the fields they are best qualified to fill. The good reaper will be put into his post, sickle in hand; and if there are feeble ones who can only glean, He puts them there.

10. When youth have health and the means for obtaining an education, they must assume that God calls them to this work. They should assume that God expects them to enter the field. They will fix their eye upon this work as their own. Thinking of the masses of God's true children who are lifting up this prayer, "Lord, send forth laborers to gather in the nations to Thy Son," they will assuredly infer that the Lord will answer these prayers and send out all his faithful, fit, and true men into this field. Most assuredly, if God has given you the mind, the training, the tact, the heart, and the opportunity to get all needful preparation, you may know he will send you forth. What! is it possible that I am prepared, ready, waiting, and the hosts of the church praying that God would send laborers forth, and yet He will not send me! Impossible!

11. One indispensable part of this preparation is a heart for it. Most plainly so, for God wants no men in his harvest field whose hearts are not there.

You would not want workmen in your field who have no heart for their work. Neither does God. But He expects us to have this preparation. And He will accept of no man's excuse from service, that he has no heart to engage in it. The want of a heart for this work is not your misfortune, but your fault, your great and damning sin.

This brings me to my next general proposition,

IV. That this state of mind is an indispensable condition of salvation.

The church are, many of them, dreadfully in the dark about the conditions of salvation. I was once preaching on this subject, and urging that holiness is one condition of salvation, "without which no man can see the Lord," when I was confronted and strenuously opposed by a Doctor of Divinity. He said--The Bible makes faith the sole and only condition of salvation. Paul, said he, preached that faith is the condition, and plainly meant to exclude every other condition. But I answered, Why did Paul press so earnestly and hold up so prominently the doctrine of salvation by faith? Because he had to oppose the great Jewish error of salvation by works. Such preaching was greatly and specially needed then, and Paul pressed into the field to meet the emergency. But when Antinomianism developed itself, James was called out to uphold with equal decision the doctrine that faith without works is dead, and that good works are the legitimate fruit of living faith, and are essential to evince its life and genuineness. This at once raised a new question about the nature of gospel faith. James held that all true gospel faith must work by love. It must be an affectionate filial confidence, such as draws the soul into sympathy with Christ, and leads it forward powerfully to do all his will.

Many professed Christians hold that nothing is needful but simply faith and repentance, and that faith may exist without real benevolence and consequently without good works. No mistake can be greater than this. The grand requisition which God makes upon man is that he become truly benevolent. This is the essence of all true religion, a state of mind that has compassion like God's compassion, for human souls; that cries out in earnest prayer for their salvation, and that shrinks from no labor to effect this object. If, therefore, true religion be a condition of salvation, then is the state of mind developed in our text also a condition.

REMARKS.

1. This state of mind is as obligatory upon sinners as upon saints. All men ought to feel this compassion for souls. Why not? Can any reason be named why a sinner should not feel as much compassion for souls as a Christian? Or why he ought not to love God and man as ardently?

2. Professors of religion who do not obey the true spirit of these precepts are hypocrites, without one exception. They profess to be truly religious, but are they? Certainly not, unless they are on the altar, devoted to God's work and in heart sincerely sympathizing in it. Without this, every one of them is a hypocrite. You profess to have the spirit of Christ; but when you see the multitudes as he saw them, perishing for lack of gospel light, do you cry out in mighty prayer with compassion for their souls? If you have not this spirit, write yourself down a hypocrite.

3. Many do not pray that God would send forth laborers because they are afraid He will send them. I can recollect when religion was repulsive to me because I feared that if I should be converted, God would send me to preach the gospel. But I thought further on this subject. God, said I, has a right to dispose of me as he pleases, and I have no right to resist. If I do resist, He will put me in hell. If God wants me to be a minister of his gospel and I resist and rebel, He surely ought to put me in hell, and doubtless He will.

But there are many young men in this college who never give themselves to prayer for the conversion of the world, lest God should send them into this work. You would blush to pray--"Lord, send forth laborers, but don't send me." If the reason you don't want to go is that you have no heart for it, you may write yourself down a hypocrite, and no mistake.

If you say, "I have a heart for the work, but I am not qualified to go," then you may consider that God will not call you unless you are or can be qualified. He does not want unfit men in the service.

4. The ministry for the last quarter of a century has fallen into disgrace for this reason; many young men have entered it who never should have entered. Their hearts are not fixed, and they shrink from making sacrifices for Christ and his cause. Hence they do not go straight forward, true to the right, firm for the oppressed and strong for every good word and work. By whole platoons, they back out from the position which they have sworn to maintain. The hearts of multitudes of lay brethren and sisters are in great distress, crying out over this

fearful defection. To a minister who was complaining of the public reproach cast on his order, a layman of Boston replied, "I am sorry there is so much occasion for it; God means to rebuke the ministry, and He ought to rebuke them since they so richly deserve it." Do not understand me to say that this vacillation of the ministry is universal;--no, indeed; I am glad to know there are exceptions; but still the painful fact is that many have relapsed, and consequently as a class they have lost character, and this has discouraged many young men from entering the ministry.

Let this be so no longer. Let the young men now preparing for the ministry come up to the spirit of their Master, and rush to the front rank of the battle. Let them toil for the good of souls, and love this toil as their great Lord has done before them. Thus by their fidelity let them redeem the character of this class of men from the reproach under which it now lies. Let them rally in their strength and lay themselves with one heart on the altar of God. So doing, not one generation should pass away ere it will be said--Mark the faithful men; note the men whose heart is in and on their work; the ministry is redeemed!

5. With sorrow I am compelled to say--many don't care whether the work is done or not. They are all swallowed up with ambitious aspirations. Who does not know that they do not sympathize with Jesus Christ?

Beloved, let me ask you, if you are honestly conscious of sympathizing with your great Leader? I never can read the passage before us without being affected by the manifestation it makes of Christ's tenderness and love. There were the thronging multitudes before Him. To the merely external eye, all might have been fair; but to one who thought of their spiritual state, there was enough to move the deep fountains of compassion. Christ saw them scattered abroad as sheep who have no shepherd. They had no teachers or guides in whom they could repose confidence. They were in darkness and moral death. Christ wept over them, and called on his disciples to sympathize in their case, and unite with him in mighty prayer to the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth laborers. Such was his spirit. And now, dear young men, do you care whether or not this work is done?

6. Many seem determined to shirk this labor and leave it all for others to do. Indeed, they will hardly entertain the question what part God wants them to take and perform.

Now let me ask you;--Will such as they be welcomed and applauded at last by the herald of judgment destiny, crying out--"Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord?" Never; no never!

7. Many say--I am not called, but really they are not devoted to this work so as to care whether they are called or not. They do not want to be called--not they!

Now the very fact that you have the requisite qualifications, means and facilities for preparation, indicates God's call. These constitute the voice of his providence, saying, Go forth, and prepare for labor in my vineyard! There is your scholarship; use it: there the classes for you to enter; go in and occupy till you are ready to enter the great white fields of the Saviour's harvest. If providential indications favor, you must strive to keep up with their summons;--pray for the baptisms of the Holy Ghost; seek the divine anointing, and give yourself no rest till you are in all things furnished for the work God assigns you.

It is painful to see that many are committing themselves in some way or other against the work. They are putting themselves in a position which of itself forbids their engaging in it. But do let me ask you, young men, can you expect ever to be saved if, when you have the power and the means to engage in this work, you have no heart for it? No, indeed! You knock in vain at the gate of the blessed! You may go there and knock;-- but what will be the answer? Are ye my faithful servants? Were ye among the few, faithful among the faithless--quick and ready at your Master's call? O no, no; you studied how you could shun the labor and shirk the self-denial! I know you not! Your portion lies without the city walls!

Let no one excuse himself, as not called, for God calls all to some sort of labor in the great harvest field. You never need, therefore, to excuse yourself as one not called to some service for your Lord and Master. And let no one excuse himself from the ministry unless his heart is on the altar and he himself praying and longing to go, and only held back by an obvious call of God, through his providence, to some other part of the great labor.

Many will be sent to hell at last for treating this subject as they have, with so much selfishness at heart! I know the young man who for a long time struggled between a strong conviction that God called him to the ministry and a great repugnancy against engaging in this work. I know what this feeling is, for I felt it a long time myself. A long time I had a secret conviction that I should be a

minister, though my heart repelled it. In fact, my conversion turned very much upon my giving up this contest with God, and subduing this repellency of feeling against God's call.

8. You can see what it is to be a Christian, and what God demands of men at conversion. The turning point is--Will you really and honestly serve God? With students especially the question is wont to be--Will you abandon all your ambitious schemes and devote yourself to the humble, unambitious toil of preaching Christ's gospel to the poor? Most of this class are ambitious and aspiring; they have schemes of self-elevation, which it were a trial to renounce altogether. Hence with you, your being a Christian and being saved at last will turn much, perhaps altogether, on your giving yourself up to this work in the true self-denial of the gospel spirit.

9. Many have been called to this work, who afterwards backslide and abandon it. They begin well, but backslide; get into a state of great perplexity about their duty; perhaps, like Balaam, they are so unwilling to see their duty, and so anxious to evade it, that God will not struggle with them any longer, but gives them up to their covetousness, or their ambition.

Young man, are you earnestly crying out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me do?" Be assured, God wants you in his field somewhere; He has not abandoned his harvest to perish; He wants you in it, but he wants you first to repent and prepare your heart for the gospel ministry. You need not enter it till you have done this.

Many are waiting for a miraculous call. This is a great mistake. God does not call men in any miraculous way. The finger of his providence points out the path, and the fitness He gives you indicates the work for you to do. You need not fear that God will call you wrong. He will point out the work He would have you do.- Therefore, ask Him to guide you to the right spot in the great field. He will surely do it.

Young men, will you deal kindly and truly with my Master in this matter? Do you say, "O my God, I am on hand, ready for any part of the work thou hast for me to do?" What say you? Are you prepared to take this ground? Will you consecrate your education to this work? Are you ready and panting to consecrate your all to the work of your Lord? Do you say, "Yes, God shall have all my powers, entirely and forever?" "I do beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God,

which is your reasonable service." The altar of God is before you. A whole sacrifice is the thing required. Are you ready to forego all your selfish schemes? Ye who have talents fitting you for the ministry, will you devote them with all your soul to this work? Say, will you deal honestly and truly with my Master? Say, do you love his cause, and count it your highest glory to be a laborer together with God, in gathering in the nations of lost men to the fold of your Redeemer?

[Back to Top](#)

Men Invited to Reason Together With God

Lecture II

May 11, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Isa. 1:18: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

God is a moral agent. If he was not, He could not have moral character. That He has moral character is sufficiently manifest from the revealed fact that man is made in his image. Every man knows himself to have a moral constitution, and to be a moral being. It is also a fact that we necessarily conceive of God as a moral agent, and cannot rationally think otherwise.

God is also a good being--not only moral, but holy and wise. He always acts upon good and sufficient reasons, and never irrationally and without reasons for his conduct.

Hence if we would appeal to God on any subject, we must address him as a good being, and must make our appeal through his intelligence, expecting him to be influenced more or less according as we present good and sufficient reasons.

God is always influenced by good reasons. Good reasons are more sure to have their due and full weight on his mind than on the mind of any other being in the

universe. Nothing can be more certain than this--that if we present to him good reasons and such as ought to influence him, he will be influenced as much as he ought to be. Upon this we may rest with unlimited confidence.

1. Entering now upon the direct consideration of our text, let us first inquire, What is that to which this text invites us?

"Come now, and let us reason together"--but what are we to "reason" about? The passage proceeds to say--"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." In the previous context God makes grievous and terrible charges against men. Their sins and hypocrisies and apostasies have been provoking beyond measure;--Now therefore He comes down to look into their case and see if there be any hope of repentance, and proceeds to make a proposal. Come now, He says, let us reason together; Come near if ye will reason with me. Produce your strong reasons why your God should forgive your great sin.

2. The invitation, coupled with the promises annexed, implies that there are good and sufficient reasons why God should forgive the penitent. Hence the case is fair for practical results. The way is open for salvation. Sinners may so present their reasons before God as to ensure success.

3. The nature of the case shows that we are to address our reasons and make our appeal, not to Justice, but to Mercy. We are to present reasons which will sanction the exercise of mercy. We have no hope from any appeal that we can make to justice. We must not come to demand the blessing we need, for it is assumed that our sins are as scarlet, and hence that there can be no such thing as a justification for them. Hence our inquiry is brought within fixed limits. We have only to search for those considerations which may induce the Lord to exercise mercy in our case.

Now since sinners need two great blessings; viz., pardon and sanctification, our subject naturally embraces two points;

I. The reasons which may be offered why God should pardon our sin;

II. The corresponding reasons why he should sanctify our hearts.

I. First, then, what reasons have we to present before God why he should

forgive sin?

I enter upon this inquiry and bring up these reasons before your mind in order to show you what reasons you may present before God and to encourage you to present them.

1. You may plead that you entirely justify God in all his course. You must certainly take this position, for he cannot forgive you so long as you persist in self-justification. You know there is a breach of friendship between your soul and God. You have broken his laws. You either have good reason for your sin or you have not. If you have, God is wrong; if you have not, then you are wrong. You know how this case stands. You know beyond all question--with a force of reason that ought to silence all cavil,--that all the wrong is on your side and all the right on God's side. You might and should know also that you must confess this. You need not expect God to forgive you till you do. He ought not to publish to the universe that he is wrong and you are right, when there is no truth in such a proclamation. Hence you see that you must confess what your conscience affirms to be truth in the case.

Now therefore, will you honestly say--not as the decision of your conscience merely, but as the utterance of your heart, that you do accept the punishment of your iniquities as just, and do honour and acquit your God in all the precepts of his law, and in all the course of his providence? Can you present this reason? So far as it goes, it is a good reason, and will certainly have its weight.

2. You may come to God and acknowledge that you have no apology whatever to make for your sin. You renounce the very idea of apology. The case, you deeply feel, admits of none.

3. You must also be ready to renounce all sin and be able in all honesty to say this before God. You must utterly cease from all rebellion against God, and be able to say so from your very heart,--else you can not reasonably expect to be forgiven.

4. You must unconditionally submit to his discretion. Nothing less than this is the fitting moral position for a sinner towards God. You must unqualifiedly surrender yourself to his will and utterly renounce your own. This will be an important element in your plea before God for pardon

whenever you can honestly make it.

5. You may plead the life and death of Jesus Christ as sufficient to honor the law and justify God in showing mercy. It is plain that our reasons must reach other points besides our own state of mind; they must also refer to the penalty of law, and show that such arrangements are made as will insure the honor and sustain the dignity of the law, though sin be forgiven. Hence we see how much it is worth to us that we are able to plead before God that Christ has fully honored the law, so that God can forgive sin without the danger of seeming to connive at it. It is everything to the purpose of a returning sinner that he may plead that forgiveness through Christ's death is safe to the government of God. Pardon must not put in peril the holiness or justice of Jehovah. The utmost expression he could make, or need to make, of his holiness and justice, as touching the sins of man, is already made in the death of Christ, "whom God did himself set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past . . . that he might be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus."

Now therefore, can you say that you are willing to accept the sacrifice which he has made, and receive the gift of salvation through his blood as all of boundless grace, and in no sense or measure of meritorious works? If you can truly say this, it will become a strong reason before God why he should forgive you.

6. You may also urge his professed love for sinners. God has professed the greatest love for lost men; has even spoken of loving them "with an everlasting love," and you are at liberty to urge this when you come to reason together with God. You may plead that he has manifested this love in the gift of his dear Son, and hence you must be sure that you understand his language, and there cannot be any mistake in the matter. All your life long, too, he has been manifesting his love towards you in his kind providence;-- so that he has not ever left himself without witness to both the fact and the greatness of this love for the lost of our race.

7. He has also invited you to come and reason with him. Therefore he has fully opened the way for the freest and fullest communion on this point. With amazing condescension he suffers you to come before him and plead, filling your mouth with arguments. You may speak of all his promises, and

of that solemn oath in which he swore by himself, to the end that they all "might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us in the gospel."

8. You may also plead his honor, that seeing he is under oath and stands committed before the universe, you may ask him what he will do for his great name if he refuses to forgive a repentant and believing sinner. You may plead all the relations and work of Christ. You may say to him, Lord, will it not induce other sinners to come to thee? Will it not encourage thy church to labor and pray more for salvation? Will not thy mercy, shown to me, prove a blessing to thousands?

9. You may urge the influence of refusing to do so. You may suggest that his refusal is liable to be greatly misapprehended--that it may be a scandal to many, and that the wicked will be emboldened to say that God has made no such exceeding great and precious promises.

10. You may urge that there is joy in heaven and on earth also over every sinner pardoned and saved--that the saints everywhere will be delighted and will exceedingly rejoice in the Lord their God. The psalmist represents the young convert as saying--"The humble shall hear thereof and be glad." You may urge that since God loves to make saints happy in this world, he surely will not be averse to giving you his Spirit and putting away your sins--it will cause such joy in the hearts of his dear people.

11. You may also plead the great abhorrence you have of living in sin, as you surely will unless he forgives you. You may also plead that God hates sin and therefore must be more than willing to turn your heart away from sinning and make it wholly pure before his eyes. You may urge on him the worth of your soul, a thing which he understands far better than you do, and which he shows that he appreciates inasmuch as he gave up his only Son to die that souls might not perish. Ask him if he does not know what it is for a soul to be saved and what it is for a soul to be lost, and tell him that the great question between these two momentous states is now pending in your case and must be soon decided for eternity! Ask him if after all he has done and said about salvation he can refuse to save your perishing soul. Say--O my God, dost thou not know how much my soul is worth, and how certainly it is lost for ever unless thou interpose to save it?

12. You may mention before him your lost estate--that you are entirely dependent on his grace and mercy; that you are utterly lost to God, to happiness and to heaven, unless he has mercy on you, and you may conjure him by the love of his dear Son to take all these things into consideration.

13. You may also allude to his merciful disposition, and suggest how often his word has affirmed that "the Lord delighteth in mercy," and that while "judgment is his strange work, mercy is his delight." Ask him if he will not gratify his own love of showing mercy, and give you the salvation you so much need. Remind him that here is a great opportunity to magnify his mercy, and display the riches of his grace, and make an impression on the minds of both saints and sinners greatly to his own honor and to their good. Tell him that to save one so lost and so vile as you cannot but glorify his great mercy far as the case is known in earth, or hell, or heaven. Tell him how he has said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," and ask him if he will not take advantage of this opportunity to show all men how he loves to act on this divine law of benevolence.

14. Tell him moreover how wretched you are and must be in your sins if you cannot find salvation, and what mischief you will be likely to do everywhere, on earth and in hell, if you are not forgiven and renewed in holiness. Tell him that it is awful and makes your soul shudder to think of going on in sin and of becoming hardened past all repentance. Remind him that he has invited you to come and reason with him, and that he has virtually promised to hear and to consider your case. You do not come to justify yourself, but only to plead his great mercy and what Christ has done for you. With these very strong reasons you come before him, on his own invitation, not to complain against his justice, but to intercede for his mercy; that you must beg of him to consider the awful ruin of hell, and that you cannot escape without his help, and cannot endure its everlasting horrors. He has himself said, "Can thy heart endure, or can thy hands be strong in the day that I shall deal with thee?" Tell him your heart cannot endure this, and that this should be a strong reason why he should have mercy on your soul.

15. You also commit yourself entirely to his hands, and resign everything to his discretion and to his supreme disposal. Tell him you believe he will do the very best thing possible to him, all things considered, and that you shall

by no means shrink from confiding your whole case to his disposal. You are not disposed to dictate or control what God shall do, but are willing to submit all to his wisdom and love. In fact you have such confidence in him that you expect he will give you salvation, for you believe he has intended to encourage you to expect this great blessing, and on this ground you do expect to find mercy. You will therefore at any rate renounce all your sin henceforth and forever. Say, "O Lord, thou knowest that I am purposed to renounce all sinning, and in this purpose I will persist and die in it if I must, yea, go to hell, if so it must be, renouncing all my sin, and trusting in thy promised grace."

Let this be the manner of your reasoning together with God on this great question of the salvation of your soul.

II. We must now notice a few reasons which may be urged by the pardoned sinner who pleads for entire sanctification.

1. You may plead your present justification. You have already found grace in his sight. This is a good reason to be used in your plea that he would fulfil all his promises to you, and not leave his great work, already begun, unfinished.
2. You may plead your relation to Him, to the church, and to the world--that having now been justified and adopted into his family, you are known as a Christian and a child of God, and it therefore becomes of the utmost consequence that you should have grace to live so as to adorn your profession and honor the name by which you are called.
3. You may also plead your great responsibilities, and the weight of those interests that are depending upon your spiritual progress. Tell Him you have publicly committed yourself to his faithfulness--that you have trusted that he would keep you blameless and henceforward make his grace sufficient for you. You have professed to rely upon sanctifying grace, and how can you bear now to fail of finding all you need and all you have professed to expect?
4. You should notice also the matter of your influence over others, especially the influence of your example. If it is known that you frequently fall into sin, how sad must be the influence! On the other hand, if God

enables you to stand up and testify continually to his sustaining grace, what a testimony is this to his praise, and what a blessing to your Christian acquaintances!

5. Plead the desire you feel to be completely delivered from sin. Ask him if he has not given you this very desire himself, and inquire if He intends to sharpen your thirst and yet withhold the waters of life. Ask him if you must suppose that he means to enkindle the burning desire and yet leave it for ever unsatisfied.

6. Plead also his expressed will. Revert to that explicit avowal--"This is the will of God, even your sanctification." Ask if he did not intend you should understand this as applicable to deliverance from all sin and therefore as an unqualified expression of his desire and will that you should be altogether free from sin even now. Ask if he has not so revealed his will on this point that you do not come to him in any uncertainty as to his will. Has He not in many forms, and in forms most clear and decisive, signified his wish that you should "perfect holiness," and rise quite above all the power of temptation? Remind Him how He has pledged his word of grace and held out before you most encouraging promises.

7. Tell him also how the church needs such witnesses to testify what grace has done and what they have themselves experienced. Refer to what the world is saying because the church is not sanctified, and show how great a scandal unsanctified professors are to their brethren because they testify falsely to the rich provisions of gospel grace. Plead that the church has many of them fallen almost out of sight of God's great grace, and so that they have become a sad stumbling-block to the world. Consider how much scandal and unbelief exist everywhere and ask how these great evils can be removed and evermore prevented.

8. Appeal to his great love for you as manifested in what Christ has done, and in his present office as your Advocate on high;--as evinced, also, in the gift of the Spirit. Tell him you must and will confide in his love. Say, "I understand it; I must and will assume it, I cannot doubt, I must not disbelieve. I do not make my appeal to one who is an alien and a stranger, but to a kind and loving Father; and I come in simple confidence as his child." Say--"I dread to offend thee and I long to live worthy of my vocation, and cannot endure to misrepresent that great and blessed grace on

which my hope reposes."

9. So you must come to reason with your Heavenly Father. By no means forget to urge the love he has professed, and to throw yourself upon his faithfulness, pleading that He will fulfil to you all that He has promised, and gloriously finish the work He has begun. Tell him how you have stumbled many by your falls into sin and have given great occasion of reproach to the cause you love; tell Him you cannot live so--that you are ready to die under this awful burden. Cry out before Him, "How have I given thine enemies occasion to doubt thy sanctifying grace and to disbelieve thy words of promise! O, my Saviour, didst thou not give thyself to die for such a sinner as I am, to redeem me from all iniquity? and now, art thou willing that thy servants should be stumbled by me and fall over me into the depths of hell?"

10. Remind Him also of your dependence on Him, and that you set out in the Christian life with the understanding that without his grace to help, you could do nothing. Tell him you have consecrated yourself to Him in distinct reliance upon his promised aid, and that you cannot endure to fall so far short of what you had hoped, and what you have promised and expected. Tell him of your willingness to make any sacrifice--that there is nothing you are unwilling to give up--that you are willing to forego your good name and to lay your reputation wholly upon his altar--that there is not one sacrifice you are not willing to make and you beg of Him if He sees a single thing held so dear to your heart that you are not willing to sacrifice it for his sake, to show you what it is, and press you to forsake it. Assure Him that if self-denial comes in his service you are willing to meet all the consequences. You are ready to confess his grace to you and not conceal it from the great congregation. Can you say this? If so, do it. Tell him you are ready to die to the world--ready to give it all up and renounce it utterly and forever. You are determined you will have no more fellowship with the works of darkness--to have the world become dead to you and you to the world. You are ready to meet all and bear all that the service of Christ may impose and involve. No matter if the world disowns you and casts you out from its regard and fellowship. You have counted the cost and are ready to meet it all.

11. Urge as a further reason that you are willing to become dead to a

worldly and unbelieving church--that you are ready to die even to their good opinion--to be excommunicated if they will do it; to be cast out if they will cast you out. You shrink not from being reputed a heretic, if you may only have grace to overcome all sin and every temptation. You wish to please but one, and you are quite satisfied with pleasing God only. This shall be your object, and this, attained, shall fully satisfy your soul. You are willing to give up all idols and live to Him alone. No matter if your name be cast out as evil and trodden down as vile, by the church, by her ministry, by all men, if you may only live to please God. Tell Him you are willing to renounce all creature help, and all earthly reliances, with only one great inquiry--How can I most and best please God?

12. Be sure to remind him that you intend to be wholly disinterested and unselfish in this matter; you ask these things not for your own present selfish interest; you are aware that a really holy life may subject you to much persecution--you know that "if any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, he shall suffer persecution;" and you are well aware that if you receive this cleansing, it may bring on you much persecution;--you come not therefore to ask for present personal good, for you expect only greater trials; but you will consent to endure anything that does not involve sin. You want to represent him truly. You want to encourage all Christians and all sinners too to seek abounding grace by showing them how you have found mercy.

13. Then tell Him of your great weakness, and how you entirely distrust yourself; how, oftentimes, you are covered with confusion and filled with shame so that you cannot lift up your head and you are constrained to cry, O, my God, dost thou not pity thy child? Tell Him you loathe yourself--that you would fain spue yourself out of your own mouth, because you so much dishonor Him. Tell him you despair utterly of saving yourself, but that you still have unshaken confidence in Him. Remind Him moreover of his promises, and say that you are encouraged because you know that you are asking mercy of a most gracious God. Tell Him you shall go away greatly disappointed if you do not receive the grace you ask and need. As said a dear sister in a great struggle of her soul for spiritual blessings--"O, my God, thou hast made me exceeding great and precious promises; now if thou dost not give me these blessings, what can I say any more for thee? How can I plead for thee if thou dost shut me up in my desolations? How

can I ever again present thy strong claims to be believed and trusted as to all thy words of gracious promise?"

Thus making your strong issue, you come pleading not your goodness but your badness;--appealing not to God's justice, but to his mercy; telling him how poor you are and how rich he is, and that therefore you cannot bear to go away empty.

REMARKS.

1. Whenever we have considered the reasons for God's actions till they have really moved and persuaded us, they will surely move Him. God is not slow--never slower than we, to see the reasons for showing mercy and for leading us to holiness.
2. Many fail in coming to God because they do not treat Him as a rational being. Instead of considering him as a rational being, they come without ever considering the reasons why he should and will forgive and sanctify. Of course, failing to have faith, and having views altogether dishonoring to God, they fail to get the blessing they seek.
3. Many do not present these reasons, because in honesty they cannot. Now God assumes that we ought to be in a state of mind to present all these reasons honestly. If we are not in such a state, we ought not to expect blessings.
4. When we want anything of God, we should always consider whether we can present good reasons why it should be granted. If you were to apply to any other being, e.g., your Governor, you would of course ask in the outset--Can I give any good reasons? If you are to appeal to justice, you must ask--Have I any good reasons to offer? So if you want favours on the score of mercy, what reasons have you to offer why they should be granted? If you have reasons, be sure to offer them, and by no means assume that you shall get your case without reasons.
5. All who are in any want are invited to come and bring forward their strong reasons. If in sorrow, distress, affliction, come and present your plea. If you are a sinner, oppressed with a sense of sin, fear not to unbosom your heart before your God. All those who are under any afflictive dispensation should come, like Job, and tell God how deeply you are afflicted. Why not? Did not saints of old say to God, "Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and

Israel acknowledge us not?"

Christian parents, you are invited to come and present your strong reasons why your children should be converted. Come and tell God how much you need this blessing. Tell him you cannot endure that all your prayers in their behalf should come to naught, that the great labour of your life should fail, and worse than fail, as it must if your children of the covenant should disgrace religion and press their way through throngs of offered mercies down to hell.

Backsliders should come and tell God all their case. Ask him if he will not break your chains, and bring you back, and put a new song into your mouth, even of praise for recovering grace.

6. Of all beings, God is most easily influenced to save. He is by his very nature disposed to save the lost. He loves to let his mercies flow. You have only to bring forth your strong reasons; indeed you have only to come in the spirit of a child, trustful and lowly, and your case is gained. You need not come with a bribe; you need not come and offer pay. No; you have only to come and say--I want to serve God; for this end I need spiritual blessings. Tell him how much He has loved you, and how often and richly He has manifested this love; and plead that He would still show forth this same love yet more abundantly, that you may still follow on in his service, and never more be confounded and put to shame and sorrow for your own grievous sins.

7. We, of Oberlin, have peculiar reasons to urge why God should appear for the conversion and salvation of sinners among us. Just look here, brethren, you who have come here to embosom this institution with your influence and your prayers--have you no special reasons to urge why God should bless this place and sanctify this school, and convert to Himself these precious souls? O come and ask God if the growing people of this great nation, already outstripping the progress of the means of grace, must not become almost heathen, if his infinite mercy does not descend on all our schools and colleges and mold these young minds to Himself! These young women, what shall their influence be when they become wives and mothers, and are scattered over the breadth of the land? And these young men, destined to stand on the high places of social and moral power--shall the Great West feel their influence--and the distant South, shall it and its peculiar institutions feel the touch of their power? And the East--shall it know the weight of their principle and of their educated and sanctified talent? O have we not reason to plead mightily with God! O how many young palpitating hearts

are here which need to be drawn into God's work and into the spirit of full consecration to the Lord of Hosts! Christians, have you no plea, no special, peculiar plea to urge in behalf of interests so great and so pressing?

Sinners in Oberlin, have you not some plea to urge? O, my stony heart, go not down to ruin from this Oberlin! Say rather, O my God, wash all my sins away; O fulfil thy promise and make me white as snow. Let me not die, but live and declare the high praises of my God for evermore!

[Back to Top](#)

The Saviour Lifted Up, and the Look of Faith

Lecture III

May 25, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--John 3:14, 15: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Text.--John 12:32, 33: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. (This he said, signifying what death he should die.)"

In order to make this subject plain, I will read the passage referred to.--Num. 21:6-9. "And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived."

This is the transaction to which Christ alluded in the text.

The object in both cases was to save men from perishing. The bite of the serpent, its influence being unchecked, is the death of the body: the effects of sin, unpardoned and uncleansed from the heart, are the ruin of the soul. Christ is lifted up, to the end that sinners, believing in him, may not perish, but may have eternal life. In such a connection, to "perish" cannot mean annihilation, for it must be the antithesis of eternal life, and this is plainly much more than eternal existence. It must be eternal happiness--real life in the sense of exquisite enjoyment, and the counterpart of this, eternal misery, is presented under the term "perish." It is common in the scriptures to find a state of endless misery contrasted with one of endless happiness.

We may observe two points of analogy between the brazen serpent and Christ.

I. Christ must be lifted up as the serpent was in the wilderness;

II. Christ must be held up as a remedy for sin, even as the brazen serpent was as a remedy for a poison.

I. Christ must be lifted up as the serpent was in the wilderness.

From the passage quoted above out of Jn. 12, it is plain that this refers to his being raised up from the earth upon his cross at his crucifixion.

1. In this respect the serpent of brass was a type of Christ. Whoever looked upon this serpent was healed. So Christ heals not from punishment only, for to this the analogy of healing is less pertinent--but especially from sinning--from the heart to sin. He heals the soul and restores it to health. So it was said by the announcing angel, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. His power avails to cleanse and purify the soul.

2. Both Christ and the serpent were held up each as a remedy; and let it be specially noted--as a full and adequate remedy. The ancient Hebrews, bitten by fiery serpents, were not to mix up nostrums of their own devising to help out the cure: it was all-sufficient for them to look up to the remedy of God's own providing. God would have them understand that the healing was altogether his own work. The serpent on a pole was the only external object connected with their cure; to this they were to look, and in this most simple way--only by an expecting look, indicative of simple faith, they received

their cure.

3. Christ is to be lifted up as a present remedy. So was the serpent. The cure wrought then was present, immediate. It involved no delay.

4. This serpent was God's appointed remedy. So is Christ, a remedy appointed of God, sent down from heaven for this express purpose. It was indeed very wonderful that God should appoint a brazen serpent for such a purpose--such a remedy for such a malady; and not less wonderful is it that Christ should be lifted up in agony and blood, as a remedy for both the punishment and the heart-power of sin.

5. The brazen serpent was a divinely-certified remedy; --not a nostrum gotten up as thousands are, under high-sounding names and flaming testimonials; but a remedy prepared and brought forth by God himself, under his own certificate of its ample healing virtues.

6. So was Christ. The Father testifies to the perfect adequacy of Jesus Christ as a remedy for sin.

7. Jesus Christ must now be held up from the pulpit as one crucified for the sins of men. His great power to save lay in his atoning death.

8. He must not only be held up from the pulpit, but this exhibition of his person and work must be endorsed, and not contradicted by the experience of those who behold him.

Suppose that in Moses' time many who looked were seen to be still dying; who could have believed the unqualified declaration of Moses, that "every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live?" So here in the gospel and its subjects. Doubtless the Hebrews had before their eyes many living witnesses who had been bitten and yet bore the scars of those wounds; but who, by looking, had been healed. Every such case would go to confirm the faith of the people in God's word and in his own power to save. So Christ must be represented in his fullness, and this representation should be powerfully endorsed by the experience of his friends. Christ represents himself as one ready and willing to save. This, therefore is the thing to be shown. This must be sustained by the testimony of his living witnesses.

II. As the first point of analogy is the lifting up of the object to be looked

upon, the second is this very looking itself.

Christ must be held up as a remedy for sin, even as the brazen serpent was as a remedy for a poison. It is not uncommon in the Bible to see sin represented as a malady. For this malady, Christ had healing power. He professed to be able to forgive sin and to cleanse the soul from its moral pollution. Continually did he claim to have this power and encourage men to rely upon him and to resort to him for its application. In all his personal instructions he was careful to hold up himself as having this power, and as capable of affording a remedy for sin.

1. Men looked upon the serpent, expecting divine power to heal them. Even those ancient men, in that comparatively dark age, understood that the serpent was only a type, not the very cause in itself of salvation.

2. So is there something very remarkable in the relation of faith to healing. Take for illustration, the case of the woman who had an issue of blood. She had heard something about Jesus, and somehow had caught the idea that if she could but touch the hem of his garment, she should be made whole. See her pressing her way along through the crowd, faint with weakness, pale, and trembling;--if you had seen her you would perhaps have cried out, What would this poor dying invalid do?

She knew what she was trying to do. At last, unnoticed of all, she reached the spot where the Holy One stood and put forth her feeble hand and touched his garment. Suddenly he turns himself and asks--Who was it that touched me? Somebody touched me;--who was it? The disciples, astonished at such a question, put under such circumstances, reply--The multitude throng thee on every side, and scores are touching thee every hour; why then ask--Who touched me?

The fact was, somebody had touched Him with faith to be healed thereby, and he knew that the healing virtue had gone forth from himself to some believing heart. How beautiful an illustration this [sic.] of simple faith! And how wonderful the connection between the faith and the healing!

3. Just so the Hebrews received that wonderful healing power by simply looking toward the brazen serpent. No doubt this was a great mystery to them, yet it was none the less a fact. Let them look; the looking brings the cure, although not one of them can tell how the healing virtue comes. So we

are really to look to Christ, and in looking, to receive the healing power. It matters not how little we understand the mode in which the looking operates to give us the remedy for sin.

4. This looking to Jesus implies that we look away from ourselves. There is to be no mixing up of quack medicines along with the great remedy. Such a course is always sure to fail. Thousands fail in just this way,--forever trying to be healed partly by their own stupid, self-willed works, as well as partly by Jesus Christ. There must be no looking to man or to any of man's doings or man's help. All dependence must be on Christ alone. As this is true in reference to pardon, so is it also in reference to sanctification. This is done by faith in Christ. It is only through and by faith that you get that divine influence which sanctifies the soul--the Spirit of God; and this in some of its forms of action was the power that healed the Hebrews in the wilderness.

(1). Looking to Christ implies looking away from ourselves in the sense of not relying at all on our own works for the cure desired, not even on works of faith. The looking is toward Christ alone as our all-prevalent, all-sufficient and present remedy.

(2). There is a constant tendency in Christians to depend on their own doings, and not on simple faith in Christ. The woman of the blood-issue seems to have toiled many years to find relief before she came to Christ; had no doubt tried everybody's prescriptions, and taxed her own ingenuity besides to its utmost capacity, but all was of no avail. At last she heard of Jesus. He was said to do many wonderful works. She said within herself--This must be the promised Messiah--who was to "bear our sicknesses" and heal all the maladies of men. O let me rush to him, for if I may but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be whole. She did not stop to philosophize upon the mode of the cure; she leaned on no man's philosophy, and had none of her own; she simply said--I have heard of One who is mighty to save, and I flee to him.

(3). So of being healed of our sins. Despairing of all help in ourselves or in any other name than Christ's, and assured there is virtue in him to work out the cure, we expect it of him and come to him to obtain it.

Several times within the last few years, when persons have come to me

with the question, Can I anyhow be saved from my sins--actually saved, so as not to fall again into the same sins, and under the same temptations? I have said--Have you ever tried looking to Jesus? O yes.

But have you expected that you should be actually saved from sin by looking to Jesus, and be filled with faith, love, and holiness? No; I did not expect that.

Now suppose a man had looked at the brazen serpent for the purpose of speculation. He has no faith in what God says about being cured by looking, but he is inclined to try it. He will look a little and watch his feelings to see how it affects him. He does not believe God's word, yet since he does not absolutely know but it may be true, he will condescend to try it. This is no looking at all in the sense of our text. It would not have cured the bitten Israelite; it cannot heal the poor sinner. There is no faith in it.

5. Sinners must look to Christ with both desire and design to be saved. Salvation is the object for which they look.

Suppose one had looked towards the brazen serpent, but with no willingness or purpose to be cured. This could do him no good. Nor can it do sinners any good to think of Christ otherwise than as a Saviour, and a Saviour for their own sins.

6. Sinners must look to Christ as a remedy for all sin. To wish to make some exception, sparing some sins, but consenting to abandon others, indicates rank rebellion of heart, and can never impose on the All-seeing One. There cannot be honesty in the heart which proposes to itself to seek deliverance from sin only in part.

7. Sinners may look to Christ at once--without the least delay. They need not wait till they are almost dead under their malady. For the bitten Israelite, it was of no use to wait and defer his looking to the serpent till he found himself in the jaws of death. He might have said--I am wounded plainly enough, but I do not see as it swells much yet;--I do not feel the poison spreading through my system;--I cannot look yet, for my case is not yet desperate enough; I could not hope to excite the pity of the Lord in my present condition, and therefore I must wait. I say, there was no need of

such delay then and no use of it. Nor is there any more need or use for it in the sinner's case now.

8. We must look to Christ for blessings promised, not to works but to faith. It is curious to see how many mistakes are made on this point. Many will have it that there must be great mental agony, long fasting, many bitter tears and strong crying for mercy before deliverance can be looked for. They do not seem to think that all these manifestations of grief and distress are of not the least avail, because they are not simple faith, nor any part of faith, nor indeed any help toward faith; nor are they in anywise needed for the sake of acting on the sympathies of the Saviour. It is all as if under the serpent-plague of the wilderness, men had set their wits at work to get up quack remedies; fixing up plasters, and ointments, and plying the system with depletions, cathartics, and purifiers of the blood. All this treatment could avail nothing; there was but one effective cure, and if a man were only bitten and knew it, this would be the only preparatory step necessary to his looking as directed, for his cure.

So in the case of the sinner. If he is a sinner and knows it, this constitutes his preparation and fitness for coming to Jesus. It is all of no avail that he should go about to get up quack prescriptions, and to mix up remedies of his own devising with the great Remedy which God has provided. Yet there is a constant tendency in religious efforts toward this very thing--toward fixing up and relying upon an indefinite multitude and variety of spiritual quack remedies. See that sinner. How he toils and agonizes. He would compass heaven and earth to work out his own salvation, in his own way, to his own credit, by his own works. See how he worries himself in the multitude of his own devisings! Commonly before he arrives at simple faith, he finds himself in the deep mire of despair. Alas, he cries, there can be no hope for me! O! my soul is lost!

But at last the gleam of a thought breaks through the thick darkness, "possibly Jesus can help me! If He can, then I shall live, but not otherwise, for surely there is no help for me but in Him." There he is in his despair--bowed in weariness of soul, and worn out with his vain endeavors to help himself in other ways. He now bethinks himself of help from above. "There is nothing else I can do but cast myself utterly in all my hopelessness, upon Jesus Christ. Will He receive me? Perhaps He will; and that is enough for me

to know." He thinks on a little further, "Perhaps, yes, perhaps He will;--Nay, more, I think He will, for they tell me He has done so for other sinners;--I think he will--yes, I know he will--and here's my guilty heart! I will trust Him--yea, though He slay me, I will trust in Him."

Have any of you experienced anything like that?

"Perhaps He will admit my plea.

Perhaps will hear my prayer."

This is as far as the sinner can dare to go at first. But soon you hear him crying out--He says He will; I must believe Him! Then faith gets hold, and rests on promised faithfulness, and ere he is aware, his "soul is like the chariots of Amminadab," and he finds his bosom full of peace and joy as one on the borders of heaven.

REMARKS.

1. When it is said in John 12, "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me," the language is indeed universal in form, but cannot be construed as strictly universal without being brought into conflict with Bible truth and known facts. It is indeed only a common mode of speaking to denote a great multitude. I will draw great numbers--a vast "multitude that no man can number." There is nothing here in the context, or in the subject to require the strictly universal interpretation.
2. This expedient of the brazen serpent was no doubt designed to try the faith of the Israelites. God often put their faith to the test, and often adapted his providences to educate their faith--to draw it out and develop it. Many things did He do to prove them. So now. They had sinned. Fiery serpents came among them and many were poisoned and dying on every hand. God said, Make a brazen serpent and set it upon a pole, and raise it high before the eyes of all the people. Now let the sufferers look on this serpent and they shall live. This put their faith to the test.
3. It is conceivable that many perished through mere unbelief, although the provisions for their salvation were most abundant. We, look at a serpent of brass--they might say, scornfully--as if there were not humbugs enough among the rabble, but Moses must give us yet another! Perhaps some set themselves to

philosophizing on the matter. We, they say, will much sooner trust our tried physicians than these "old wives' fables." What philosophical connection can any man see between looking upon a piece of brass and being healed of a serpent's bite?

So, many now blow at the gospel. They wonder how any healing power can come of gospel faith. True, they hear some say they are healed, and that they know the healing power has gone to their very soul, and they cry--"I looked to Jesus and I was healed and made whole from that very hour." But they count all this as mere fanatical delusion. They can see none of their philosophy in it.

But is this fanaticism? Is it any more strange than that a man bitten of poisonous serpents should be healed by looking at God's command on a brazen serpent?

4. Many are stumbled by the simplicity of the gospel. They want something more intelligible! They want to see through it. They will not trust what they cannot explain. It is on this ground that many stumble at the doctrine of sanctification by faith in Christ. It is so simple their philosophy cannot see through it.

Yet the analogy afforded in our text is complete. Men are to look to Jesus that they may not perish but may have eternal life. And who does not know that eternal life involves entire sanctification?

5. The natural man always seeks for some way of salvation that shall be altogether creditable to himself. He wants to work out some form of self-righteousness and does not know about trusting in Christ alone. It does not seem to him natural or philosophical.

6. There is a wonderful and most alarming state of things in many churches abroad;--almost no Christ in their experience. It is most manifest that He holds an exceedingly small space in their hearts. So far from knowing what salvation is as a thing to be attained by simply believing in Christ, they can only give you an experience of this sort. How did you become a Christian? I just made up my mind to serve the Lord. Is that all? That's all. Do you know what it is to receive eternal life by simply looking to Jesus? Don't know as I understand that. Then you are not a Christian. Christianity, from beginning to end is received from Christ by simple faith. Thus, and only thus does the pardon of sin come to the soul, and thus only can come that peace of God, passing all understanding,

which lives in the soul with faith and love. Thus sanctification comes through faith in Christ.

What, then shall we think of that religion which leaves Christ out of view?

7. Many are looking for some wonderful sign or token, not understanding that it is by faith they are to be brought completely into sympathy with Christ and into participation with his own life. By faith Christ unites them to himself. Faith working by love, draws them into living union with his own moral being. All this is done by the mind's simply looking to Christ in faith.

8. When the serpent was up, no doubt many perished because they would not accept and act upon so simple a plan of remedy. Many perished because they did not and would not realize their danger. If they saw men cured, they would say-- We don't believe it was done by the brazen serpent on the pole. Those men were not much poisoned--would not have died anyhow. They assume that those who ascribe their cure to the power of God are mistaken.

9. Many perished also from delay. They waited to see whether they were in danger of dying. And still they waited--till they were so bedizzened and crazed, they could only lie down and die.

10. So now in regard to the gospel. Some are occupied with other matters, more important just now, and of course they must delay. Many are influenced by others' opinions. They hear many stories. Such a man looked and yet lost his life. Another man did not look and yet was saved. So men have different opinions about their professedly Christian neighbors, and this stumbles many. They hear that some set out strong for religion, but seem to fail. They looked as they thought, but all in vain. Perhaps it was so; for they might have looked without real faith. Some will philosophize till they make themselves believe it is all a delusion to look. They think they see many pretend to look and appear to look, who yet find no healing. Who can believe where there are so many stumbling-blocks?

These discouraging appearances drove some into despair in the wilderness, we may suppose; and certainly we see that the same causes produce these effects here in the case of sinners. Some think they have committed the unpardonable sin. They class themselves among those who "having been once enlightened," "there remains for them no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain looking for of

vengeance and fiery indignation." Some are sure it is too late for them now. Their heart is hard as the nether mill-stone. All is dark and desolate as the grave. See him; his very look is that of a lost soul! Ah, some of you are perhaps reasoning and disbelieving in this very way!

11. Many neglected because they thought they were getting better. They saw some change of symptoms as they supposed. So with sinners; they feel better for going to meeting, and indeed there is so much improvement, they take it they are undoubtedly doing well.

12. Many of the ancient Hebrews may have refused to look because they had no good hope; because indeed they were full of doubts. If you had been there you would have found a great variety of conflicting views, often even between brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, parents and children. Some ridicule; some are mad; some won't believe anyhow. And must I say it--some sinners who ought to be seeking Christ are deterred by reasons fully as frivolous and foolish as these.

13. It is easy for us all to see the analogy between the manner of looking and the reasons for not looking at the brazen serpent and to Christ the Saviour. I need not push the analogy into its minute particulars any further. But the question for you all now is: Do you really believe that as "Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so is the Son of man lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but shall have eternal life"? Do you understand the simple remedy of faith? Perhaps you ask--What were they to believe? This; that if they really looked at the brazen serpent on the pole, they should certainly experience the needed healing. It was God's certified remedy, and they were so to regard it. And what are you now to believe? That Christ is the great antitype of that serpent lifted up in the wilderness, and that you are to receive from him by simple faith all the blessings of a full and free salvation. By simple faith, I say, and do you understand this? Do I hear you say to these things--What, may I, a sinner, just fix my eye in simple faith on Jesus? Who, who may do this? Is it I? How can it be that I should have this privilege?

I see here to-day the faces of some whom I saw last fall in the meetings for inquiry. What have you been doing? Have you been trying to work yourselves into some certain state of mind? Are you wishing intensely that you could only feel so and so--according to some ideal you have in your mind? Do you understand that you are really to look by faith, and let this look of faith be to you

as the touch of the poor woman with an issue of blood was to her dying body, believing that if you look in simple trust, He surely will receive you, and give you his divine love and peace and life and light, and really make them pulsate through your whole moral being? Do you believe it? Nay, don't you see that you do not believe it? Oh, but you say, "It is a great mystery!" I am not going to explain it, nor shall I presume that I can do so, any more than I can explain how that woman was healed by touching the hem of the Saviour's garment. The touch in this case and the looking in that, are only the means, the media, by which the power is to be received. The manner in which God operates is a thing of small consequence to us; let us be satisfied that we know what we must do to secure the operations of his divine Spirit in all things that pertain to life and godliness.

You have doubtless had confused notions of the way of salvation, perhaps contriving and speculating, and working upon your own feelings. Now you pray, and having prayed, you say--Now let me watch and see if this prayer has given me salvation! This course is much as if the Hebrew people when bitten by serpents and commanded to look to the serpent of brass, had gone about to apply here a plaster, there a blister, and then a probe, all the time losing sight of just that one thing which God told them would infallibly cure. Oh! why should men forget, and why not understand that all good needed by us comes from God to simple faith? When we see any want, there is Christ, to be received by faith alone; and His promises leave no want unprovided for.

Now, if this is the way of salvation, how wonderful that sinners should look every other way but toward Christ, and should put forth all other sorts of effort except the effort to look at once in simple faith to their Saviour! How often do we see them discouraged and confounded, toiling so hard and so utterly in vain. No wonder they should be so greatly misled. Go round among the churches and ask, Did you ever expect to be saved from sin in this world? No;--but you expect to be saved at death. Inasmuch as He has been quite unsuccessful in his efforts to sanctify your soul during your life, you think He will send death on in season to help the work through!

Can you believe this?

While Christians disown the glorious doctrine of sanctification by faith in Christ, present, and according to each man's faith so done to him, it cannot be expected that they will teach sinners with intelligible clearness how to look to Christ in simple faith for pardon. Knowing so little of the power of faith in their own

experience, how can they teach others effectively, or even truthfully? Thus blind leading blind, it is no wonder that both are found together where the Bible proverb represents both the leaders and the led as terminating their mutual relations.

There seems to be no remedy for such a finality except for professing Christians to become the light of the world; and for this end, to learn the meaning and know the experience of simple faith. Faith once learned, they will experience its transforming power, and be able to teach others the way of life.

[Back to Top](#)

The Sinner's Excuses Answered

Lecture IV

June 8, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Job 36:1-3: "Elihu also proceeded and said, Suffer me a little, and I will shew thee that I have yet to speak on God's behalf. I will fetch my knowledge from afar, and will ascribe righteousness to my Maker."

Elihu was present and heard the controversy between Job and his friends. The latter maintained that God's dealings with Job proved him wicked. This Job denied, and maintained that we could not judge men to be good or bad, from God's providential dealings with them, because facts show that the present is not a state of rewards and punishments. They, however, regarded this as taking part with the wicked, and hence did not shrink from accusing Job of doing this.

Elihu had previously said--My desire is that Job may be tried in regard to what he has said of wicked men. But ere the discussion closed, he saw that Job had confounded his three friends, maintaining unanswerably that it was not because of any hypocrisy or special guilt that he was so signally scourged. Yet plainly even Job had not the key to explain the reason of God's dealings with him. To him it was still a mystery. He did not see that God might have been seeking to

test and discipline his piety, or even to make an example of his integrity and submissiveness to confound the devil with.

Elihu purposed to speak in God's behalf and ascribed righteousness to his Maker. It is my present object to do the same in regard to sinners who refuse to repent, and who complain of God's ways. But before I proceed, let me advert to a fact. Some years since, in my labours as an evangelist, I became acquainted with a man prominent in the place of his residence for his general intelligence, and whose two successive wives were daughters of Old School Presbyterian clergymen. Through them he had received many books to read on religious subjects, which they and their friends supposed would do him good, but which failed to do him any good at all. He denied the inspiration of the Bible, and on grounds which those books did not in his view obviate at all. Indeed, they only served to aggravate his objections.

When I came into the place, his wife was very anxious that I should see and converse with him. I called; she sent for him to come in and see the new minister;--to which he replied that he was sure he could do him no good, since he had conversed with so many and found no light on the points that so much stumbled him; but upon her urgent entreaty, he consented for her sake to come in. I said to him in the outset, "Don't understand me as having called here to have a quarrel with you, and provoke a dispute. I only wish at your wife's request to converse with you if you are perfectly willing, upon the great subject of divine revelation." He signified his pleasure to have such a conversation, and accordingly I asked him to state briefly his position. He replied--"I admit the truths of natural religion, and believe most fully in the immortality of the soul, but not in the inspiration of the scriptures. I am a Deist." But, said I, on what ground do you deny the inspiration of the Bible? Said he, I know it cannot be true. How do you know that? It contradicts the affirmations of my reason. You admit and I hold that God created my nature, both physical and moral. Here is a book, said to be from God, but it contradicts my nature. I therefore know it cannot be from God.

This of course opened the door for me to draw from him the particular points of his objection to the Bible as teaching what his nature contradicted. These points and my reply to them will constitute the body of my present discourse.

1. The Bible cannot be true because it represents God as unjust. I find myself

possessed of convictions as to what is just and unjust. These convictions, the Bible outrages. It represents God as creating men and then condemning them for another's sin.

Indeed, said I, and where? Say, where does the Bible affirm this?

Why, does it not? said he. No. Are you a Presbyterian? said he. Yes. He then began to quote the catechism. Stop, stop, said I, that is not the Bible. That is only a human catechism. True, said he, but does not the Bible connect the universal sin of the race with the sin of Adam? Yes, said I, it does in a particular way, but it is quite essential to our purpose to understand in what way. The Bible makes this connection incidental and not direct; and it always represents the sinner condemned as really sinning himself, and as condemned for his own sin.

2. But, continued he, children do suffer for their father's sins.

Yes, said I, in a certain sense it is so, and must be so. Do you not see yourself, everywhere, that children must suffer for the sins of their parents? and be blessed also by the piety of their parents? You see this and you find no fault with it. You see that children must be implicated in the good or ill conduct of their parents; their relation as children makes this absolutely unavoidable. Is it not wise and good that the happiness or misery of children should depend on their parents, and thus become one of the strongest possible motives to them to train them up in virtue? Yet it is true that the son is never rewarded or punished punitively for his parents' sins. The evil that befalls him through his connection with his parents is always disciplinary--never punitive.

3. Again, he said, the Bible certainly represents God as creating men sinners, and as condemning them for their sinful nature.

No, replied I; for the Bible defines sin as voluntary transgression of law, and it is absurd to suppose that a nature can be a voluntary transgressor. Besides, it is in the nature of the case impossible that God should make a sinful nature. It is in fact doubly impossible, for the thing is a natural impossibility, and if it were not, it would yet be morally impossible that he should do it. He could not do it for the same reason that He can not sin.

In harmony with this is the fact that the Bible never represents God as

condemning men for their nature, either here or at the judgment. Nowhere in the Bible is there the least intimation that God holds men responsible for their created nature, but only for the vile and pertinacious abuse of their nature. Other views of this matter, differing from this, are not the Bible, but are only false glosses put upon it usually by those whose philosophy has led them into absurd interpretations. Every where in the Bible, men are condemned only for their voluntary sins, and are required to repent of these sins, and of these only. Indeed there can possibly be no other sins than these.

4. Again, it is said, the Bible represents God as being cruel, inasmuch as He commanded the Jews to wage a war of extermination against the ancient Canaanites.

But why should this be called cruel? The Bible expressly informs us that God commanded this because of their awful wickedness. They were too awfully wicked to live. God could not suffer them to defile the earth and corrupt society. Hence He arose in his zeal for human welfare, and commanded to wash the land clean of such unutterable abominations. The good of the race demanded it. Was this cruel? Nay, verily, this was simply benevolent. It was one of the highest acts of benevolence to smite down such a race and sweep them from the face of the earth. And to employ the Jews as His executioners, giving them to understand distinctly why He commanded them to do it, was putting them in a way to derive the highest moral benefit from the transaction. In no other way could they have been so solemnly impressed with the holy justice of Jehovah. And now will any man find fault with God for this? None can do so, reasonably.

5. But the Bible allows slavery.

What? The Bible allow slavery? In what sense allow it? and under what circumstances? and what kind of slavery? These are all very important inquiries if we wish to know the certainty and the meaning of the things we say.

The Bible did indeed allow the Jews, in the case of captives taken in war, to commute death for servitude. When the customs of existing nations put captives taken in war to death, God authorized the Jews in certain cases to spare their captives and employ them as servants. By this means they were taken out from among idolatrous nations and brought into contact with the

worship and ordinances of the true God.

Moreover God enacted statutes for the protection of the Hebrew servant, which made his case infinitely better than being cut off in his sins. And who shall call this cruel? Jewish servitude was not American slavery, nor scarcely an approximation toward it. It would require too much time to go into the detail of this subject here. All that I have stated might be abundantly substantiated.

6. Again, it is objected God is unmerciful, vindictive, and implacable. The gentleman to whom I have alluded said--I don't believe the Bible is from God when it represents Him as so vindictive and implacable that He would not forgive sin until He had first taken measures to kill His own Son.

Now it was by no means unnatural that, under such instructions he had received, he should think so. I had felt so myself. This very objection had stumbled me. But I afterwards saw the answer so plainly that it left nothing more to be desired. The answer indeed is exceedingly plain. It was not an implacable disposition in God which led Him to require the death of Christ as the ground of forgiveness. It was simply his benevolent regard for the safety and blessedness of His kingdom. He knew very well that it was unsafe to forgive sin without such a satisfaction. Indeed this was the strongest possible exhibition of a forgiving disposition, to consent to the sacrifice of His Son for this purpose. He loved His Son, and certainly would not inflict one needless pang upon Him. He also loved a sinning race, and saw the depth of that ruin toward which they were rushing. Therefore He longed to forgive them, and to prepare a way in which He could do so with safety. He only desired to avoid all misapprehension. To forgive without such atonement as would adequately express His abhorrence of sin, would leave the intelligent universe to think that He did not care how much any beings should sin. This would not do.

Let it be considered also that the giving up of Jesus Christ was only a voluntary offering on God's part to sustain law so that He could forgive without peril to His government. Jesus was not in any sense punished; He only volunteered to suffer for sinners that they might be freed from the governmental necessity of suffering. And was not mercy manifested in this? Certainly. How could it be manifested more signally?

7. But, says the objector, God is unjust, inasmuch as He requires impossibilities on pain of endless death.

Does He, indeed? Then where? In the law, is it, or in the gospel? In these taken together we have the aggregate of all God's requirements. In what part, then, of either law or Gospel do you find the precept contained which requires impossibilities? Is it in the law? But the law says only--"Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart;" not with another man's heart, but simply with thine own; only with all thine own heart, not with more than all. Read on still further: "and with all thy strength." Not with the strength of an angel--not with the strength of any other being than thyself, and only with such an amount of strength as you actually have for the time being. The demands of the law, you see, exactly meet your ability; nothing more and nothing else.

8. Indeed, said he, this is a new view of the subject.

Well; but is not this just as it should be? Does not the law carry with it, its own vindication in its very terms? How can any one say that the law requires of us impossible service--things we have no power to do? The fact is it requires us to do just what we can and nothing more. Where then is this objection to the Bible? Where is the impossibility of which you speak?

9. But, resumed he, is it not true that "no mere man since the fall has been able wholly to keep the commandments of God, but doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed?"

Ah, my friend, that's catechism, not Bible; we must be careful not to impute to the Bible all that human catechisms have said. The Bible only requires you to consecrate to God what strength and powers you actually have, and is by no means responsible for the affirmation that God requires of man more than he can do. No, verily, the Bible nowhere imputes to God a requisition so unreasonable and cruel. No wonder the human mind should rebel against such a view of God's law. If any human law were to require impossibilities, there could be no end to the denunciations that must fall upon it. No human mind could possibly approve of such a law. Nor can it be supposed that God can reasonably act on principles which would disgrace and ruin any human government.

10. But, resumed he, here is another objection. The Bible represents men as unable to believe the Gospel unless they are drawn by God, for it reads--"No man can come to me except the Father who hath sent me draw him." Yet sinners are required to believe on pain of damnation. How is this?

To this the reply is, first, the connection shows that Christ referred to drawing by means of teaching or instruction; for to confirm what he had said, he appeals to the ancient scriptures, "It is written, They shall all be taught of God." Without this teaching, then, none can come. They must know Christ before they can come to Him in faith. They cannot believe till they know what to believe. In this sense of coming, untaught heathen are not required to come. God never requires any to come, who have not been taught. Once taught, they are bound to come, may be and are required to come, and are without excuse if they refuse.

11. But, replied he, the Bible does really teach that men cannot serve the Lord, and still it holds them responsible for doing it. Joshua said to all the people, "Ye cannot serve the Lord, for He is an holy God."

Let us see. Joshua had called all the people together and had laid before them their obligation to serve the Lord their God. When they all said so readily and with so little serious consideration that they would, Joshua replied--"Ye cannot serve the Lord for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins." What did he mean? Plainly this--Ye cannot serve God, because you have not heartily abandoned your sins. You cannot get along with a God so holy and so jealous, unless you give up sinning. You cannot serve God with a selfish heart. You cannot please Him till you really renounce your sins altogether. You must begin by making to yourselves a new heart. Joshua doubtless saw that they had not given up their sins and had not really begun to serve God at all, and did not even understand the first principles of true religion. This is the reason why he seemed to repulse them so suddenly. It is as if he would say--Stop; you must go back and begin with utterly putting away all your sins. Ye cannot serve a holy and jealous God in any other way, for He will not go along with you as his people if you persist in sinning against Him.

It is a gross perversion of the Bible to make it mean that men have no power to do what God requires. It is true indeed, that in this connection it sometimes uses the words can and cannot, but these and similar words

should be construed according to the nature of the subject. All reasonable men construe thus intuitively in all common use of language. The Bible always employs the language of common life and in the way of common usage. Hence it should be thus interpreted.

When it is said that Joseph's brethren hated him and could not speak peaceably to him, the meaning is not that their organs of speech could not articulate kind words; but it points us to a difficulty in the heart. They hated him so badly they could not speak pleasantly. Nor does the sacred historian assume that they could not at once subdue this hatred and treat Joseph as brother should treat brother. The sacred writers are the last men in the world to apologize for sin on this wise.

There is the case of the angels sent to hasten Lot out of guilty Sodom. One said, "Haste thee, escape thither, for I can not do anything until thou be come thither." Does this mean that the Almighty God had no power to overwhelm Sodom so long as Lot was in it? Certainly not. It meant only that it was his purpose not to destroy the city till Lot was out. Indeed all men use language thus in common life. You go into one of our village stores and say to the merchant--Can you lift a ton of your goods at once? No. Can you sell me that piece of cloth for a shilling a yard? No. Does this "can" mean the same as the other? By no means. But how is it that you detect the difference? How is it that you come to know so readily which is the physical cannot and which the moral? The nature of the subject tells you.

But, you say, the same word ought always to mean the same thing. Well, if it ought to, it does not, in any language ever yet spoken by man. And yet there is no difficulty in understanding even the most imperfect of human languages if men are honest in speaking and honest in hearing, and will use their common sense. They intuitively construe language according to the nature of the subject spoken of.

The Bible always assumes that sinners cannot do right and please God with a wicked heart. It always takes the ground that God abhors hypocrisy--that He cannot be satisfied with mere forms and professions of service when the heart is not in it, and hence that all acceptable service must begin with making a new and sincere heart.

12. But here is another difficulty. Can I make to myself a new heart?

Yes, and you could not doubt but that you could, if you only understood what the language means and what the thing is.

See Adam and Eve in the garden. What was their heart? Did God create it? No; it is not possible that He should, for a heart in this sense is not the subject of physical creation. When God made Adam, giving him all the capacities for acting morally, he had no heart good or bad until he came to act morally. When did he first have a moral heart? When he first waked to moral consciousness and gave his heart to God. When first he saw God manifested and put confidence in Him as his Father and yielded up his heart to Him in love and obedience. Observe he first had this holy heart because he yielded up his will to God in entire consecration. This was his first holy heart.

But at length the hour of temptation came, alluring him to withdraw his heart from God and turn to pleasing himself. To Eve the tempter said--"Hath God indeed said--Ye shall not surely die?" Ah, is that so? Thus he raised the question either as to the fact that God had really threatened death for sin, or as to the justice of doing so. In either case it raised a question about obedience and opened the heart to temptation. Then that fruit came before her mind. It was fair and seemed good for food. Her appetite enkindles and clamours for indulgence. Then, it was said to be fitted to "make one wise," and by eating it she might "be as the Gods, knowing good and evil." This appealed to her curiosity. Yielding to this temptation and making up her mind to please herself, she made herself a new heart of sin; she changed her heart from holiness to sin, and fell from her first moral position. When Adam yielded to temptation, he made the same change in his heart; he gave himself up to selfishness and sin. This accounts for all future acts of selfishness in after life.

Adam and Eve are again brought before God. God says to Adam--Give me thy heart. Change your heart. What! says Adam, I cannot change my own heart! But God replies, How long is it since you have done it? It is but yesterday that you changed your own heart from holiness to sin; why can't you change it back?

So in all cases. Changing the ruling preference, the governing purpose of the mind, is the thing, and who can say, I cannot do that. Cannot you do that? Cannot you give yourself to God?

The reason you cannot please God in your executive acts, is that your governing purpose is not right. While your leading motive is wrong all you do is selfish, because it is all done for the single object of pleasing yourself. You do nothing for the sake of pleasing God, and with the governing design and purpose of doing all His holy will; hence all you do, even your religious duties, only displease God. If the Bible had anywhere represented God as being pleased with your hypocritical services it would be proven false, for this is perfectly impossible.

13. But you say--The Bible requires me to begin with the inner man--the heart;--and you say you cannot get at this; that you cannot reach your own heart or will to change it.

Indeed, you are entirely mistaken. This is the very thing that is most entirely within your power. Of all things conceivable, this is the very thing that you can do most certainly--that is most absolutely within your power. If God had made your salvation turn upon your walking across the room, you might not be able to do it; or if upon lifting your eyelids, or rising from your seat, or any, the least movement of your muscles, you might be utterly unable to do it. You could will the motion required, and you could try; but the muscles might have no power to act. You often think that if God had only conditioned your salvation upon some motions of your muscles, it would have been so easy; if he had only asked you to control the outside; but oh, you say, how can I control the inside? The inside is the very thing you can move and control. If it had been the outside, you might strive and groan till you die, and not be able to move a muscle, even on pain of an eternal hell. But now inasmuch as God only says, "Change your will," all is brought within your control. This is just the thing you always can do; you can always move your will. You can always give your heart, at your own option. Where, then, is your difficulty and objection? God requires you to act with your freedom; to exercise the powers of free voluntary action that he has given you. He asks you to put your hand on the fountain head of all your own power, to act just where your central power lies--where **YOU ALWAYS HAVE POWER** so long as you have a rational mind and a moral nature. Your liberty does not consist in a power to move your muscles at pleasure, for the connection between your muscles and your will may be broken, and at all events is always necessary when your body is in its normal state; therefore God does

not require you to perform any particular movement of the muscles, but only to change your will. This, compared with all other things, is that which you can always do, and can do more surely than anything else.

Again, considering volitions as distinct from ultimate purposes, and as standing next before executive acts, it is not volitions that God requires, but he lays his requisition directly upon the ultimate purposes. The ultimate purposes being given, these subordinate volitions follow naturally and necessarily. Your liberty therefore does not, strictly speaking, lie in these subordinate volitions--such as the volition to sit, to walk, to speak. But the ultimate purpose controlling all volition, and relating to the main object you shall pursue, as for example, whether you shall in all things strive to please God, or on the other hand, strive to please yourself; this, being the precise point wherein your liberty of free action lies, is the very point upon which God lays his moral requisitions. The whole question is, will you please God, or please yourself? Will you give your heart to Him, or give it to your own selfish enjoyment?

So long as you give your heart to selfish pleasure and withhold it from God, it will be perfectly natural for you to sin. This is precisely the reason why it is so natural for sinners to sin. It is because the will, the heart, is set upon it, and all they have to do is to carry out this ruling propensity and purpose. But, just change this governing purpose and you will find obedience equally natural and equally easy in all its executive acts. It will then become natural to please God in everything. Now pleasing yourself is natural enough; why? Because you are consecrated to pleasing yourself. But change this purpose; make a new and totally opposite consecration; reverse the committed heart, and let it be for God and not for self; then all duty will be easy for the same reason that all sin is so easy now.

So far is it from being true that you are unable to make your heart new, the fact is you would long ago have done it if you had not resisted God in His efforts to move you to repentance. Do you not know that you have often resisted God's Spirit? You know it well. So clear were your convictions that you ought to live for God, you had to resist every appeal of your own conscience, and march right in the face of known duty, and press your way along directly against God. If you had only listened to the voice of your reason, and to the demands of your conscience, you would have had a new

heart long ago. But you resisted God when He tried to persuade you to have a new heart. O sinner, how strong you have been to resist God! How strong to resist every consideration addressed to your intelligence and to your reason! How strangely have you listened to the considerations for sinning! O the miserable petty things--tell me, what were they? Suppose Christ should question you, and ask--What is there in earth that you should love it so well? What in sin that you should prize it above my favour and my love? What are those little indulgences--those very small things that always perish with the using? Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Most utterly contemptible! You have been holding on to sin with no reasonable motive for so doing. But O, consider what motives you have fought against and resisted--motives of almost infinite force! Think of the motives resulting from God's law--so excellent in itself, but so dreadful in its penalties against transgressors; and then think also of God's infinite love in the Gospel; how He opened the life-tides of his great heart and let blessings flow with fullness like a God! Yet consider how, despite of this love, you have abused your God exceedingly. You have gone on as if the motives to sin were all persuasive, and as if sin's promises of good were more reliable than God's. When God spread out before you the glories of heaven, made all attractive and delightful in the beauties of holiness, you coolly replied, Earth is far better! Give me earth while I can have it, and heaven only when I can have earth no longer! O sinner, you would have been converted a long time ago if you had not opposed God, and trodden under foot his invitations and his appeals.

O what a thing is this moral agency! How awful its power, and how momentous therefore must be its responsibilities. When God is pouring forth influences in waves of light and power, with a kind of moral omnipotence, you resist and withstand all! As if you could do anything you pleased despite of God! As if His influence were almost utterly powerless to move your heart from its fixed purpose to sin!

Does it require great strength to lay down your weapons? Indeed this is quite a new thing; for one would suppose it must rather require great strength to resist and to fight. And so you put forth your great strength in fighting against God, and would fain believe that you have not got strength enough to lay your weapons down! O the absurdity of sin and of the sinner's apology for sinning!

14. But you say--I must have the Holy Ghost.

I answer, Yes; but only to overcome your voluntary opposition. That is all.

After I had gone over this ground with my friend, as I have already explained, he became very much agitated. The sweat started from every pore; his feelings overcame him; he dropped his head down upon his knees, buried in intensest thought and full of emotion. I rose and went to the meeting. After it had progressed awhile he came in; but O how changed! Said he, "Dear wife, I don't know what has become of my infidelity. I ought to be sent to hell! What charges I have been making against God! And yet with what amazing mercy did my God bear with me and let me live!" In fact, he found he had been all wrong and he broke all down and became as a little child before God.

And you, too, sinner, know you ought to live for God, yet you have not; you know that Jesus made himself an offering to the injured dignity of that law which you violated, yet you have rejected him. He gave himself a voluntary offering, not to suffer the penalty of the law, but as your legal substitute; and shall He have done all this in vain? Do you say--"O, I'm so prejudiced against God and the Bible!" What, so prejudiced that you will not repent? How horrible! O let it suffice that you have played the fool so long and erred so exceedingly. It has been all wrong! At once return and devote yourself to God. Why should you live to yourself at all? You can get no good so!

Come to God--He is so easily pleased! It is so much easier to please Him than to please and satisfy yourself. The veriest little child can please Him. Children often have the most delightful piety, because it is so simple-hearted. They know what to do to please God, and, meaning honestly, to please Him, they can not fail. No matter how simple-hearted they are, if they mean to please God, they surely will.

And cannot you at least do so much as honestly to choose and aim to please God?

[Back to Top](#)

God's Love for A Sinning World

Lecture V

June 22, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Sin is the most expensive thing in the universe. Nothing else can cost so much. Pardoned or unpardoned, its cost is infinitely great. Pardoned, the cost falls chiefly on the great atoning substitute; unpardoned, it must fall on the head of the guilty sinner.

The existence of sin is a fact everywhere experienced -- everywhere observed. There is sin in our race, everywhere, and in awful aggravation.

Sin is the violation of an infinitely important law, -- a law designed and adapted to secure the highest good of the universe. Obedience to this law is naturally essential to the good of creatures. Without obedience there could be no blessedness even in heaven.

As sin is a violation of a most important law, it cannot be treated lightly. No government can afford to treat disobedience as a trifle, inasmuch as everything -- the entire welfare of the government and of all the governed--turns upon obedience. Just in proportion to the value of the interests at stake is the necessity of guarding law and of punishing disobedience.

The law of God must not be dishonoured by anything He shall do. It has been dishonoured by the disobedience of man; hence the more need that God should stand by it, to retrieve its honour. The utmost dishonor is done to law by disowning, disobeying, and despising it. All this, sinning man has done. Hence, this law being not only good but intrinsically necessary to the happiness of the governed, it becomes of all things most necessary that the law-giver should vindicate his law. He must by all means do it.

Hence sin has involved God's government in a vast expense. Either the law must

be executed at the expense of the well being of the whole race, or God must submit to suffer the worst results of disrespect to His law--results which in some form must involve a vast expense.

Take for example any human government. Suppose the righteous and necessary laws which it imposes are disowned and dishonoured. In such a case the violated law must be honoured by the execution of its penalty, or something else not less expensive, and probably much more so, must be endured. Transgression must cost happiness, somewhere, and in vast amount.

In the case of God's government it has been deemed advisable to provide a substitute, one that should answer the purpose of saving the sinner, and yet of honouring the law. This being determined on, the next great question was--How shall the expense be met?

The Bible informs us how the question was in fact decided. By a voluntary conscription--shall I call it,--or donation? Call it as we may, it was a voluntary offering. Who shall head the subscription? Who shall begin where so much is to be raised? Who will make the first sacrifice? Who will take the first step in a project so vast? The Bible informs us. It began with the Infinite Father. He made the first great donation. He gave his only begotten Son--this to begin with--and having given him first, He freely gives all else that the exigencies of the case can require. First, He gave his Son to make the atonement due to law; then gave and sent his Holy Spirit to take charge of this work. The Son on his part consented to stand as the representative of sinners that he might honor the law, by suffering in their stead. He poured out his blood, made a whole life of suffering a free donation on the altar--withheld not his face from spitting, nor his back from stripes--shrunk not from the utmost contumely that wicked men could heap on him. So the Holy Ghost also devotes himself to most self-denying efforts unceasingly, to accomplish the great object.

It would have been a very short method to have turned over his hand upon the wicked of our race, and sent them all down quick to hell, as once He did when certain angels "kept not their first estate." Rebellion broke out in heaven. Not long did God bear it, around his lofty throne. But in [the] case of man he changed his course--did not send them all to hell, but devised a vast scheme of measures, involving most amazing self-denials and self-sacrifices, to gain men's souls back to obedience and heaven.

For whom was this great donation made? "God so loved the World," meaning the whole race of men. By the "world" in this connection cannot be meant any particular part only, but the whole race. Not only the Bible, but the nature of the case shows that the atonement must have been made for the whole world. For plainly if it had not been made for the entire race, no man of the race could ever know that it was made for himself, and therefore not a man could believe on Christ in the sense of receiving by faith the blessings of the atonement. There being an utter uncertainty as to the persons embraced in the limited provisions which we now suppose to be made, the entire donation must fail through the impossibility of rational faith for its reception. Suppose a will is made by a rich man bequeathing certain property to certain unknown persons, described only by the name of "the elect." They are not described otherwise than by this term, and all agree that although the maker of the will had the individuals definitely in his mind, yet that he left no description of them which either the persons themselves, the courts, nor any living mortal can understand. Now such a will is of necessity altogether null and void. No living man can claim under such a will, and none the better though these elect were described as residents of Oberlin. Since it does not embrace all the residents of Oberlin, and does not define which of them, all is lost. All having an equal claim and none any definite claim, none can inherit. If the atonement were made in this way, no living man would have any valid reason for believing himself one of the elect, prior to his reception of the Gospel. Hence he would have no authority to believe and receive its blessings by faith. In fact the atonement must be wholly void--on this supposition--unless a special revelation is made to the persons for whom it is intended.

As the case is, however, the very fact that a man belongs to the race of Adam--the fact that he is human, born of woman, is all-sufficient. It brings him within the pale. He is one of the world for whom God gave his Son, that whosoever would believe in him might not perish, but have everlasting life.

The subjective motive in the mind of God for this great gift was love, love to the world. God so loved the world that he gave his Son to die for it. God loved the universe also, but this gift of his Son sprang from love to our world. True in this great act he took pains to provide for the interests of the universe. He was careful to do nothing that could in the least let down the sacredness of his law. Most carefully did he intend to guard against misapprehension as to his regard for his law and for the high interests of obedience and happiness in his moral universe.

He meant once for all to preclude the danger lest any moral agent should be tempted to undervalue the moral law.

Yet farther, it was not only from love to souls, but from respect to the spirit of the law of his own eternal reason, that he gave up his Son to die. In this the purpose to give up his Son originated. The law of his own reason must be honoured and held sacred. He may do nothing inconsistent with its spirit. He must do everything possible to prevent the commission of sin and to secure the confidence and love of his subjects. So sacred did he hold these great objects that he would baptize his Son in his own blood, sooner than peril the good of the universe. Beyond a question it was love and regard for the highest good of the universe that led Him to sacrifice his own beloved Son.

Let us next consider attentively the nature of this love. The text lays special stress on this--God so loved--his love was of such a nature, so wonderful and so peculiar in its character, that it led Him to give up his only Son to die. More is evidently implied in this expression than simply its greatness. It is most peculiar in its character. Unless we understand this, we shall be in danger of falling into the strange mistake of the Universalists, who are forever talking about God's love for sinners, but whose notions of the nature of this love never lead to repentance or to holiness. They seem to think of this love as simply good nature, and conceive of God only as a very good-natured being, whom nobody need to fear.-- Such notions have not the least influence towards holiness, but the very opposite. It is only when we come to understand what this love is in its nature that we feel its moral power promoting holiness.

It may be reasonably asked, If God so loved the world with a love characterized by greatness and by greatness only,-- why did He not save all the world without sacrificing his Son? This question suffices to show us that there is deep meaning in this word so, and should put us upon a careful study of this meaning.

1. This love in its nature is not complacency--a delight in the character of the race. This could not be, for there was nothing amiable in their character. For God to have loved such a race complacently would have been infinitely disgraceful to himself.
2. It was not a mere emotion or feeling. It was not a blind impulse, though many seem to suppose it was. It seems to be often supposed that God acted as men do when they are borne away by strong emotion. But there could be

no virtue in this. A man might give away all he is worth under such a blind impulse of feeling and be none the more virtuous. But in saying this we do not exclude all emotion from the love of benevolence, nor from God's love for a lost world. He had emotion, but not emotion only. Indeed the Bible everywhere teaches us that God's love for man, lost in his sins, was paternal--the love of a father for his offspring--in this case, for a rebellious, froward, prodigal offspring. In this love, there must of course blend the deepest compassion.

3. On the part of Christ, considered as Mediator, this love was paternal. "He is not ashamed to call them brethren." In one point of view he is acting for brethren, and in another, for children. The Father gave him up for this work and of course sympathizes in the love appropriate to its relations.

4. This love must be altogether disinterested, for he had nothing to hope or to fear--no profit to make out of his children if they should be saved. Indeed it is impossible to conceive of God as being selfish, since his love embraces all creatures and all interests according to their real value. No doubt he took delight in saving our race--why should he not? It is a great salvation in every sense, and greatly does it swell the bliss of heaven;-- greatly will it affect the glory and the blessedness of the Infinite God. He will eternally respect himself for love so disinterested. He knows also that all his holy creatures will eternally respect him for this work and for the love that gave it birth. But let it also be said, he knew they would not respect him for this great work unless they should see that he did it for the good of sinners.

5. This love was zealous--not that cold-hearted state of mind which some suppose--not an abstraction, but a love, deep, zealous, earnest, burning in his soul as a fire that nothing can quench.

6. The sacrifice was a most self-denying one. Did it cost the Father nothing to give up his own beloved Son to suffer, and to die such a death? If this be not self-denial, what can be? Thus to give up his Son to so much suffering,-- is not this the noblest self-denial? The universe never could have the idea of great self-denial, but for such an exemplification.

7. This love was particular because it was universal, and also universal because it was particular. God loved each sinner in particular, and therefore loved all. Because He loved all impartially, with no respect of persons,

therefore He loved each in particular.

8. This was a most patient love. How rare to find a parent so loving his child as never to be impatient. Let me go round and ask, how many of you, parents, can say that you love all your children so well, and with so much love, and with love so wisely controlling, that you have never felt impatient towards any of them;--so that you can take them in your arms under the greatest provocations, and love them down, love them out of their sins, love them into repentance and into a filial spirit? Of which of your children can you say, Thank God, I never fretted against that child; Of which, if you were to meet him in heaven, could you say--I never caused that child to fret? Often have I heard parents say, I love my children, but oh how my patience fails me! And after the dear ones are dead you may hear their bitter moans, -- O my soul, how could I have caused my child so much stumbling and so much sin!

But God never frets--is never impatient. His love is so deep and so great that He is always patient.

Sometimes when parents have unfortunate children, poor objects of compassion, they can bear with anything from them; but when they are very wicked, they seem to feel that they are quite excusable for being impatient. In God's case, these are not unfortunate children, but are intensely wicked, intelligently wicked. But O, his amazing patience--so set upon their good, so desirous of their highest welfare, that however they abuse Him, He sets himself to bless them still, and weep them down, and bleed them down, and die them down by the death of His Son in their stead!

9. This is a jealous love, not in a bad sense, but in a good sense--in the sense of being exceedingly careful lest anything should occur to injure those he loves. Just as husband and wife who truly love each other are jealous with ever wakeful jealousy over each other's welfare, seeking always to do all they can to promote each other's true interests.

This donation is already made--made in good faith--not only promised, but actually made. The promise, given long before, has been fulfilled. The Son has come--has died, has made the ransom and lives to offer it--a prepared salvation, to all who will embrace it.

The Son of God died not to appease vengeance, as some seem to understand it, but under the demands of law. The law had been dishonoured by its violation. Hence Christ undertook to honour it by giving up to its demands his suffering life and atoning death. It was not to appease a vindictive spirit in God, but to secure the highest good of the universe in a dispensation of mercy.

Since this atonement has been made, all men in the race have a right to it. It is open to every one who will embrace it. Though Jesus still remains the Father's Son, yet by gracious right he belongs in an important sense to the race--to every one; so that every sinner has an interest in his blood if he will only come humbly forward and claim it. God sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world--of whomsoever would believe and accept this great salvation.

God gives his Spirit to apply this salvation to men. He comes to each man's door and knocks, to gain admittance if he can, and show each sinner that he may now have salvation. O, what a labor of love is this!

This salvation must be received, if at all, by faith. This is the only possible way. God's government over sinners is moral, not physical, because the sinner is himself a moral and not a physical agent. Therefore God can influence us in no way unless we will give him our confidence. He never can save us by merely taking us away to some place called heaven--as if change of place would change the voluntary heart. There can, therefore, be no possible way to be saved but by simple faith.

Now do not mistake and suppose that embracing the gospel is simply to believe these historical facts, without truly receiving Christ as your Saviour. If this had been the scheme, then Christ had need only to come down and die; then go back to heaven and quietly wait to see who would believe the facts. But how different is the real case! Now Christ comes down to fill the soul with His own life and love. Penitent sinners hear and believe the truth concerning Jesus, and then receive Christ into the soul to live and reign there supreme and for ever. On this point many mistake, saying, If I believe the facts as matters of history, it is enough. No! No! This is not it by any means. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." The atonement was indeed made to provide the way so that Jesus could come down to human hearts and draw them into union and sympathy with himself--so that God could let down the arms of his love and embrace sinners--so that law and government should not be dishonoured by such tokens of friendship shown by God toward sinners. But the atonement will by no means

save sinners only as it prepares the way for them to come into sympathy and fellowship of heart with God.

Now Jesus comes to each sinner's door and knocks;--hark--what's that? what's that? Why this knocking? Why did He not go away and stay in heaven if that were the system, till men should simply believe the historical facts and be baptized, as some suppose, for salvation. But now, see how He comes down--tells the sinner what He has done--reveals all his love--tells him how holy and sacred it is, so sacred that He can by no means act without reference to the holiness of his law, and the purity of his government. Thus impressing on the heart the most deep and enlarged ideas of his holiness and purity, He enforces the need of deep repentance, and the sacred duty of renouncing all sin.

REMARKS.

1. The Bible teaches that sinners may forfeit their birthright and put themselves beyond the reach of mercy. It is not long since I made some remark to you on the manifest necessity that God should guard himself against the abuses of his love. The circumstances are such as create the greatest danger of such abuse, and, therefore He must make sinners know that they may not abuse his love and cannot do it with impunity.

2. Under the gospel, sinners are in circumstances of the greatest possible responsibility. They are in the utmost danger of trampling down beneath their feet the very Son of God. Come, they say, let us kill Him and the inheritance shall be ours. When God sends forth, last of all, his own beloved Son, what do they do? Add to all their other sins and rebellions the highest insult to this glorious Son! Suppose something analogous to this were done under a human government. A case of rebellion occurs in some of the provinces. The king sends his own son, not with an army, to cut them down quick in their rebellion, but all gently, meekly, patiently, he goes among them, explaining the laws of the kingdom, and exhorting them to obedience. What do they do in the case? With one consent they combine to seize him and put him to death!

But you deny the application of this, and ask me, Who murdered the Son of God? Were they not Jews? Aye, and have you, sinners, had no part in this murder? Has not your treatment of Jesus Christ shown that you are most fully in sympathy with the ancient Jews in their murder of the Son of God? If you had been there, would any one have shouted louder than you, Away with him--

crucify him, crucify him? Have you not always said--Depart from us--for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways?

3. It was said of Christ that, Though rich He became poor that we through his poverty might be rich. How strikingly true is this! Our redemption cost Christ his life; it found Him rich but made Him poor; it found us infinitely poor but made us rich even to all the wealth of heaven. But of these riches none can partake till they shall each for himself accept them in the legitimate way. They must be received on the terms proposed, or the offer passes utterly away, and you are left poorer even than if no such treasures had ever been laid at your feet.

Many persons seem entirely to misconceive this case. They seem not to believe what God says, but keep saying, If, if, if there only were any salvation for me--if there were only an atonement provided for the pardon of my sins. This was one of the last things that was cleared up in my mind before I fully committed my soul to trust God. I had been studying the atonement; I saw its philosophical bearings--saw what it demanded of the sinner; but it irritated me and I said--If I should become a Christian, how could I know what God would do with me? Under this irritation I said foolish and bitter things against Christ--till my own soul was horrified at its own wickedness and I said--I will make all this up with Christ if the thing is possible.

In this way many advance upon the encouragements of the gospel as if it were only a peradventure, an experiment. They take each forward step most carefully, with fear and trembling, as if there were the utmost doubt whether there could be any mercy for them. So with myself. I was on my way to my office, when the question came before my mind--What are you waiting for? You need not get up such an ado. All is done already. You have only to consent to the proposition--give your heart right up to it at once--this is all. Just so it is. All Christians and sinners ought to understand that the whole plan is complete--that the whole of Christ--his character, his work, his atoning death, and his ever-living intercession--belong to each and every man, and need only to be accepted. There is a full ocean of it. There it is. You may just as well take it as not. It is as if you stood on the shore of an ocean of soft, pure water, famishing with thirst; you are welcome to drink, and you need not fear lest you exhaust that ocean, or starve any body else by drinking yourself. You need not feel that you are not made free to that ocean of waters; you are invited and pressed to drink--yea to drink abundantly! This ocean supplies all your need. You do not need to have in

yourself the attributes of Jesus Christ, for his attributes become practically yours for all possible use. As saith the Scripture--He is of God made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. What do you need? Wisdom? Here it is. Righteousness? Here it is. Sanctification? Here you have it. All is in Christ. Can you possibly think of any one thing needful for your moral purity, or your usefulness which is not here in Christ? Nothing. All is provided here. Therefore you need not say, I will go and pray and try, as the hymn--

"I'll go to Jesus tho' my sin
Hath like a mountain rose,
Perhaps He will admit my plea;
Perhaps will hear my prayer."

There is no need of any perhaps. The doors are always open. Like the doors of Broadway Tabernacle in New York, made to swing open and fasten themselves open, so that they could not swing back and shut down upon the crowds of people thronging to pass through. When they were to be made, I went myself to the workmen and told them by all means to fix them so that they must swing open and fasten themselves in that position.

So the door of salvation is open always--fastened open, and no man can shut it--not the Pope, even, nor the devil, nor any angel from heaven or from hell. There it stands, all swung back and the passage wide open for every sinner of our race to enter if he will.

Again, sin is the most expensive thing in the universe. Are you well aware, O sinner, what a price has been paid for you that you may be redeemed and made an heir of God and of heaven? O what an expensive business for you to indulge in sin!

And what an enormous tax the government of God has paid to redeem this province from its ruin! Talk about the poor tax of Great Britain and of all other nations superadded;--all is nothing to the sin-tax of Jehovah's government--that awful sin-tax! Think how much machinery is kept in motion to save sinners! The Son of God was sent down--angels are sent as ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation; missionaries are sent, Christians labour, and pray, and weep in deep and anxious solicitude--all to seek and save the lost. What a wonderful-

enormous tax is levied upon the benevolence of the universe to put away sin and to save the sinner! If the cost could be computed in solid gold, what a world of it--a solid globe of itself! What an array of toil and cost, from angels, Jesus Christ, the Divine Spirit, and living men. Shame on sinners who hold on to sin despite of all these benevolent efforts to save them! who instead of being ashamed out of sin, will say--Let God pay off this tax: who cares! Let the missionaries labour, let pious women work their very fingers off to raise funds to keep all this human machinery in motion; no matter: what is all this to me? I have loved my pleasures and after them I will go! What an unfeeling heart is this!

Sinners can very well afford to make sacrifices to save their fellow sinners. Paul could for his fellow sinners. He felt that he had done his part toward making sinners, and now it became him to do his part also in converting them back to God. But see there--that young man thinks he cannot afford to be a minister, for he is afraid he shall not be well supported. Does he not owe something to the grace that saved his soul from hell? Has he not some sacrifices to make, since Jesus has made so many for him, and Christians too, in Christ before him--did they not pray and suffer and toil for his soul's salvation? As to his danger of lacking bread in the Lord's work, let him trust his Great Master. Yet let me also say that churches may be in great fault for not comfortably supporting their pastors. Let them know God will assuredly starve them if they starve their ministers. Their own souls and the souls of their children shall be barren as death if they avariciously starve those whom God in his providence sends to feed them with the bread of life.

How much it costs to rid society of certain forms of sin, as for example, slavery. How much has been expended already, and how much more yet remains to be expended ere this sore evil and curse and sin shall be rooted from our land! This is part of God's great enterprise, and He will press it on to its completion. Yet at what an amazing cost! How many lives and how much agony to get rid of this one sin!

Woe to those who make capital out of the sins of men! Just think of the rumseller--tempting men while God is trying to dissuade them from rushing on in the ways of sin and death! Think of the guilt of those who thus set themselves in array against God! So Christ has to contend with rumsellers who are doing all they can to hinder his work.

Our subject strikingly illustrates the nature of sin as mere selfishness. It cares not how much sin costs Jesus Christ--how much it costs the Church, how much it taxes the benevolent sympathies and the self-sacrificing labours of all the good in earth or heaven;--no matter; the sinner loves self-indulgence and will have it while he can. How many of you have cost your friends countless tears and trouble to get you back from your ways of sin? Are you not ashamed when so much has been done for you, that you cannot be persuaded to give up your sins and turn to God and holiness?

The whole effort on the part of God for man is one of suffering and self-denial. Beginning with the sacrifice of His own beloved Son, it is carried on with ever-renewed sacrifices and toilsome labours--at great and wonderful expense. Just think how long a time these efforts have been protracted already--how many tears, poured out like water, it has cost--how much pain in many forms this enterprise has caused and cost--yea, that very sin which you roll as a sweet morsel under your tongue! God may well hate it when He sees how much it costs, and say--O do not that abominable thing that I hate!

Yet God is not unhappy in these self-denials. So great is his joy in the results, that he deems all the suffering but comparatively a trifle, even as earthly parents enjoy the efforts they make to bless their children. See them; they will almost work their very hands off;--mothers sit up at night to ply their needle till they reel with fatigue and blindness--but if you were to see their toil, you would often see also their joy, so intensely do they love their children.

Such is the labour, the joy, and the self-denial of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, in their great work for human salvation. Often are they grieved that so many will refuse to be saved. Toiling on in a common sympathy, there is nothing, within reasonable limits, which they will not do or suffer to accomplish their great work. It is wonderful to think how all creation sympathizes too in this work and its necessary sufferings. Go back to the scene of Christ's sufferings. Could the sun in the heavens look down unmoved on such a scene? O no, he could not even behold it--but veiled his face from the sight! All nature seemed to put on her robes of deepest mourning. The scene was too much for even inanimate nature to bear. The sun turned his back and could not look down on such a spectacle!

The subject illustrates forcibly the worth of the soul. Think you God would have done all this if he had had those low views on this subject which sinners usually

have?

Martyrs and saints enjoy their sufferings--filling up in themselves what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ; not in the atonement proper but in the subordinate parts of the work to be done. It is the nature of true religion to love self-denial.

The results will fully justify all the expense. God had well counted the cost before He began. Long time before He formed a moral universe He knew perfectly what it must cost Him to redeem sinners, and He knew that the result would amply justify all the cost. He knew that a wonder of mercy would be wrought--that the suffering demanded of Christ, great as it was, would be endured; and that results infinitely glorious would accrue therefrom. He looked down the track of time into the distant ages--where, as the cycles rolled along, there might be seen the joys of redeemed saints, who are singing their songs and striking their harps anew with the everlasting song, through the long long, LONG eternity of their blessedness; --and was not this enough for the heart of infinite love to enjoy? And what do you think of it, Christian? Will you say now, I am ashamed to ask to be forgiven? How can I bear to receive such mercy! It is the price of blood, and how can I accept it? How can I make Jesus so much expense?

You are right in saying that you have cost Him great expense--but the expense has been cheerfully met--the pain has all been endured, and will not need to be endured again, and it will cost none the more if you accept than if you decline; and moreover still, let it be considered Jesus Christ has not acted unwisely; he did not pay too much for the soul's redemption--not a pang more than the interests of God's government demanded and the worth of the soul would justify.

O, when you come to see Him face to face, and tell Him what you think of it--when you are some thousands of years older than you are now, will you not adore that wisdom that manages this scheme, and the infinite love in which it had its birth? O what will you then say of that amazing condescension that brought down Jesus to your rescue! Say, Christian, have you not often poured out your soul before your Saviour in acknowledgment of what you have cost Him, and there seemed to be a kind of lifting up as if the very bottom of your soul were to rise, and you would pour out your whole heart. If any body had seen you they would have wondered what had happened to you that had so melted your soul in gratitude and love.

Say now, sinners, will you sell your birthright? How much will you take for it? How much will you take for your interest in Christ? For how much will you sell your soul? Sell your Christ! Of old they sold Him for thirty pieces of silver; and ever since, the heavens have been raining tears of blood on our guilty world. If you were to be asked by the devil to fix the sum for which you would sell your soul, what would be the price named? Lorenzo Dow once met a man as he was riding along a solitary road to fulfil an appointment, and said to him--Friend, have you ever prayed? No. How much will you take never to pray hereafter? One dollar. Dow paid it over, and rode on. The man put the money in his pocket, and passed on, thinking. The more he thought, the worse he felt. There, said he, I have sold my soul for one dollar! It must be that I have met the devil! Nobody else would tempt me so. With all my soul I must repent, or be damned forever!

How often have you bargained to sell your Saviour for less than thirty pieces of silver! Nay, for the merest trifle!

Finally, God wants volunteers to help on this great work. God has given himself, and given his Son, and sent his Spirit;--but more labourers still are needed; and what will you give? Paul said, I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Do you aspire to such an honour? What will you do--what will you suffer? Say not, I have nothing to give. You can give yourself--your eyes, your ears, your hands, your mind, your heart, all; and surely nothing you have is too sacred and too good to be devoted to such a work upon such a call! How many young men are ready to go? and how many young women? Whose heart leaps up, crying, Here am I! send me?

[Back to Top](#)

Alive Without the Law, Slain Thereby

Lecture VI

July 6, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 7:9: "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died."

In my remarks upon this passage, I shall pursue the following outlines:

- I. Show in what sense Paul was without the Law.*
- II. What were the consequences of this state.*
- III. In what sense the "commandment came".*
- IV. The consequences of this "coming of the commandment".*

I. In what sense Paul was without the Law.

1. Paul was thoroughly a Pharisee. He had been brought up and instructed in the oracles of God according to the best teachings of his time, and therefore could not have been "without law" in the sense of not having the letter of it in his hands and before his mind. He had the law as given to Moses, the whole of it, both moral and ceremonial, and indeed he had given much of his life to the study of it, having been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, enjoying the best advantages his country could afford for knowledge in the Jewish law.

2. Yet Paul was really ignorant of the true meaning and spirit of the law. His grand mistake was that he regarded it only in its relations to his outward life, as if he assumed that it had no other relation, made no other demands. His moral and spiritual eyes were not open. I mean by this language that he did not see his moral and spiritual relations to God and to his fellowmen, and did not even seem to recognize the fact of the existence of any such

relations.

As to his outward relations, the course of life was objectively just, while subjectively it was altogether unjust. By subjectively just, I mean just and right at heart, being and doing in reference to the law what it requires. In the state of his heart he was all wrong, for he was supremely selfish. Here lay the great error of his school of moralists. Their whole attention was directed to the objective and withdrawn from the subjective. In other words, they thought everything of the outside, nothing of the heart. Exclusively regarding the letter and the ceremony, they seemed never to ask--Is the heart honest and pure before God? Thus the moral and spiritual eye was not trained to discern or even to notice the real meaning of the law. Consequently it is not strange that Pharisees, so trained, should suppose themselves to be obeying the law, while in truth they entirely overlooked all that is really valuable. So with Paul. His spiritual consciousness was not awake.

Here let us make a distinction which is somewhat important in reference to this subject. There is a natural consciousness; a moral consciousness, and also a spiritual consciousness. The natural is exercised upon things merely natural and worldly--external and not in regard to their moral relations. The moral relates to things of a moral nature, and when distinguished from spiritual, should refer to our relations to fellow-beings, while the term spiritual may be applied to our relations to God. An active spiritual consciousness keeps the mind awake to the presence of God, as naturally, we are conscious of the presence of each other. It keeps us alive to all that is embraced in our relations to God. Moral consciousness respects moral questions, yet, in the strict sense, only as they lie between ourselves and our fellow-beings. The difficulty with Paul was that his moral and spiritual eyes being closed, he entirely overlooked his own subjective state of mind, the very thing which God's law primarily regards.

II. I am now to speak of the consequences of being in this sense "alive without the law."

1. Paul was in a state of both moral and spiritual delusion. He supposed himself to be performing his duty to his fellow men, when really he was doing no such thing. He had only the idea of objective justice, justice viewed in its outward relations. If he did not cheat a man, it mattered in his view little or nothing how much he coveted his goods, or how utterly void

his heart might be of true love to his neighbor. Consequently he never performed the duty which the law required of him, towards his fellow men.

The same was true of his spiritual relations to God. He regarded simply what the law required externally; went round and round with the routine of his outside duties, while his heart all this time was dead and cold, and as it showed itself subsequently, bitter as hell itself, towards the lovely and innocent Son of God.

2. Another consequence was a false hope. Supposing himself to be complying with the law of God, he expected to be saved as much as he expected anything whatever. Yet this expectation was altogether unfounded, for although he was very zealous yet he was also very bitter in his spirit, showing that his zeal sprang from any other source, rather than real benevolence. Indeed he showed that his spirit was bitter as the bitterness of the pit. How then can it be supposed that his hope of heaven was anything better than a delusion?

3. Another result was a self-righteous performance of all he called his religion. But there I must explain; for I am afraid many are not well aware what the Bible means by self-righteousness; certainly it is the case that many professed Christians do not well understand this matter. For explanation of the point that is most important for discrimination, take the case of Paul. When he performed what he called his duties, and thanked God, Pharisee-like, that he prayed and fasted, and paid tithes, did he feel himself so utterly lost that he ascribed all his acceptable work to Christ, working in him? Far from it. He had done all these things himself.

When he came ultimately to know himself and then to know Christ, he could speak on this subject with intelligent discrimination, and ever wakeful interest. Then he dwelt much on the fact that the Jews depended on their own works and on themselves alone, to do their own works; while on the other hand he insisted that while left to themselves they never did anything but sin. He always maintained that the energetic power of the divine Spirit wrought in them all that was ever acceptable to God. Often does he illustrate this by his own experience. Before he was a Christian, he performed religious duties as regularly as now; says "I profited in the Jews' religion above many of mine equals," but all along, he regarded his obedience as in such a sense rendered in his own strength that he made no hearty acknowledgments of

dependence on sovereign grace. Of that grace which comes through divine mercy, and first moves the heart to good, he seemed to know nothing. His own righteousness was self-originating, self-performed. There was nothing else of it but what came of himself. It had no spiritual life or power in it, for the reason that there was no power of God in its origin, no influence from God, molding its character. Paul did not truly recognize God's grace in this obedience, and God did not impart His grace to subdue selfishness and beget true love in his soul.

Now here is a curious distinction which spiritually-minded persons make, but which others, if they use it, never understand. The spiritually-minded say with Paul--"By the grace of God I am what I am." With many, this language degenerates into mere cant; but really there is a world of meaning in it, and a meaning which is inexpressibly dear to the real Christian's heart. The man who truly enters into the spirit of religion never regards himself as having done it; he knows it is all of grace; nothing can offend him more than to have it assumed that it is himself and not God's grace that has wrought in him all good. He knows deep in his consciousness, that if left to himself, there never was and never will be any good thing in him. Hence he honors and praises divine grace with a fullness of meaning and an outgushing of heart, which self-righteousness never knew. This deep recognition of God's grace comes to be wrought into the very life, intertwined through all the fibers and incorporated into the substance of the soul. Through all his being he feels that all is of rich grace, and nothing of praise is due to himself.

Not that his exercises are not right, for to deny this were to impugn the efficiency of God's grace; and not that they are not his own acts, for to deny this were to set aside man's agency and responsibility, and involve the Bible doctrine of God "working to will and to do" in us, in entire confusion. The simple idea is that the Spirit of God, acting upon our minds in harmony with the laws of mind, instructs, stimulates, draws, and thus substantially causes right voluntary action on our part.

III. We are next to consider in what sense "the commandment came" to Paul.

The law was set home to both his moral and spiritual consciousness and perception. He was led to see what the law meant in its moral relations to himself and to his neighbor, that without love, all was nothing. He saw the same

also in regard to prayer, to alms, to worship, that all is nothing, only a grievous abomination in the sight of God when the subjective state of the heart is wrong. He became fully aware of this, all suddenly, as if a flash of lightning had broken upon him. He saw the reality of this spiritual meaning, and with it a purity and blessedness in the law itself which commanded his most intense regard. And what was the result of this new view of God's law? This is the point we are next to consider.

1. It quickened his selfishness. This was the first result of bringing the spirituality of the law home to his selfish heart. This new light as it flashed upon his mind found him in a most self-complacent state, altogether satisfied with himself. No sooner however did he see the spirituality of the law than one of two results must inevitably take place;--either he must break down at once, acknowledge his guilt and empty himself of all his self-righteousness, or if he resist this, his selfishness must be quickened into fresh activity. In Paul's case the latter result ensued; his selfishness was aroused and stirred up as if Ithuriel's spear had touched him. The long unnoticed enmity of his heart was developed. We are not to suppose that during all the time he was persecuting the Church, he enjoyed an easy, self-complacent state of mind, and that all was quiet until the moment when the great light from heaven broke upon him. By no means. It must not be assumed that he had no serious thought about his moral relations to God, prior to the scenes at Damascus. Doubtless his mind had been stirred up long before. He had heard of the sermon on the mount; had heard about Christ's pungent and terrible denunciations against the Pharisees; he had known that Christ had publicly rebuked and exposed their favorite interpretations of the law, and had torn up their system from its very foundations, and that the masses of the common people heard him gladly. This had greatly quickened the selfishness and stirred up the enmity of his heart against that man, so that his very soul was maddened. You recollect he says of himself--"I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." It was obviously under color of being very zealous for the truth;--but really his selfishness was all on fire and all the malign passions of his soul were astir. It is exceedingly plain from the history that Paul was all this time warring against his own consciousness. This great fact was perfectly known to Jesus, and hence, when He came down in that flood of overwhelming light and arrested the

burning persecutor, what did He say? "Saul, Saul, who persecutest thou Me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

Here we have the secret of Saul's state of mind. He is kicking against the pricks. The sharp points of his moral sense are against him, and he is resisting and is wounding himself upon those piercing points continually. He is like a hampered animal trying to run away, while every step drives the goads into his quivering flesh. He tries to kick--he winces and shrieks, yet has too much obstinacy to yield. Sometimes perhaps he half persuaded himself that he ought to oppose Jesus of Nazareth; but the whole case shows that he was ill at ease in that impression, and that on the whole he knew better and was truly fighting against his prevailing convictions of duty.

2. When the law came home to his soul, it compelled reflection. This almost always supervenes when the law comes home more and more to the soul. There will be hours of deep and earnest reflection, producing first consternation--then a deep sense of shame, the mind waking up to see things in their true light. This leads to great consternation, remorse, self-condemnation, and then, often to despair. The man is stripped of all his excuses, and then, not having yet seen the great love of God, and having therefore no faith and trust, he settles down in the conviction,--I ought to be damned and I certainly must be! There can be no help for me! More than one such case have I seen where men, long time settled down in infidelity, are wakened to see themselves as they are before God and His holy law, and they cry out, I deserve eternal damnation! One such I have in my mind's eye. I shall never forget how he looked. Every feature of his countenance depicted horror. Every muscle was in a tremor. A little reflection had brought him into an attitude in which he could not stand before God. There was also the case of Dea. H. whom I well knew in his years of infidelity. He is now in heaven, but when an infidel, he professed to be entirely satisfied that the Bible was all priestcraft, and verily thought that soon this delusion (Christianity,) would be swept from the earth. Returning at one time from the dale of infidel books, full of self-complacency, all elated with his success, he conversed freely with his wife upon his labors for the day--when all suddenly, a new view of the truth and meaning of God's word broke in upon his mind; intuitively he saw himself a sinner and undone; he could no longer shut his eyes to the fact that Jesus whom he had been opposing was truly the Savior of the world, that the Bible he had been

gainsaying was really God's own revelation to lost men. Seeing all this he was in agony. His wife, alarmed, cried out, Dea. H., what is the matter with you? Still he groaned as a man in agony of body, and still she pressed her question--What's the matter? At last he broke out saying--"The stubborn oak must bow! Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world!" She was thunderstruck! It could not have surprised her more if a bolt from heaven had broken through the roof and smote him to the floor. There he was--but how changed! Go and ask him now what Paul meant by saying--"When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." He can doubtless tell you.

IV. The consequences of this "coming of the commandment".

Paul had long thought on this subject and was troubled. But at last the matter came to a head. Jesus met him in the way and broke him down. He let in light upon his already troubled conscience; He made him see the purity and the spiritual meaning of His law; and now mark what follows--mark that self-condemnation, shame, that dreadful remorse! Nothing is more common than for despair to supervene for a season in such cases as this. In the case of Paul, this was momentary. Yet we must suppose that he utterly gave up his old hope, and this to him was like the giving up of the ghost. It was as death. No wonder, therefore, that he should say--"Sin revived, and I died." When he saw how strangely the rebellion of his heart burst forth, and sin in this sense "revived," his hope perished, his heart sank within him;--such revelations were made of himself as suddenly blighted all his hopes of being in the divine favor, and he died in the darkness of despair. This seems to be the obvious explanation of his language, and corresponds entirely with what we must infer from the laws of mind and the uniform course of similar experiences.

REMARKS.

1. The Pharisees generally in those days, and all Pharisees in heart in every age, are under the same delusion. Yet they were then and are often supposed to be the most pious people. It was a common saying then that if only two men were to be saved out of all mankind, one of them must be a Pharisee. But they were entirely deceived--their moral perceptions were blunted; the subjective state which alone constitutes true religion was not even apprehended in their minds. When you hear them speak, you hear nothing of religious experience, like that of David for example; they do not cry out--"O how I love the law!" "Cleanse me from secret faults;" "My soul thirsteth for God, yea, for the living God." Indeed you seldom

hear any of them go farther than to pray for those states of mind which they know God requires. They do not profess to have them already, nor do they use language in the honest simplicity of their hearts which implies that they have a right subjective state of heart now. Many do nothing more than hold on to a hope. With no small difficulty they manage to do so much, and often they call into exercise the utmost pertinacity of purpose to effect even this.

2. Manifestly the teachings of Christ roused up the whole tribe of Pharisees. It deeply disturbed their peace. They were like a hive of bees as you have seen them when somebody breaks up their house, or as when they are forced to swarm, or are led out to battle. So thoroughly had He torn up their entire system, root and branch, and so fully had its great defects been laid open to the eye of the world, that they could rest no longer. This general result was produced by the lingering yet almost departing rays of the Spirit's light upon the nation. God was giving a corrupt people their last call; here was a deep and damning delusion fastened strongly on the hearts of thousands, and if any were to be saved, this terrible delusion must be broken up by outspoken and crushing truth. It was but natural and necessary that in such an effort, many hearts should become excited, maddened, and thrown into a state of most bitter opposition.

So in our own day many professed Christians, who are living along in a legal and pharisaic state, get now and then some scattering rays of new light--glimpses of truth break in upon their minds as they hear the true gospel, faithfully preached, or as the Spirit sets home upon their souls some portions of God's word; something within says--"That is true Religion, but I have not got it--I have no such experience as that." Sometimes in reasons of searching power, the Spirit of God hurls His arrows broadcast, and many are pricked in their heart and constrained to say--"My hope is vain and I am yet in my selfishness, and know nothing yet of true religion as I must know it. I must give up this old rotten hope, or be lost!" But they resist at the moment; they cannot quite bring their minds to give it all up now and throw their naked souls on divine mercy as lost sinners; and, thus resisting, they relapse into ten fold greater hardness and delusion. If under such appeals from God they would not resist, light would increase, and they would doubtless be soon brought forth into day. I knew the case of an elder who took an honest course, unlike most persons in similar circumstances. I was preaching in the place of his residence; the Spirit was pressing truth on some minds, as I endeavored to aid His searching scrutiny into the heart by preaching on the case of Achan and the accursed thing. I was progressing in my sermon, in

search after that accursed thing, when suddenly he rose in the midst of the congregation and cried out--"Mr. Finney, Mr. Finney, you need not say another word, it's found; I am the man, I am the very man!" There he stood pale as ashes. "If there were no other Achan here," said he, "I am enough to curse the whole church. I did not want to disturb the congregation," he added, "but I saw that I must speak. I have been brought almost to this point before, but I drew back and my soul relapsed into darkness. I knew that I must meet the demands of my conscience now, or my soul would be lost."

So with many, there are times when God lifts the veil and lets them see their naked hearts. Constrained by truth they cry out--"I am deceived, I know I am," but instead of making thorough work and acting with decision, they hesitate, lose the light God gave them, grieve the Spirit away, fall back to their old position, go on as before, and perish utterly in their own corruptions. I should not be surprised if in fact there had been hundreds in this place who have passed through this very course, doomed, unless they earnestly repent, to reach the same awful end. Influenced by your pride of character, and by the force of an old hope, you delay, and put over the thorough examination you ought to make, and thus slide on to ruin. O that everlasting spirit of DELAY! How many souls it has lured along to ruin!!

3. There are many non-professing sinners, who are laboring under this same difficulty. They have the objective but not the subjective, of religion. Externally they are upright; but alas, internally, there is no true love to God or man. Some of you here in this congregation are in just this position. I know you well; I have had business dealings with you and know you to be honest and upright in all those things; but what shall I say of your treatment of your God and Savior! Nobody denies you the credit of being prompt in your business with men and of doing your work as you ought to do it; you would scorn to do objective wrong; but you seem not to think that this, in itself, is nothing towards real obedience. Suppose any of you, students, were as upright in externals as Saul of Tarsus himself;--you might nevertheless be as guilty a sinner as lives out of hell! What did Paul say of himself when his eyes came to be opened? Speaking of sinners he says, "Of whom I am chief." He looked upon himself as a heart-hypocrite! He did not attempt to say one good thing of his former Pharisee life, but condemned it all. You mean to do right you say, but you think only of objective right--right as to the external only. You know that all your rightness is only this, no more. You know that all you think of when you speak of doing right is of the external

and objective; you do not even inquire whether the heart, the motive, is pure before God. You know that real love to God and man is not the life and spring of your activities. Precisely here is your deep and ruinous delusion!

Suppose my wife should claim to do right in her relations as a wife, and think, like you, only of the objective, the outside appearance. She says she means to do all right, but what does she mean by that? Suppose she trims her ways to answer the demands of external propriety;--but suppose also that everybody has reason enough to know that she loves somebody else with all her heart! What would you say to that? Suppose you know that any wife is absolutely devoted to some other man than her husband; would you not abominate all her professions of doing right towards her husband? Suppose it to be your own wife,--would you not spew her out--nauseated and sick of such right-doing!

Let every mere moralist know--you never have done one thing in all your life of which God did not say--"Who hath required this at your hand?" You need not come and tell Him it is all right--you mean to do right; for all is utterly wrong because your heart is after your idols and is not yielded up trustfully to God. How can all your right-doing be anything but an abomination so long as you do not give God your heart?

4. This text does not profess to give the whole of Paul's conversion. It only gives us his conviction. "I was alive without the law once--(In my self-righteous hopes) but when the commandment came--(revealing God's holy law) then sin revived, and I died--(my hopes perished then). There he was till he gave himself up to the Lord Jesus Christ. Substantially this experience of being slain by the law must always precede the acceptance of Jesus Christ as our own Savior. The reason of this is--men will not accept Christ's robe while their own apparel suits them better; they will not rely on another for salvation while they are strong in their self-dependence.

5. We can see in the light of our subject what the work of the Spirit is in both conversion and sanctification.

Some are forever inquiring--What is the work of the Spirit? Others think there is no need of any divine Spirit in order to produce conviction of wrong, for they assume that natural conscience is all-sufficient for this result.

But who does not know that the light of nature and all the force of mere

conscience will never slay the enmity of the sinner's heart and break him down in real penitence and humiliation? The Spirit of God must wake and rouse the moral and spiritual consciousness: the Spirit must take God's holy law and hold it up as a molten looking-glass. There the sinner must see the meaning of that law and his own awful sin in having so long trampled it beneath his feet.

The Spirit also reveals the spiritual nature of the gospel. Having with one hand held up the spiritual nature of the law, with the other He reveals in like manner the love of the gospel, unfolding the heart of Jesus till the sinner says--How can I abuse such love! How can I refuse to trust such a Savior!

6. Those of you who are not conscious of such things as these in your experience are not converted. Ye who have not had before your mind's eye this looking-glass of the law and gospel,--what do you know about the gospel? If Christ has not been revealed to your soul, what do you know about faith in Christ?

Do not some of you see that you are certainly deluded? You who are merely moralists--impenitent sinners still, have you utterly failed to see today the utter abomination of all your offerings and sacrifices?

What awful danger there is lest some of you should put out the light of the Holy Ghost as it shines in upon your souls! What result can be more fatal and more awful than this? How can we account for the moral state of many men except on the supposition that they have grieved away the Spirit of God? They go and come--go and come with God's people; but they seem never to see the very thing that stands right out before their eyes--their own self-deception and impending damnation!!

I have seen some of you writhe under the truth as if an arrow had struck you. And did you then at once give up all and say--I am a deceived wretch! I must repent! Did you not rather say--I will look this subject over after I get home? Several times during the last season, I thought I saw most clearly that some of you were on the very pivot of life; and I said--"Come now--come right forward and settle this matter at once for all;--but you did not come, and what was the result? Go and see--all gone back. You did not come up to the light and therefore of course fell back into deeper darkness than ever. And are you still waiting for more light? I beseech you, be not so absurd as to wait, in such resistance to God as surely grieves away the Spirit and sinks the soul into yet more fatal darkness. Have not some of you young men, waited for more light until you have lost all

you had? The Bible doctrine is, Use, and you gain more; neglect and you lose. "From him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." Why? Because the fact that he hath not proves that he has not improved.

To professors of religion let me next say--It is becoming most alarmingly true that there is a great want of discrimination in distinguishing what is essential from what is merely incidental, to a good Christian life. Often in attending examinations of candidates for admission to the church have I been pained to hear questions put which did not at all touch the real merits of the case. They might have been answered in the most favorable way and yet the answers should have afforded no decisive testimony of real conversion. The questions altogether failed to show whether the candidates had ever really felt themselves to be lost sinners, and as such had thrown themselves upon God's mercy. Did this conviction of being lost and self-ruined fasten on them, and then under its impression, did they search for the remedy and find it in casting themselves wholly on infinite grace? Where this is wanting, there can be no Christian experience.

Often and perhaps I may say always, where under gospel light true conversion does not take place, the reason is, something binds the mind. Truth adapted to wake up the consciousness, first to fear and then to love, fails to produce its effects. Do you ask the reason? Selfishness has bound up the mind all round about and it has no enlargement--no freedom, to go forth in confidence or in penitence. When they attempt to pray, it is as if something bound up the mind; no earnest going out of soul after God. When they say, I will go and seek God, they go not. It is not with them as with those whom the Spirit of God is drawing, who feel as if their very soul would go out after Christ--even almost out of the body. This going out of the soul I often compare to what you may have noticed often when you put a burning candle in a strong draft of air; the wind bears the blaze away and almost forces it entirely from the wick, yet it flickers and hangs--yet you can see it borne quite a perceptible distance from the wick--but the connection is still maintained and when you arrest the draft, the candle burns again as before. So the Christians almost goes off from the body--his soul being drawn away by the power of his ravishing views of Jesus.

Right over against this is the state which I have been noticing; no spontaneous going out of the heart after God either in prayer or in attempted consecration. Ask such an one--Do you feel your whole soul going, going, as if nothing were

held back? No; I know nothing about that, yet when one really yields himself to the drawing of the Spirit, he is as conscious of giving himself up as he ever is of giving anything to another. A lady whom I saw last winter, said--"I went to my room to give myself to God there and as soon as I knelt down there was a spontaneous going forth of my heart to God and it seemed hardly necessary for me to say a word for my heart had already gone out to Christ. Words seemed too poor to express my mind to God, for it seemed as if my very soul had gone itself, and no words were needed." She came down from her room so wonderfully filled with the Holy Ghost that her soul was all on fire and some suggested that such a woman must be crazy. But many are utterly hard and unmoved--no going out of heart towards God and no melting of soul before Him.

Christian, do you know what it is to be slain by the law and truly made alive by the Holy Ghost? Or is it the case that you are living along with a hope that does not assimilate you to Jesus Christ? Are not some of you aware that you have so long resisted God and His truth, that it will not do for you to try it again? Now is your time--you need not pause to make terms with God; for all the terms are fixed already. Let your inward heart go! Say--Lord, I come to Thee! It is long enough that I have lived on in my sins. I am ashamed to ask another hour's life in which to fight and war against God! Let it be enough that I have lived in sin so long; now and forevermore I will be the Lord's!

[Back to Top](#)

The Essential Elements of Christian Experience

Lecture VII

August 31, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 5:6: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

There are a great many things in the experience of Christians, which traced out in their natural history, are exceeding interesting. I have been struck to notice

how very commonly what is peculiar to Christian experience, drops out of the mind; while that which is merely incidental remains, and constitutes the mind's entire conception of what religion is. Their way of talking of their experience leaves you quite in the dark as to its genuineness, even when they propose to give you especially the reasons of their hope.

My design is first to state some of the facts which belong to the life of God in the soul.

1. Hunger and thirst are states of mind, and do not belong to the body. They are of two kinds, natural and spiritual. The objects on which the natural terminates are food and drink. By our very constitution these are necessary to our well-being in the present world. These appetites are natural and terminate on their appropriate objects.

There are also spiritual hunger and spiritual thirst, which are as truly natural as the former. It is no more a figure of speech to use these terms in this case than in the other.

The appetites that demand food and drink are facts and experiences. Everybody knows what it is to have them, and everybody knows in general what those things are, which are so related to the human constitution as to meet those demands.

So also the spiritual appetites are not less things of fact and experience, and stand in like manner related to the objects which are adapted to the demand.

2. Sin is a fact in the natural history of our race. That it is so, must be attributed to the fall of our first parents. Yet whatever explanation be given of the introduction of sin into the human family, it now exists as an undeniable fact.

Some attention to the manner in which sin is first developed, may serve to show its relations to what I have called the natural history of the race.

We all know it to be a fact that the natural appetites commence their development immediately after the natural birth. The first awakening to a conscious existence in this world seems to be, if not occasioned by, yet closely connected with, a constitutional demand for food. The alternations of demand and supply commence and go on while health continues--all the time developing the strength of this class of appetites. Commonly the natural

make their development far in advance of the spiritual.

Not much is said in the Bible as to the mode in which sin entered our world and acquired such relations to the human soul, but it is distinctly referred to Adam's first sin, and is asserted to be in some way connected with that event. Facts show that sin has become in a most significant sense natural to the race, so that they all spontaneously, not of necessity, yet spontaneously, if no special grace interpose, begin to sin as soon as they begin to act morally, or in other words, as soon as they become capable of moral action. Not that men are born sinners, not that they sin before they are born, not that sin is born in them, nor that they are beyond their control born into sin; but yet the constitution of the man--body and mind--is such, and the law of development is such, that men sin naturally (none the less voluntarily, responsibly, and guiltily), but they all sin of free choice; the temptations to sin being developed in advance of those intellectual and moral powers which should counteract the excessive demands of the sensibility. Mark the developments of the new-born child. Some pain or some appetite awakens its consciousness of existence, and thus is created a demand for the things it perceives itself to need. Then the little infant begins to struggle for good--for that particular good which its new-developed sensibility demands. Want, the struggling demand for supply, and the gratification, form a process of development which gives such power to the sensibility as generates ere long an intense selfishness; and before the conscience and the reason are perceptibly developed, have laid the foundation for spiritual death. If the Spirit of God does not excite spiritual wants and arouse the mind to efforts in obtaining them, the mind becomes so engrossed and its sensibilities acquire such habits of control over the will, that when the idea of right and wrong is first developed the mind remains dead to its demands. The appetites have already secured the ascendancy. The mind seems to act as if scarcely aware that it has a soul or any spiritual wants. The spiritual consciousness is at first not developed at all. The mind seems not to know its spiritual relations. When this knowledge first forces itself upon the mind, it finds the ground pre-occupied, the habits fixed, the soul too much engaged for earthly good to be called off. The tendency of this law of development is altogether downward; the appetites become more and more despotic and imperious; the mind has less and less regard for God. The mind comes into a state in which spiritual truth frets and chafes it, and of course it thoroughly inclines to

spiritual apathy-- choosing apathy, though not unaware of its danger before the perpetual annoyance of unwelcome truths. This tends toward a state of dead insensibility to spiritual want.

The first symptom of change is the soul's awaking to spiritual consequences. Sometimes this is feeble at first, or sometimes it may be more strongly aroused to its spiritual relations, position, and wants. This brings on anxiety, desire, a deep sense of what the soul truly needs. From this arises an influence which begins to counteract the power of appetite. It begins to operate as a balance and check to those long unrestrained demands.

Here you may notice that just in proportion as the spiritual consciousness is developed, the mind becomes wretched, for in this proportion the struggle becomes intense and violent. Before, the man was dead. He was like an animal as to the unchecked indulgence of appetite--above the mere animal in some things, but below in others. He goes on without that counteracting influence which arises from the spiritual consciousness. You see some who live a giddy, aimless life. They seem not at all aware that they have a spiritual nature or any spiritual wants. When they awake to spiritual consciousness and reflection, conviction produces remorse and agony. This spiritual struggle, at whatever age it may occur, is in its general character the same as occurs in the infant when its spiritual consciousness is first awakened.

It is but natural that when the spiritual faculties are aroused, men will begin to pray and struggle under a deep sense of being wrong and guilty. At first this may be entirely selfish. But before conversion takes place, there will be a point in which the counter influences of the selfish against the spiritual will balance each other, and then the spiritual will gain the ascendancy. The animal and the selfish must relatively decline and the spiritual gain strength, till victory turns on the side of the spiritual powers. How commonly do you observe that when the mind becomes convicted of sin, the attractions of the world fade away; all it can give looks small; sinners can no longer take the pleasure in worldly things they once had. Indeed this is a most curious and singular struggle. How rapid and great are the changes through which the sinner passes! To-day, he quenches the light of God in his soul, and gropes on in darkness; tomorrow the light may return and reveal yet greater sin; one day he relapses back to worldliness, and gives up his soul to his own

thoughts and pleasures; but ere another has past, there is bitterness in this cup and he loathes it, and from his soul cries out: This can never satisfy an immortal mind! Now he begins to practice upon external reformation; but anon he finds that this utterly fails to bring peace to his soul. He is full of trouble and anxiety for salvation, yet all his struggles thus far have been entirely selfish, and ere he is converted he must see this to be the case. He is in a horrible pit of miry clay. The more he struggles, the deeper he sinks and the more desperate his case becomes. Selfish efforts for spiritual relief are just like a quagmire of thick clay. Each struggle plunges the sinking man the deeper in the pit. The convicted man is ready to put himself to hard labor and mighty effort. At first he works with great hope of success, for he does not readily understand why selfish efforts will not be successful. He prays, but all in a selfish spirit. By this I mean that he thinks only of himself. He has no thought of honoring or pleasing God--no thought of any benefit to his fellow-beings. He does not inquire whether his course of life and state of heart are such that God can bless him without detriment to the rest of his great family. In fact he does not think of caring for the rest of that family nor for the honor of its great Father. Of course such selfish praying brings no answer; and when he finds this to be the case, he frets and struggles more than ever. Now he goes on to add to his works and efforts. He attends more meetings, and reads his Bible more, and tries new forms of prayer. All is in vain. His heart is selfish still. What can I do? he cries out in agony; if I pray I am selfish, and if I desist from prayer, this too is selfish; if I read my Bible or neglect to read it, each alike is selfish, and what can I do? How can I help being selfish?

Alas, he has no idea of acting from any other or higher motive than his own interests. It is his darkness on this very point that makes the sinner's struggle so long and so unprofitable. This is the reason why he cannot be converted at once, and why he must needs sink and flounder so much longer in the quagmire of unavailing and despairing works. It is only when he comes at last to see that all this avails nothing, that he begins to take some right views of his case and of his relations. When he learns that indeed he cannot work out his own salvation by working at it on this wise, he bethinks himself to inquire, whether he be not all wrong at bottom--whether his motives of heart are not radically corrupt. Looking round and abroad, he begins to ask whether God may not have some interests and some rights as well as himself.

Who is God and where is He? Who is Jesus Christ and what has He done? What did He die for? Is God a great King over all the earth, and should He not have due honor and homage? Was it this great God who so loved the world as to give His Son to die for it? O, I see I have quite neglected to think of God's interests and honor! Now I see how infinitely mean and wicked I have been! Plainly enough, I cannot live so. No wonder God did not hear my selfish prayers. There was no hope in that sort of effort, for I had, as I plainly see, no regard to God in any thing I was doing then. How reasonable it is that God should ask me to desist from all my selfish endeavors and to put away this selfishness itself, and yield myself entirely and forever to do or suffer all his blessed will!

It is done; and now this long-troubled soul sinks into deep repose. It settles itself down at Jesus' feet, content if only Christ be honored and God's throne made glorious. The final result--whether saved or lost--seems to give him no longer that agonizing solicitude; the case is submitted to the Great Disposer in trustful humility. God will do all things well. If He takes due care of his own interests and glory, there will be no complaining--nothing but deep and peaceful satisfaction.

In the case of most young converts, this state of peaceful trust in God is subject to interruptions. The natural appetites have been denied--their dominion over the will disowned; but they are not dead. By and by they rise to assert their sway. They clamor for indulgence, and sometimes they get it. Alas, the young convert has fallen into sin! His soul is again in bondage and sorrow. O, how deeply is he mortified to think that he has again given away to temptation, and pierced the bosom on which he loved to recline! He had promised himself he should never sin, but he has sinned, and well for him if he finds no heart to evade or deny the fact. Better admit it all, and most freely, although it wounds his heart more than all his former sins. Mark his agony of spirit! His tears of repentance were never before so bitter! He feels disappointed, and it almost seems to him that this failure must blast all his plans and hopes of leading a Christian life. It does not work as he thought it would. He feels shy of God; for he says, how can God ever trust me again after such developments of unfaithfulness. He can hardly get himself to say a word to God or to Christ. He is almost sure that he has been deceived. But finally he bethinks himself of the Cross of Calvary, and catches a faint ray of light--a beam of the light of love. He says, there may be mercy for me yet! I

will at least go to Jesus and see. Again he goes, and again he falls into those arms of love and is made consciously welcome. The light of God shines on his soul again, and he find himself once more an accepted son in his Father's presence.

But here a new form of desire is awakened. He has learned something of his own weakness and has tasted the bitterness of sin. With an agony of interest never known before, he asks, Can I ever become established in holiness? Can I have righteousness enough to make me stand in the evil day? This is a new form of spiritual desire, such as our text expresses in the words "hunger and thirst after righteousness."

These extended remarks are only an introduction to my general subject, designed to get before your mind the true idea of hungering and thirsting after righteousness. This state of mind is not merely conviction; it is not remorse, nor sorrow, nor a struggle to obtain a hope or to get out of danger. All these feelings may have preceded, but the hungering after righteousness is none of these. It is a longing desire to realize the idea of spiritual and moral purity. He has in some measure appreciated the purity of heaven, and the necessity of being himself as pure as the holy there, in order to enjoy their bliss and breathe freely in their atmosphere.

This state of mind is not often developed by writers, and it seems rarely to have engaged the attention of the Church as its importance demands.

When the mind gets a right view of the atmosphere of heaven, it sees plainly it can not breathe there, but must be suffocated, unless its own spirit is congenial to the purity of that world. I remember the case of a man, who after living a Christian life for a season, relapsed into sin. At length God reclaimed his wandering child. When I next saw him, and heard him speak of his state of relapse, he turned suddenly away and burst into tears, saying, "I have been living in sin, almost choked to death in its atmosphere; it seemed as if I could not breathe in it. It almost choked the breath of spiritual life from my system."

Have not some of you known what this means? You could not bear the infernal atmosphere of sin--so like the very smoke of the pit! After you get out of it, you say, Let me never be there again! Your soul agonizes and struggles to find some refuge against this awful relapsing into sin. O, you

long for a pure atmosphere and a pure heart, that will never hold fellowship with darkness or its works again.

The young convert, like the infant child, may not at first distinctly apprehend its own condition and wants; but such experience as I have been detailing develops the idea of perfect purity, and then the soul longs for it with longings irrepressible. I must, says the now enlightened convert, I must be drawn into living union with God as revealed in Jesus Christ. I can not rest till I find God, and have him revealed to me as my everlasting refuge and strength.

Some years since, I preached a sermon for the purpose of developing the idea of the spiritual life. The minister for whom I preached said to me, I want to show you a letter written many years ago by a lady now in advanced age, and detailing her remarkable experience on this subject. After her conversion she found herself exceedingly weak, and often wondered if this was all the stability and strength she could hope for from Christ in his gospel. Is this, said she, all that God can do for me? Long time and with much prayer she examined her Bible. At last she found, that below what she had ever read and examined before, there lay a class of passages which revealed the real gospel--salvation from sinning. She saw the provisions of the gospel in full relief. Then she shut herself up, determined to seek this blessing till she should find. Her soul went forth after God, seeking communion with him, and the great blessing which she so deeply felt that she needed. She had found the needed promises in God's Word, and now she held on upon them as if she could not let them go until they had all been fulfilled in her own joyful experience. She cried mightily to God. She said, "if thou dost not give me this blessing, I can never believe thee again." In the issue the Lord showed her that the provisions were already made, and were just as full and as glorious as they needed to be or could be, and that she might receive them by faith if she would. In fact it was plainly the case the Spirit of the Lord was pressing upon her acceptance, so that she had only to believe--to open wide her mouth that it might be filled. She saw and obeyed: then she became firm and strong. Christ had made her free. She was no longer in bondage; her Lord had absolutely enlarged her soul in faith and love, and triumphantly she could exclaim: Glory be to God! Christ hath made me free.

The state of mind expressed by hungering and thirsting is a real hunger and

thirst, and terminates for its object upon the bread and water of life. These figures (if indeed they are to be regarded as figures at all) are kept up fully throughout the Bible, and all true Christians can testify to the fitness of the language to express the idea.

I have said that this state of mind implies conversion; for although the awakened sinner may have agonies and convictions, yet he has no clear conceptions of what this union with Christ is, nor does he clearly apprehend the need of a perfectly cleansed heart. He needs some experience of what holiness is, and often he seems also to need to have tasted some of the exceeding bitterness of sin as felt by one who has been near the Lord, before he shall fully apprehend this great spiritual want of being made a partaker indeed of Christ's own perfect righteousness. By righteousness here, we are not to understand something imputed, but something real. It is imparted, not imputed. Christ draws the souls of his people into such union with himself, that they become "partakers of the divine nature," or as elsewhere expressed, "partakers of his holiness." For this the tried Christian pants. Having had a little taste of it, and then having tasted the bitterness of a relapse into sin, his soul is roused to most intense struggles to realize this blessed union with Christ.

I. What is implied in being filled with this righteousness.

II. What are the conditions of receiving this fullness

I. A few words should now be said on what is implied in being filled with this righteousness.

1. Worldly men incessantly hunger and thirst after worldly good. But attainment never outstrips desire. Hence they are never filled. There is always a conscious want which no acquisition of this sort of good can satisfy. It is most remarkable that worldly men can never be filled with the things they seek. Well do the Scriptures say, this desire enlarges itself as hell, and is never satisfied. They really hunger and thirst the more by how much the more they obtain.

2. Let it be especially remarked that this being filled with righteousness is not perfection, in the highest sense of this term. Men often use the term

perfection, of that which is absolutely complete, a state which precludes improvement and beyond which there can be no progress. There can be no such perfection among Christians in any world--earth or heaven. It can pertain to no being but God. He, and He alone, is perfect beyond possibility of progress. All else, but God, are making progress--the wicked from bad to worse, the righteous from good to better. Instead of making no more progress in heaven, as some suppose, probably the law of progress is in a geometrical ratio; the more they have, the farther they will advance. I have often queried whether this law which seems to prevail here will operate there, viz: of what I may call impulsive progression. Here we notice that the mind from time to time gives itself to most intense exertion to make attainments in holiness. The attainment having been made, the mind for a season reposes, as if it had taken its meal and awaited the natural return of appetite before it should put forth its next great effort. May it not be that the same law of progress obtains even in heaven?

3. Here we see the operations of this law in the usual Christian progress. Intense longing and desire beget great struggling and earnest prayer; at length the special blessing sought is found, and for the time the soul seems to be filled to overflowing. It seems to be fully satisfied and to have received all it supposed possible and perhaps even more than was ever asked or thought. The soul cries out before the Lord, I did not know there was such fullness in store for thy people. How wonderful that God should grant it to such an one as myself! The soul finds itself swallowed up and lost in the great depths and riches of such a blessing. O, how the heart pours itself out in the one most expressive petition, "Thy will be done on earth as in heaven!" All prayer is swallowed up in this. And then the praise, the FULLNESS OF PRAISE! All struggle and agony are suspended: the soul seems to demand a rest from prayer that it may pour itself out in one mighty tide of praise. Some suppose that persons in this state will never again experience those longings after a new baptism; but in this they mistake. The meal they have had may last them a considerable time--longer perhaps than Elijah's meal, on the strength of which he went forty days; but the time of comparative hunger will come round again, and they will gird themselves for a new struggle.

4. This is what is sometimes expressed as a baptism, an anointing, an unction, an ensembling of the Spirit--an earnest of the Spirit. All these terms

are pertinent and beautiful to denote this special work of the Divine Spirit in the heart. They who experience it, know how well and aptly it is described as eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Lord Jesus, so really does the soul seem to live on Christ. It is also the bread and the water of life which are promised freely to him that is athirst. These terms may seem very mystical and unmeaning to those who have had no experience, but they are all plain to him who has known in his own soul what they mean. If you ask why figures of speech are used at all to denote spiritual things, you have the answer in the exigencies of the human mind in regard to apprehending spiritual things. Christ's language must have seemed very mystical to his hearers, yet was it the best he could employ for his purpose. If any man will do his will, he shall know of his doctrine; but how can a selfish, debased, besotted, and withal disobedient mind, expect to enter into the spiritual meaning of this language? How strangely must Christ's words have sounded on the ears of Jewish priests: "God in us," "The Holy Ghost dwelling in you," "Ye shall abide in me." How could they understand these things? "The bread that came down from heaven," what could this mean to them? They thought they understood about the manna from heaven, and they idolized Moses; but how to understand what this Nazarene said about giving them the true bread from heaven which should be for the life of the world, they could not see. No wonder they were confounded, having only legal ideas of religion, and having not even the most remote approximation to the idea of a living union with the Messiah for the purposes of spiritual life.

II. What are the conditions of receiving this fullness?

1. That the soul hunger and thirst for it, is the only condition specified in this passage. But we know it is very common to have promises made in the Bible, and yet not have all the conditions of the promise stated in the same connection. If we find them elsewhere, we are to regard them as fixed conditions, and they are to be understood as implied where they are not expressed.

2. Elsewhere we are told that faith is a fundamental condition. Men must believe for it and receive it by faith. This is as naturally necessary as receiving and eating wheat bread is for the sustenance of the body. Ordinary food must be taken into the system by our own voluntary act. We take and

eat; then the system appropriates. So faith receives and appropriates the bread of life.

In general it is found true that before Christians will sufficiently apprehend the relations of this supply to their wants and to the means of supplying them, this hunger and thirst becomes very intense, so as to overpower and cast into insignificance all their other appetites and desires. As by a general law one master passion throws all minor ones into the shade, and may sometimes suspend them for a season entirely, so we find in this case a soul intensely hungering and thirsting after righteousness almost forgets to hunger and thirst even after its common food and drinks. Place before him his study-books, he cannot bring his mind to relish them now. Invite him to a singing-concert, he has no taste that way at present. Ask him into company, his mind is pressing in another direction. He longs to find God, and can take but little interest in any other friend at present. Offer him worldly society, and you will find he takes the least possible interest in it. He knows such companions will not understand what his soul so intensely craves, and of course it were vain to look for sympathy in that quarter.

3. It is an important condition that the mind should have somewhat clear apprehensions of the thing needed and of the means of obtaining it. Effort cannot be well directed unless the subject be in some good measure understood. What is that en sealing of the Spirit? What is this baptism? I must by all means see what this is before I can intelligently seek it and hope to gain it. True, no man can know before experience as he can and will know afterwards; but he can learn something before and often much more after the light of experience shines in upon his soul. There is no more mystification than there is in hungering for a good dinner, and being refreshed by it after you have eaten it.

Again, if we would have this fullness, we must be sure to believe this promise and all this class of promises. We must regard them as truly promises of God--all yea and amen in Christ Jesus, and as good for our souls to rely upon as the promise of pardon to the penitent and believing

Yet again we must ask and insist upon their fulfillment to our souls. We are authorized to expect it in answer to our faith. We should be first certain that we ask in sincerity, and then should expect the blessing just as we always expect God to be faithful to his word. Why not? Has he said and shall he not

do it? Has He promised and shall he not perform?

4. We must believe that the promise implies a full supply. Our faith must not limit the power or the grace of Christ. The Christian is not straitened in God; let him take care therefore that he do not straiten himself by his narrow conceptions of what God can do and loves to do for his hungering and thirsting children. Often there is need of great perseverance in the search for this blessing. Because of the darkness of the mind and the smallness of its faith the way may not for a long time be prepared for the full bestowment of this great blessing.

REMARKS.

1. The Antinomian Perfectionists mistook the meaning of this and of similar passages. They supposed that whoever believes gets so filled as never to thirst any more. But the fact is, the mind may rise higher and higher, making still richer attainments in holiness at each rising grade of progress. It may indeed find many resting-places, as Bunyan gives to his pilgrim--here at the top of the hill Difficulty, there on the Delectable Mountains, where he passes through scenes of great triumph, great faith and great joy in God. Subsequently to these scenes will occur other periods of intense desire for new baptisms of the Spirit, and for a new ascent upon the heights of the divine life. This is to be the course of things so long at least as we remain in the flesh, and perhaps forever. Perhaps the blest spirits in heaven will never reach a point beyond which there shall not be the same experience--new developments of God made to the mind, and by this means new stages of progress and growth in holiness. With what amazement shall we then study these stages of progress and admire to look abroad over the new fields of knowledge successively opened, and the corresponding developments of mental power and of a holy character, all which stand related to these manifestations of God as effects to their cause. What new and glorious views have been bursting upon us, fast as we could bear them, for myriads of ages! Looking back over the past, we shall say--O, this everlasting progress--this is indeed the blessedness of heaven! How far does this transcend our highest thought when we looked forward to heaven from the dim distance of our earthly pilgrimage! Here there is no end to the disclosures to be made, nor to the truths to be learned.

If there was to be no more food, how could there be any more spiritual thirst and spiritual hunger? How, indeed, could there be more spiritual joy? Suppose that

somewhere in the lapse of Heaven's eternal ages, we should reach a point where nothing more remains to be learned--not another thing to be inquired after--not another fact to be investigated, or truth to be known.--Alas, what a blow to the bliss of heaven!

We are told that the angels are desiring to look into the things of salvation. Oh, yes, when they saw our Messiah born they were allowed to come so near us with their joyous outbursts of praise that even mortals could hear. Do you not suppose those angels too are growing in grace, and advancing in knowledge? No doubt they are, most wonderfully, and have been ever since they came into being.

How much more they must know of God now than they did before our world was created! And how much more they have yet to learn from God's government over our race. Think you they have no more desires after the knowledge of God? And have they no more desire to rise to yet higher conformity of heart and character to the great Model of Heaven?

If so with angels, surely not less so with their younger brethren--the holy who are redeemed from among men.

You might suppose that by studying in this school for a few days, you would learn all human science. This were a great mistake. You might master many sciences and still have other heights to ascend--other vast fields of knowledge to explore. You might have the best of human teachers and the best possible opportunities for learning, yet still it would be enough to occupy you the length of many lives to master all there is in even human science. The mind is not made to be so filled to satiety that it craves no more--can receive no more. Like the trees planted on the rivers of the waters of life, which bring forth twelve manner of fruits and whose roots go deep and drink largely of those blessed waters--so is the mind which God has endowed with the functions of immortal progress.

As our ideal becomes elevated, and we see higher points to which we may arise, we shall have more enkindlings of desire, and more intense struggles to advance. What Christian does not find as he reads the Bible over, new and deeper strata of meaning never seen before--new truths revealed and new beauties displayed. Old father O. used to say, "I am reading the Word of God. It is deep and rich, like the great heart of its Author. I have read now two hours and have not got over but two verses. It will take me to all eternity to read it through." So it was. He really found more in the Bible than other men did. He went deeper, and the deeper he

went, the richer did he find its precious ores of gold and silver.

So the Psalmist says--"Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Have you not been so ravished with love to this blessed book that you wanted to clasp it to your bosom and become purified with its spirit? As you go down into its depths and find in each successive stratum of its deep thoughts new beauties and new fields of truth to explore, have you not been filled with intense desire to live long enough and have time and strength enough to see, to learn, and to enjoy it all? Like the successive landscapes as you ascend the lofty mountain's side;--at each stage you see them spreading out in grander beauty and broader range--so, as you really study into the great and rich things of God's spiritual kingdom, there is no limit to this sweep of the knowledge of God; for the fields only become the broader and the more enchanting as you ascend. Do you not think that his soul must be truly blessed who eats and drinks and fills his soul with divine righteousness?

2. I am strongly impressed with the conviction that some of you need a new development of the spiritual life. You need to go deeper into the knowledge of God as revealed in the soul; you need to hunger and thirst more intensely, and be by this means filled as you have not often been as yet. Even though you may have tasted that the Lord is gracious, you yet need to eat and drink largely at His table. It will not avail you to live on those old dinners, long past and long since digested. You want a fresh meal. It is time for you to say--"I must know more about this being filled with righteousness. My soul languishes for this heavenly food. I must come again into this banqueting house to be feasted again with his love."

3. The full soul cannot be satisfied to enjoy its rich spiritual provisions alone. If well fed himself, he will be only more exercised to see others also fed and blessed. The Spirit of Christ in his heart is a spirit of love, and this can never rest except as it sees others reaching the same standard of attainment and enjoyment which is so delightful to itself.

4. Real Christians should be, and in the main they will be growing better and holier as they come nearer heaven. On the other hand, how great and fearful is the contrast between an aged growing Christian and an aged sinner growing in depravity and guilt. The one is ripening for heaven, the other for hell. The one goes on praising and loving, laboring and suffering for God and for his generation according to the will of God; but the other goes on his downward

course, scolding and cursing as he goes, abhorred of men and disowned of his Maker. You have seen the awful contrast. You could hardly believe that two men so unlike were both raised in the same township--taught at the same school--instructed in the same religious assembly and presented with the same gospel;--and yet see how manifestly the one is saved and the other damned. Each bears the sign beforehand--the palpable, unmistakable evidence of the destiny that awaits him.

5. Is it not full time that each one of you who has any spiritual life should stand out before the world and put on your beautiful garments? Let all the world see that there is a power and a glory in the gospel, such as human philosophy never has even approached. Show that the gospel begets purity and peace. Show that it enlarges the heart and opens the hand for the good of all human kind. Show that it conquers selfishness and transforms the soul from hate to love.

Sinners, ye who have earthly hunger and thirst enough, let your ears be opened to hear the glad tidings of real salvation. Ye whose hearts have never known solid peace--ye who are forever desiring yet never satisfied--ye who cry in your inmost souls--O for office--O for honor--O for wealth! See, here is that which is better far than all you seek. Here are durable riches and righteousness. Here are the first installments of pleasures that flow forever at God's right hand. Here is heaven proffered and even pressed upon your regard and your choice. Choose life before death, as you would be wise for your eternal well-being.

[Back to Top](#)

Death to Sin Through Christ

Lecture VIII

September 14, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 6:11: "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The connection of this passage will help us to understand its meaning. Near the close of the previous chapter Paul had said--"The law entered that the offence might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." He speaks here of sin as being a reigning principle or monarch, and of grace also as reigning. Then, in chapter 6, he proceeds--"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

You observe here that Paul speaks of the man, the old sinner--as being crucified with Christ--so destroyed by the moral power of the cross that he who was once a sinner shall no longer serve sin. When he speaks of our being planted or buried with Christ we must of course understand him as employing figures of speech to teach the great truth that the gospel redeems the soul from sin. As Christ died for sin, so by a general analogy we die to sin; while, on the other hand, as He rose to a new and infinitely glorious life, so the convert rises to a new and blessed life of purity and holiness.

But recurring particularly to our text, let me say--The language used in our translation would seem to denote that our death to sin is precisely analogous to Christ's death for sin; but this is not the case. We are dead to sin in the sense that it is no longer to be our Master, implying that it has been in power over us. But sin never was in power over Jesus Christ--never was His master. Christ died to abolish its power over us--not to abolish any power of sin over himself, for it had none. The analogy between Christ's death in relation to sin and our dying to sin, goes to this extent and no farther: He died for the sake of making an atonement for sin and of creating a moral power that should be effective to kill the love of sin in all hearts; but the Christian dies unto sin in the sense of being divorced from all sympathy with sin and emancipated from its control.

But I must proceed to remark upon the text itself, and shall inquire,

I. What it is to be dead unto sin in the sense of the text.

II. What it is to be alive unto God.

III. What it is to reckon ourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

IV. What it is to be alive unto God through Jesus Christ.

V. What is implied in the exhortation of our text.

VI. What is implied in complying with this injunction?

I. What it is to be dead unto sin in the sense of the text.

Being dead to sin must obviously be the opposite of being dead in sin. The latter must undeniably be a state of entire sinfulness--a state in which the soul is dead to all good through the power of sin over it. But right over against this, to be dead to sin, must be to be indifferent to its attractions--beyond the reach of its influence--as fully removed from its influences as the dead are from the objects of sense in this world. As he who is dead in the natural sense, has nothing more to do with earthly things, so he who is dead to sin has nothing to do any more with sin's attractions or with sinning itself.

II. What it is to be alive unto God?

To be full of life for Him--to be altogether active and on the alert to do his will; to make our whole lives a perpetual offering to Him, constantly delivering up ourselves to Him and his service that we may glorify his name and subserve his interests.

III. What it is to reckon ourselves dead indeed unto Him?

The word rendered reckon is sometimes rendered account. Abraham's faith was accounted unto him for righteousness. So in this passage--reckon must mean--believe, esteem yourselves dead indeed unto sin. Account this to be the case. Regard this as truly your relation to sin; you are entirely dead to it; it shall have no more dominion over you.

A careful examination of the passages where this original word is used will show that this is its usual and natural sense. And this gives us the true idea of gospel faith--embracing personally the salvation which is by faith in Jesus Christ. But more of this hereafter.

IV. What is meant by reckoning yourselves alive indeed unto God through Jesus Christ?

Plainly this: that you are to expect to be saved by Jesus Christ and to calculate on this salvation as your own. You are to esteem yourself as wholly dead to sin and as consequently brought into life and peace in Christ Jesus.

V. What is implied in the exhortation of our text?

That there is an adequate provision for this expectation, and for realizing these blessings in fact. For if there were no ground for realizing this, the injunction would be most absurd. A precept requiring us to account ourselves dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God, would be utterly untenable if there were no probability of the thing--if no provision were made for our coming into such relations to sin on the one hand and to God through Christ on the other. For if these blessings could not be reasonably expected, there could be no rational ground for the expectation. If it were not reasonable to expect it, then to enjoin us to expect it would be palpably unreasonable. Who does not see that the very injunction implies that there is a foundation laid and adequate provision made for the state required?

VI. What is implied in complying with this injunction?

1. Believing such a thing to be possible. Believing it possible that through Christ we may live in the required manner, that we may avoid sin--desist from sinning--give it up and abandon it altogether, and put it forever away. There can be no such thing as an intelligent compliance with this precept except as there shall underlie it this belief in its practicability.
2. That the mind regards the state required as a practicable one--not merely as true in theory--not merely as good philosophy--but as actually made practicable by adequate grace, adapted to the laws of mind and to the actual moral condition of lost men.
3. That we cease from all expectation of attaining this state of ourselves, and by our own independent, unaided efforts. There is no beginning to receive by grace till we renounce all expectation of attaining by natural works. It is only when empty of self that we begin to be filled of Christ.
4. A present willingness to be saved from sin. We must actually renounce all sin as such--that is, renounce sin because it is sin, and for what it is. This position the mind must take: I can have nothing more to do with sinning--for God hates sin, and I am to live henceforth and forever to please and

glorify Him. My soul is committed with its strength of purpose to this pleasing of God and doing his will.

5. It implies also an entire committal of your whole case to Jesus Christ, not only for present but for all future salvation from sin. This is absolutely essential. It must always be the vital step--the cardinal act in this great work of salvation from sin.

6. It implies also the foreclosing of the mind against temptation, in such a sense that the mind truly expects to live a life purely devoted to God. This is the same sort of foreclosing of the mind as takes place under a faithful marriage contract. The Bible everywhere keeps this figure prominent. Christians are represented as the bride of Christ. They stand in a relation to Him, which is closely analogous to that of a bride to her husband. Hence when they commit their whole hearts to Him, reposing their affections in Him and trusting Him for all good, their hearts are strongly foreclosed against temptation. We see the principle here involved, illustrated in the merely human relation. When parties are solemnly betrothed in mutual honest fidelity, there is no longer any thought of letting the eye rove or the heart go abroad for a fresh object of interest and love. The heart is fixed--willingly and by blighted [sic.] faith fixed, and this fact shuts out the power of temptation almost entirely. It renders it comparatively an easy matter to keep the heart safely above the influence of temptation to apostasy. Before the sacred vows are taken, individuals may be excused for looking round and making any observations, or inquiries: but never after the solemn vow is made. After the parties have become one by vow of marriage, never to be broken, there is to be no more question as to a better choice--no further thought about changing the relation or withdrawing the heart's affections. No wavering is admissible now; the pledge is made for everlasting faithfulness, settled once and forever! This is God's own illustration, and surely none need be more apt, or more forcible. It shows how the Christian should look upon sin and upon all temptation to sin. He must say, Away from my heart for ever! I am married to Jesus Christ; how then can I look after other lovers? My mind is forever settled. It rests in the deep repose of one whose affections are plighted and fixed--to rove no more! Sin? I can think of yielding to its seductions no longer. I cannot entertain the question for a moment. I can have nothing to do with sinning. My mind is settled--the question forever fore closed, and I can no more admit the temptation to

small sins than to great sins--no more consent to give my heart to worldly idols than to commit murder! I did not enter upon religion as upon an experiment, to see how I might like it--no more than a wife or husband take on themselves the marriage vow as an experiment. No; my whole soul has committed itself to Jesus Christ with as much expectation of being faithful forever as the most faithful husband and wife have of fulfilling their vows in all fidelity till death shall part them.

Christians in this state of mind no more expect to commit small sins than great sins. Hating all sin for its own sake and for its hatefulness to Christ, any sin however small is to them as murder. Hence if the heart is ever afterwards seduced and overcome by temptation, it is altogether contrary to their expectation and purpose; it was not embraced in their plan by any means, but was distinctly excluded; it was not deliberately indulged aforetime, but broke on them unexpectedly through the vantage ground of old habits or associations.

Again, the state of mind in question implies that the Christian knows where his great strength lies. He knows it does not lie in works of fasting, giving alms, making prayers, doing public duties or private duties--nothing of this sort--not even in resolutions or any self-originated efforts, but only in Christ received by faith. He no more expects spiritual life of himself apart from Christ, than a man in his senses would expect to fly by swinging his arms in the air. Deep in his soul lies the conviction that his whole strength lies in Christ alone.

When men are so enlightened as truly to apprehend this subject, then to expect less than this from Jesus Christ as the result of committing the whole soul to Him for full salvation, is virtually to reject Him as a revealed Saviour. It does not honour Him for what He is; it does not honour the revelations He has made of Himself in his word by accepting Him as there presented. For consider what is the first element of this salvation? Not being saved from hell, but being saved from sin. Salvation from punishment is quite a secondary thing, in every sense. It is only a result of being saved from sin, and not the prime element in the gospel salvation. Why was the infant Messiah to be called Jesus? Because He should save his people from their sins. And does the Bible anywhere teach any other or different view from this?

REMARKS.

1. This text alone--"Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ"--most entirely justifies the expectation of living without sin through all-abounding grace. If there were no other passage bearing on this point, this alone is adequate, and for a Christian to offer this only as a reason for such a hope in Him is to offer as good a reason as need be given. There are indeed many others that fully justify this expectation.

2. To teach that such an expectation is a dangerous error is to teach unbelief. What if the apostle had added to this injunction which requires us to account ourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, this singular averment: "Yet let me warn you, nobody can rationally hope to be free from sin in this world. You must remember that to entertain such an expectation as God enjoins in this language is a dangerous error."--What should be thought of this if--it were attached to Rom. 6:11?

No man can deny that the passage treats of sanctification. The whole question is shall Christians "continue in sin" after having been forgiven and accepted in their Redeemer. Paul labours to show that they should, and of course that they may die to sin--even as Christ died for sin; and may also live a new--a spiritual life (through faith in his grace), even as Christ does a higher and more glorious life.

Let me refer here to another passage, in which it is said--"Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers--what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God. Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." "Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." This is a very remarkable passage. Note how precept and promise are intermingled, and how, finally, upon the basis of a most glorious promise, is founded the precept enjoining us to perfect holiness. Now what should we think of Paul and of the Divine Spirit who spake through Paul, if He had immediately subjoined--"Take care lest any of you should be led by these remarks to indulge the very dangerous and erroneous expectation that you can "perfect holiness," or "cleanse yourselves from any sin, either of flesh or spirit, in this world." Would not this have been trifling with the intelligence and Christian sensibility of every reader of his words through all time? Should we

not account it as substantially blasphemous?

It so happens that the Bible never gainsays its own teachings; but I ask--What if it had? What if the Bible had solemnly asserted--"No mere man either of himself or by any grace received in this life, has ever kept or shall ever keep the commandments of God wholly, but doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed?

To teach that such an expectation is dangerous is a great deal worse than no teaching at all. Far better to leave men to their own unaided reading of God's word, for this could scarcely in any case so sadly mislead them, however inclined they might be to the misapprehension. Dangerous to expect salvation from sin? Dangerous?!--What does this mean? What! Dangerous to expect victory over any sin? If so, what is the gospel worth? What gospel have we that can be deemed good news at all?

Many indulge the very opposite expectation. Far from expecting any such thing as the apostle authorizes them to expect, they know they have no such expectation.

Of some yet more than this is true--they expect to count themselves always in sin. They depend on reckoning themselves, not dead indeed unto sin but somewhat alive to it through all their mortal life, and in part alive to God through Jesus Christ. It follows as quite a thing of course that expecting no such thing as complete victory over sin, they will use no appropriate means, since faith stands foremost among those means, and faith must include at least a confidence that the thing sought is possible to be attained.

In this and the following chapters we have the essence of the good news of the gospel. Any one who has been wounded and made sore by sin--its bitter shafts sinking deep into his moral being--one who has known its bitterness and felt the poison thereof drink up his spirit--such an one will see that there is glory in the idea of being delivered from sin. He will surely see that this deliverance is by far the greatest want of his soul, and that nothing can be compared with escaping from this body of sin and death. Look at Rom. 7th. There you will have the state of a man who is more than convinced, who is really convicted. It is one thing to be convinced, and a yet further stage of progress in the right direction to be convicted. This term implies the agency of another party. The criminal at the bar may be quite convinced of his guilt by the view he was compelled to take of his

own case; but his being convicted is a still further step; the testimony and the jury convict him.

Some of you know what it is to see yourself a sinner, and yet the sight of the fact brings with it no smart--no sting; it does not cut deep into your very soul. On the other hand, some of you may know what it is to see your sins all armed like an armed man to pierce you through and through with daggers. Then you cry out as here--O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? You feel a piercing sting as if your soul were filled with poison--with dark rankling venom, diffusing through the depths of your soul the very agonies of hell! This is what I mean by being convicted, as a state of mind beyond being merely convinced. The shafts and the smiting of sin seem really like the piercings of an arrow, as if arrows from the Almighty did really drink up your spirit. When you experience this, then you can understand what the good news of the gospel is. A remedy for such pangs must be good news beyond all contradiction. Then to know that the blood of Christ can save, is indeed a cordial of life to the fainting soul.

Place a man in this state of cutting, piercing conviction, and then let him feel that there is actually no remedy, and he sinks under the iron shafts of despair. See his agony! Tell him there can never be any remedy for his guilty soul! You must lie there in you wailing and despair forever! Can any state of mind be more awful?

I remember a case that occurred in Reading, Pa., many years ago. There was a man of hard heart and iron frame--a strong, burly man, who had stood up against the revival as if he could shake off all the arrows of the Almighty, even as the Mastodon of which the tradition of the red man says, he shook off all the arrows of the warriors from his brow and felt no harm. So he stood. But he had a praying wife and a praying sister, and they gathered their souls in the might of prayer close about him as a party of men would hem in a wild bull in a net. Soon it was apparent that an arrow from the quiver of the Almighty had pierced between the joints of his harness and had taken hold of his innermost heart. O, was not he in agony then! It was night--dark and intensely cold. It seemed that absolutely he could not live. They sent for me to come and see him. I went. While yet sixty rods from his house I heard his screams and wailings of woe. It made me feel awfully solemn--so like the echoes of the pit of hell! I reached the house: there he lay on the floor rolling in his agony and wailing, as is rarely heard this side the pit of despair. Cold as the weather was, he sweat like rain,

every part of his frame being in a most intense perspiration. O his groans! and to see him gnaw his very tongue for pain--this could not but give one some idea of the doom of the damned. O, said I, if this be only conviction, what is hell?! But he could not bear to hear anything about sin; his conscience was already full of it, and had brought out the awful things of God's law so as to leave nothing more to be done in that direction. I could only put Christ before him, and just hold his mind to the view of Christ alone. This soon brought relief. But suppose I had nothing else to say but this--"Mr. B., there is no help possible for your case! You can wail on and wail on: no being in the universe can help you?" Need you say to him hell has no fire? Oh, he has fire enough in his burning soul already. It seems to him that no hell of fire can possibly be worse than this.

How perfectly chilling and horrible for persons to oppose the idea of expecting deliverance from sin and yet talk calmly of going on in sin all the rest of their earthly days! As an elder whom I knew rose in meeting and told the Lord he had been living in sin thus far and expected to go on in sin as long as he lived; he had sinned today and should doubtless sin tomorrow and so on--and yet he talked as calmly about it all as if it were foolish to make any ado, as well as impossible to attempt any change for the better. Talk of all this calmly--think of that! Quite calmly of living alone in sin all the rest of his days! How horrible! Suppose a wife should say to her husband, "I love you some, but you know I love many other men too, and that I find it pleasant to indulge myself with them. You certainly must be aware that all women are frail creatures and liable to fall continually, and indeed you know that I expect to fall more or less as it may happen every day I live, so that you certainly will not expect from me anything so impracticable and fanatical as unblemished virtue! You know we have none of us any idea of being perfect in the present life--we don't believe in any such thing!"

Now let me ask you to look at this woman and hear what she has to say. Can you hear her talk so, without having your soul filled with horror? What! is this woman a wife, and does she think and talk in this way about conjugal fidelity?

And yet this is not to be compared in shocking guilt and treason with the case of the Christian who says, "I expect to sin every day I live," and who says this with unmoved carelessness. You expect to be a traitor to Jesus each day of your life; to crucify him afresh each day; to put him each day to an open shame; each day to dishonour his name, and grieve his heart, and to bring sorrow and shame upon

all who love Christ's cause; and yet you talk about having a good hope through grace! But tell me, does not every true Christian say, "Do not let me live at all if I cannot live without sin; for how can I bear to go on day by day sinning against him whom I so much love!"

Those who are really opposed to this idea, are either very ignorant of what the gospel is, or they are impenitent and of course do not care to be delivered from their sins; or at best they are guilty of great unbelief. Into which of these classes the opposers of the doctrine may fall, is a question for themselves to settle, as between their own consciences and their God.

There are two distinct views of salvation entertained among professed Christians, and correspondingly two distinct classes of professors--often embraced within the same church. The one class regard the gospel as a salvation from sin. They think more of this and value it more than the hope of heaven, or of earth either. The great thing with them is to realize the idea of deliverance from sin. This constitutes the charm and glory of the gospel. They seek this more than to be saved from hell. They care more by far to be saved from sin itself than from its penal consequences. Of the latter they think and pray but little. It is their glory and their joy that Christ is sent to deliver them from their bondage in iniquity--to lift them up from their wretched state and give them the liberty of love. This they labour to realize; this is to them the good news of gospel salvation.

The other class are mostly anxious to be saved from hell. The punishment due for sin is the thing they chiefly fear. In fact, fear has been mainly the spring of their religious efforts. The gospel is not thought of as a means of deliverance from sin, but as a great system of indulgences--a vast accommodation to take off the fear and danger of damnation, while yet it leaves them in their sin. Now, here I do not by any means imply that they will call their system of gospel faith a scheme of indulgences: the name doubtless will be an offence to them. They may not have distinctly considered this point, and may have failed to notice that in fact it is such and nothing better.

They seem not to notice that a scheme of salvation that removes the fear of damnation for sin, and which yet leaves them in their sins to live for themselves, to please themselves, and which holds that Christ will at last bring them to heaven notwithstanding their having lived in sin all their days, must be a vast scheme of indulgences. Indeed, it is a compromise on a most magnificent scale.

By virtue of it, the whole church is expected to wallow on in sin through life, and be none the less sure of heaven at last.

These opposite views are so prevalent and so palpable you will see them everywhere as you go round among the churches. You will find many in the church who are altogether worldly and selfish; who live conformed to the world in various neglects of duty, and who expect to indulge themselves in sin more or less all the way through life. You may ask them, Do you think that is right? They answer: No. Why then do you do it? O, we are all imperfect, and we can't expect to be any better than imperfect while here in the flesh. Yet they expect to be saved at last from hell, and to have all their sins forgiven; but how? Not on condition of sincerely turning away from all their sins, but on the assumption that the gospel is a vast system of indulgences--more vast by far than Pope Leo X. ever wielded and worked to comfort sinning professors in his day. For here, not merely those that sin occasionally as there, but those who live in sin and know they do, and expect they shall as long as they live, yet expect to be saved without fail at last.

The other class of professed Christians have no expectation of being saved only as they have a pure heart and live above the world. Talk to them about living in sin, they hate and dread the very thought. To them the poison of asps is in it. Sin is bitter to their souls. They dread it as they dread death itself.

No one can go round within this church or any other without finding these two classes as distinct in their apprehension of the gospel as I have described them to be. The one class are in agony if they find themselves even slipping, and they are specially cautious against exposing themselves to temptation.

Not so with the other class. Two ministers of the gospel being together, one urged the other strongly to engage in a certain service. The other declined. "Why not go?" said the first. "Because I do not think myself justified in exposing myself to such and so much temptation."

"But why stop for that? We expect to sin more or less always; and all we have to do is to repent of it afterwards."

Horror-smitten, the other could only say, "I hold to a different gospel from that altogether."

Suppose a wife should say to her husband, "I am determined I will go to the

theater." "But, my dear," says he, "you know bad people congregate there, and you may be tempted." But she replies, "Never mind; if I sin I will repent of it afterwards."

The real Christian may be known by this, that the very thought of being drawn into sin drives him to agony. He cannot bear the idea of living in sin; no, not for one moment.

The young people here who are truly Christians, are careful about this ensuing vacation. You will be on your guard, for you are afraid you may be ensnared into sin. I do not mean that you need fear to go where God calls you, but it is a terrible thing to be ensnared into sin, and you cannot but feel it to be so. If you know what it is to be wounded by the arrows of sin in your soul, you will go abroad into apparent danger, walking softly and with caution, and much prayer. You will surely be much on your guard. But if you say, "O, if I sin I will repent," what shall I say of you? You will repent, will you? And this will make all right again so easily? Suppose you foresaw that in going abroad for vacation, you would get drunk a few times, and would commit one or two murders, would you say, "O, I may be a good Christian notwithstanding. I will be careful to repent of it after it is all over." Horrible! And yet you can think yourself a good Christian! Let me tell you, a Christian man who repents of sin, repents of it as sin. He makes no such discriminations as between a little secret sin and a great sin, for example, a murder. He knows no such distinction between sins as will leave him to commit the one class without scruple and to shrink from the other. With him anything that grieves God is a horrible thing. Anything that displeases God--"Ah," he cries out, "God will see it; it will grieve his heart!" How it will affect God--this is all in all with him. One who knows what it is to appear guilty of sin before God, and then who knows also what it is to be delivered from this condition, will understand how the Christian ought to feel in circumstances of temptation, where he feels himself in danger of sinning. His hair all stands on end! How awful to sin against God! Hence anything that seems likely to bring him into danger will rouse up all his soul within him and put him on his guard.

The unbelief of the Church as to what they may receive from Christ, is the great stumbling-block, hindering themselves and others from experiencing deliverance. Not only is this a great curse to professed Christians, but it is also a great grief to Jesus Christ and a sore trial.

Many seem to have hardened their hearts against all expectation of this

deliverance from sin. They have heard the doctrine preached. They have seen some profess to be in this state of salvation from sin, but they have also seen some of this class fall again, and now they deliberately reject the whole doctrine. But is this consistent with really embracing the gospel? What is Christ to the believer? What was his errand into the world? What is he doing, and what is he trying to do?

He has come to break the power of sin in the heart, and to be the life of the believer, working in him a perpetual salvation from sin, aiming to bring him thus, and only thus, to heaven at last. What is faith, what but the actual giving of yourself up to Christ that he may do this work for you and in you! What are you to believe of Christ if not this, that he is to save his people from their sins? Can you tell of anything else? Does the Bible tell you to expect something different and less than this? The fact is, that it has been the great stumbling-block to the church that this thing has not been well understood. The common experience of nominal Christians has misrepresented and belied the truth. The masses forming their views much more from this experience than from the Bible, or at best applying this experience to interpret the Bible, have adopted exceedingly defective, not to say false, opinions as to the nature and design of the gospel. They seem to forget altogether that Paul writing to Christians at Rome, assures them that if they are under grace, sin shall not have dominion over them.

When Christians do not expect this blessing from Christ, they will not get it. While they expect so little as they usually do, no wonder they get so little. According to their faith, and not ever very much beyond it, need they expect to receive.

It is often the case that sanctification is held as a theory, while the mind does not yet by any means embrace the truth in love. The case is analogous to that of impenitent sinners who hold in theory that they must have a new heart. They profess to believe thus, but do they really understand it? No. Suppose it were revealed to their minds so that they should really see it as it is, would they not see a new thing? Would they not be startled to see how utterly far they are, while impenitent, from being acceptable to God, and how great the change they must experience before they can enter the kingdom? So of sanctification. Although this class of persons profess to hold it in theory, yet the passages of Scripture which describe it do not enter into their experience. They do not see the whole truth. If they were to see the whole truth, and should then reject it, I believe it

would be in them the unpardonable sin. When the Spirit of God discloses to them the real meaning of the gospel, then if they deliberately reject it, how can the sin be less than what the Scriptures represent as the unpardonable sin? Having once been enlightened, and having received the knowledge of the truth that they might be saved, then turning back, is it not thenceforth impossible that they should be renewed again to repentance? One thing, at least must be said, there is a peril which many of the professed Christians of our day seem not to realize, in having so much light before the mind as they actually have in regard to the provisions made in the gospel for present sanctification, and then in rejecting this light practically and living still in sin as if the gospel made no provision to save the Christian from his sins. Into this awful peril how many rush blindly and to their own destruction!

[Back to Top](#)

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Lecture IX

November 9, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Luke 16:19-31: "There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day; and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table; moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores.

"And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried: and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried, and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he

is comforted and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed; so that they which would pass from hence to you, cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

"Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

A parable is a little anecdote or a case of supposed history, designed to illustrate some truth. A simple and striking mode of illustration--it makes no attempt at reasoning; indeed it takes the place of all reasoning by at once revealing truth to the mind. In general, parables assume certain truths--a thing which they have an ample right to do, for some truths need no proof, and in other cases, a teacher may speak from his perfect knowledge, and in such a case, there can be no reason for demanding that he stop to prove all he asserts.

In the case of parables it is often interesting to notice what truths they do assume. This is especially true of the parables of Christ for none were ever more rich by virtue both of the truths directly taught and also by virtue of the truths they assume. I may also remark here that truths are taught in Christ's parables both directly and incidentally. Some one great truth is the leading object of the illustration, yet other truths of the highest importance may be taught incidentally, not being embraced in his direct design.

The passage which I have read to you this morning, is probably a parable though not distinctly affirmed to be so. The nature of the case seems to show this; although these very circumstances might have all actually occurred in fact and in the same order as here related.

In discussing the passage, I propose,

I. To notice some truths that are assumed in it;

II. To present some that are intentionally taught.

I. Some truths that are assumed in this parable.

1. Christ assumes in this passage the direct opposite of annihilation. He assumes that men are not annihilated at death, nor indeed ever. For he speaks of things that take place immediately after death. The men who lived on earth live beyond death and receive according to the things they have done here in the body. It was no part of his direct object to affirm this doctrine; yet his statements imply it. Being himself the Great Teacher, it is not without reason that He should assume the fundamental truths that pertain to man's future existence under God's moral government.
2. He assumes that the state into which both good and bad men pass at death is one of real and intense consciousness. This of course denies the assumption that this state is an unconscious one. You are aware that some do not hold to annihilation, yet hold to unconsciousness in the intermediate state between death and the resurrection. This doctrine, whether applied to saints or sinners, is entirely set aside by our Saviour's teachings in this narrative.
3. He assumes that the righteous and the wicked recognize each other after death. The rich man knew both Abraham and Lazarus. Abraham knew him. They all respectively knew each other. The statements represent the colloquy to have been held between the rich man and Abraham. Abraham, though long since in heaven, knew both this rich man and Lazarus. It was not our Lord's design directly to affirm this, yet he obviously implies it.
4. It is also assumed that they are acquainted with each other's state and history. All these matters were entirely familiar to their minds.
5. It is fully assumed that at death the righteous go immediately to a state of bliss and the wicked to a place of torment. This lies out undeniably on the face of the passage.

II. I am next to notice some of the truths distinctly and directly taught in this passage.

1. That at death angels conduct the righteous to their place of blessedness. It is expressly said of Lazarus that he was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. Dogs were his companions here up to his death; angels immediately thereafter. When the dogs could minister to his wants no longer, angels

stepped in and took his case in charge. They bore him away to the home of the blessed.

We may infer that this is the common employment of angels. Paul in Hebrews 1:12 strengthens this position, in his question, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

2. Saints after death are sensible of no want. They have nothing left to desire. They are sensible of wanting nothing that can be needful to their highest happiness. In this life they may have had their cup filled with bitterest grief; but at death, this cup is removed for ever away, and quite another cup is placed to their lips--forever. Lazarus had his evil things in this world; poverty, pain, sores, and want, were his portion here; but after death, he knew these things no more at all. They passed away forever.

3. On the other hand sinners after death are full of want, and have no good at all. The rich man asked for only the very smallest favour. He had fared sumptuously every day; but now he is reduced so low, he can only beg for one drop of water to cool his tongue. He asks for only so much as might adhere to the tip of one's finger when taken from the water. You have seen persons lie under a burning fever--prostrate, parched, can't say a word, can only beckon for water--water--one drop to cool their burning tongue. See the man dying;--he tries to move a little, towards the water;--ah he fails; he sinks back in his bed for the last time, and the burning fever has used up all his strength. You who have suffered from fever know what this means--to have a consuming fire shut up within you. Here mark. The Great Teacher makes the rich man cry out, "Send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." Why did he not ask for an ocean of water, or a pail-full at least, or a pitcher-full; why restrict himself to the least drop? Plainly he knew himself to be placed beyond all good. He knew this was the utmost he could ask, and even this is denied him! What could our Lord have designed but to teach this? How irresistibly is this taught and with what overpowering force! What remarkable facts are these! How obviously and how forcibly is the truth taught here that saints at death pass into a state all joyful, but the wicked into one of unutterable torment!

4. We learn the state of mind in which the wicked are. This man asks for

only the very slightest mitigation. He says not one word about pardon; this he knows to be impossible. How small the boon he dares to ask! How very small if he could have had it, would have been the boon of one small drop of water on a tongue tormented in flame. Yet he does not dare to ask for anything beyond this;--nor even this of God! He knew and he most deeply felt that he had cast off God and God in turn had cast off him. He could not think of speaking to God. He could venture to speak only to Abraham, and this solitary Bible case of prayer to saints in heaven surely affords no very plausible foundation for the Romish practice. This rich man had not the least hope of release from his woe. He did not ask so great a boon as this. Deep in his soul he felt that such a request was for ever precluded.

It is remarkable too that, though the boon he did ask was so trifling and his need so great, yet even this pittance was denied him. Abraham gave him plainly to understand that this was impossible. Son, said he, remember that thou in thy lifetime hast received thy good things; thou hast had thine all; there are no more for thee to enjoy!

5. Besides this, there is a great gulf fixed--parting forever the saved from the damned: we cannot go to you if we would; you cannot come to us, however much you may desire it. Most plainly does Christ teach in this representation that the state of both the righteous and the wicked is fixed, fixed forever, and forever changeless. There can be no passage open therefore as some would fain have it, from one world to the other. They who are in heaven can never get to hell to help the suffering ones there if they would; and on the other hand, the miserable in hell can never get to heaven. What less than this could the Saviour have intended to teach--that each class enter at death upon another state which is to each alike unchangeable? The righteous cannot pass the great gulf to hell; the wicked cannot pass it to heaven. Once heaven's gate was open to even the sinner on his repentance; now it is open to him no more. He has passed away from the world where his moral state can be changed. He has entered on one where no change can reach him any more at all forever.

6. The wicked dread to have their friends come to them in this place of torment. You see this feeling most distinctly manifested in this parable. The reason of the feeling is obvious. They are still human beings and therefore it can be no joy to them to have their earthly friends come into their place of

woe. They have human feelings. They know they can look for no alleviation of their own woe from the presence of their friends. They know that if those friends come there as they did they can never escape; therefore they beg that those friends may never come. Therefore this rich man prays that Abraham would send Lazarus to his five brethren, to testify to them, lest they also come into that place of torment.

7. The state of mind that rejects the Bible would reject any testimony that could be given. This is plainly taught here, and can be proved. It can be proved that the testimony of one who should rise from the dead is no better or stronger than that of the Bible. Paul said he had been caught up to the third heaven, but men would not believe him. Or take the case of Lazarus, raised beyond all question from the dead. We are not told what he taught, nor is it said that his instructions made any special impressions on the living unbelievers of that generation. Those of you who have read the history of William Tennant--a co-labourer with Whitfield and Edwards, know how he apparently died; how after death he went to heaven; how he too like Paul, saw there unspeakable things which no man could utter; how he returned again and lived several years as one who had seen the glories of heaven; but was this stronger evidence than the Bible itself? Did it surpass in strength of demonstration the teachings of Moses and of the prophets? Yet more, did it surpass the force and evidence with which Jesus spake and also his apostles? No, verily. When unbelief has taken possession of the mind, you may pile miracle on miracle; men will not believe it. Suppose ever so many should rise from the dead. Men who reject the Bible would not believe their testimony. They would insist either that they had not been really dead, or that if they had been, they did not bring back a reliable report from that other country. They would make a thousand objections, as they do now, against the Bible, and with much more plausibility than now. Now, they only know their objections are really unfounded; then they would have more plausible objections to make, and would be sure to give them credit enough to refuse to repent under their teachings. They would not be persuaded even then.

8. The estimation in which God holds men may not be learned from their outward circumstances. His favor cannot be inferred from the trappings of wealth; nor is it precluded by any amount of poverty. These external things neither prove nor disprove God's approbation of the hearts and the life of

men.

9. The righteous need not envy rich sinners. Lazarus did not envy the rich man. He saw that he was petted for his great wealth, but pitied rather than envied him. He doubtless understood that this man was having his good things in this world. So good men, if they have faith, understand that those rich and wicked men are receiving all their good things in this world therefore are far from being objects of envy.

10. The former poverty of the righteous poor will give a keener relish to the joys of heaven. Think of the abject poverty of this man--wandering about with no home, no place even to lay his head. So multitudes in Eastern countries may be seen lying around the city walls like the swine of the streets. I saw them in Malta when I was there, and in Sicily also. They had no home to go to, no resources against a sick or stormy day. So Lazarus lived and it was from such a life and such scenes that he was transferred to the royal palace of Jehovah. Take the case of some poor beggar lying helpless outside the palace-walls of Queen Victoria. Suppose him suddenly taken up and exalted to the highest honors of the palace itself. How would his joy intoxicate his brain--too much for flesh and blood to bear! So poor saints passing from the dunghill on earth to the golden palaces of heaven. It is well they lose their nerves in the change, for surely nerves of flesh could not bear so great a change. See Lazarus, sick and sore, perhaps putrid--licked by dogs; but he reached at length the crisis of his sorrows, and all suddenly the mortal coil drops, and his spirit takes wings--angels receive him; he soars away and heaven opens wide its gates of pearl to make him welcome! Sometimes when I have stood and seen the Christian die--have seen him struggle and pant and gasp and pass away, I have said, What a wonderful change is this! See how that eye grows glassy and dark; then it closes; it sees no more of earth, but all suddenly it opens on the glories of the upper world to be closed no more forever!

11. But to have the luxuries of this life superseded by the poverty and woe of hell--how awful! This rich man had royal wealth. We are told that he fared sumptuously every day--not only on special occasions, but every day! Every day too he was clad in purple and fine linen; but now how wonderful the contrast! Nothing is said of the burial of Lazarus; perhaps he had none worth noticing; but this man had a funeral. It was a noticeable fact. Perhaps

thousands gathered round his remains to do him honour--but where is he? Lifting up his eyes in hell, being in torments! What a change! From his table and his palace, to hell! Lazarus passed from his sores and beggary to heaven; the rich man, from his pomp and pride and feasting, to hell. As the great poverty of Lazarus, so set off in contrast with heaven, must have given great edge and keenness to the joys of that world, so on the reverse scale, how dreadful the contrast which this rich man experienced! If we always get clearer and stronger views by contrast, surely we have a picture drawn here that is adapted to teach us awful truth and force it home on the soul with telling power.

12. If it be true that angels convey saints to heaven, as we are taught both here and elsewhere in God's word, then it is not irrational to suppose that what many saints say in their dying hours of the things they see is strictly true. Gathering darkness clouds the senses, and the mind becomes greatly spiritual as their looks plainly show; those looks--the eye, the countenance, the melting whisper, these tell the story better than any words can do it; indeed no words can describe those looks--no language can paint what you can stand by and see and hear--a peace so deep and so divine; this shows that the soul is almost in heaven. In all ages it has been common for some dying saints to hear music which they supposed to be of heaven and to see angels near and around them. With eyes that see what others cannot see, they recognize their attending angels as already come, "Don't you hear that music?" say they. "Don't you see those shining ones? they come, they come!" But attending friends are yet too carnal to see such objects and to hear such sounds; for it is the mind and not the body that has eyes. It is the mind that sees, and not the body. No doubt in such cases, they do really see angelic forms and hear angelic voices. The Bible says--"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." How gloriously do these closing scenes illustrate this truth.

13. If this be true of saints, then doubtless wicked spirits are allowed to drag the wicked down from their dying beds to hell. Nor is it unreasonable to suppose that they too really see awful shapes and hear dreadful sounds. "Who is that weeping and wailing? Did I not hear a groan? Is there not some one weeping as if in awful agony? O, that awful thing; take him away, take him away! He will seize me and drag me down; take him away, away!"

So the wicked are sometimes affected in their dying moments. There is no good reason to doubt that these objects seen and sounds heard, by saints and sinners in their last earthly moments, are realities. You who have read Dr. Nelson's book on infidelity, cannot but have noticed especially what he says of the experience of persons near death. These things passed under his observation chiefly while he was a physician, and while yet an infidel himself. Dying sinners would cry out, "O, that awful creature! take him away, away; why don't you take him away?" Ye who know Dr. Nelson, must have known that he did not say these things at random. He did not admit them without evidence, or state them without due consideration.

14. We are left to infer the character of this rich man from his worldly-mindedness. Christ did not seem to deem it necessary to state that he was a wicked man, but left this to be inferred from his self-indulgent life. He needed only to say of him that he lived for self-gratification; that he used his wealth for himself only, and not for the good of man, or for the glory of God. This explained his character sufficiently.

People act very much in this world, as if they supposed poverty would disqualify them for heaven. They would seem to hold the exact opposite of the truth. Christ said, "How hardly shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven"; and yet, who seems to have the least fear of losing heaven by means of the snare of wealth? How wonderful is the course that men pursue, and indeed a great many Christian men are pursuing! A Christian mother, writing to me from New York, said, "All, even Christians, are giving themselves up to making money, MONEY, MONEY! They are wholly given up to stocks, and banks, and getting rich." There is a great deal of this spirit all over the country, and even here. But look at it in the light of this parable and of our Saviour's assumption in regard to the character of this rich man, and what a fearful state is this to live and to die in.

15. What can Universalists say or believe when they read such passages as this? What miserable shifts they must make to interpret these words! I recollect when I tried and wanted to be Universalist, and for this purpose went to their meetings and heard their arguments; I said to myself, "For very shame, I could never use such arguments; no, not for the shame of admitting and avowing such absurdities!" What can be more absurd than to resort to such sophistry and special pleading to set aside statements so clear

and direct to the point as these in this chapter.

16. God is giving to all sinners--to you sinners in this place--a great many rich gifts. What use are you making of them? What are you doing with these gifts? What are you doing with these things which God comes down each day to bring to you? Are you cavilling, to prevent Christ from saving you if you can? Many act as if they meant to avoid being saved if by any means they can. You act just like reprobates. But I must explain myself. I often meet with persons whose spirit makes me believe they are reprobates. You know that all things are eternally present to the mind of God. He saw how these sinners would treat the gospel. He saw they would repel and hate Christ--would not love his service nor accept the offers of his great salvation. He saw all this in his past eternity; therefore he reprobated them; therefore he gave them over to their own hearts' lusts. Those things which God saw in the depths of his eternity, we only see as they boil up upon the surface of actual present life. You see them resist the Spirit; you see them cavil and fight against God's truth; you know they are fighting against God. So strongly does the conviction fasten on the minds of Christians in some cases, that they cannot pray for those who they are assured are reprobates. Said a very pious woman, "For ten years, I have not prayed for that son." Why? She saw that he was set against God, and she could not pray for him. It is indeed an awful thing to find such cases in Christian families. Nobody can tell the agony of a parent's heart to see a son setting at naught all the claims and all the mercies of God, and working his dismal way obstinately down to the depths of an eternal hell. Some of you before me today, know that you have children who give awful evidence of being reprobate!

Hear that man across the street sighing as he moves along. What is the matter? He is in agony for a hardened, reprobate son.

You call at a neighbor's door; you ring the bell; the mother comes. You see the tear in her eye; she can scarcely speak. What is the matter? She has a son, and she fears he is a reprobate. All his conduct heightens the awful fear that he is given over of God.

But let those who have not gone so far, take warning. Some of those whom you have mocked and reviled, you may by and by see in glory. They may be in Abraham's bosom, and you afar off! You may cry to them for help, but all in vain. Will they rush to your help? No. You see your father, your mother,

afar off in that spirit land,--you think they will fly to succor you, and bring you at least one drop of water,--they used to do so many a time when you were in pain. Ah! many a time has that mother watched over your suffering frame, and rushed to your relief; but will she do so now? "My son, hear this: there is no passing from this place to that. You once lived in my house and lay in my bosom, but I cannot bring you one drop of water now!" And has it come to this? Must it come to this? Ah, yes, it must come to this!

Christian parents, one word to you. Suppose you conceive of this as your case. You see one of your children crying, "O give me one drop of water to cool my burning tongue!" I know what Universalists would say to this. They say, "Can a parent be happy, and see this? And do you think a parent is more compassionate than God?"

But in that hour of retribution, those Christian parents will say even of the sons and daughters they have borne, "Let them perish, they are the enemies of God and of his kingdom! Let them perish, since they would not have salvation! They must perish, for God's throne must stand and ought to stand, though all the race go down to hell!"

[Back to Top](#)

Losing One's First Love

Lecture X

November 23, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rev. 2:4: "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love."

This passage occurs in a part of this Epistle which Jesus dictated and John wrote to the Church of Ephesus, "These things saith He who holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks."

Christ says many good things of this Church. They had been jealous for the

truth; they had found some to be liars and could not bear such; they had borne and had had patience. Christ always loves to say all the good He can of His people. The faults which He sees in them do not by any means blind His eyes to their good qualities.

Nor on the other hand, could their good things shut His eyes to their evil. "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love"

The word "somewhat" is in italics, indicating that there is no corresponding word in the original. The sense is given better without it. "I have it or this against thee, that thou hast left thy first love." The leaving of their first love is exactly the thing He has against them. This is what He means to say; and not this other thing--that He has a somewhat--a little objection to them because they had left their first love.

Mark the solemn threatening. "Repent; else I will come unto thee quickly and remove the candlestick out of his place;--that is--will annihilate the Church itself.

Discussing this subject I shall inquire:

- I. What the first love of a christian is;*
- II. How it evinces or manifests its existence;*
- III. How it may be known whether persons have left their first love.*
- IV. Some of the consequences of this sin.*

I. First love involves sincere devotion of heart to God.

Of course it includes all that such devotion implies;--confidence in God; sympathy with His benevolence; in short, it implies just what is implied when a wife is truly devoted to her husband and when true benevolence underlies all.

II. It manifests itself in an intense interest in His word.

1. Think how much interest husbands and wives take in each other's letters. You who have been separated from each other know this well and can

understand even a brief allusion. Or take the case of children who are absent from dear home; you know how they prize letters from those they love and from those in whom they confide. So in the very nature of the relation sustained by Christians towards their heavenly Father, they must be intensely interested in His letters--His written words. These letters come from One we love supremely and trust implicitly; from One in whom we take a lively and affecting interest. Of course we shall have a desire to read them. We shall study them intently, and oftentimes with tears.

2. Again, this first love will manifest itself in an intense love for the ordinances of God's house. It will beget a lively interest in all the scenes and places where God is wont to meet the soul; where so to speak, He has an appointment to meet His people to bless them. How sweetly the Sabbath rises on one who is in his first love! This, he says, is one of my best and most blessed days; my own Lord's day and I may surely meet Him this day according to His own arrangement. How sweet the worship of God's house! All incomprehensible to those who never relish it! How can they expect to understand what they never experienced? I well remember how my own mind was impressed on the first Sabbath after my conversion. I had been in that congregation for some time; I had led the choir--had taken the same sort of interest that other sinners do. But now my heart was so drawn out to God that I wanted to keep my eyes shut all the day. I thought how I had led the choir without any real devotion. Indeed I had so much to think of, I felt that I could not open my eyes to have my mind diverted to external objects at all. The worship and ordinances of God's house were sweet beyond expression.

3. This first love manifests itself also in a cheerful obedience. He is perfectly joyful in its obedience. Weary of sinning, turning away from all transgression with deep unutterable loathing, he is prepared to run in the way of God's commands with all the heart. You know how we fear to displease those we love, how we supremely dread to offend those whom we love supremely. So the young convert has a conscience tender in the extreme, and sensitive to the least approach towards sin. He not only fears to sin himself, but he is deeply grieved at the sins of others. Are we not always grieved when our dear friends are absent?

4. First love implies great zeal for the cause and honor of God. With most

intense care, he will refrain from whatever might dishonor God. On the other hand he will feel a great interest in the prosperity of God's cause. You will see him manifest the most lively joy in the prosperity of Zion and the most pungent grief in her calamities. All wakeful to the interests of religion--all jealous of everything that may injure those interests--full of care if anything threatens to go wrong--you will see in all those ways that his heart is in the cause of his Lord.

5. It will also manifest itself in self-denying labors for God and for souls. He will not count it a grievous thing to toil and deny himself for His Savior. You may always count upon his being ready to perform the most self-denying service with all cheerfulness.

The world will lose its dominion over his soul. His heart will set very loosely on worldly things, instead of being engrossed and absorbed in those interests. He will esteem them as of very little importance. Other things of far more absorbing interest are blessing his soul.

Again, this first love of converts will develop itself in intense desire for the salvation of sinners. It will be a love for souls;--a deep interest also in humanity in general. How strongly is the heart drawn out towards fellow-beings, in warm desire for the happiness of all mankind.

6. Especially you may see this love manifested towards enemies. If a convert in his first love has any enemies, you will see a more striking development of this love towards them than anywhere else. If his bosom burns with first love, he will surely love his enemies with a feeling of tenderness and forbearance very unlike what is often seen in such a world as this. Persons almost always think they may speak as reproachfully as they please of their enemies. But not so does the convert in his early love feel. He is ready to say--I may have been mistaken. That man whom I thought so hostile to me may sin much less than I had supposed. I will at least make for him all the apology I honestly can.

Again, this true love to God will manifest itself in the absence of a spirit of self-seeking. These persons are really devoted to God and not to self. Hence you will observe they are not continually making self the chief end of their efforts.

On the contrary, they are full of intense interest in the conversion of sinners, and in all efforts bearing directly on the great end. You will hear them asking--How did the meeting of inquiry appear? What is the state of the prayer meeting? Was the Spirit of the Lord there? Were any souls converted to God? Were any convicted of sin? If a meeting of inquiry is appointed, they are asking--Who will go? Are there not some whom I can persuade to attend? If they see any indication of a revival, they are all awake. I recollect the case of a young convert whom I knew for several years. He made progress rapidly in grace himself, but the Church kept running down. At length some indications of a revival appeared. A young man arose in a prayer-meeting to say that his soul was borne down beneath a burden of sin. This young man could scarcely refrain from shouting and crying--Bless the Lord, for here are tokens of another revival! This was a living manifestation of his first love, living yet and burning in his soul.

III. Evidences of having left one's first love.

1. Being very much engrossed in worldly business. Seest thou a man in this state of mind? He is getting away from his first love. Sinking more and more deeply into the scenes and the spirit of business, his attention becomes more and more withdrawn from spiritual things, and soon he finds that when he does return to them, it is with decidedly abated interest. He may try to make himself think he is doing his business for the Lord; but let him beware lest even so it ensnare his soul and draw him from his first love.

Again, a legal spirit takes possession of his mind. He begins to do his service as a duty and not from love to God. They fall to duty-doing as they call it and make this their business. Their labors for God and the devoted affections of their soul do not flow out spontaneously, prompted by deep love which boils up so fervently that their spirit naturally longs for communion with God as its daily food. The living Christian loves to bathe his soul in such communion with God. But the man who has left his first love only presses himself into duty-doing as a thing he may not neglect.

2. Another evidence is an antinomian spirit. Whatever faith they have does not work by love. They may suppose they rely on Jesus Christ, but their faith lacks the distinctive spiritual feature, for it does not inspire true love, nor does it co-operate along with love in begetting active and cheerful obedience to God's law.

The meaning of the term Antinomian is -- against law. You will often see Antinomians hold the Bible and the Sabbath very loosely. They have a slovenly way of getting on in religion. Their faith in Christ, instead of quickening their souls to love and to labor, serves only to make them feel vastly easy about everything of a spiritual nature. They trust in Christ in just such a way as makes them reckless about doing much to honor God or benefit man. They can do almost anything and yet never allow themselves to doubt that all is well.

3. While first love continues there will always be a careful discharge of duty and an equal care to maintain first love in its unabated warmth and power. It sometimes happens that when first love declines, duty-doing is kept up, with the heart out. This is but a sorry service to offer to God, when the affections of the heart are dropped out.

4. When persons have left their first love, they are often more anxious to obtain comfort in religion than to be reinstated in communion with God, so as to have power with Him and a holy heart. Once they knew the comfort of public worship and of secret devotion. Now they know very little indeed about comfort, except as they find it in the hope that they shall yet be restored to see again the light of their Savior's face. When they lived near the Lord, how often were their hearts borne aloft as if enraptured with heavens' own music. But let their love die away, and with all their musical taste and cultivation, they get but little indeed of the rapture of soul they once found in Zion's songs. Now all their joys are in the music; they have lost all else.

5. In general you will find that if first love is lost, there will be a manifest loss of interest in whatever respects religion. On going to labor in a new field, I have had occasion to rebuke the leading men sharply for the small concern felt to provide things necessary for the comfort of the people and the success of the efforts to be made. If they had been about to have a public auction, they would have had due notice given -- the room comfortable -- all things in order. But here it is only a religious meeting; let anybody take care of its business. Little does it concern them, though the windows be broken -- the wood exhausted, or too green to warm the room. Their first love has gone and with it their lively interest in the work of saving souls. If full of love and interest, they would inquire -- Who were

there? Was there prayer in that meeting? Was anything done? Are there signs of Zion's reviving?

6. But exactly over against this, if first love has declined, they ask no questions on such points, though they will be ready enough to ask questions on matters of business or pleasure. Oh, how many times you may see which way the wind blows by the flying feathers. You may learn where a man's heart is by noticing what it is that interests him most. If he can be more interested in a party of pleasure or an excursion ride, or in a political meeting, than he is in efforts to save souls and honor God, you may read his spiritual state at once. If the heart is true with God, nothing is to him like the solemn assembly, the season of prayer, and the communion his soul finds with God. In the spirit of the world, persons will go to a party of pleasure and never think the service long though it stretch onto 10, 11, 12, or 1 o'clock in the night. It is never too long for them. But oh, how long the meetings are, when there is nothing to entertain them, nothing to enjoy, but God!

7. The same loss of first love is manifested often by conformity to the world, You may detect this in many ways. When a young lady begins to backslide, she will begin to put on ornaments, jewelry, and costly attire. These things are natural indications of the state of the heart.

Again you will see them taking more interest in other books than in the Bible, especially in books of a worldly sort. They prefer worldly to spiritual conversation. They entirely forget to pray for others than themselves, or than their nearest friends who are a part of themselves.

Yet all these are only a part of the manifestations of this loss of first love. But we must pass now to speak,

IV. Of the consequences of losing one's first love.

1. He will be brought again under the dominion of old sins and propensities. Grace declining, sin will rise and reassert its sway. Strangely he will find himself returning, as the Scripture hath it, "like a dog to his vomit." Where he had thought himself washed, he finds himself again "wallowing in the mire."

2. He will also have a sense of guilt, in place of that sweet peace of mind

which he once enjoyed. Self-condemned, he can no longer feel a sweet assurance of acceptance and favor with God. His present religion is formal, and he cannot but see and know that it is. Hence he is thrown into serious and distressing doubts whether he were ever a child of God. Distrustful of himself it is but natural that he should become distrustful of others, and ultimately uncharitable and severe in his judgments.

3. He ceases to be prevalent in prayer. He loses his hold on God; fails of obtaining sensible access to the throne of grace, and not improbably will begin to query whether anybody prays acceptably and whether prayer avails anything ever.

4. There will be for many reasons a constant tendency to self-delusion. Many a backslider wraps himself all round about with delusions. He says -- It is true I don't feel much, and I know my chief interests are absorbed in earthly things; yet still I think I am supremely devoted to God. The fact is if you have left your first love, you have opened the door for every form of delusion. You are not making one particle of real progress in religion. All is movement in the wrong direction.

Thus are the consequences of losing your first love fearfully disastrous.

REMARKS.

1. Those who have left their first love are a great stumbling block to all their acquaintance. They scandalize religion, misrepresent the gospel, and do just those things which most effectually shut the gate of heaven against immortal souls.

2. A state of backsliding of heart is most odious to God. There is nothing He more abominates than the forms and pretensions of godliness where the heart is gone. It is the instinct of human nature to abhor hypocrisy; how then must God abhor it? It never deceives Him. He sees through it, even as if it had no covering.

3. It is withal a most dangerous state. It is dangerous because like all forms of sin, it tends to perpetuate itself; dangerous because it is insulting to God; dangerous because it abuses and grieves the Holy Spirit. If Christ would threaten to annihilate the church at Ephesus, despite of their many good qualities, unless they would repent of losing their first love, what may the individual Christian professor expect who falls into the same sin and provokes the same indignation?

4. Those who have never had a first love will not understand what I have been saying. They may suppose they do, but they do not and will not. But if you have known what a first love is and have not left it, you may in some measure understand; yet only those who have once had a first love and have left it can be supposed to know the full reality of these things. Your experience covers the whole ground.

5. It is time this subject were brought home to your hearts and consciences. What is your state? Are you willing to make sacrifices? Do you love to make them for Christ and His cause? Have you retained even the religion you once had? Some of you, I know have made progress. You can say -- "How little I knew at first, compared with what I know now, of the height and depth and breadth of the love of God! On looking back, I can see how much of my first zeal was merely an animal excitement. Since those days, I think I have learned to live more truly upon God."

Still let me ask -- Where are you now? Have you measured the depth of the love of God, in your own experience of its power? Have you known successively one and another of Christ's offices by receiving Him in them so as to taste and see their richness and their adaptation of your wants? Have you in this sense known the exceeding great and precious promises of God? Do you say -- Talk to me no more of my "first love;" that was only an infant's love; God has shown me broader things and deeper far -- even the great depths of His love. He has made me see that there is no end to the vastness and richness of His spiritual blessings. He has shown me indeed that in my Father's house is bread enough and to spare, so that I never need suffer from hunger.

If this be truly your state, you will experience real and deep grief over those who wander from their way and decline in their spiritual life. Your heart will be bowed in sorrow that they should fall so sadly and dishonor the Savior's name so grievously.

But some of you ought to see that these delineations of the state and guilt of losing your first love, apply to yourselves. You may, perchance, be very slow to admit this; while all your acquaintances see it, you may be blind to the glaring facts; yet as I said, you ought to see it and ought to be alarmed. It is high time that you were deeply concerned and crying out from the depth of your declension -- Where and how shall I find God? How can I regain my first love? Can I ever be forgiven? Shall my soul ever know again the joy of pardoned sin

and of deep peace in God, my Savior?

One word to those who have recently expressed hope in Christ. How is it with you? Where are you? Are you planting your feet more and more firmly upon the Rock of Ages? Are you learning to take hold by faith of the arm that "bears creation up?" That arm can surely sustain God's children well. You need not fear while undergirded with Almighty strength. If underneath you are these "everlasting arms," you cannot fall or falter. "Even the youth shall faint and be weary and the young man shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

[Back to Top](#)

Jehovah's Appeal to Sinners and Backsliders

Lecture XI

December 7, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Micah 6:3: "O My people, what have I done unto thee? And wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against Me."

This is indeed a most striking passage. God Himself appeals to His backslidden people to say what He has done to them that can any way justify their course of conduct towards Him. The connection shows that this is addressed to sinners and backsliders -- to those who had been His professed people, but who had grievously departed from Him. "Hear, O ye mountains, the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth; for the Lord hath a controversy with His people, and He will plead with Israel." The Gentile nations having gone after other gods and all His own chosen people having grievously revolted, where could He get a candid hearing of His case among all the race of men? How affecting in this point of light is this summoning the case before the "mountains" and the "strong foundations of the earth?" Inanimate nature is not blinded by depravity; has not gone into apostasy from its Maker. Let the case come before

the mountain, and let the hills hear the pleadings and render their verdict. "Hear what the Lord saith; arise (O sinner), contend thou before the mountains and let the hills hear thy voice."

The case then, comes on for hearing, and the Lord opens with summoning His people to testify against Him and show what He has done, or wherein He has wearied them. Upon you, sinners, does your Maker call, as subjects of His moral government. He has given you the existence you now enjoy, and has liberally provided for the supply of your physical and social wants. He calls on you to bear witness against Him if you can; if you have anything to say in bar of the judgment which His law has threatened against all who violate it. If you have any charge to bring against Him, it shall be duly considered. He lets you have the full benefit of a candid hearing. He even asks you to bear witness against Him if you can. Nothing can be farther from His heart than to do you any injustice. Indeed He is not happy to have even an erroneous impression left on your mind that you have been wronged in any way. If such an impression is there, come forward and reveal it; bring forward your strong reasons and let the case be examined and debated.

Now therefore let me speak in God's behalf to those who make no profession of love to God. Let us take up this matter as between your own souls and your Maker. Let us enter into all the important particulars. Has God injured you in any way? What have you to say against His administration? I want to put these questions specially to you. You refuse to acknowledge the Lord Jehovah as your God and Father. You ought not to do this without having some reasons in your mind for it. Probably you have something in your mind which you regard as a reason. What is it? Why do you grieve your Heavenly Father's heart? Have you a reason? If so, what is it? Has He done you wrong in any way? Has He required you to love Him without good cause? Has He required you to repent when He had no good reason for this requirement? Has He wronged you by the implication that you have sinned and therefore ought to repent? Or has He wronged you by implying that you can repent?

I. Issues between Jehovah and those who profess no allegiance to His law or gospel.

II. Similar questions upon the attention of those who have professed to know and love Him, but have left their first love and have backslidden from their God.

I. Issues between Jehovah and those who profess no allegiance to His law or gospel.

1. I want you to understand that God is present. You may suppose Him to sitting here, and that you can see Him. He comes down here to discuss and investigate this subject, and give you the fairest possible opportunity to vindicate yourself. He comes and asks of you your reason for not loving and obeying Him. Will you reply, "Lord, Thou knowest I have no good reason for loving Thee"? And has He indeed forfeited your confidence, so that you have no good reason to confide in Him? Has He required you to trust in Him, while yet He has given you no good reasons for so doing?

2. He requires you to submit unqualifiedly to His supreme authority; is there any good reason why you should not? Has He required too much of you? Do you say -- "He is so exacting! He requires so much and withal so rigidly! How can I ever meet it?"

If now you were to meet God face to face, would you say so? Or would you enter this complaint against Him? Or would you insist that the penalties He affixes to the violation of His law are too severe? But are you a fit judge in your own case? Besides, have you any good reason for objecting to the penalty, or is it merely a feeling, an impression on your mind, that it will be hard to bear it?

3. But consider again. Has not your God cared for you? Can you say, Lord, Thou hast not cared for my immortal soul? Will you say -- "O Lord God, Thou hast brought me into being, Thou hast made me immortal and hast placed me in a most delicate and critical position where my soul may be utterly and forever lost; and having done all this, Thou hast not cared for this immortal soul of mine? Altogether happy in Thyself, Thou has not cared for me, a poor dependent being, destined to live forever, and moreover to have its destinies soon fixed, past all change." Or will you say, "If He has cared for me, He has given me no evidence of it"? Will you say, "Lord, I can see no token of Thy love; not any at all. If Thou hast cared for me, I have no evidence of it. I can see no manifestations that show it"! Is this what you have to say? And have you quite forgotten how "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" for its redemption;

and shall this go for nothing?

4. Or has God been impatient with you? Has He been severely impatient, so severely as to repel you from all confidence and trust? Can you justly say, "O my Heavenly Father, Thou hast so repelled me, and hast so fretted and wearied me, how can I ever approach Thee? Thou hast been so hard and cruel withal."

But in what way has He been cruel? Wherein has He wearied you? Has He done you no good? Can you think of no way in which He has blessed you? Look all round about you and make up an inventory of your enjoyments; then say, is there no hand of God in these things?

5. Or will you say, "All God has done for me hast cost Him nothing"? Will you say this? Do you regard it as nothing that He should give up His Son to death for you? Has He made you no offers of mercy? And does mercy cost nothing? Do you claim it as of right yours? Or can it be exercised without risks and hazards to the great interests of the government? If special provision is made in this case to obviate these risks, then you should at least inquire whether this provision did not cost something.

Look now at this whole subject. Has God in no way tried to overcome your aversion? Has He not sought to melt your heart by kindness? Say now as in His very presence -- Has He refused to open before you the gate of Mercy? Has He locked its doors and thrown the key away? Or on the other hand, has He offered to save you on the very lowest possible terms? Is it the case that He has only required on your part your full consent to be saved? And will you look up into His face and tell Him that even this is asking too much?

Again, has He not given you time? Have you not had time enough; days and months and years enough to consider this subject fully as you need to do, and to decide it wisely and for your own eternal well-being? Have you not also had ample opportunity to get instruction? Has not the sanctuary opened its doors before you and made you welcome to come in and hear the words of life? Have you not had Sabbaths, many and precious, inviting you to serious thought upon your ways? What more could you have had done for you that you have not had? You cannot say you have not been urged to repent and accept of mercy. Yet you may be disposed to complain that you have been urged too much. You have often felt that you were urged unreasonably. Indeed this is precisely one of the

points of this investigation. God asks you, "Wherein have I wearied thee?" What ground of complaint can you find against Me for being in earnest to secure your salvation? What better could I do, or what should I do, for your eternal well-being?

Thus stands the matter at issue as between Jehovah and those who profess no allegiance to His law or gospel.

II. We come now to press similar questions upon the attention of those who have professed to know and love Him, but have left their first love and have backslidden from their God.

It is a most remarkable fact that persons of this class are exceedingly slow to admit it and say -- I am the man! They would not justify backsliding; they know it cannot be justified. As for themselves, they are not guilty. We find this most serious difficulty, lying across our path in the onset as we attempt to apply this subject to the case of real backsliders. It is precisely for this reason that the appeal which God made to His backslidden people is likely to have so little useful application to you. How is it you get into such an attitude that you cannot be reached? The moment you hear any thing that would open your case to your own view, you repel it.

But this must not be! You must consent to see your case as it is, and on God's behalf I must plead with you.

1. What has God done to you? How do you account for this, that you are so backslidden from God? Suppose a young bride, not married longer than some of you have been professedly united to Jesus Christ, should give signs of great alienation of heart from her husband. You are that husband, and sitting down by her side you kindly inquire, "What have I done? What is the reason of this too obvious coldness in your affections towards me? It is sometimes said that persons soon after marriage become remiss in those little attentions which sustain affection and hence that love grows cold. Has this been my fault towards you?" So you might debate and inquire in a case between yourself and your bride.

2. So God debates and inquires with you. What has He done towards you? Has He been remiss in those little attentions which are the life of love? When each day He spreads your table and fills your cup with earthly good,

does He not show His kind remembrance of you? And when He provides day by day your spiritual bread, and evermore fulfills His promise to manifest Himself to those who keep His commandments and show forth their love, does He not show Himself mindful of you, -- most tenderly so?

3. Or has He required too much self-denial of you, or of such sort as would really injure you? Has He taken away your friends arbitrarily, with no good reasons? Has He smitten you and drawn blood from your heart unfeelingly, as if He did not care how much pain He caused you? Has He taken away your property or your children in a hard and apparently unfeeling way? If you dare to think so, tell Him so. Say, "O, Lord, didst Thou not cut down my husband or my wife, reckless of the pain and the agony it would cost me?" Did he die hard, in great pain and racking torture? And was this done on God's part without consideration? Nay, was it not all mercy and kindness on His part? Has He not told you that He never does afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men for His own pleasure?

4. Perhaps you have found it impossible to get the comforts and necessities of life, and you are therefore tempted to doubt whether God does fairly by you. You are prone to think that perhaps God does not mean to provide for you. But have you forgotten that even His dear Son when He came to dwell among men had no where to lay His head? I found a sister once who made this excuse for backsliding. She found no sympathy in the church, and therefore turned to the world. And will you also say, "God takes no notice of me, and therefore I will cast Him off?"

5. Or again, has God manifested towards you unreasonable jealousy? Has He been too particular in regard to giving you permission to enjoy the world? Has He imposed on you unreasonable restraints? Has He been suspicious without reason, and disposed evidently to cut you off from reasonable enjoyments? Do you believe this?

6. Or has He attempted to govern you by authority rather than by love? Parents, you say, never get the love of their children by dint of mere authority; and do you on this ground complain of God that He has required too much and has seemed to expect to gain your love by mere requisitions? Are you disappointed, and do you find on better acquaintance that God is not what you expected? Sometimes in earthly relationships persons find themselves mistaken. Many a one has said this mournfully, "I have been

mistaken; I am sorely disappointed; I am utterly undone!" So some of you are disappointed -- perhaps -- are you? Is not religion what you supposed it to be? Is it not as good as you expected? Does it fail to meet your wants as you expected it would? A man once said to me after I had been presenting the fulness of gospel salvation, "Either the Gospel is not what it pretends to be, or I do not know anything about it." Doubtless in all such cases the latter supposition is the fact; the man knows nothing about the true gospel by actual experience. How is this with you?

7. But let me ask you again -- Wherein has God forfeited your confidence? Tell Him, tell Him, if you can. If such be the fact, He allows you to tell Him so. He says, "Testify against Me." I never shall forget the forbearance and kindness with which He treated me when I ventured to tell Him how troubled I was to believe His word. I was pleading for the gift of the Holy Ghost, on the strength of the promise in Luke 11. "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" I was pleading this promise, and it seemed to me that I had been asking for this bread of life a long time and yet did not obtain it. I therefore said, "O Lord, I am a father, and I love to give to my children anything and everything that they ask and that I think will be a real good to them. I give them such good things, and do not give them occasion to ask and tease me over and over. Now, Lord, how is this matter as between me and Thee?" When I ventured to plead thus with God, He did not rebuke me, by any means, but this He did; He showed me that the fault was wholly in myself, and He let me know what I must do. He bore with me most tenderly and most graciously; and so, my hearers, will He surely do with you. Suppose someone here in this house should say, "I have used all the means of salvation, yet I am not saved. I have done all my part faithfully; but God has dealt hardly with me, and I can trust Him no longer. I thought once that I would and did give Him my heart, but I take it back."

8. On what grounds do you say this? What has God done, or what has He failed to do, that you should thus complain of Him, and break friendship and withdraw confidence? Perhaps you will say, "I have not found Him a sufficient portion. Before I turned from my sins to God I was told that He would be a sufficient portion for my soul, but I have tried it and have not

found it so. My heart has not been satisfied and therefore I return to the world again to make that my portion."

9. And must you then say that Christ is an unfaithful lover for your soul, so that you must go after other lovers? Does He withhold all proper manifestations of affection? Do you go to Him imploring some token of His friendship, and does He sternly withhold any and all such manifestations? He has said, "Seek and ye shall find." Do you seek honestly and humbly and yet find nothing? He has said also, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, loveth Me, and I will love him and will manifest Myself unto him." He has surely said, "And ye shall seek for Me and find Me when ye shall search for Me with all your heart." Are you prepared to deny the truth of these promises? Can you testify against God that you have sought thus and have not found?

Again, has He been hard-hearted when you have confessed your guilt before Him? When you have come into His presence deeply humbled, and your bleeding heart has poured out its confessions and sorrows, has He quite certainly turned His ear away? He has promised to hear, to forgive and to restore, and will you say He has not done so? Can you say that while He has promised always to hear and to forgive, He yet has not done so? Now weigh this matter well, and be very sure that your own heart has been truly humbled before your God for all your sins.

10. Or have you found some friends more to your liking and such as more fully meet your wants? Will you say, "I must give my heart to some better friend than God?" And do you really think so?

11. Or are you sick of His love and does your heart therefore demand some change? Have you had the gospel until it has ceased to interest you, and has become an old story? Is this your case? Have you gained anything at all by transferring your affections to somebody else? Have you obtained better friends, more peace of mind, or more satisfaction? On the other hand, have you not lost something of substantial value? Have you not lost your own self-respect? When you look into your own face, do you not instinctively say, "That is the face of a hypocrite?" Have you not lost that sweetness of temper which you had in your first love? Do not your acquaintances see that something is wrong with you? Have you not such a sense of guilt that you dread everything that may enforce conviction? Are you not oppressed

with a sense of shame? Do you not inwardly know that you are altogether hypocritical in your religion? Can you honestly draw near to God and tell Him how much you love Him? Or, on the other hand, is it not true that desire has fled; that every vestige of true affection has perished from your heart, and that the whole of your religion is mere hypocrisy? Do you not feel that you have acted most unreasonably and cruelly? Have you not acted madly? Has not your course in leaving your first love been one of moral insanity and infatuation? Have you not been compelled to say of yourself, "I have had not reason, I have acted like a lunatic; God knows I have played the fool and have erred exceedingly?" Have you not done as a treacherous wife who madly goes after other lovers and forsakes the covenant of her God and the plighted love of her vows? And are you not evermore going from bad to worse, getting still farther and farther from God, more and more grieving the Spirit by your course of dealings with God? Are you not doing more and more things which you will hate to confess and yet which you must confess, or never turn acceptably to God? Are you not wandering from God, and still building up walls of separation to obstruct your return? And worse still, if possible, are you not laying stumbling-blocks before others?

Let all these points be deeply pondered. Are you prepared to come before God and table your complaints against Him, and show that in all the points at issue between your soul and Him, the fault is wholly on His side?

REMARKS.

Do you think anybody ever treats you as badly as you treat God? Was ever anyone so abusive to you as you have been to your Maker and to your Redeemer? If God were to summon all His creatures before Him, could He find one among them all, who has treated Him so badly as you have? Must you not say, "All the evil I have ever received from all creatures together is as nothing compared with the treatment I have shown to God?"

Considering His nature and His resources, how wonderful that He should permit us to live and treat Him so! He who abhors sin and meanness so intensely, and who has withal such power to punish, or even to annihilate us, how wonderful that He should still prolong our days and still pour out blessings upon us!

When men are once convinced of duty to God, to procrastinate is most

abominable. It is not only violating conscience deliberately, but it is deliberately insulting God! What can be more provoking? What can more surely bring down on the soul the fearful wrath of the Most High?

God does not exact of us what He refuses to do Himself. When He asks us to do our duty, He always holds Himself responsible to do His. If He has done wrong He is willing to stand rebuked before the universe. We see this truth lying out upon the very face of our text.

By a law of necessity sinners know they have no excuse for sin. If anyone should really and honestly suppose that he had a good excuse for what might be called sin, it could not be sin in him under those circumstances; for real sin is never that which men do for good reasons and which they suppose they ought to do. Sin lies in the intention. It is not an intention to do right and to do what ought in the actor's view to be done, but an intention to do what is seen to be wrong.

To live in a backslidden state is most disgraceful. What should we say of a wife who should forsake her husband and go off into down right whoredom? Yet this is the very figure which God uses to express the guilt and shamefulfulness of His people's backslidings from Him. You may read a vivid delineation of this sin under this figure in Hosea 2, and often in the prophet Jeremiah. Who that reads these passages and considers for a moment what intense feelings of abhorrence and detestation are naturally excited by this sin can fail to get a strong impression of God's abhorrence of backsliding? Yet He invites you to return, and gives you many most precious assurances that on your return you shall again be welcomed to His confidence and love. So God does; but I suppose a wife to have proved a harlot while her husband had borne a blameless character and course towards her. Suppose a wife to have been utterly treacherous to her vows, giving herself up to most shameful conduct, going on from step to step in depravity and crime till she becomes a filthy prostitute -- on the street; suppose that while in this forlorn and wretched state, her husband should come to her and say, "I have come to do you good, to clothe and feed and bless you, and take you with your consent again to my house and home and heart;" would not this be a wonderful scene? Has human nature often manifested such tenderness and such forgiveness of wrongs?

But you will perhaps say, "I am not so degraded and debased as that. I can yet take care of myself and I can not admit that the case you have supposed presents my case fairly." Whereas, the fact is that you are almost infinitely worse than she

is who has only played the harlot in her earthly relations and as towards a husband. The great God had consented to take you into a similar relation to Himself, and you have disowned Him!

The parable of the prodigal son may be applied both to the unconverted sinner and to the backslider. To either and to both, God is a father if they will return and seek His face. You may see in the parable how God feels towards everyone in whom He sees the spirit of true penitence and confession.

And now, how long ere you will turn your footsteps towards the house and home of your Father above? Hear what He says, "Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him I do earnestly remember him still; therefore My bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." Will you yield the controversy now, or will you still persist in your course of sin and folly? Let the case be settled. Either come on and table your charges against your God, and make out your case if you can, or forever withdraw them, and turn once for all to seek the face of your injured God in penitence and prayer. Come back if you pretend to come at all, not to play the hypocrite again, but to devote yourself henceforth and forever to the love and service of your God. Come and say, "Here, Lord, are all my powers. I give to Thee all Thou hast ever given me, withholding nothing. Here am I, and here is all I am and have; take all my powers and use them up in most divine economy in Thy service forever. Nothing that I can do is too much for me to desire to do."

"Had I ten thousand hearts to give,
Lord, they should all be Thine."

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as

they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE VII). Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians* (LECTURE XII).

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians* (LECTURE I).

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE LXXVI).

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE LXXIV).

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE LVIII).

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral

obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

End of the 1853 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1854
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Lecture I. [Converting Sinners A Christian Duty](#)
- Lecture II. [Christ Our Advocate with The Father](#)
- Lecture III. [The Inner and The Outer Revelation](#)
- Lecture IV. [On Quenching The Spirit](#)
- Lecture V. [What Men Highly Esteem, God Abhors](#)
- Lecture VI. [Variety in the Service Offered to God](#)
- Lecture VII. [License, Bondage and Liberty](#)
- Lecture VIII. [Living by Faith](#)
- Lecture IX. [God's Commandments Not Grievous](#)
- Lecture X. [The Wages of Sin](#)
- Lecture XI. [The Wants of Man and Their Supply](#)

Lecture XII. [Where Sin Occurs God Cannot Wisely Prevent It](#)

Lecture XIII. [The Ways of Sin Hard; Of Holiness, Pleasant](#)

Lecture XIV. [The Indications and The Guilt of Backsliding](#)

Lecture XV. [The Christian's Genuine Hope](#)

Lecture XVI. [The Primitive Prayer-Meeting](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Converting Sinners A Christian Duty

Lecture I

January 4, 1854

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--James 5:19, 20: "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

A subject of present duty and of great practical importance is brought before us in this text. That we may clearly apprehend it, let us

I. Enquire into the true idea of a sinner. What constitutes a sinner?

II. What is conversion? What is it to "convert the sinner from the error of his ways?"

III. In what sense does man convert a sinner?

IV. We must next enquire into the kind of death of which the text speaks, "shall save a soul from death."

V. We now consider the importance of saving a soul from death.

VI. He who converts a sinner not only saves more misery, but confers more happiness than all the world has yet enjoyed, or even all the created

universe.

I. What constitutes a sinner?

- 1. A sinner is, essentially, a moral agent. So much he must be, whatever else he may or may not be. He must have free will, in the sense of being able to originate his own activities. He must be the responsible author of his own acts, in such a sense that he is not compelled irresistibly to act one way or another, otherwise than according to his own free choice.

He must also have intellect, so that he can understand his own relations and apprehend his moral responsibilities. An idiot, lacking this element of constitutional character, is not a moral agent and can not be a sinner.

He must also have sensibility, so that he can be moved to action--so that there can be inducement to voluntary activity, and also a capacity to appropriate the motives for right or wrong action.

These are the essential elements of mind, necessary to constitute a moral agent. Yet these are not all the facts which develop themselves in a sinner.

- 2. He is a selfish moral agent, devoted to his own interests, making himself his own supreme end of action. He looks on his own things, not on the things of others. His own interests, not the interests of others, are his chief concern.

Thus every sinner is a moral agent, acting under this law of selfishness, having free will and all the powers of a moral agent, but making self the great end of all his action. This is a sinner.

- 3. We have here the true idea of sin. It is in an important sense, error. A sinner is one that "erred." "He that converteth a sinner from the error of his ways." It is not a mere mistake, for mistakes are made through ignorance or incapacity. Nor is it a mere defect of constitution, attributable to its author. But it is an "error in his ways." It is missing the mark in his voluntary course of conduct. It is a voluntary divergence from the line of duty. It is not an innocent mistake, but a reckless yielding to impulse. It involves a wrong end--a bad intention--a being influenced by appetite or passion, in opposition to reason and conscience. It is an attempt to secure some present

gratification at the expense of resisting convictions of duty. This is most emphatically missing the mark.

II. What is conversion? What is it to "convert the sinner from the error of his ways?"

This error lies in his having a wrong object of life--his own present worldly interests. Hence to convert him from the error of his ways is to turn him from this course to a benevolent consecration of himself to God and to human well-being. This is precisely what is meant by conversion. It is changing the great moral end of action. It supplants selfishness and substitutes benevolence in its stead.

III. In what sense does man convert a sinner?

Our text reads--"If any of you do err from the truth and one convert him"--implying that man may convert a sinner. But in what sense can this be said, and done?

I answer, the change must of necessity be a voluntary one--not a change in the essence of the soul, nor in the essence of the body--not any change in the created constitutional faculties; but a change which the mind itself, acting under various influences, makes as to its own voluntary end of action. It is an intelligent change--the mind, acting intelligently and freely, changes its moral course, and does it for perceived reasons.

The Bible ascribes conversion to various agencies--

- (1.) To God. God is spoken of as converting sinners, and Christians with propriety pray to God to do so.
- (2.) Christians are spoken of as converting sinners. We see this in our text.
- (3.) The truth is also said to convert sinners.

Again, let it be considered, no man can convert another without the co-operation and consent of that other. His conversion consists in his yielding up his will and changing his voluntary course. He can never do this against his own free will. He may be persuaded and induced to change his voluntary course; but to be persuaded is simply to be led to change one's chosen course and choose another.

Even God cannot convert a sinner without his own consent. He cannot, for the simple reason that the thing involves a contradiction. The being converted implies his own consent--else it is no conversion at all. God converts men therefore only as He persuades them to turn from the error of their selfish ways to the rightness of benevolent ways.

So also, man can convert a sinner only in the sense of presenting the reasons that induce the voluntary change and thus persuading him to repent. If he can do this, then he converts a sinner from the error of his ways. But the Bible informs us that man alone never does or can convert a sinner. It holds however that when man acts, humbly depending on God, God works with him and by him. Men are "laborers together with God." They present reasons and God enforces those reasons on the mind. When the minister preaches, or when you converse with sinners, man presents truth, and God causes the mind to see it with great clearness and to feel its personal application with great power. Man persuades and God persuades; man speaks to his ear--God speaks to his heart. Man presents truth through the medium of his senses to reach his free mind; God presses it upon his mind so as to secure his voluntary yielding to its claims. Thus the Bible speaks of sinners as being persuaded;--"Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." In this the language of the Bible is entirely natural. Just as if you should say you had turned a man from his purpose, or that your arguments had turned him, or that his own convictions of truth had turned him. So the language of the Bible on this subject is altogether simple and artless, speaking right out in perfect harmony with the laws of mind.

IV. We must next enquire into the kind of death of which the text speaks, "shall save a soul from death."

- 1. Observe, it is a soul, not a body, that is to be saved from death; consequently we may dismiss all thought of the death of the body in this connection. However truly converted, his body must nevertheless die.
- 2. The passage speaks of the death of the soul.
- 3. By the death of the soul is sometimes meant spiritual death--a state in which the mind is not influenced by truth as it should be. The man is under the dominion of sin and repels the influence of truth.

- 4. Or the death of the soul may be eternal death--the utter loss of the soul, and its final ruin. The sinner is of course spiritually dead, and if this condition were to continue through eternity, this would become eternal death. Yet the Bible represents the sinner, dying unpardoned, as "going away into everlasting punishment," and as being "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power." To be always a sinner is awful enough--is a death of fearful horror; but how terribly augmented is even this when you conceive of it as heightened by everlasting punishment, far away "from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power!"

V. We now consider the importance of saving a soul from death.

- 1. Our text says, he who converts a sinner saves a soul from death. Consequently he saves him from all the misery, he else must have endured. So much misery is saved.

And this amount is greater in the case of each sinner saved than all that has been experienced in our entire world up to this hour. This may startle you at first view and may seem incredible. Yet you have only to consider the matter attentively and you will see it must be true. That which has no end--which swells utterly beyond all our capacities for computation, must surpass any finite amount, however great.

- 2. Yet the amount of actual misery experienced in this world has been very great. As you go about the great cities in any country you can not fail to see it. Suppose you could ascend some lofty eminence and stretch your vision over a whole continent, just to take in at one glance all its miseries. Suppose you had an eye to see all forms of human woe and measure their magnitude--all the woes of slavery, oppression, intemperance, war, lust, disease, heart-anguish;--suppose you could stand above some battle-field and hear as in one ascending volume all its groans and curses and take the gauge and dimensions of its unutterable woes; suppose you could hear the echo of its agonies as they roll up to the very heavens;--you must say--there is indeed an ocean of agony here; yet all this is only a drop in the bucket compared with that vast amount, defying all calculation, which each sinner lost must endure, and from which each sinner, converted, is saved. If you were to see the cars rush over a dozen men at once, grinding their flesh and

bones, you could not bear the sight. Perhaps you would even faint away. O, if you could see all the agonies of the earth accumulated, and could hear the awful groans ascending in one deafening roar that would shake the very earth, how must your nerves quiver! Yet all this would be merely nothing, compared with the eternal sufferings of one lost soul! And this is true, however low may be the degree of this lost soul's suffering, each moment of his existence.

- 3. Yet farther. The amount of suffering thus saved is greater not only than all that ever has been but than all that ever will be endured in this world. And this is true even although the number of inhabitants be supposed to be increased a million-fold, and their miseries be augmented in like proportion. No matter how low the degree of suffering which the sinner would endure, yet our supposition, if the earth's population increased a million-fold, and its aggregate of miseries augmented in like proportion, cannot begin to measure the agonies of the lost spirit.
- 4. Or we may extend our comparison and take in all that has yet been endured in the universe--all the agonies of earth and all the agonies of hell combined, up to this hour--yet even so, our aggregate is utterly too scanty to measure the amount of suffering saved, when one sinner is converted. Nay more, the amount thus saved is greater than the created universe ever can endure in any finite duration. Aye, it is even greater--myriads of times greater, than all finite minds can ever conceive. You may embrace the entire conception of all finite minds, of every man and every angel, of all minds but that of God, and still the man who saves one soul from death saves in that single act more misery from being endured than all this immeasurable amount. He saves more misery, by myriads of times, than the entire universe of created minds can conceive.

I am afraid many of you have never given yourselves the trouble to think of this subject. You are not to escape from this fearful conclusion by saying that suffering is only a natural consequence of sin, and that there is no governmental infliction of pain. It matters not at all whether the suffering be governmental or natural. The amount is all I speak of now. If he continues in his sins, he will be miserable forever by natural law, and therefore the man who converts a sinner from his sins saves all this immeasurable amount of

suffering.

You may recollect the illustration used by an old divine who attempted to give an approximate conception of this idea, an enlarged conception by means of the understanding. There are two methods of studying and of endeavoring to apprehend the infinite; one by the reason which simply affirms the infinite; and another by the understanding which only approximates toward it by conceptions and estimates of the finite. Both these modes of conception may be developed by culture. Let a man stand on the deck of a ship and cast his eye abroad upon the shoreless expanse of waters, he may get some idea of the vast; or better, let him go out and look at the stars in the dimmed light of evening; he can get some idea of their number and of the vastness of that space in which they are scattered abroad. On the other hand his reason tells him at once that this space is unlimited. His understanding only helps him to approximate toward this great idea. Let him suppose, as he gazes upon the countless stars of ether that he has the power of rising into space at pleasure and that he does ascend with the rapidity of lightning for thousands of years. Approaching those glorious orbs, one after another, he takes in more and more clear and grand conceptions of their magnitude, as he soars on past the moon, the sun, and other suns of surpassing splendor and glory. So of the conceptions of the understanding in reference to the great idea of eternity.

The old writer to whom I alluded supposes a bird to be removing a globe of earth by taking away a single grain of sand once in a thousand years. What an eternity, almost, it would take! And yet this would not measure eternity.

Suppose, sinner, that it is you yourself who is suffering during all this period and that you are destined to suffer until this supposed bird has removed the last grain of sand away. Suppose you are to suffer nothing more than you have sometimes felt; yet suppose that bird must remove, in this slow process, not this world only--for this is but a little speck, comparatively--but also the whole material universe. Only a single grain at a time!

Or suppose the universe were a million times more extensive than it is, and then that you must be a sufferer through all this time, while the bird removes slowly a single minute grain once in each thousand years! Would it not appear to you like an eternity? If you knew that you must be deprived of all happiness for all time, would not the knowledge sink into your soul with a

force perfectly crushing?

But after all, this is only an understanding conception. Let this time thus measured roll on, until all is removed that God ever created or ever can create, even so, it affords scarcely a comparison, for eternity has no end. You can not even approximate towards its end. After the lapse of the longest period you can conceive, you have approached no nearer than you were when you first began. O sinner, "can your heart endure, or your hands be strong in the day when God shall deal thus with you?"

But let us look at still another view of the case.

VI. He who converts a sinner not only saves more misery, but confers more happiness than all the world has yet enjoyed, or even all the created universe.

You have converted a sinner, have you? Indeed! Then think what has been gained! Does any one ask--What then? Let the facts of the case give the answer. The time will come when he will say--In my experience of God and divine things, I have enjoyed more than all the created universe had done up to the general judgment--more than the aggregate happiness of all creatures, during the whole duration of our world; and yet my happiness is only just begun! Onward, still onward--onward forever rolls the deep tide of my blessedness, and evermore increasing!

Then look also at the work in which this converted man is engaged. Just look at it. In some sunny hour when you have caught glimpses of God and of his love and have said--O if this might only last forever! O, you have said, if this stormy world were not around me! O, if my soul had wings like a dove, then would I fly away and be at rest. Those were only aspirations for the rest of heaven--this which the converted man enjoys above is heaven. You must add to this the rich and glorious idea of eternal enlargement--perpetual increase. His blessedness not only endures forever, but increases forever. And this is the bliss of every converted sinner.

If these things be true, then,

- 1. Converting sinners is the work of the Christian life. It is the great work to which we, as Christians, are especially appointed. Who can doubt this?

- 2. It is the great work of life because its importance demands that it should be. It is so much beyond any other work in importance that it cannot be rationally regarded as anything other or less than the great work of life.
- 3. It can be made the great work of life, because Jesus Christ has made provision for it. His atonement covers the human race and lays the foundation so broad that whosoever will may come. The promise of his Spirit to aid each Christian in this work is equally broad, and was designed to open the way for each one to become a laborer together with God in this work of saving souls.
- 4. Benevolence can never stop short of it. Where so much good can be done and so much misery can be prevented, how is it possible that benevolence can fail to do its utmost?
- 5. Living to save others is the condition of saving ourselves. No man is truly converted who does not live to save others. Every truly converted man turns from selfishness to benevolence, and benevolence surely leads him to do all he can to save the souls of his fellow-man. This is the changeless law of benevolent action.
- 6. The self-deceived are always to be distinguished by this peculiarity--they live to save themselves. This is the chief end of all their religion. All their religious efforts and activities tend toward this sole object. If they can secure their own conversion so as to be pretty sure of it, they are satisfied. Sometimes the ties of natural sympathy embrace those who are especially near to them--but selfishness goes commonly no further--except as a good name may prompt them on.
- 7. Some persons take no pains to convert sinners, but act as if this were a matter of no consequence whatever. They do not labor to persuade men to be reconciled to God.
- 8. Some seem to be waiting for miraculous interposition. They take no

pains with their children or friends. Very much as if they felt no interest in the great issue, they wait and wait for God, or miracle to move. Alas, they do nothing in this great work of human life!

- 9. Many professed Christians have no faith in God's blessing, and no expectation, thereby, of success. Consequently they make no effort in faith. Their own experience is good for nothing to help them, because never having had faith, they never have had success. Many ministers preach so as to do no good. Having failed so long, they have lost all faith. They have not gone to work expecting success, and hence they have not had success.
- 10. Many professors of religion, not ministers, seem to have lost all confidence. Ask them if they are doing anything; they answer truly--nothing. But if their hearts were full of the love of souls, or of the love of Christ, they would certainly make efforts. They would at least try to convert sinners from the error of their ways. They would live religion--would hold up its light as a natural spontaneous thing.
- 11. Each one, male or female, of every age, and in any position in life whatsoever, should make it a business to save souls. There are indeed many other things to be done; let them have their place. But don't neglect the greatest of all.
- 12. Many professed Christians seem never to convert sinners. Let me ask you how is it with you? Some of you might reply--Under God, I have been the means of saving some souls. But some of you can not even say this. You know you have never labored honestly and with all your heart for this object. And you do not know that you have ever been the means of converting one sinner.

What shall I say of those young converts here? Have you given yourselves up to this work? Are you laboring for God? Have you gone to your impenitent friends, even to their rooms and by personal, affectionate entreaty, besought them to be reconciled to God?

By your pen and by every form of influence you can command, have you sought

to save souls and do what you can in this work? Have you succeeded?

Suppose all the professors of religion in this congregation were to do this, each in their sphere and each doing all they severally could do, how many would be left unconverted? If each one should say--"I lay myself on the altar of my God for this work; I confess all my past delinquencies; henceforth, God helping me, this shall be the labor of my life;" if each one should begin with removing all the old offences and occasions of stumbling--should publicly confess and deplore his remissness and every other form of public offence, confessing how little you have done for souls, crying out: O how wickedly I have lived in this matter! but I must reform, must confess, repent, and change altogether the course of my life;--if you were all to do this and then set yourselves each in your place, to lay your hand in all earnestness upon your neighbor and pluck him out of the fire--how glorious would be the result!

But to neglect the souls of others and think you shall yet be saved yourself is one of guilt's worst blunders! For unless you live to save others, how can you hope to be saved yourself? "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

[Back to Top](#)

Christ Our Advocate with The Father

Lecture II

February 1, 1854

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 John 2:1: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

In remarking upon this passage, I must,

I. Explain the sense in which the term "advocate" is here used;

II. Show what is implied in the existence of this office;

III. Explain the essential qualifications of an advocate;

IV. State some of the conditions of his success.

I. In which the term "advocate" is here used

An advocate is one who undertakes for another, and represents his case. He stands up in plead for his friend, and to use his own influence in his behalf. The office is readily explained by reference to the common judicial proceedings, in which each side is managed before the court by one or more advocates. We must suppose the term is used in our text in the same general sense.

II. In the existence of this office it is implied,

- 1. That there is an accusation against us. We are all indicted and summoned for trial. We are held as sinners, and must appear to answer for this high offense. There is a question pending which implicates us all, and the influence of this advocate is needed in the case.
- 2. The existence of the office shows that the case as between sinners and their God is not altogether hopeless. It is not like that of the fallen angels. If it were, there could be no place for an advocate. It is the case of sinners, yet not of hopeless sinners. If the question of relief were entirely foreclosed, there would be no propriety in having any advocate at all.
- 3. The existence of such an office evinces a compassionate disposition on God's part towards us. It should be considered that this Advocate is provided by God, not by the sinner. Why then should He furnish us an advocate at all if He were really implacable?

Some persons seem to think that the compassion displayed in the gospel plan belongs wholly and alone to Jesus Christ--that the Father had no other than an implacable spirit. But it should be considered that Christ was appointed to this office by the Father--a fact which shows that the difficulty in the way of any sinner's being forgiven lies not in the Father's heart, but in the exigencies of His government.

- 4. Sinners are in such a condition that they cannot help themselves. If they

could, there would be no demand for an advocate. If they could be saved upon the bare mercy of God, as some have supposed, there would be no need of an advocate.

III. The essential qualifications of an advocate for sinners.

- 1. He must not be so implicated with the transgressors that he is a transgressor himself. He must be righteous before God; else he will himself need an advocate. Consequently we read of our Advocate--"Jesus Christ, the righteous." It is altogether essential that he should come with clean hands before the great tribunal.
- 2. He must be willing to undertake the advocacy, to whatever amount of self-denial, pain, or expense it may subject him. He must be willing to assume all the responsibility, or of course he will not succeed. For what can the sinner do for himself before the court of the Holy and pure One?
- 3. He must take an interest in the race or people for whom he pleads. If he lacks this, he will not succeed, especially if there are great obstacles to be overcome, and such as demand great labor, suffering and trial. Such is the case of sinners that whoever undertakes to be their advocate must encounter great obstacles--as everyone who had ever been convicted of sin must know.

IV. As to the conditions of his success, it may be said:

- 1. He must be willing to undertake. We are assured that such is the fact.
- 2. He must be "retained" by each sinner for himself. This is a legal term and implies that the party needing the services of an advocate, engages him to undertake it, and agrees for himself to commit his case into the advocate's hands. It is indispensable that the advocate should have the entire consent of those for whom he undertakes. They must commit their whole case to him. If he sees there are certain things they must do, or certain confessions they must make in order to success, as he supposes, they must promptly do those things and make those confessions. They must put themselves entirely in his hands. For example, if He insists that they must give up all sin, they

must do it; or if He insists they must repent, they must do it without hypocrisy and without delay. If he insists they deny themselves, they must cheerfully meet the demand.

- 3. He must have some prevailing plea. He must have something to produce before the court that will come with power and influence.

Now what plea can Christ make for the sinner? Can He say, "This is a righteous man, and not an offender against God's law or against His gospel"? No. Can he plead any justification or apology? Ah, He can neither deny nor excuse the fact of sin. Sometimes a criminal denies the fact, and sometimes he pleads some apology, or that he had a right to do the deed. But in the sinner's case, Christ can plead nothing of this sort at all.

Christ as an advocate will use no trickery, no deception; nothing of the kind. No sinner should make the least reliance on anything of this character.

- 4. The pleas in this case is not made on the question of guilt or innocence. The question made is not as is common in human courts--guilty or not guilty; Christ does not come forward to plead on that question. Our text reads, "If any man sin, we have an advocate," --implying of course that the question of sin is settled past all debate. As to the fact of sin, there is no dispute. There is no need of a jury upon the fact. The only question is whether mercy can be given. The question is not at all whether the man deserves to die, or is under condemnation; this fact is fully settled and the sinner knows it. He is condemned and knows he ought to die. There is no lack of real guilt, and the question therefore does not at all need to be asked whether he is guilty nor how much guilt he had incurred. But the question comes up in entirely another shape. There is no apology to be made at all. The only question is, Can mercy be shown and the guilty man be pardoned? Can the execution be arrested, and can the sentence of death be set aside?
- 5. Christ will not attempt to set aside the penalty on legal grounds. By no means. Sometimes before human courts an advocate appears and makes a motion to arrest proceedings on the ground of some error in fact or in law. But here in the sinner's case there has been nothing done on God's part to be corrected--nothing wrong or in error.

- 6. Christ does by no means interpose because He fears that the Father will not treat you with all the forbearance which your case will any wise allow. But the appeal is to God's own compassion for you--to His own disposition to show mercy if by any means He can safely do it under the circumstances of the case. Our Advocate knows that as to the Father, judgment is His strange work and mercy His delight; and He assumes that the Father is entirely sincere in these declarations and in calling you all to repentance. Yet Christ does not take it for granted that because God loves to pardon, therefore He will be able to do so, consistently with the demands of His government. He knows that God will show mercy if He wisely can--if it can be done benevolently, in consistency with the support of law.
- 7. But how is this to be done? Exactly here is the necessity for an advocate, to settle the question that it can be done with safety to the divine government.

The Bible often brings out the fact that there was an understanding between the Father and the Son, that Christ should do certain things to honor the law and to persuade the sinner to turn from his sins, and then God would on certain conditions forgive. In theological terms, this is often called, "the covenant of redemption." It was made before the world began. It provided that if the world were made--if the race should sin--then if Christ would interpose for them to bear their sins in His own body on the tree, doing so much as would render it proper for the Father to forgive, then forgiveness should be freely granted to all those who would repent of their sins and believe in Christ as their Redeemer. This was the understanding and to it Christ makes His appeal. Hence Christ comes forward and pleads this condition--that He has done all that was agreed on. The great work, at least in its chief department was completed when, suspended on the cross, He cried aloud, "It is finished!" and gave up the ghost. All along in the previous history we see Him intent on doing up His work. "Know ye not," said He, "that I must be about My Father's business?" He felt that He had a certain work to do; it was the business of His life and His soul was pressed down with a heavy burden, until it be done. "I have," said He, "a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!" He struggles under the burden. He must needs go up to Jerusalem at the last

great festival. He must be in haste to teach His great doctrines, daily in the temple, and by night as He retired from public scenes, He explained these things to His disciples. Near at hand were the more solemn and fearful scenes of His betrayal, His mock judgment, from which He is led away, bearing His own cross, to the final scene of crucifixion. These were, all of them, points in the covenant of redemption.

It is curious to see to what an extent these intimations are dropped all along the track of the sacred narrative. Plainly no one could write His history without bringing out continually this ruling idea--that He lived as one who had a great work to do, and felt Himself solemnly and stringently bound in spirit until it should be done. His disciples could not understand these intimations for a long time, but looked on often with wonder and sometimes presumptuous rebuke, until they saw Him die so strangely, and saw that He had certainly risen from the dead, and had appeared to them openly and re-explained these great things of His kingdom; then, after He had really finished all that part of His work which pertained properly to His human relations, then they began to understand what these things should mean. Christ had gloriously honored the law; He had perfectly obeyed it; yet had He suffered, the just for the unjust. He had thrown a halo of mercy around the upper throne; He had filled the heavenly sanctuary as with the incense from the altar of His own sacrifice, so that now God's law being every way honored, mercy can be shown to the guilty and no peril accrue to the interests of His throne.

All these things entered into the great work of Christ as our Advocate before the Father.

We must suppose also that Christ makes His appeal to His own appointment by the Father to this office. He might say, Hast Thou not called Me to this work, and now wilt not Thou hear My plea for the perishing whom I died to save?

- 8. The things of which I have thus far spoken relate chiefly to God and to His government. There is yet another distinct and vital department in His work--He must secure the hearty consent of the sinner. If you would avail yourself of His advocacy, you must admit that you deserve to die--that you can make no apology for your sin--that no one can make any apology for you--and that you fully sustain your Advocate in making this statement of

your case. He must be able to affirm that you do sincerely repent of all your sin, for He cannot save you in your sins; He has made no engagement to this effect and could not carry it through if He had. He must be able to show that you honestly intend to do right as God's subject--that you do truly repent of your sins--do obey God and honor the gospel of His Son, and hope for your salvation only through this plan of God's own providing.

- 9. Moreover, He must stand as your surety. It would be of no avail for Him to say, You do repent, unless He can also become your surety, for else you would surely fall again. He therefore pledged Himself to uphold you and "keep you from falling, that He may present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy." He thus undertakes to assure the Father that He will be your surety for present repentance, and for your being upheld in faith and love unto the end.

Then He pleads God's gracious promise, and on this ground urges that God should be propitious. These promises are all made to and through Christ. They all presuppose His atonement and His availing advocacy. Because Christ undertook for sinners, therefore God gave promises and therefore He fulfills them in answer to Christ's advocacy.

God has signified His willingness to forgive, yet will not allow the sinner to appear in his own name. He can receive and hear a righteous advocate, for such an arrangement comports with the honor of His throne and the support of law.

Christ can plead the governmental safety of this arrangement. By the sacrifice of Himself, He has rendered it safe to pardon and set aside the execution of the penalty. The fact that He has rendered it safe by His own sacrifices and sufferings, makes it specially fitting that He should Himself become our advocate to plead for our pardon.

REMARKS.

1. It is easy to see what a simple thing it is to become a Christian. It is not going about to do some great work of your own, but it is simply to accept of God's prepared righteousness. It is said of the Jews that, going about to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of

God. They did not understand that righteousness, considered as a ground of their acceptance with God, is something to be prepared and provided for them and by them appropriated. I never can forget the brightness with which this was revealed to me at my conversion--so brightly that probably this vital distinction between doing myself, and accepting what Christ had done for me, can never be forgotten, nor indeed can ever be made more clear than it was then. The question had come up with great force--What are you doing here? I had said I would attend to nothing else. But I had a multitude of errors in my views of the gospel and of my duty. For example, I was supposing that I must be a long time working out my own salvation--a long time under conviction before I could be accepted of God--that I did not see my sins plainly enough--that I did not pray enough--had not done enough to earn the salvation I needed. In this state of perplexity, the question came up all at once--What are you waiting for? The atonement is already made--this is a prepared salvation; the question is not whether you are going now to work out a salvation of your own, but whether you will accept a prepared salvation, made ready to your hand. What a contrast! How plain was this simple proposition! There it was, plain before me; atonement is made and an advocate stands ready; your consent alone is wanted. This was just as plain to me as if a proposition had been made in writing and it only required my signature to close the contract. This is the case. You are altogether condemned; you can do no works of righteousness to help yourself; yet a remedy is provided; will you accept it? The salvation of the gospel is all provided and ready; will you have it? I said I will accept it this very day, or I will die. All my self-righteous thoughts disappeared at once. God's method of making me righteous by faith in Jesus Christ, by my taking Him as my Advocate and Mediator, came before me with amazing clearness and beauty. I saw and I accepted, and here I found peace. Then I understood that wonder language--"being found in Him." The union, by which a sinner, penitent and pardoned, is by faith brought into the closest possible relation to Christ--this became a present reality to my mind. The sinner is brought into Christ as into some shelter from storm or danger. He is compared to the cleft of a great rock, in which by faith the sinner hides away from the fearful storm which violated law would else bring down upon us. Not by any means that Christ takes our part against God's government; but, showing what He has Himself done to sustain law--showing His own wounded side and bleeding heart--revealing at once His own love for us and His own infinite regard for God's law, He shows that God can safely forgive now, and thus He lays the foundation for His availing plea that He should.

What a simple thing to be a Christian! O how simple! You have thought it would take a long time. You say, I have not time; I must study; or I must do this or that business. It doesn't need a long time; it requires almost no time at all.

But you say--I have not conviction enough. Yet you know you have committed sins enough; you know all you need to know. I remember how these notions were rebuked in my case. I said to myself--I can get nothing ready; I am all wrong; I have no such conviction as I need. But God placed the matter before me in a very different form. He asked me if I would admit my guilt and accept of Christ as a mere gratuity--as a real favor, an undeserved mercy.

How very simple then is this! You need only to make up your mind to consent to God's way of salvation, and to renounce your own will and way, and shelter yourself under His advocacy. Hear Him cry--"How often would I have gathered you as a hen gathers her brood under her wings; but ye would not." How often thus does He propose to throw all round about you that shield of His advocacy! Will you accept it?

Did you ever attend a court of justice? Did you mark the manner in which the client would hang on the lips of his advocate? See too how his advocate feels! See how he looks--pale as ashes--cannot sleep nights--he sympathizes so intensely in the case of his client. See how the criminal leans on him; it seems as if he would hide himself within his advocate, so dependent does he feel and so confiding! What Christian has not felt this? What Christian does not understand it all? He hangs on his Advocate.

2. You see the safety of the Christian, resting on Christ. He has an Advocate who never lost a case. How many criminals have groaned out--O that I had a powerful advocate who could not fail!

3. How infinitely inexcusable you are if you lose your soul! You need not waste time in looking after some other remedy--some other savior. It is settled, as surely as if you had been a thousand years in hell, that unless you accept of this Savior in this way, you are lost! There is no other name under heaven, given among men, whereby any can be saved. Christ now offers to undertake for you; will you allow Him to do so?

4. The poor and the rich alike may have the services of this Advocate. Sometimes in human affairs, men fail of getting a good advocate and of getting

justice done them, for want of money. But here is One who will not be bribed to favor the rich, nor will He reject the poor for their poverty. The one great condition is such as you can all fulfill--"My son, give Me thy heart"--give Me thy confidence. Do you believe that I can and will save you?

The thing that Christ requires then is simply that you will give Him your confidence, and let Him manage your case. Can you not say--Jesus, Thou knowest that I believe, and that I do give Thee my confidence?

The rich and the poor alike must do this; the rich can buy no dearer way and the poor need not fail of this.

5. See here also the madness of self-dependence. Whoever depends on himself rejects this Great Advocate, and flies in the very face of God, as if he could manage his own case there! Alas, what folly!

6. This Advocate opens an office in every town, in every city. His sign is displayed before all eyes. O what a place is this! Think how Christ sends out His people all abroad and bids them invite all to receive Christ as their Advocate. You have heard the offer. Will you accept?

7. Ye who complain that God cannot forgive your sins because of their greatness, quite overlook the real difficulty. It is not that your sins are great, for He can "save to the uttermost." He has said--"Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out." "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners."

8. But you will say--It is not a sense of the greatness of my sins that discourages me, but because I have so little sense of my sin. It was so in my own case. I was oppressed with the same difficulty. I was on my way home from my office, when all at once, as if I heard a voice behind me, saying, this is the way, it came into my mind--Do you not know that Christ has prepared a full salvation, and holds it in waiting for your acceptance? There it was. Will you have it?

Let this offer console sinners of every class who will come to this Savior. Do not wait. If you have sinned, flee to this Advocate. Say to Him,--I have sinned, but I condemn my sin, and I flee to thee--I cleave to thee alone. I have no other refuge. Undone in myself, I fly to Thee. Again, O sinner, let me urge you that, salvation being near, and freely offered, you now embrace for once and forever.

[Back to Top](#)

The Inner and The Outer Revelation

Lecture III

February 15, 1854

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

There are many who believe that a loose indefinite infidelity has rarely, if ever, been more prevalent in our country than at this time, especially among young men. I am not prepared to say it is an honest infidelity, yet it may very probably be real. Young men may really doubt the inspiration of the Christian Scriptures, not because they have honestly studied those scriptures and their numerous evidences, but because they have read them little and reasoned legitimately, yet less. Especially have they almost universally failed to study the intuitive affirmations of their own minds. They have not examined the original revelation that God has made in each human soul, to see how far this would carry them, and how wonderfully it opens the way for understanding and indeed for embracing the revelation given in God's Word.

To bring these and kindred points before your minds, I have taken as my text, the words of Paul--

Text.--2 Cor. 4:2: "By manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

Paul is speaking of the gospel ministry which he received, and is stating how he fulfilled it. He shows plainly that he sought to preach to the human conscience. He found in each man's bosom a conscience to which he could appeal, and to which the manifestation of the truth commended itself.

Probably no thoughtful man has ever read the Bible without noticing that there has been a previous revelation given in some way to man. It assumes many things as known already. I may have said in the hearing of some of you that I was studying in my law-office when I bought my first Bible, and that I bought it as one of my law-books. No sooner had I opened it than I was struck to see how

many things it assumed as known, and therefore states with no attempt at proof. For instance, the first verse in the Bible--"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This assumes the existence of God. It does not aim to prove this truth; it goes on the presumption that this revelation--the existence of a God--has been made already to all who are mature enough to understand it. The Apostle Paul also in his epistle to the Romans, asserts that the real Godhead and eternal power of the one God, though in some sense "invisible things," are yet "clearly seen," in the creation of the world, "being understood by the things that are made," so that all wicked men are without excuse. His doctrine is that the created universe reveals God. And if this be true of the universe without us, it is no less true of the universe within us. Our own minds--their convictions, their necessary affirmations--do truly reveal God and many of the great truths that respect our relations to Him and to his government.

When we read the Bible attentively and notice how many things, of the utmost importance, it assumes and bases its precepts on them, without attempting to prove them, we cannot forbear to inquire--Are these assumptions properly made?

The answer to this question is found when we turn our eye within and inquire for the intuitive affirmations of our own minds. Then we shall see that we possess an intellectual and moral nature which as truly reveals great truths concerning God and our relations to him and to law, as the material world reveals his eternal power and Godhead.

For instance, we shall see that man has a moral nature related to spiritual and moral truth, as really as he has a physical nature related to the physical world. As his senses, sight, touch, hearing, intuit certain truths respecting the external world, so does his spiritual nature intuit certain truths respecting the spiritual world. No man can well consider the first class of truths without being forced to consider and believe the second.

Let us see if this be true.

It is not long since I had interviews with a young lady of considerable intelligence who was a skeptic. She professed to believe in a God and in those great truths pertaining to his attributes which are embraced in Deism; but she quite rejected the Bible and all that pertains to a revealed way of salvation.

I began with presenting to her mind some of the great truths taught by the mind's own affirmations concerning God, his attributes, and government, and then from this, I passed on to show her how the Bible came in to make out a system of truth needful to man as a lost sinner. She admitted the first of course; and then she saw that the second must be true if the first was, or there could be nothing for man but hopeless ruin. Starting back in horror from the gulf of despair, she saw that only her unbelief was ruining her soul; and then renouncing this, she yielded her heart to God and found Gospel peace and joy in believing.

I propose now to present much the same course of thought to you as I did to her.

And here the first great inquiry is--What ideas does our own nature--God's first revelation--give us?

(1.) Undoubtedly, the idea of God. Our own minds affirm that there is and must be a God; that He must have all power and all knowledge. Our mind also gives us God's moral attributes. No man can doubt that God is good and just. Men are never afraid that God will do anything wrong. If at all afraid of God, it is because He is good--is just and holy.

(2.) Man's nature gives him the idea of law--moral law. He can no more doubt the existence of a moral law, imposed too on himself, than he can doubt the existence of his own soul and body. He knows he ought not to be selfish--ought to be benevolent. He knows he is bound to love his neighbor as himself--bound to seek the higher at the sacrifice, if need be, of the lower good.

How is it that men get these ideas? I answer, They must have them by nature; they must be in the mind before any direct instruction from human lips, else you could never teach a child these ideas, more than you could teach them to a horse. The child knows these things before he is taught, and cannot remember when he first had them.

Suppose you were to close your Bible, and ask, Now, apart from all this book teaches, how much do I know? How much must I admit? You would find that your moral nature gives you the idea of a God, and affirms his existence; it gives you his attributes, natural and moral, and also your own moral relations to him and to your fellow-beings. In proof of this I can appeal to you--not one of you can say, I am under no obligation to love God; I am not bound to love my

fellow-men. Your moral nature gives you these things--it affirms to you these truths, even more directly and undeniably than your senses give you the facts of the external world. Moreover, your moral nature not only gives you the law of supreme love to God and of love equal and impartial toward your fellow-men, but it affirms that you are sinners--that you have displeased God--have utterly failed to please Him, and of course that you are under condemnation from his righteous law. You know that God's good law must condemn you, because you have not been good in the sense required by that law. Hence you must know that you are in the position of an outlaw, condemned by law, and without hope from the administration of justice.

Another thing it gives you, viz., that you are still in penitence (I speak of those who know this to be their case;) your own conscience affirms this to you past all contradiction. It affirms that you are still living in sin, and have not reformed in such a sense that God can accept your reformation. You know that you do violence to your own conscience, and that while you are doing this, you can neither respect yourself nor be respected by God. You know that so long as this is the case with you, God cannot forgive you. Nay more, if He should, it would do you no good; you could not be happy; you could not respect yourself even if you were told that you were forgiven. Indeed if your nature spake out unbiased, it would not let you believe yourself really forgiven, so long as you are doing violence to conscience. I can remember when these thoughts were in my mind like fire. I saw that no man could doubt them, any more than he can doubt his own existence. So you may see these truths and feel their force.

You know then that by your sins, you have forfeited the favor of God, and have no claim on Him at all on the score of justice. You have cast off his authority, have disowned subjection to his law and government; indeed you have cast all his precepts beneath your feet. You can no longer come before God and say, "Thou oughtest not to cast me off; I have not deserved it at thy hand." You can no more say this honestly, than you can deny your own existence.

Did you ever think of this? Have you ever tried this, to see what you can honestly do and say, before God? Have you ever tried to go into God's presence and tell Him solemnly that He has no right to punish you? Not one of you can tell Him so without being conscious in yourself of blasphemy.

It is a good method because it may serve to show you how the case really stands. Suppose then you try it. See what you can honestly and with an approving

conscience say before God, when your soul is deeply impressed with the sense of his presence. Consider, I am not asking you whether you can harden your heart and violate your conscience enough to blaspheme God to his face; not this, but I am asking you to put the honest convictions of your own conscience to the test and see what they are and what they will allow you to do and to say before God. Can you kneel down before Him and say--"I deny that I have cast off God--I have never refused to treat Him as a friend--I have never treated Him as an enemy?"

You know you can make no issue of this sort with God without meeting the rebukes of your own mind.

Again; you can see no reason to hope for forgiveness under the law. With all the light of your Deism you can discern no ground of pardon. Outside the Bible, all is dark as death. There is no hope. If you cherish any, it must be directly in the teeth of your own solemn convictions. Why do you think it is so difficult to induce a discreet governor to grant a pardon? When Jerome Bonaparte was monarch of Spain, why did Napoleon send him that earnest rebuke for pardoning certain criminals? What were the principles that underlaid that remarkably able state paper? Have you ever studied those principles, as they were grasped and presented so vigorously by the mighty mind of Napoleon?

You can never infer from the goodness of God that He can forgive; much less, that He must. One of the first Universalist preachers I ever heard announced in the outset that he should infer from the goodness of God that He would save all men. I can well remember how perfectly shallow his sophistry appeared to me and how absurd his assumptions. I was no Christian then, but I saw at a glance that he might far better infer from the goodness of God that He would forgive none than that He would forgive all. It seemed to me most clear that if God were good and had made a good law, He would sustain it. Why not? I must suppose that his law is a good one;--how could a Being of infinite wisdom and love impose any other than a good law? And if it were a good law, it had a good end to answer; and a good God could not suffer it to fail of answering those ends by letting it come to naught through inefficiency in its administration. I knew enough about law and government then to see that a firm hand in administration is essential to any good results from ever so good a law. Of course I knew that if law were left to be trampled under foot by hardened blasphemous transgressors, and then to cap the climax, an indiscriminate pardon were given, and nothing

done to sustain law, there would be an end of all authority and a positive annihilation of all the good hoped for under its administration. What? Shall rational men undertake to infer from God's goodness that he will pardon all sinners! Suppose the spirit of riot and misrule now so rampant at Erie, Pa., to go on from bad to worse; that the rioters perpetrate every form of mischief in their power; they tear up the rails, burn down the bridges, fire into the cars, run whole trains off the track and crush the quivering flesh of hundreds en masse into heaps of blood and bones;--and by and by when the guilty are arrested and convicted by due course of law, then the question comes up--Shall the governor pardon them? He might be very much inclined to do so, if he wisely could; but the question is--Can a good governor do it? Supposing him to be purely good and truly wise, what would he do? Will you say, O he is too good to punish--he is so good, he will certainly pardon? Will you say that pardon indiscriminately given, and given to all, and according to previous assurance moreover--will secure the highest respect for law and the best obedience? Every body knows that this is superlative nonsense. No man who ever had anything to do under the responsibilities of government, or who has ever learned the a b c of human nature in this relation, can for one moment suppose that pardon--in such ways--can supplant punishment with any other result than utter ruin. No; if the ruler is good, he will surely punish; and all the more surely, by how much the more predominant is the element of goodness in his character.

You, sinners, are under law. If you sin, you must see great reason why God should punish and not forgive.

Here is another fact. When you look upon yourself and your moral position, you find yourself twice dead. You are civilly dead in the sense of being condemned by law, an outcast from governmental favor. You are also morally dead, for you do not love God, do not serve Him, have no tendencies that draw you back into sympathy with God; but on the other hand you are dead to all considerations that look in this direction. You are indeed alive to your own low, selfish interests, but dead to God's interests; you care nothing for God only to avoid Him and escape his judgment. All this you know, beyond all question.

In this condition, without a further revelation, where is your hope? You have none, and have no ground for any.

Furthermore, if a future revelation is to be made, revealing some ground of pardon, you can see with the light now before you on what basis it must rest.

You can see what more you need from God. The first revelation shuts you up to God--shows you that if help ever comes, it cannot come out of yourself, but must come from God--cannot come of his justice, but must come from his mercy--cannot come out of law, but must come from some extra provision whereby law may have its demands satisfied otherwise than through the execution of its penalty on the offender. Somebody, you can see, must interpose for you, who can take your part and stand in your stead before the offended law.

Did you never think of this? In the position where you stand, and where your own nature and your own convictions place you, you are compelled to say--My case is hopeless! I need a double salvation--from condemnation and from sinning; first from the curse, and secondly from the heart to sin--from the tendency and disposition to commit sin. Enquiring for a revelation to meet these wants of my lost soul, where can I find it? Is it to be found in all the book of nature? Nowhere. Look into the irresistible convictions of your own moral being; they tell you of your wants, but they give you no supply. They show what you need, but they utterly fail to give it. Your own moral nature shows that you need an atoning Saviour and a renewing Spirit. Nothing less can meet the case of a sinner condemned, outlawed, and doubly dead by the moral corruption of all his voluntary powers.

The worst mischief of infidelity is that it ignores all this; it takes no notice of one entire side of our nature, and that the most important side; talking largely about philosophy, it yet restricts itself to the philosophy of the outer world and has no eye for the inner and higher nature. It ignores the fact that our moral nature affirms one entire class of great truths, with even more force and certainty than the senses affirm the facts of the external world. Verily, this is a grand and a fatal omission!

REMARKS.

1. Without the first revelation the second could not be satisfactorily proved. When the Bible reveals God, it assumes that our minds affirm his existence and that we need no higher proof. When it reveals his law, it pre-supposes that we are capable of understanding it, and of appreciating its moral claims. When it prescribes duty, it assumes that we ought to feel the force of obligation to obey it.

Now the fact that the Bible does make many assumptions of this sort establishes

an intimate and dependent connection between it on the one hand, and the laws of the human mind on the other. If these assumptions are well and truly made, then the divine authority of the Bible is abundantly sustained by its correspondence and harmony with the intellectual and moral nature of man. It fits the beings to whom it is given. But on the other hand, if these assumptions had on examination proved false, it would be impossible to sustain the credit of the scriptures as coming from a wise and honest Being.

2. Having the first revelation, to reject the second is most absurd. The second is, to a great extent, a re-affirmation of the first, with various important additions of a supplementary sort, e.g. the atonement, and hence the possibility of pardon; the gift and work of the Spirit, and hence the analogous possibility of being saved from sinning.

Now those things which the first revelation affirms and the second re-affirms are so fundamental in any revelation of moral duty to moral beings, that, having them taught so intuitively, so undeniably, we are left self-convicted of extreme absurdity if we then reject the second. Logically there seems no ground left on which to base a denial of the written revelation. Its supplementary doctrines are not, to be sure, intuitive truths, but they are so related to man's wants as a lost sinner, and so richly supply those wants; they, moreover, are so beautifully related to the exigencies of God's government and so amply meet them, that no intelligent mind, once apprehending all these things in their actual relations, can fail to recognize their truthfulness.

3. The study of the first secures an intellectual reception of the second. I do not believe it possible for a man to read and understand the first thoroughly and then come to the second and fairly apprehend its relation to his own moral nature and moral convictions, and also his moral wants, without being compelled to say--all is true--this book is all true! They coincide so wondrously, and the former sustains the latter so admirably and so triumphantly--a man can no more deny the Bible after knowing all his own moral relations than he can deny his own existence.

4. You see why so many reject the Bible. They have not well read themselves. They have not looked within, to read carefully the volume God has put on record there. They have contrived to hush and smother down the ever-rising convictions of their own moral nature. They have refused to listen to the cry of want which swells up from their troubled bosom of guilt.--Hence there is yet one whole

volume of revelation of which they are strangely ignorant. This ignorance accounts for their rejection of the Bible.

A little attention to the subject will show you that the ground here indicated is beyond question that on which the masses in every Christian land really repose their faith in the Bible. Scarce one in ten thousand of them has studied the historical argument for divine revelation extensively and carefully, so as intelligently to make this a corner stone for his faith in the Bible. It is not reasonable to demand that they should. There is an argument shorter and infinitely more convincing. It is a simple problem; given, a soul guilty, condemned and undone; required, some adequate relief. The gospel solves the problem. Who will not accept the solution? It answers every condition perfectly; it must therefore come from God; it is at least our highest wisdom to accept it.

If it be replied to this, that such a problem meets the case of those only who give their hearts to God; it may be modified for yet another class, on this wise;--given, a moral nature which affirms God, law, obligation, guilt, ruin; required, to know whether a written revelation is reliable, which is built upon the broad basis of man's intuitive affirmations; which gives them the sanction of man's Creator; which appends a system of duty and of salvation, of such sort that it interlocks itself inseparably with truth intuitive to man, and manifestly fills out a complement of moral instructions and agencies in perfect adaptation to both man and his Maker. In the Bible, we have the very thing required. A key that threads the countless wards of such a lock must have been made to fit. Each came from the same Author. You can not grant to man an origin from God but you must grant the same origin to the Bible.

When I came to examine these things in the light of my own convictions, I wondered I had not seen them truly before.

Suppose I should stand here and announce to you the two great precepts of the moral law; would not their obvious nature and bearings enforce on your mind the conviction that these precepts must be true and must be from God? As I should descend to particulars, you would still affirm--these must be true; these must certainly have come down from heaven. If I were even to go back to the Mosaic law--(a law which many object against, because they do not understand the circumstances that called for such a law)--yet if I should explain their peculiar circumstances and the reasons for such statutes, every man must affirm the rectitude of even those statutes. The Old Testament, I am aware, reveals truth

under a veil, the world not being prepared then for its clearer revelation. The veil was taken away when in the fullness of time, people were prepared for unclouded revealings of God in the flesh.

The reason therefore why the masses receive the Bible, is not that they are credulous, and hence swallow down absurdities with ease; but the reason is that it commends itself so irresistibly to each man's own nature and to his deep and resistless convictions, he is shut up to receive it; he must do violence to his inner convictions, if he reject it. Man's whole nature cries out--This is just what I need! That young lady of whom I spake could not help but abandon her infidelity and yield up her heart to God, when she had reached this point. I said--Do you admit a God? She answered--Yes. Do you admit a law? Yes. Do you admit your personal guilt? Yes. And your need of salvation? O, yes. Can you help yourself? said I. Ah no, indeed, she said, I do not believe I can ever be saved. But God can save you. Surely nothing is too hard for Him.

Alas, she replied, my own nature has shut me up--I am in despair; there is no way of escape for me; the Bible, you know, I don't receive; and here I am in darkness and despair!

At this point, I began to speak of the gospel. Said I to her--See there; God has done such and such things as revealed in the gospel; he came down and dwelt in human flesh to meet the case of such sinners as you are; he made an ample atonement for sin; there, what do you think of that? "That is what I need exactly," said she, "if it were only true."

If it is not true, said I, you are lost beyond hope--Then why not believe?

I can not believe it, she said, because it is incredible. It is a great deal too good to be true!

And is not God good, said I--infinitely good? Then why do you object that anything He does is too good to be true?

"That is what I need," again she repeated, "but how can it be so!"

Then you cannot give God credit for being so good! said I.

Alas, I see, it is my unbelief--but I cannot believe. It is what I need, I can plainly see--but how can I believe it?

At this point I rose up and said to her solemnly--The crisis has come! There is now only one question for you--Will you believe the gospel? She raised her eyes, which had been depressed and covered for half an hour or more; every feature bespoke the most intense agitation;--while I repeated--Will you believe God? Will you give him credit for sincerity? She threw herself upon her knees, and burst into loud weeping. What a scene--to see a skeptic beginning to give her God credit for love and truth! To see the door of light and hope opened, and heaven's blessed light breaking in upon a desolate soul! Have you ever witnessed such a scene?

When she next opened her lips, it was to show forth a Saviour's praise!

The Bible assumes that you have light enough to see, and to do your duty and to find the way to heaven. A great many of you are perhaps bewildered as to your religious opinions, holding loose and skeptical notions. You have not seen that it is the most reasonable thing in the world to admit and embrace this glorious truth. Will you allow yourself to go on, bewildered, without considering that you are yourself a living, walking revelation of truth? Will you refuse to come into such relations to God and Christ as will save your soul?

In my early life, when I was tempted to skepticism, I can well recollect that I said to myself--It is much more probable that ministers and the multitudes of good men who believe the Bible are right, than that I am. They have examined the subject, but I have not. It is therefore entirely unreasonable for me to doubt.

Why should you not say--I know the gospel is suited to my wants. I know I am afloat on the vast ocean of life, and if there is no Gospel, there is nothing that can save me. It is therefore no way for me to stand here and cavil. I must examine--must look into this matter. I can at least see that if God offers me mercy, I must not reject it. Does not this gospel show you how you can be saved from hell and from sin? O then believe it! Let the blessed truth find a heart open for its admission. When you shall dare to give God credit for all his love and truth, and when you shall bring your heart under the power of this truth, and yield yourself up to its blessed sway,--that will be the dawn of morning to your soul! Whosoever will, let him come and take of the waters of life, freely.

[Back to Top](#)

On Quenching The Spirit

Lecture IV

March 1, 1854

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 Thess. 5:19: "Quench not the Spirit."

In treating the subject presented in this passage, I shall,

- I. Show what it is to quench the Spirit;*
- II. How it is done;*
- III. Some of the consequences of doing it.*

I. Show what it is to quench the Spirit.

The Bible represents the Spirit as giving to the mind both light and heat. It both illumines and impresses; both reveals the truth, and makes it seem real, and hence makes it effective as truth, upon the mind. Hence the fitness of the figure which on the day of Pentecost, presented the descending Spirit under the symbol of "cloven tongues like as of fire." Hence also the figure implied in our text -- "Quench not" -- as if it were a candle flame, a fire, which might be extinguished. It is the office-work of the Spirit to enlighten the intellect, and at the same time to warm the sensibilities. This is indeed a most remarkable fact, that when the Spirit of God reveals light, it is done in a manner which always warms the sensibility. The mind is quite as conscious of the latter influence upon the sensibilities as of the former upon the intellect. Beyond question, Christians are sometimes conscious of new views of truth, which they rightly attribute to the teaching of the Spirit; but not less clearly are they sometimes conscious of the animating and quickening influences of the Spirit, deeply rousing their sensibilities. Hence no figure can be more apposite than this. To quench this light and heat by counteracting and repelling the Spirit is the thing against which the text exhorts us.

II. But we must give a minute more attention to this question as to the manner in which the Spirit may be quenched.

I have said the Spirit causes the mind both to see and to feel. He convinces of sin. He strongly enforces obligation. The degree of impression made by the Spirit on the mind of course varies indefinitely, from the very slightest up to the broad and blazing sun-light which almost overwhelms the outward man.

The Spirit may be quenched in many ways.

- 1. By disregarding His teachings. When the Spirit reveals truth and urges duty upon the mind, then if the man turns away and refuses to obey, he quenches the Spirit. Often in pressing home truth upon the mind, the Spirit makes the sinner so uneasy, that he says, "I cannot endure this; I am not ready to yield now, and I cannot bear the perpetual urging. I must resist it." It often happens that students are so unhappy under the convicting influence of the Spirit that they declare they will not attend to the subject, but will harden their hearts against this disturbing and annoying influence. Perhaps to help on their purpose of diverting their attention, they will carry their study books into religious meetings, to occupy their minds in something else besides religious truth. Cases of this sort have occurred among us; students have found their studies hindered by intruding thoughts of God and their soul's salvation, and have determined they would not have it so, and consequently have ruled the whole subject out of their mind. Others besides students may do the same thing perhaps for similar reasons; the subject interferes with some cherished pursuit, and they would sooner risk the loss of heaven than bear the interruption of cherished sinful pleasures.
- 2. The Spirit is quenched often by the sinner's refusing obedience when the will of God is distinctly known. They see that if they would please God, they must do some particular duty, impressed on their mind so strongly they cannot doubt as to the Divine will; but they refuse to do it. Thus they quench the Spirit, for it seems a fixed rule in God's spiritual administration that He does not strive by His Spirit long, in the face of direct and determined disobedience.

I must also say here that men may quench the Spirit when the mind is by no means definitely and consciously committed to disobedience. Perhaps the

man is only conscious that he cares very little about obedience. He would not wish to insult God, but he cares so little about pleasing Him that his mind settles down into a chronic stupidity. Under the influence of this, he sees God's demands only with great indistinctness and with the utmost unconcern. I need not say that such a state of mind repels the Holy Spirit, and quenches its sacred fire.

The cases are fearfully numerous in which men see with great clearness what God requires, and see that God has brought before them the distinct issue of eternal destiny, as hanging upon their present decision. Yet they reject God's counsel and rush on their own damnation. I have often seen cases of this kind in which persons have told me that they saw the dreadful issue, yet made the fearful plunge.

- 3. The Spirit is quenched by procrastination.

It is not their design to put the matter off forever, nor perhaps very long; but they have some selfish reason, for doing so, just at this time. Alas who knoweth what shall be on the morrow? This is one of the fatal ways to quench the Spirit.

- 4. By yielding to some temptation, the Spirit is often quenched. The temptation will often come in just that form which is, of all, most adapted to quench the Spirit. It may be the very object of the tempter to seduce you to do just the thing that will most surely and fatally repel the Divine Spirit forever from your heart. True to his genius and character, he will present it in a very seductive form. It will make its warm appeal to some long cherished indulgence. Then if you parley with the temptation instead of instantly repelling it, you are gone. If you allow yourself to linger in presence of the tempting good, and let your sensibilities to that good become excited, and do not try to hold strongly before your mind the great things of God, you have nothing to expect but a fearful fall before its power.

A distinction should be made, as to the matter of guilt, between being hurried suddenly into temptation before you can think and so yielding, and on the other hand, looking long and thoughtfully at the subject and then giving way deliberately to its influence. In the latter case the results must be terribly fearful.

Often men give way to some worldly motive, and thereby so fundamentally decide the question as between their own souls and God, that the Spirit is quenched, and withdraws in despair of success. I could name cases where men have yielded to political motives, and other cases where they have yielded to business motives. They were sufficiently enlightened in their duty; they saw the will of God revealed plainly enough, but the temptation came, and they yielded. Some very striking cases have come under my personal observation, and I have lived to mark the results. I have lived to see that these men, giving way to the temptation of some strong political or business motive, have turned away from God fatally and forever, and God has withdrawn from them -- to return no more. "Woe unto them -- saith the Most High, when I depart from them."

In some cases sinners give way to the fear of man. It may happen that some other sinner has great influence over him; the latter dare not displease his companion; indeed would sooner displease God than this poor sinner under whose influence he has suffered himself to fall. Some issue will be made by the Spirit of God; the Spirit will present and press the claims of the gospel, and then there is no alternative but to sacrifice the favor of this wicked friend or the favor of God. Such issues are often made as between the claims of God and the influence of some individual. The simple question is -- Whom will you serve? Will you serve God, or God's enemy?

You may remark in such cases the truth which has ten thousand illustrations in the moral world -- that the Spirit of God never shuns, but rather seeks fundamental issues -- issues of such a sort as decide the main question pending between God and the sinner. It is His business to bring this great question to a decision as between God and the sinner. Hence, He does not shrink from pressing His claims because the question may bring on a fundamental issue. You have often found it so. The question comes up in your mind -- Shall the fear of God or the fear of man, control me? An issue, made in this form is in its own nature fundamental and decisive. Whoever dishonors God by preferring man's honor before His, cuts his acquaintance, to use a familiar phrase; he cuts the friendship of the Almighty and casts Him off. Insulting as he does the majesty of God, how can it be otherwise? Shall the great God submit to have others, such as sinning and mean men, preferred before Himself, and this too in the vital respect of honor and obedience? If He were to submit to such an insult, what would become of

His kingdom?

- 5. Men quench the Spirit by self-indulgence. Men are often brought to see that their self-indulgent habits are displeasing to God. When this is the case, they come into a fearful trial. Shall they yield to the demands of self-indulgence, or resisting these demands, shall they yield to God? This becomes oftentimes the great crisis of their lives.

Some of you recollect the case of a young man once a student here, who under the influences of the Spirit, became greatly agonized on the question of using tobacco. At one time he tried to laugh it off; at another tried to justify himself by pleading the example of many good man; but when all these pleas availed not, he yielded at last, and said he would do God's will, cost what it might. He afterwards said to me, most emphatically, "I have no doubt I should have gone to hell, if I had held on and resisted God through that struggle. It was the crisis of my destiny."

I have in mind another case of a man who visited me. He said as he entered, "I have a particular errand in making this call upon you, and yet I have scarcely strength to tell you my case. The dreadful conflict in my soul has almost crushed me." He spent some days with me. When he came to be able to relate his story, he said in substance, "I have been in the habit of using tobacco a long time. At length I saw an article in some paper, which set forth the evils and the sin of the practice. I was convicted, I saw those evils developing themselves in my own system. I felt convicted of the sin of this mischievous and sensual indulgence, and resolved to discontinue it. But ere long temptation came; I yielded, and returned to my guilty self-indulgence. What was the result? I fell to the very depths of moral impotence; I seemed to have lost all power to resist not only this temptation, but every other form of temptation. In fact the Spirit of God seems to have utterly departed from me."

Some of you may be disposed to sneer at this as a trifling thing; but mark! it can be no trifle to decide a great fundamental question as between yourself and God!

Suppose a child takes issue with his father. It may be about the merest trifle; but no matter how small the thing in controversy may be; the question of obedience or disobedience is always great. When a child rebels against

parental authority and takes issue on the question of authority, the results are momentous. Do you estimate the sin to be small because the indulgence promised in the temptation is insignificant and trifling? Will you yield to a temptation to displease God, and think it no harm because the temptation is so very small? Will you infer that God does not care how much you insult and disobey Him, provided your temptation to do so is quite trifling! To think so is to mistake absurdity for argument. The smaller the temptation and the indulgence, the greater the guilt and the insult towards God when you prefer contemptibly small things to His favor, and to Himself.

- 6. Persons quench the Spirit by indulging in hard thoughts and revengeful feelings. Let any man go down upon his knees in prayer to God, and while in this attitude and in these attempts, let him indulge in revengeful purposes. Can he pray any more? Certainly not, until he breaks down and repents. If one allows himself to brood over his fancied wrongs and cherish a revengeful feeling and purpose, it is vain for him to suppose that the Spirit of God can dwell in his bosom. The antipathy may fasten on some individual, or on bodies of men, or on some of the great reforms of the age; it is all the same as to the result -- it must quench the Spirit of God. How strongly do some men speak and act in some things, showing that they are under the dominion of their prejudices. With such, the Spirit of God cannot dwell.
- 7. So also the indulgence of envious feeling quenches the Spirit. You see this sometimes among students. A few years since, there was a young man here who had a rare talent for public speaking, and some other respectable talents besides. There were at that time several students here who allowed themselves to indulge in feelings of envy towards him. I had occasion to know that not one of them enjoyed the presence of God so long as they indulged this envious spirit.
- 8. A selfish ambition must have the same result. When a student is determined to rise in the world for purely selfish ends, he will surely quench the light of God in his soul.
- 9. When persons allow themselves in a censorious and contemptuous spirit,

and give scope to their tongues to speak censoriously, they quench the light of God from their own souls. They can not have the Spirit of the Lord dwelling within.

- 10. When persons having done wrong refuse to make confession, and when satisfied of their own wrong, are yet too proud to confess, it cannot be otherwise than that they quench the Spirit. They may think God will overlook such sin as theirs, but they know not God if they think so.

Some do not directly refuse to make restitution, but put it off a long time. I know one man who has wronged his neighbor, and has refused to make restitution so far as I know up to this hour. I am certain he has not had any of the Spirit's presence since he perpetrated that foul wrong. Even if he should say he enjoyed the Spirit and should make his oath of it, I would not believe him. He might deceive himself, but he cannot deceive God; nor can he induce God to look with any favor upon his iniquity.

Again, men often quench the Spirit thus. A great public object comes before them, demanding pecuniary aid -- as for example, raising the salary of a minister and some people dodge away and grieve the Spirit of God.

- 11. In their public relations, men often quench the Spirit by political dishonesty. It is striking to observe how much room there is for this since the great social and moral reforms have come up to throw their influence and their demands into political life. Truly may it be said, these reforms are "set for the fall and rise of many in Israel." How searchingly do they put to the test the consciences of political men! And how fearfully do they harden many consciences -- presenting moral claims which selfish men find it convenient to resist! You, young men, might go and preach to such seared consciences till you die, and never bring the first man of them to repentance. If from similar motives they do what they know is wrong; if for party purposes they give way to political dishonesty -- where are they?

Persons may commit themselves to the wrong side and thus throw themselves under an influence which is utterly adverse to their being led by the Spirit of God. Men associate themselves together into parties, and by and by, their party takes a morally wrong position; then the whole strength of the party bond goes to bind them to wrong-doing and to harden their conscience

against all appeals to do right. Suppose a minister should preach on political duties before such a body of men, and any one of them should see his own dreadful error and should begin to think seriously of turning from his evil way. Some one accosts him, saying -- Will you be influenced in politics by the preacher? At once his pride is up; the party ties draw; he returns again to his iniquities.

- 12. Some men are influenced by what they call prudence, which is real unbelief. The amount of it is they judge merely after men and according to human views, and as if there were no God, or at least no reliance to be placed on what He has said. Must not such a course quench the Spirit?
- 13. Sometimes men trample down their religious feelings and put an extinguisher upon their emotions, and thus put out the light of God in their souls. If it be true, as I have said, that the Spirit gives heat as well as light; quickens the emotions as well as enlightens the understanding, then most clearly those who resolutely repress all religious emotions must quench the Spirit.
- 14. Yet again, men will quench the Spirit when they resist conviction of any question of duty. No matter how these impressions of duty may be made, whether immediately by the Spirit, or mediately by external providences, yet if they are resisted, the Spirit is driven away.
- 15. And finally some quench the Spirit by resenting reproof when they really need and deserve it.

In such ways as these men quench God's Spirit.

III. We must now consider some of the consequences.

- 1. Judicial blindness of the intellect is a natural result. The intellect becomes more dark and blind than ever before, even doubting and perhaps denying things which were clear before. It is most remarkable that truths, never before doubted are doubted now. Such persons lose confidence in the Bible and even in the very existence of God; declare that they have no confidence in anybody's piety, and even deny that there is anything as

sincere benevolence. Such a state proves itself to be a judgment from God - for no mind in its normal, rational state can take such views as these. It is a dark atheistic state. God has given such men up to strong delusion that they may believe a lie. The reason why He has done so is that they would not receive the truth in love that they might be saved. They resisted and quenched the Spirit. They set at naught all the agencies God could wisely employ to save them -- distorted all the truth He revealed to bless them; and now it only remains that their example of dark delusion and full damnation should be a lesson of warning to save other souls from that way of death.

It is only right and just that God should send strong delusion on such as will not obey the truth, and such as will neither honor nor cherish the work of His Spirit in their hearts. He has an unquestionable right to deliver them up as He did Ahab. Ahab, you recollect, would have his own way, although God told him he must not go and would lose his life if he did. Still he wanted to go -- would go -- went and was killed. You may recollect the circumstances. Ahab had years before been at war with Syria; there had now been a three years' suspension of hostilities. A certain city, called Ramoth Gilead, belonging of right to Ahab, had been during this armistice, in possession of Syria. Jehoshaphat of Judah makes Ahab a friendly visit. While there, it occurs to Ahab to propose to him to go up with him to help him recapture Ramoth Gilead, and he replies favorably. But in those days no king went to war without consulting his gods. Hence Jehoshaphat inquires if there are not some prophets of the Lord by whom they may consult the true God. Ahab replies -- I have a host of prophets of Baal and of the groves; let them all be convened and questioned on this great matter. But, says Jehoshaphat, have you not some prophet of the Lord whom we may consult? "There is one," says Ahab, "but I hate him, for he never prophesies good for me, but only evil." Nay, says Jehoshaphat, but let him come also, and let us hear what he shall say from the Lord.

With one voice Baal's prophets said, "Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king." Jehoshaphat, still unsatisfied, calls for the answer from the one adhering prophet of Jehovah. Micaiah knew how the case stood. Aware that Ahab had sold himself to do wickedly and that God was giving him up to his chosen delusions, he answered at first ironically -- "Go and prosper" -- as the false prophets had said. It is plain there was something in his tone and manner that showed Ahab that his words meant what they did

not say, and therefore he replies -- "How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?" Then Micaiah, under the awful solemnity of his position, revealed to Ahab his true character and his impending doom. "Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord; I saw the Lord sitting on His throne and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right hand and on His left." I need not repeat what is written of the imagery of this scene; suffice it to say God suffered a lying spirit to go forth to lead Ahab on in his own cherished and chosen course. Yet even so, Ahab rejects this solemn warning from the Lord; though warned, he still persisted in his plan and met his death as God had said. So men are sometimes given up to judicial hardness and speedy ruin. They lose all sense of guilt; they seem desperately infatuated; afloat on a sea of doubt and darkness, they speedily near the awful brink of death; you look for them, and they are gone!

In our days, the methods of delusion are slightly modified as compared with those which obtained in the days of Ahab. Yet you may distinctly trace the same law of the Divine administration -- the same dark ocean of doubts and absurdities. Now, mesmerism, biology, the most foolish things that can be gotten up, will seem to them more like truth than the teachings of God's Spirit. They will even believe the revelations of Andrew Jackson Davis more than those of Isaiah, and will give up all belief in the Bible if some rapping spirit tells them to do so. From all I can learn, I regard these delusions as the legitimate result of the manner in which the Holy Ghost was treated in those revivals which have overspread the land since my remembrance. The dread results are before us -- delusions deep, dark and damning, hastening on the righteous doom of those who knew their duty but who did it not; who were visited with the light of God's Spirit, but having quenched that light, are left to judicial blindness and strong delusion.

- 2. Again, let me say, if persons quench the Holy Ghost they will wax worse and worse. By no methods of their own will they deliver their own souls. Abandoned of God, their own intelligence strangely perverted by deep depravity of heart, there is no redeeming power to save them. The most palpable lies they seem to have lost all power to discriminate from the truth, or to deliver their souls from the power thereof. If they attempt to pray, they cannot realize that they are praying to God at all. Nothing to support, nothing to guide them; no Holy Ghost to enlighten them, no power from

above to warm their souls into life; oh, how languid are their efforts at self-recovery; how feeble and how futile! If at any time one of this class becomes a little alarmed, and feeling some sensibility on religious subjects, falls on his knees to pray, almost before he begins, his mind wanders, he thinks of something else, and this is the end of his prayer.

Are any of you in this state? If any one should listen at your closet door, would he hear a feeble whisper and be impressed that your spiritual efforts are only of the very feeblest sort? What are your prayers? Is all earnestness dropped out? Is everything dark and dead round about your soul and within it, when you essay to draw near to God? Do you go and lie on your knees, almost ashamed of yourself that you think of praying at all? What is your state? Are you honestly afraid that the light of heaven has gone out? One of the most talented young men I ever knew came under the powerful influences of the Spirit, but resisted them finally and fatally. He had so much worldly political ambition, he could not possibly have God. His death-bed scene hastened on apace after he had fatally repelled the Spirit of God. Why should God spare him to live longer? The death scene came on. Darkness gathered thick upon his soul, so thick that it seemed to him the very room was all dark as the pit of despair. Lifting up his voice to its highest note, he cried, "Bring in a light, bring in a light!" Alas, how could he see light, after he had quenched all the light of God! How affecting the contrast between his case and that of the dying saint who melts away into the light of heaven!

Will you suffer yourself to pass on, rejecting God? Then no mercy or hope can ever beam upon you.

But if there be still a ray of light and some earnest thought of God; if your soul yet longs and trembles, O, seize the precious moment while yet it lingers; say -- "I will never quench the Spirit of God again! May the Lord enlighten me into all His blessed will!" This is the only safe course; the only course that can result in salvation. What do you say? Will you come and gather round the altar of God, to pour out your heart in mighty prayer? "Behold now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation."

[Back to Top](#)

What Men Highly Esteem, God Abhors

Lecture V

March 29, 1854

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Luke 16:15: "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God."

Christ had just spoken the parable of the unjust steward, in which He presented the case of one who unjustly used the property of others entrusted to him, for the purpose of laying them under obligation to provide for himself after expulsion from his trust. Our Lord represents this conduct of the steward as being wise in the sense of forethoughtful and provident for self--a wisdom of the world, void of all morality. He uses the case to illustrate and recommend the using of wealth in such a way as to make friends for ourselves who at our death shall welcome us into everlasting habitations." Then going deeper, even to the bottom principle that should control us in all our use of wealth, He lays it down that no man can serve both God and Mammon. Rich and covetous men who were serving Mammon need not suppose they could serve God too at the same time. The service of the one is not to be reconciled with the service of the other.

The covetous Pharisees heard all these things, and they derided Him. As if they would say--"Indeed, you seem to be very sanctimonious, to tell us that we do not serve God acceptably! When has there ever been a tithe of mint that we did not pay?" Those Pharisees did not admit His orthodoxy, by any means. They thought they could serve God and mammon both. Let whoever would say they serve mammon, they knew they served God also and they had nothing but scorn for those teachings that showed the inconsistency and the absurdity of their worshipping two opposing gods and serving two opposing masters.

Our Lord replied to them in the words of our text--"Ye are they who justify yourselves before men, but God knoweth your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God."

In pursuing the subject thus presented, I shall--

Show how and why it is that men highly esteem that which God avoids.

1. They have a different rule of judgment. God judges by one rule; they by another. God's rule requires universal benevolence; their rule is satisfied with an amount of selfishness, so be it sufficiently refined to meet the times. God requires men to devote themselves not to their own interest, but to His interest and those of His great family. He sets up one great end--the highest glory of His name and kingdom. He asks them to become divinely patriotic, devoting themselves to their Creator and to the good of His creatures.

The world adopts an entirely different rule, allowing men to set up their own happiness as their end. It is curious that some pretended philosophers have laid down the same rule--viz.: that men should pursue their own happiness, and only take care not to infringe on others happiness too much. Their doctrine allows men to pursue a selfish course only not to infringe too palpably on others rights and interests.

But God's rule is, "Seek not thine own." His law is explicit--"Thou shalt love (not thy self, but) the Lord thy God with all thy heart." "Love is fulfilling of the law." "Charity (this same love) seeketh not her own." This is characteristic of the love the law requires--it does not seek its own. "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's." (1Cor.10:24.) "Look not every man on his own things, but every man on the things of others." "For all seek their own, and not the things which are Jesus Christ." Phil. 2:4,21. To seek their own interest and not Jesus Christ, Paul regards an entire departure from true Christianity.

God regards nothing as virtue except devotion to the right ends. The right end is not one's own, but the general good. Hence God's rule requires virtue, while man's rule at best only restrains vice. All human governments are founded on this principle, as all who study the subject know. They do not require benevolence, they only restrain selfishness. In the foundation principles of our government, it is affirmed that men have certain inalienable rights, one of which is the right to pursue each his own happiness. This is affirmed to be an inalienable right, and is always assumed to be right in itself, provided it does not infringe on others' rights of happiness. But God's rule requires positive benevolence and regards nothing else as virtue except devotion to the highest good. Man's rule condemns nothing, provided man so restrains himself as not to infringe on others' rights.

Moral character is as the end sought. It cannot be predicated of muscular action, but must always turn on the end which the mind has in view. Men always really assume and know this. They know that the moral character is really as the end to which man devotes himself. Hence God's law and man's law being as they are, to obey God's is holiness; to obey only man's law is sin.

Men very inconsiderately judge themselves and others, not by God's rule, but by man's. They do this to an extent truly wonderful. Look into men's real opinions and you will see this. Often without being at all aware of it, men judge themselves, not by God's rule, but by their own.

Here I must notice some of the evidences of this, and furnish some illustrations.

(1.) Thus, for example, a mere negative morality is highly esteemed by some men. If a man lives in a community and does no harm, defrauds no man, does not cheat, or lie--does no palpable injury to society; transacts his business in a way deemed highly honorable and virtuous--this man stands in high repute according to the standard of the world. But what does all this really amount to? The man is just taking care of himself; that is all. His morality is wholly of this negative form. All you can say of him is, he does no hurt. Yet this morality is often spoken of in a manner which shows that the world highly esteem it. But does God highly esteem it? Nay, but it is abomination in His sight.

Again, a religion which is merely negative is often highly esteemed. Men of this religion are careful not to do wrong; but what is doing wrong? It is thought no wrong to neglect the souls of their neighbors. What do they deem wrong? Cheating, lying, stealing. These and such like things, they will admit are wrong. But what are they doing? Look round about you even here and see what men of this class are doing. Many of them never try to save a soul. They are highly esteemed for their inoffensive life; they do no wrong; but they do nothing to save a soul. Their religion is a mere negation. Perhaps they would not cross a ferry on the Sabbath; but never would they save a soul from death. They would let their own clerks go to hell without one earnest effort to save them. Must not such a religion be an abomination to God?

(2.) So, also, of a religion which at best consists of forms and prayers and does not add to these the energies of benevolent effort. Such a religion is all hollow. Is it serving God to do nothing but ask favors for one's self?

Some keep up Sabbath duties, as they are termed, and family prayer, but all their religion consists in keeping up their forms of worship. If they add nothing to these, their religion is only an abomination before God.

(3.) There are still other facts which show that men loosely set up a false standard, which they highly esteem, but which God abhors. For example, they will require true religion only of ministers; but no real religion of any body else. All men agree in requiring that ministers should be really pious. They judge them by the right rule. For example, they require ministers to be benevolent. They must enter upon their profession for the high object of doing good, and not for the mere sake of a living--not for filthy lucre's sake, but for the sake of souls and from disinterested love. Else they will have no confidence in a minister.

(4.) But turn this over and apply it to business men. Do they judge themselves by this rule? Do they judge each other by this rule? Before they will have Christian confidence in a merchant or a mechanic, do they insist that these shall be as much above the greed for gain as a minister should be--should be as willing to give up their time to the sick as a minister--be as ready to forego a better salary for the sake of doing more good, as they insist a minister should be? Who does not know that they demand of business men no such conditions of Christian character as those which they impose of gospel ministers? Let us see. If a man of business does any service for you, he makes out his bill, and if need be he collects it. Now suppose I should go and visit a sick man to give him spiritual counsel--should attend him from time to time for counsel and for prayer, till he died, and then should attend his funeral; and having done this service should make up my bill and send it in, and even collect it;--would there not be some talk? People would say, What right has he to do that? He ought to perform that service for the love of souls, and make no charge for it. This applies to those ministers who are not under salary to perform this service, of whom there are many. Let any one of these men go and labor ever so much among the sick or at funerals, they must not take pay. But let one of these ministers send his saw to be filed, and he must pay for it. He may send it to that very man whose sick family he has visited by day and by night, and whose dead he has buried, without charge, and "for the love of souls;" but no such "love of souls" binds the mechanic in his service. The truth is, they call that, religion, in a layman which they call sin in a minister. That is the fact. I do not complain that men take pay for labor, but that they do not apply the same principle to a minister.

Again, the business aims and practices of business men are almost universally an abomination in the sight of God. Almost all of these are based on the same principle as human governments are, namely, that the only restraint imposed shall be, to prevent men from being too selfish, allowing them to be just as selfish as they can be and yet leave others an equal chance to be selfish too.

Shall we go into an enumeration of the principles of business men respecting their objects, and modes of doing business? What would it all amount to? Seeking their own ends; doing something, not for others, but for self. Provided they do it in a way regarded as honest and honorable among men, no further restriction shall be imposed.

(5.) Take the Bible Society for an illustration. This Institution is not a speculation, entered upon for the good of those who print and publish. But the object aimed at is to furnish them as cheap to the purchaser as possible, so as to put a Bible into the hands of every human being at the lowest possible price. Now it is easy to see that any other course and any different principle from this would be universally condemned. If Bible societies should become merely a speculation they would cease to be benevolent institutions at all, and to claim this character would bring down on them the curses of men. But all business ought to be done as benevolently as the making of Bibles; why not. If it be not, can it be a benevolent business? and if not benevolent, how can it have the approval of God? What is a benevolent business? The doing of the utmost good—that which is undertaken for the one only end of doing good, and which simply aims to do the utmost good possible. In just this sense, men should be patriotic, benevolent, should have a single eye to God's glory in all they do, whether they eat or drink or whatever they may do.

Yet where do you find the man who holds his fellowmen practically to this rule as a condition of their being esteemed Christians, viz.: That in all their business, they should be as benevolent as Bible societies are? What should we say of a Bible society which should enter upon a manifest speculation and should get as much as they can for their Bibles, instead of selling at the lowest living price? what would you say of such a Bible society? You would say, "Horrible hypocrite!" I must say the same of every Christian who does the same thing. Ungodly men do not profess any Christian benevolence, so we will not charge this hypocrisy on them, but we will try to get this light before their mind.

Now place a minister directly before your own mind, and ask, Do you judge

yourself as you judge him? Do you say of yourself, I ought to do for others gratuitously all and whatever I require him to do gratuitously? Do you judge yourself by the same rule by which you judge him?

Apply this to all business men. No matter what your business is whether high or low, small or great; filing saws, or counting out bank bills; you call the Bible society benevolent; do you make your business as much so and as truly so in your ends and aims? If not, why not? What business have you to be less benevolent than those who print, publish and sell Bibles?

(6.) Here is another thing which is highly esteemed among men, yet is an abomination before God; viz.: selfish ambition. How often do you see this highly esteemed! I have been amazed to see how men form judgments on this matter. Here is a young man who is a good student in the sense of making great progress in his studies, (a thing the devil might do,) yet for this only, such young men are often spoken of in the highest terms. Provided they do well for themselves, nothing more seems to be asked or expected in order to entitle them to high commendation.

So of professional men. I have in my mind's eye the case of a lawyer who was greatly esteemed and caressed by his fellow men; who was often spoken of well by Christians; but what was he? Nothing but an ambitious young lawyer, doing every thing for ambition--ready at any time to take the stump and canvass the whole country--for what? To get some good for himself. Yet he is courted by Christian families! Why? Because he is doing well for himself! See Daniel Webster. How lauded, I had almost said canonized! Perhaps he will be yet. Certainly the same spirit we now see would canonize him if this were a Catholic country. But what has he done? He has just played the part of an ambitious lawyer and an ambitious statesman; that is all. He has sought great things for himself; and having said that, you have said all. Yet how have men lauded Daniel Webster! When I came to Syracuse, I saw a vast procession. What, said I, is there a funeral here? Who is dead? Daniel Webster. But, said I, he has been dead a long time. Ye, but they are playing up funeral because he was a great man. What was Daniel Webster? Not a Christian, not a benevolent man; every body knows this. And what have Christians to do in lauding and canonizing a merely selfish ambition? they may esteem it highly, yet let them know, God abhors it as utterly as they admire it.

(7.) The world's entire morality and that of a large portion of the church are only

a spurious benevolence. You see a family very much united and you say, How they love one another! So they do; but they may be very exclusive. They may exclude themselves and shut off their sympathies almost entirely from all other families, and they may consequently exclude themselves from doing good in the world. The same kind of a morality may be seen in towns and in nations. This makes up the entire morality of the world.

Many have what they call humanity, without any piety; and this is often highly esteemed among men. They pretend to love men, but yet after all do not honor God, nor even aim at it. And in their love of men, they fall below some animals. I doubt whether many men, not pious, would do what I knew a dog to do. His master wanted to kill him, and for this purpose took him out into the river in a boat and tied a stone about his neck. In the struggle to throw dog and stone overboard together, the boat upset; the man was in the river; the dog, by extra effort, released himself from his weight, and seizing his master by the collar, swam with him to land. Few men would have had humanity enough--without piety--to have done this. Indeed men without piety are not often half so kind to each other as animals are. Men are more degraded and more depraved. Animals will make greater sacrifices for each other than the human race do. Go and ask a whaler what he sees among the whales when they suffer themselves to be murdered to protect a school of their young. Yet many mothers think they do most meritorious things because they take care of their children.

But men, as compared with animals, ought to act from higher motives than they. If they do not, they act wickedly. Knowing more--having the knowledge of God and of dying Savior as their example and rule, they have higher responsibilities than animals can have.

(8.) Men often make a great virtue of their abolitionism though it be only of the infidel stamp. But perhaps there is no virtue in this, a whit higher than a mere animal might have. Whoever understands the subject of slavery and is a good man at heart will certainly be an abolitionist. But a man may be, an abolitionist without the least virtue. There may not be the least regard for God in his abolitionism, nor even any honest regard to human well-being. He may stand on a principles and adopt practices which show that if they had the power, they would enslave the race. They will not believe that a man can be a colonizationist, but I know good men who are--some men not only lord it over the bodies of their fellow men, but over their minds and souls--their opinions and consciences--

which is much worse oppression and tyranny than simply to enslave the body.

(9.) Often there is a bitter and an acrimonious spirit--not by any means the spirit of Christ; for while Christ no doubt condemns the slaveholder, he does not hate him. This biting hatred of evil-doers is only malevolence after all; and though men may ever so highly esteem it, God abominates it. On the other hand, many call that piety, which has no humanity in it. Whip up their slaves to get money to give to the Bible Society! Touch up the gang; put on the cat o'nine tails; the agent is coming along for money for the Bible Society! Here is piety (so called) without humanity. I abhor a piety which has no humanity with it and in it, as deeply as I condemn its converse--humanity without piety. How greatly then must He abhor either when unnaturally divorced from the other!

All those so called religious efforts which men make, having only self for their end, are an abomination to God.

There is a wealthy man who consents to give two hundred dollars towards building a splendid church. He thinks this is a very benevolent offering, and it may be highly esteemed among men. But before God approves of it He will look into the motives of the giver; and so may we, if we please. The man we find owns a good deal of real estate in the village which he expects will rise in value on the very day that shall see the church building determined on, enough to put back into his pocket two or three fold what he pays out. Besides this he has other motives. He thinks of the increased respectability of having a fine house and himself the best seat in it. And yet further, he has some interest in having good morals sustained in the village, for vice is troublesome to rich men and withal somewhat dangerous. And then he has an indefinable sort of expectation that this new church and his handsome donation to build it will somehow improve his prospects for heaven. In as much as these are rather dim at best the improvement, though indefinite, is decidedly an object. Now if you scan these motives, you will see that from first to last they are altogether selfish. Of course they are an abomination in God's sight.

The motives for getting a popular minister are often of the same sort. The object is not to get a man sent of God, to labor for God and with God, and one with whom the people may labor and pray for souls and for God's kingdom. But the object being something else than this is an abomination before God.

The highest forms of the world's morality are only abominations in God's sight.

The world has what it calls good husbands, good wives, good children; but what sort of goodness is this? The husband loves his wife and seeks to please her. She also loves and seeks to please him. But do either of them love or seek to please God in these relations? By no means. Nothing can be farther from their thoughts. They never go beyond the narrow circle of self. Take all these human relations in their best earthly form, and you will find they never rise above the morality of the lower animals. They fondle and caress each other, and seem to take some interest in the care of their children.. So do your domestic fowls, not less, and perhaps even more. Often these fowls in your poultry yard go beyond the world's morality in these qualities which the world calls good.

Should not human beings have vastly higher ends than these? Can God deem their highly esteemed qualities any other than an abomination if in fact they are even below the level of the domestic animals?

An unsanctified education comes into the same category. A good education is indeed a great good; but if not sanctified, it is all the more odious to God. Yes, let me tell you, if not improved for God, it is only the more odious to him in proportion as you get light on the subject of duty, and sin against that light the more. Those very acquisitions which will give you higher esteem among men will if unsanctified make your character more utterly odious before God. You are a polished writer and a beautiful speaker. You stand at the head of the College in these important respects. Your friends look forward with hopeful interest to the time when you will be heard of on the floor of Senates, moving them to admiration by your eloquence, But alas, you have no piety! When we ask, how does God look upon such talents, unsanctified, we are compelled to answer--only as an abomination. This eloquent young student is only the more odious to God by reason of all his unsanctified powers. The very things which give you the more honor among men will make you only the scoff of hell. The spirits of the nether pit will meet you as they did the fallen monarch of Babylon, tauntingly saying--"what are you here? You who could shake kingdoms by your eloquence, are you brought down to the sides of the pit? You who might have been an angel of light--you who lived in Oberlin; you, a selfish doomed sinner--away and be out of our company! We have nobody here so guilty and so deeply damned as you!"

So of all unsanctified talents, beauty, education, accomplishments; all, if unsanctified, are an abomination in the sight of God. All of those things which

might make you more useful in the sight God, are if misused, only the greater abomination in His sight.

So a legal religion, with which you serve God only because you must. You go to church, yet not in love to God or to His worship, but from regard to your reputation, to your hope, or your conscience. Must not such a religion be of all things, most abominable to God?

REMARKS.

1. The world have mainly lost the true idea of religion. This is too obvious from all I have said to need more illustration.

2. The same is true to a great extent of the church--professed Christians judge themselves falsely because they judge by a false standard.

3. One of the most common and fatal mistakes is to employ a merely negative standard. Here are men complaining of a want of conviction. Why don't they take the right standard and judge themselves by that? Suppose you had let a house burn down and made no effort to save it; what would you think of the guilt of stupidity and laziness there? Two women and five children are burnt to ashes in the conflagrations; why did not you give the alarm when you saw the fire getting hold? Why did not you rush into the building and drag out the unconscious inmates? Oh you felt stupid that morning--just as people talk of being "stupid" in religion! Well, you hope not to be judged very hard, since you did not set the house on fire; you only let it alone; all you did was to do nothing! That is all many persons plead as to their religious duties. They do nothing to pluck sinners out of the fire, and they seem to think this is a very estimable religion! Was this the religion of Jesus Christ or of Paul? Is it the religion of real benevolence? or of common sense?

You see how many persons who have a Christian hope indulge it on merely negative grounds. Often I ask persons how they are getting along in religion. They answer, pretty well; and yet they are doing nothing that is really religious. They are making no effort to save souls--are doing nothing to serve God. What are they doing! O they keep up the forms of prayer! Suppose you should employ a servant and pay him off each week, yet he does nothing all the long day but pray to you!

4. Religion is very intelligible and is easily understood. It is a warfare. What is a

warrior's service? He devotes himself to the service of his country. If need be he lays down his life on her altar. He is expected to do this.

So a man is to lay down his life on God's altar, to be used in life or death, as God may please, in His service.

5. The things most highly esteemed among men are often the very things God most abhors. Take for example, the legalist's religion. The more he is bound in conscience and enslaved, by so much the more, usually, does his esteem as a Christian rise.

The more earnestly he grows under his bondage to sin--the more truly he has to say -

"Reason I hear, her counsels weigh,

And all her words approve;

Yet still I find it hard to obey

And harder yet to love,"

by so much the more, does the world esteem and God abhor, his religion. The good man, they say--he was all his life-time subject to bondage! He was in doubts and fears all his life? But why did he not come by faith into that liberty with which Christ makes His people free?

6. A morality, based on the most refined selfishness, stands in the highest esteem among men. So good a man of the world, they say--almost a saint; yet God must hold him in utter abomination.

7. The good Christian, in the world's esteem, is never abrupt, never aggressive, yet he is greatly admired. He has a selfish devotion to pleasing men, than which nothing is more admired. I heard of a minister who had not an enemy in the world. He was said to be most like Christ among all the men they knew. I thought it strange that a man so like Christ should have no enemies, for Christ,--more like Himself than any other man can be--had a great many enemies and very better enemies too. Indeed it is said, "If any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, he shall suffer persecution." But when I came to learn the facts of the case I understood the man. He never allowed himself to preach anything that could displease even Universalists. In fact he had two universalists in his Session. In

the number of his session were some Calvinists also, and he must by no means displease them. His preaching was indeed a model of its kind. His motto was-- Please the people--nothing but please the people. In the midst of a revival, he would leave the meetings and go to a party; why? To please the people.

Now this may be highly esteemed among men; but does not God abhor it?

It is a light thing to be judged of man's judgment and all the lighter since they are so prone to judge by a false standard. What is it to me that men condemn me if God only approve? The longer I live, the less I think of human opinions on the great question of right and wrong as God sees them. They will judge both themselves and others falsely. Even the church sometimes condemns and excommunicates her best men. I have known cases and could name them, in which I am confident they have done this very thing. They have cut men off from their communion, and now every body sees that the men excommunicated were the best men of the Church.

It is a blessed thought that the only thing we need to care for is to please God.

The only enquiry we need make is--

What will God think of it?

We have only one mind to please; and that the Great Mind of the universe.

Let this be our single aim and we shall not fail to please him.

But if we do not aim at this, all we can do is only an abomination in his sight.

[Back to Top](#)

Variety in the Service Offered to God

Lecture VI

May 10, 1854

by Charles Grandison Finney

President of Oberlin College

Text.--Isa. 56:4-7: "For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep My Sabbaths, and choose the things that please Me, and take hold of My covenant; even unto them will I give in Mine house and within My walls, a place and a

name better than of sons and of daughters; I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of My covenant; even them will I bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer: their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon Mine altar; for Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people."

Among the people who profess to serve God are three distinct classes, distinguishable by obvious characteristics. It will be my present object to point out these classes and their distinctive marks.

I. The first class are bond-servants;

II. The next class may be called mercenaries;

III. The third and only acceptable class of servants are described in our text.

I. The first class are bond-servants; persons whose ruling motive in all they do is fear.

The service they render is not natural, but constrained. Usually they have a good deal of conviction and an unusual degree of light on religious subjects. They know what sin is and cannot indulge in it without conviction of wrong doing. They have so much sense of religious obligation that they dare not neglect God, but are forced to think often and much of their relations to Him and of His relations to them. Their own personal guilt and danger are often before their minds. It is not uncommon for such persons to dream fearful dreams, their minds being haunted even in sleep by the strong impression that they are wrong and in peril. This fear underlies all their religion. Consequently it makes them strict in what they call their religious duties. And when their fears are specially active they will be specially careful in their business transactions as well as in all their religious duties.

When their convictions of sin and their fears of danger subside, their religious duties are relatively neglected and they become also less strict in their business affairs.

Another mark is that their hope of heaven is more or less strong according as

they find themselves more or less strict in their religious duties, and on the other hand is more or less weak according as they indulge their appetites more and are less thorough in their devotions. With the decline of hope comes a revival of fear; and following this, fresh efforts to bring up in the line of duties and strictness. When this is pretty well brought up, hope revives again, the spirit of duty-doing flags; appetite conquers; then comes awful fear again; and so the wheel revolves, bringing up each development in its turn, in one perpetual round.

Again, these persons have no true joy in the service they render to God. It is impossible they should have because their service has no love in it. They have no sympathy or interest in the great ends God has in view, and they cannot have, so long as their hearts are supremely selfish. God chooses for His great end the highest happiness He can produce. If they sympathized with His great end, they would be benevolent. But in order to this, the very fundamental things in their character must be changed.

As they have no interest in God's great end, so have they none in the means He would have them use to promote this end. The thing that supremely interests them is to build up a hope. Hence if they can do a great deal, they obtain a self-righteous satisfaction and a feeling that now they are "engaged" and are doing their duty.

In proportion as they can silence their fears they get more hope and hence they value everything that obviates their fears. They lay the greatest stress upon a "good hope," valuing nothing else in any wise so much. Their hope costs them a great deal. They had to work hard to get it and they have hard and constant trouble to keep it. It needs a deal of nursing, so much that this becomes an important part of their business for life.

In seasons of great fear, they are prone to look at others and comparing themselves with others, they manage to bolster up their hope.

They keep up a sort of warfare against temptation, but their warfare is never triumphant. They find comfort only as they assume that none can gain much victory over sin and temptation in the present life, and as they compare themselves with others.

If they do anything for benevolent objects, fear underlies it all. They fear they

shall not be prospered and that the judgments of God will be upon them. They give, under the hope they shall escape God's frown thereby.

They refrain from follies and crimes only for the same reason. Fear underlies all, their nervous temperament is greatly excited by their fears and this becomes the main-spring of all their activities. If you hear them pray or talk, you can at once read their character. They will surely show that fear and hope are the main-springs of their life; that all they do is done, and all they refrain from doing is abstained from because of its bearing on their hopes and their fears. Their fear may embrace various objects; it may be fear of final ruin, or fear of losing reputation or hope.

Again, all their religious works are performed with a sense of drudgery and pain. If they were to speak right out what they think, they would say, religion is a very expensive thing to us. It costs us a great deal of painful self-denial. They would say as a young girl said to me once about her religion. Not long since three young girls came together to see me at my room. The first told me she had got religion. I saw she was gay and dressy, and therefore said to her; "is it not a pity that at your age you should be obliged to become religious and lose all the pleasures this world can give? If you only knew you should not die too soon, would not you enjoy it much better to live as you please, unrestrained by religious obligations?" Yes, said she, if I had only known I should not die, it would no doubt have been pleasant for me to enjoy the world. The second of the three sympathized with her, saying, if she could only have been sure of not dying before she was ready it would have been pleasant to enjoy more of the world. But the third looked greatly surprised, and then grieved and began to weep. It would be no pleasure, she said, to her to have all this world could give, she could not enjoy it, because it would grieve the Savior. What! said I, would you not like to have the world if you could? No; no: all I want is to please my Savior. I could enjoy nothing unless it should be pleasing to Him. Then I had no occasion to tell the first two they had no religion. The third had answered every question so warmly from her heart and so impressively through her tears, that they needed no other testimony to show them that they had not begun to serve God at all yet.

Many are not aware that the underlying influence in all their religion, is fear. This works deep in their mind; yet they do not analyze their own mental states and go deep even to the core. They really rely much more on public sentiment as to the grounds of a hope, than on any thorough knowledge of what faith is or

holiness; as you may see by the interest they feel in noticing what others do for a good hope. What others do for a religion they too strive to do, so as not to fall below the public standard. Others may think them very pious; but at the very moment while others are applauding, they are very uncomfortable, considered in reference to their own state of mind, besides exerting a very uncomfortable influence on others.

Now it is easy to see that all this is really self-service; not any service rendered to God. To this kind of service, God promises no reward. However deep, earnest, constant and uniform it may be, there is nothing in it for God to reward.

II. The next class may be called mercenaries.

They differ constitutionally from the first class; inasmuch as these serve for reward: those, to escape punishment: these act under the influence of hope; those of fear. This second class have little fear and little conscience. The motive power in their minds is the idea of profit. Religion is respectable, especially in a place like this. Indeed, in most places there is a kind of respectability attached to religion which everybody apprehends. Some are very much influenced by this consideration. I remember that about the only time I ever had the observance of the Sabbath urged upon me, it was done by a young man who told me it would give me respectability in society. Look all round you, said he; you will see that the most respectable people go to meeting. It will be much to your profit to associate with them. It will secure you a place in their confidence. Men will employ you. Any slave holder will pay extra for a pious slave. So in every community, attendance on religious worship is profitable, It will secure the confidence of teachers, neighbors, employers; will ensure you better credit and a fairer reputation; will elevate you in society, especially if you go to a respectable church and associate with respectable people. Sabbath keeping is pleasant, and in many respects agreeable.

So it is respectable to give to charitable objects. Many say they never lose anything by giving moderately to charitable objects. They get more patronage in their own business. If they help build churches, they find it pays well. Hence there are the best of reasons for such donations.

In the same manner, prayer is profitable. It will secure the Divine direction in your business, and who cannot afford to pay well for such counsel? In short, all religious duties pay well. This is the reason why mercenary Christians perform

them. This love of the profit underlies all their religious duties. They take the same kind of interest in religion that men do in profitable business. God is good, say they, and hence will be a good paymaster. Said a man to me who was at the point of death, "I am prepared to die, I think; I don't know that I have ever done anything wrong. I have always been to meeting of a Sabbath; I am sure I have always been in my place in the sanctuary." Many who cannot say so much as this think they have done some good to off-set whatever evil they may have done; and since the Lord is not a hard but a generous master, they feel quite confident that He will balance the books in their favor.

This class of persons, as I have said, do not serve God from fear, but from hope. They go into it as a good and a paying business. They do not toil hard, for they don't suppose it necessary, and their toil does not come hard to them, because they expect a handsome reward for it. They work cheerfully as those who are driving a good business. Their religion is not a yoke of bondage. They call it "gospel liberty." They will be all the more earnest and zealous, by how much the stronger are their hope and expectation of eternal life. They are laying up treasure in heaven, why should they not be cheerful and hopeful? They make reward their end; mistake presumption for faith; the love of gain for the love of God. It does not lie before their minds as the love of gain, yet it is so, none the less truly.

Such are only mercenaries. They serve not God but self.

III. The third and only acceptable class of servants are described in our text.

God says of them, "They do the things that please Me, and take hold of My covenant. They join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord and to be His servants."

If we trace back the history of this class, we shall find that they once lived in sin; that they became awake to their guilt and convinced of their sin; were led to consider the character of God, the nature and spirit of His law; that they became interested in these objects, so that although they commenced their inquiries under convictions of danger and peril, yet they found themselves interested in God's character; they saw the fitness and excellence of His law and the glory of His gospel, and though they may be quite unable to tell when or where they embraced this gospel and committed themselves to its principles, yet this they know -- that they became intensely interested in God, in Christ, and in the entire

scheme of the gospel. They are not thinking now about their hope, but about Christ's work, His great mission; its success and their own responsibilities in promoting it. Look into the heart of one of these Christians; he seems to have dropped all fear, to have forgotten himself; he has ceased to pray much or chiefly for himself; has given himself up to a deep sympathy with the whole movement. When he comes to look within to the state of his inner impulses, he thinks this must be true religion; yet very possibly he had been in this state a long time before he saw it. He started selfishly, but lost his selfishness before the wonderful cross of the Savior! He dropped it there, when he saw and believed the love that God hath toward us. Then and thenceforward his religion became entirely spontaneous. He gave himself up to prayer for others. Neither hope nor fear is uppermost in his mind; but the love of God and the love of man -- these are quite first and uppermost in all the inner workings of his mind. All his religion is spontaneous. He loves his work because he is unified with Christ in His great enterprise and in the all-controlling benevolence of His heart.

Observe also that although this class do not seek hope, yet they have it all the more. They have it the more because they do not seek it. It comes to them by a natural law. It springs up unconsciously and uncalled for as they find themselves drawn into deeper sympathy with Christ and with holiness, and as they see without an effort that their souls are breathing the spirit of Christ and are already ripe for the benevolent employments of the heavenly state. They cannot perhaps remember the last time they prayed they might get to heaven; but they know they have been nerved day by day to pray that they may be strong in God to do every duty and bear all suffering for His name.

REMARKS.

1. The hope that needs nursing is a snare of death. If you are compelled to take pains to nurse your hope and take pains to keep it alive, rely on what I say, it is a snare of death to your soul.
2. Many as soon as they come to lose their hope are zealous in religion, till they get it back; then their zeal and effort decline. I have lately met with a painful case, in illustration of this. A man called on me as an old acquaintance, so changed however that I could not recognize him at all. He had long been a professed Christian, but long too had he been the veriest slave to intoxicating drink. I never shall forget the impression of a ruined man which his whole appearance made on my mind. He began to relate his recent exercises and said,

"I think I have now found the Savior, but I had almost lost my soul because I have been spending this whole winter in trying to regain my lost hope. What a snare that old hope has been to me! It had well nigh ruined me by preventing me from coming to my Savior. My life for many long years has been full of wretchedness. There has been scarce a night for years when the drink has been out of me but I have been in dreadful horror and almost in utter despair. This past winter my mind has been thoroughly aroused to fly for refuge to Christ, yet as I said, I begun with vain efforts to get back my old hope. At last I gave up that pursuit and thought I might better try to find Christ. Through His great mercy, I trust I have found Him."

So, many try to get back an old and perished hope. It would be both easier and safer for them to try to find Christ.

3. Sinners who are here yet unconverted can see the distinction I have made. You can see that the first two classes are not truly religious, but are deeply deluded. You can see what kind of people they are and how they came into such delusions. Some of them are in the seventh of Romans, and never have any other or better Christian experience than that. Said a merchant to me, "I have just lost a brother-in-law by death and I think his history may be of use to you as a warning to others. He was remarkably fond of show, greedy of gain, and loved money as he loved his own soul, and withal was exceedingly fond of making a parade of his wealth; yet he always found it for his interest to be very religious and to do a great deal of religious duty. I saw him when he was at the point of death and said to him -- 'are you really prepared to die?' He replied, 'Yes, no doubt of it. I take this view of the case. If there is a Savior I have got Him, for I have always done all my religious duties; and on the other hand, if there is no Savior, there is no hell and I am safe.' But even now, on the verge of the grave, he was as grasping for money as man could be. Money had all his heart. His faith was mere presumption; a most terrible and fatal mistake! His ruling spirit was a greedy, grasping spirit, and this led him to grasp the rewards of religion among the rest. He laid hold of Christ, in the sense in which he did so at all, only for the sake of future salvation. He wanted to get gain, and since this might be a good investment, lying over in the future state, where he had laid up no other possessions, he thought it wise to lay up a store of religious merit by means of some external duty-doing. If heaven had really been on sale, his plan might have been successful, that is, if it had been in the market at his price!"

And now, my hearers, let this case and the great truth which underlies it be made thoroughly practical to each heart. Let each one ask himself -- Have I done all my religious duties for reward? Have I been nothing better than a mercenary in God's service? Have I studied only respectability, and done my religious duties only for the sake of my reputation? I charge my soul before God to answer these questions in all truth and honesty. What is the fact in regard to my religious life? Have I thoroughly given myself away to Christ? Have I embarked everything in this great service? How is it with you, my brother -- with you, my sister?

I have been speaking of the third class who are truly religious and who regard themselves as humble followers of Christ; but some of you belong to a class who do not think themselves religious. Will you set yourselves to find the place where you do belong? Consider that the first two classes whom I have described have no reward whatever. You can see for yourselves that they are not honestly serving God as His true servants. Settle it therefore in your minds that you do not want such a religion. Those who are not seeking reward, but who serve God from love are the only true Christians and are all the more sure of reward by how much the less selfishly they seek it. Nay more, they have their reward here as they go along, and cannot help having it, in their very hearts as well as through the Divine favor, because they really give up their souls to benevolence as God does. Benevolence is its own reward, and would be reward enough even if there were no God, or if God should see fit not to superadd His blessing. But God will superadd His blessing, as truly as He is good.

Hence none but the real Christian makes any real profit from his religion. And he gets his profit not because he seeks it in a mercenary spirit, but because he gives himself up to doing the will of God with all his heart, and leaves the whole question of profit and reward with his Lord and Master.

[Back to Top](#)

License, Bondage and Liberty

Lecture VII

May 24, 1854

by Charles Grandison Finney

President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 8:15: "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

In a sermon preached recently, I said that the Lord had three classes of servants; bondmen, mercenaries and those who serve Him in love. I wish now to make another three-fold distinction. Persons may be classified according to their spirit. Some have a spirit of license; others a spirit of bondage; and others a spirit of true Christian liberty. Into one or the other of these classes, all moral agents who have any knowledge of God must necessarily fall. It will be my present object to develop the prominent characteristics of each several class.

I. The spirit of license.

II. Some detail of those who have the spirit of bondage.

III. To consider the case of those who have the spirit of liberty.

I. The first class have what I call the spirit of license.

License differs essentially from liberty. License is selfishness unrestrained by moral considerations--a state in which men do as they list, with no fear of God before their eyes, and follow out their own selfish ends without moral restraint.

Its characteristics are,

- 1. An undeveloped conscience. They have had so little moral training that their views on moral questions are yet immature, or merely negative, and not infrequently erroneous. To this class I once belonged. Many things which I have since regarded as gross sins, gave me then no trouble. My conscience was undeveloped. Nothing had then transpired to develop it. Some of my earliest impressions of moral restraint were produced by seeing my mother weep because my father would let his sons go to the lake fishing on the Sabbath. Her tears reminded me forcibly that there was something wrong in this. I was then old enough to know all about such matters of duty, but not having my attention turned to these subjects, I remained practically as if I had no conscience.

- 2. Others have only a seared conscience. These go on much as if they had no conscience at all, although they may have had a conscience very considerably developed. They can recollect when they could not lie or swear. Tempted, they were often obliged to refrain by the demands of conscience. Now they are inclined perhaps to smile over their former notions.
- 3. Others are not restrained, although ever so much upbraided. They have no faith in the great things revealed of God. Indeed they act as if there were no God, for although they admit His existence, they allow it to have no practical influence on their minds. They have no practical regard for what is morally right. Having no vivid sense of moral obligation, their minds are wholly open to the impulses of selfishness. If they forbear to cheat, lie, or steal, it is not through any moral consideration, but under the influence of some form of selfishness. They manifest the spirit of license in this particular, that conscience has no practical control over them. The desire to do good has no influence. They do not care to do any good, although they know they have the power and the opportunity.

Here let me stop and ask, how it is with you in this respect? What testimony do your heart and life bear when tried by such tests as these? Are you living as you know you ought not to live? Are you doing what your conscience condemns? Are you going on in your own way, despite of all God may require, under a spirit of moral recklessness? Let this matter be inquired into. You may not be reckless as to other considerations; but if you are so as to moral considerations, the fact ought to alarm you. If the motives which ought to control you fail of doing so, your heart must be fearfully wrong. If your condition is such that others, in order to influence you, must appeal to something besides conscience, and the sense of duty, you may know that you are far gone in moral recklessness and ruin.

- 4. It is curious to see how this downward tendency acts on the moral nature. The perception of moral principles grows dim; moral relations seem to fade away gradually from the mind. The man will tell you he doubts whether such and such things are sinful at all. He does not quite see how there need be any wrong in them. If you try to point out to him their moral qualities and relations, you are amazed to find, that his perceptions on such questions

are so dull that you cannot make him see a sin. This is naturally the state of all those who have the spirit of license, for if persons have clear, sharp moral perceptions, they will fall into one of the two later classes. The men of license you will find have but few moral principles. Singularly, you will see that these principles have dropped out of their mind, until there is little of that sort left. They can now laugh over the commission of sins which once made them sweat with agony. All moral principles become lax in their minds. Things once deemed wrong they learn to excuse; look back on their former scruples as superstitious and foolish; and talk largely of their "progress"--little thing, alas, that their way of progress is towards hell.

- 5. Persons in youth, having the spirit of license, will manifest in it their pleasure loving tendencies, and in their passion for dress. Amusement is often their chief delight, and of course their spirit of license develops itself in this direction. What, they say, were we not made that we might enjoy ourselves? Does not God like to see us happy? But if you search carefully into their state of mind you will see that they are "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God;" that they care little as to what will please God, but much for what will please themselves. They know how to excuse anything which it pleases them to do.
- 6. Developments of the same reckless spirit vary according to age and tastes. As the young are pleasure-loving, the middle-aged are covetous and money-loving; or perhaps they aspire after distinction in their professions. Whither the heart goes, in that direction, you will find the spirit of license in sin developing itself. Under such a state of moral feeling, men will be sure to leave a broad margin for deviations from moral right. They can justify a great many dishonest ways of getting gain; or of promoting their favorite schemes of ambition.

It is striking and sad to see how their worldly-mindedness can deface and even efface all their notions of right and of wrong; how they will plead for sin; defend various forms of sin and indulgence; roll their sin as a sweet morsel under the tongue--unscrupulously violate the Sabbath--allow themselves almost any amount of latitude in their direction, especially if among strangers; take a little strong drink and say--What's the harm if nobody knows it and it brings no disgrace? In business, what will they not do

if they can escape detection? If there is danger of detection, they will call it a mistake and rectify it,--a thing they never do for the sake of the moral principle. In political life, they manage any way to subserve their ends, their object being, never the general good, but always their own personal interests. In whatever form of self-seeking, they care not for the eye of God, nor for the dictates of conscience.

- 7. The law of progress with all men of this class is from bad to worse. If you notice where they started and trace along their secret history, you will see this distinctly and fearfully illustrated. You, young men, who yield yourselves to sin, do you not see that your law of progress is from bad to worse? And you, young women, if you give yourselves up to license in sin?

Some of you have been almost surfeited with religious instruction. You have heard prayers enough and have seen tears enough to melt any heart but yours. Where will you be when once removed forever from these restraints and given up to the full sweep of that fearful law of downward progress?

For those whose conscience has been rightly developed, I have great hope. How many have we seen here who, when they first came among us, had hardly conscience enough to make them appear decent in the house of God; but not having been hardened, they began to listen, and as they listened began to feel and think. Soon you meet them in the enquiry meeting; and then soon, at the feet of Jesus.

On the other hand, some go the other way. Already hardened fearfully, they wince under the truth; their hearts rebel against it; they fall into some low form of skepticism--cast off God and His truth, and with fearful strides rush downward, downward, to the depths of hell!

Where, young men, are you? And ye of every age and of all conditions, professing or not professing piety, let me ask you to apply these tests to your own heart and life. Where are you? Have you the spirit of license? and more than all, let me ask, Have you that most fearful of all symptoms of being far gone in the way of death,--that, knowing your state to be as bad as it can be, yet you do not care?

II. I must next speak with some detail of those who have the spirit of bondage.

- 1. Very commonly, yet improperly, those who have this spirit are called conscientious Christians. They get this name especially because they differ so widely from those who have the spirit of license. It is true, this class differs very much from that. Their conscience is not seared, but tender; is not undeveloped or inactive, but wakeful and efficient in certain directions. Yet they are not properly conscientious, because they do not go deep enough. Their conscience reaches only to the exterior of life--not to the interior. It restrains them from external conduct which they deem wrong, but does not control the heart. It is a conscience, without either faith or love. Hence their life is not spontaneously after the will of God. They are in bondage in the sense that they are not at liberty to do what they would like. Since their heart does not sympathize with God, all His ways are irksome and all their own ways, pleasant; so that of course all their religious duties must come hard. Now if their hearts were truly given to God, they would be filled with the Spirit, and nothing could so please them as the things that please God. In such a state, they can serve God without bondage,

"Tis love that makes our cheerful feet,

In swift obedience move--"

and this obedience is the highest freedom and the purest blessedness. When the heart is right it asks nothing wrong, and men have only to go according to their heart; or more strictly, they have only to follow the Lord, and to this the heart makes no resistance but yields with the utmost delight.

- 2. But those whose hearts are yet in sin, yet who do a bond-service--for God as they suppose, but really for self; they would fain lessen their religious services if they might. They would stay away from religious meetings if it would do. They lust for the fleshpots of Egypt, and would return thither if they dared. They are in bondage to their consciences. For the sake of peace with conscience, they conform to its dictates in part, in the way of compromise, pleading to be let off as much as possible, and making the best turns they can, as men are wont to do with a hard master.

Again, this class are in bondage to God, serving Him, so far as they render Him any service, in the spirit of slaves, not of sons. They think they must be religious, or do worse, and they are afraid of the worse alternative. They would do many things which God forbids, but they dare not. Hence they

submit, yet the heart yields only the form of service.

- 3. They are in bondage to the church. They are afraid of censure. To have Christians watch over them is about equivalent to having spies environing their path. So far from rejoicing to have the kind and watchful eye of brethren and sisters on them, they feel this to be an unwelcome restraint.

Now, beloved, how does this test apply to your heart?

- 4. This class abound in resolutions. These constitute their principal Christian exercises. To make resolutions and to break them; to endeavor, yet to fail to perform; to resolve and resolve, yet go on as ever--this is their religious history. The reason is, they never break up the deep foundations of selfishness and let their souls settle down into the great depths of benevolence.
- 5. They are often greatly pressed with conviction, a deep sense of sin troubles them; conscience upbraids; they say, or omit to say many things for which they condemn themselves, and hence they feel exceedingly uneasy. If they are students they scarcely get a lesson. In fact they are simply convicted sinners, not converted saints.

Again, their knowledge of their own case controls the judgment they form of others, and hence they judge others harshly. They cannot conceive how a Christian can smile without sin. They do not understand that buoyancy of spirit which is so congenial to the peaceful Christian. Always dissatisfied with themselves, how can they be satisfied with others? Always conscious of doing wrong, how can they, naturally, judge otherwise of their friends? Their own mind screwed up under a feeling of bondage and a sense of constraint, they give no credit for honest piety to those who walk peacefully and calmly in the light of the Savior's presence. Spontaneously forming harsh judgments, first of themselves, and next of others, they have no idea what a change would come over these judgments of others if once they were to come themselves into gospel liberty. Set these bond-servants to the work of Christian discipline; they almost never reclaim or reform the offender. It is quite beyond their power to love him down--for the love is not in them.

Or let another commence discipline in the church; and you will find them

almost surely throwing themselves in the way. Their sympathies will be on the side of the wrong-doer. They will treat everything as persecution which is intended to reform and subdue.

- 6. Commonly they are strict and punctual in their religious duties, yet not willingly and joyfully, but of constraint. Take the constraint away, and no such duties would be done.
- 7. In these religious duties, they get no real comfort. The true child of God gets real comfort without seeking it; this class seek it much and long, but in vain. They value it highly; want somebody to give them comfort, applaud the ministers who speak comfortably to them; but, not complying with the conditions of comfort, they must fail to find it.
- 8. They have but little hope, and that unsettled, hard to keep, of little practical worth. Anxious, unhappy, an annoyance to others, they are prone to be sour, morose and censorious. It is natural they should misunderstand those who pass into real peace by submission to God. When they see such persons enter a state of gospel light and liberty, they are alarmed, and say, "How can he be so cheerful? What can make him so light-hearted? There must be something wrong." Now persons under the spirit of bondage have not gone far enough even to see where the peaceful Christian stands.
- 9. They are also characterized by a religious zeal and a sanctimoniousness which must needs put on something, and which to a discerning eye will have the air of something put on, and not spontaneous. It is not a natural solemnity, but a constrained formality.
- 10. Their prayers amount to this, that they may be converted. They do not so understand it, for they think they have been converted, perhaps long ago; yet their convictions lead them to pray for just what would, if granted, be conversion. The amount of their prayer is that God would give them repentance, a new heart, gospel faith; in short would make them Christians. They struggle earnestly, in their way, but going perpetually about to establish their own righteousness, they come not into gospel rest.

- 11. With them, religion seems a hard business--as it always must seem to be, while the heart is wrong. What, they say, how can a man love God with all his heart? How can one love his neighbor as himself? The best they can do is to struggle on and find no peace. One perpetual round of tasked duty-doing makes up their religion. In it all, there is no real service done for God, from a heart devoted lovingly to His character and service. Such have only the spirit of bondage again to fear.

III. I am next to consider the case of those who have the spirit of liberty.

Some understand Christian liberty to be the privilege of doing as they please, right or wrong; but they greatly mistake; for this is only license.

Liberty, psychologically considered, is the power to do the contrary--the free ability to choose and to act otherwise than the actual choice. But, considered in reference to the Christian life, it may be better defined as the spirit of doing right spontaneously. The heart is united to God by thoroughly choosing His ends, and hence become unified with Him in sympathy and interest, even as the son with the father whom he respects and loves.

The Bible here in our context speaks of Christians as being "sons of God." It represents them as becoming sons both by being begotten of His Spirit in regeneration; and by adoption. Indeed the Spirit of God dwells in them, takes up His abode in their hearts; and hence creates a living union between their souls and His. They come to have the same great reason for action--the same radical purpose and aim,--that God Himself has. They have chosen the same great end, have adopted the same views; submit their heart to the control and guidance of His truth and Spirit; so that genuine benevolence issues from their very hearts, spontaneously. Hence a harmony with God in their ends, aims and affections, becomes an established, settled state; and they are really no more in bondage than Christ Himself was. You need not appeal to their conscience to prick them on to duty. They have a conscience, to be sure; but it is to them a guide, not a goad; a very important distinction. Their conscience is not a goad, under which they move along, stung, wincing, bleeding; but a guide--given of God to lead their way and point out moral relations. When cordially accepted as a guide, it has no sting; it comes not to lacerate, any more than if it were wrapped in the softest silk. As soon as the heart settles and sinks sweetly into the will of God, conscience needs no rod--no scorpion sting--not even a word of command; it has

only to say--"This is the way, Here you are to go--this is the will of your Father in heaven."

Persons not in this state and strangers to it may suppose that your conscience has fallen away and dropt out. It was said of a wife; "She is dutiful, but has no love." But suppose this woman is married to one she tenderly loves, to whom her heart is bound with bonds stronger than death. She might then say--it seems as if I had no conscience. Formerly it was compelled to be a goad, and not merely a guide; but now it has no such work to do as before; the heart needs only to know the way and it rejoices with great joy to walk therein.

This is a spirit of spontaneous co-operation with God. It is love acting itself out and manifesting itself in a way natural and easy. Everything is done as is supposed will please God. The mind acts on high principles; the law of love and of God is written on the heart; all obedience is natural and free because spontaneous and in harmony with the supreme choice. This is the full idea of Christian liberty: acting as we please when our pleasure is to act only right; taking the right course because this pleases God, and nothing can please us but what pleases Him. The mind entrusts all its own interests and destinies with God. To Him is committed the future, otherwise all unknown and untried; to Him the mind commends the present with its toils and interests; and to Him the past in the hope of free forgiveness through a Redeemer. Hence the soul is free and at ease. It is conscientious in the true sense; its state and acts being so entirely in harmony with an enlightened conscience that it comes into no collision with its dictates. All is right, says the conscience; and of course there is peace, so long as religious feeling and duty are spontaneous.

REMARKS.

1. It is hardly necessary to say that the first class which I have described--having the spirit of license--are spiritually blind and dead. This is abundantly obvious. The second class--men in bondage--are regarded as very exemplary Christians, but they are in fact only convicted sinners. That they are not saved is very evident from the fact that they are constantly praying for salvation--that is--when they are stirred up to any religious exercise. You may try to get them to pray and to labor for others; you cannot; they fall right back to praying for themselves. After preaching one evening, I went to the library room of the church, and at the door a young lady met me, and said she wanted to speak with me. She wanted to ask me what she should do to be saved. Her father, long a leading man in the

church was by; so, after talking awhile with the daughter, I said--let us pray for this dear child of yours. He seemed as one confounded; I observed his strange appearance, yet thought it best to press on our work; and therefore said: You lead first in prayer for your daughter, and I will follow. He prayed awhile, yet for himself only. He had not the face to say even once--"Lord, have mercy on my daughter." He could only say--"Lord have mercy on me." Not one word could he say for her, though under such circumstances of heart-thrilling interest.

2. It is of no use to try to drive a person out of this rut; they will forever slump back into it. But as soon as they come into the liberty of the gospel, it becomes as natural as their breath to pray for sinners. A forcible illustration of this occurred in a meeting for enquiry in which I had no assistance. I spoke to them a while to try to lead them to Christ, and then proposed to pray. Before I commenced, I said to them--after I close, if any of you want to pray, just open your mouth and your heart freely. After I stopped, one of them began; prayed a minute for himself; seemed really to come in humble faith to Christ; and then immediately began to pray for the one next to him. When he stopped, this next one began in the same way, first for himself; then coming to Christ, he launched out in most earnest prayer for his next neighbor. So the thing went on for a long time, each praying first for himself, and till his heart committed itself to Jesus; and then pouring out its prayer for sinners. It was a most affecting season, and especially instructive as showing how naturally the heart that has laid itself over upon the arms of the Savior prays for those yet in their sins.

3. Those who are really in bondage often remain so through pride. They are not humble enough to disclose their real state. When a full pouring out of their souls in confession would do them good and would honor the gospel, they refrain, too proud to take their place before God and man as humbled penitents. Especially is the danger extreme when those who have held a prominent position in the church get into bondage. Often such persons never get out. I could tell you of many cases that would surprise you. They are prone to say--If I confess, I shall stumble others. Who will believe I am converted, or will have any confidence in me if I confess the real truth of myself? Hence Satan shuts them in all round about, and few persons of any class are in so great a danger of losing their souls.

4. Persons in bondage often seem to themselves to have a much deeper sense of sin than those who are in gospel liberty. They think so, but they are entirely mistaken. Those who are free in the gospel have altogether the keenest sense of

sin. Yet the bones broken under the law are set and healed, and God has caused rejoicing where only pains were before. But if persons from this state were to fall into sin, you would see their conscience wake to a searching and a fearful retribution.

5. Young men who have not associated with Christians who were in gospel liberty and acting under the impulses of love, will almost always have false conceptions of religion. Their idea of it will lack the amenities and the charities of the true gospel life. They do not see how anybody can be in such a state as not to lust after the flesh-pots of selfishness. They have no conception of that state in which the soul rises to a new class of aspirations and sympathies--in which it ascends far above the murky and foul atmosphere of earth, and bathes itself in the love and the light of heaven. They need to come into close communion with Christians who are in this state before they can properly appreciate the idea of religion.

Do you, my hearers, lack this glorious gospel light and liberty? How is it with you today? Those of you who are not professors; what attitude will you take? Is it not time that you should set your face towards your Father's house, saying;-- From this day, my whole heart is thine? What do you say to this! Is it not time that you should get out of darkness?

Think of your bondage. Is it not time that you should awake and accept the offered boon of freedom? Jesus Christ has proclaimed you free, if you will; and is it not time that you should accept it? Will you longer remain of choice a slave?

In some of the southern States, the emancipation of a slave is so great a matter that it is done only by means of special forms and by a solemn public transaction. The master brings his slave before the court and there in a special form makes out and subscribes his papers, and thus gives the slave his freedom.

A far more wonderful transaction has taken place in another quarter; a far higher court has been in session; nay, the supreme Executive of the universe has come forth to act on this great emancipation, and has made out true papers for giving gospel liberty to a race of lost, enslaved sinners. Had you heard of this? The thing was done many years ago, but the business still lingers unfinished. In fact there have not been messengers enough to carry the glad news yet to every creature; and what is worse, very many to whom it has come cannot be persuaded to accept the boon. Hence much time has been lost and the work still

lingers. And now what will you do with this proposal? It comes to you; what will you do with it? Do you say, "I am not a slave;" ah, but you are, and you know it! Do you say, "If I were only sure that I could get such a religion--one of true gospel liberty--I would have it"? Let me tell you, there is no other true religion, none. All other is counterfeit. You can have this if you will.

Suppose a young man here should say--"If you can tell me what to do, I will do it. Any thing I can do, I am ready to do." This would be hopeful and right; and nothing less than this can be right. How many of you will pledge yourselves to do your duty, if you should be told what it is? If you are willing to do what God requires you to do to be saved even to the cutting off a right hand, then you can be readily directed to Christ and you may surely come and find life and peace. But many sinners come and ask what they shall do, and then, having heard, they refuse to do it. They come to the door and knock; but when bidden to come in, they say--"O no, I had no thought of coming in;" and turn coolly, or it may be, scornfully, away. Alas, "the turning away of the simple shall slay them!" They cannot many times repel the gospel from their hearts and dash salvation's offered cup from their lips, and yet be welcomed in, when they shall have pressing occasion to call in fearful earnest for admission.

[Back to Top](#)

Living by Faith

Lecture VIII

June 7, 1854

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Hab. 2:4: "The just shall live by faith."

These words which occur first in Habakkuk are quoted in Gal. 3:11 and again in Heb. 10:38. They express a great truth which has a specially rich and important development in the gospel.

I. I will first explain the sense in which all men live by faith; and

II. The sense in which the just live by faith.

I. Faith is not merely an intellectual state.

- 1. It is more than a mere conviction or state of being convinced. We do not reach the radical idea till we get to the heart, and till we find in this term, faith, the heart's confidence--a trusting in which the heart reposes on the word or character of one deemed worthy of confidence. It is a phenomenon of the will--it being of necessity a thing of free choice whether we will or will not refuse confidence, it being supposed that the intelligence sees good reason for such confidence.
- 2. In its generic signification it may be applied to any thing in which we repose confidence. Any exercise of mind in which we yield it up to confide and to trust is faith.
- 3. All intelligent beings live by faith in some thing. Little children live by faith, and it is striking to observe how much this is true of them. Indeed unreflecting persons do not by any means conceive how universal this principle is and must be, and how necessary to the existence of social and sentient beings. Even little children must learn to have faith in the use of their muscles, else they would not venture to trust themselves upon their feet at all. Nor would any sane man eat his daily food but for faith. He has faith in his cook that she has not poisoned it. He must have faith that this food will do him good and will not kill him. Without faith men would not dare lie down to sleep. They must have some confidence in their fellow beings that they will be permitted to sleep without being murdered. In fact men would not dare to do any thing which implies peaceful repose unless they lived by faith. Without faith, there could be no repose of mind--nothing but sleepless and intense solicitude. In this state no man could live. His very solitudes would wear out his nerves and crush down his physical system.
- 4. All families must live by faith, or rather they could not live without it. Even a pirate ship could not be managed without it. An old adage says--"There is honor among thieves;" and obviously, if there were not, there could be no such thing as organized thievishness, or association in mischief

of any sort. They who need the help or sympathies of others in their enterprise must of necessity live by faith.

- 5. It is astonishing to see how much faith there is in every thing. Look at men any where in any relations; you see them living by faith. If you, young people, had not faith, you would not be trying to get an education. Society could not get along in any form it may assume, without faith. Farmers would neither plant nor sow; nobody would bestow labor for the sake of future good results; nothing could be done,--without faith. If faith should utterly cease, the race must perish. You would be surprised, if you were to reflect, to see how soon the entire race must perish if faith were to cease. Faith is the great secret of their being--the underlying condition of their continued existence.
- 6. Without faith we overcome no obstacles, for we make no efforts. And who does not know that we never accomplish anything useful without effort? All useful things then must go undone, if it were not for faith. God has so constituted the universe that faith must be in exercise or its necessary processes must be arrested and ruin come down on all created beings.
- 7. On the other hand, in proportion as faith exists, society moves along admirably. An army, held together in strong and perfect discipline, owes its bond of strength to faith. A school well ordered, in diligence pursuing its noble work, lives by faith. A family, loving by promoting each others' interests, moving along with helpful labors and cares, have their central power in faith.
- 8. Of course I am speaking here only of faith in the generic, not the religious, sense. If confidence really exists, in all these multiform relations, then all goes right; all moves along smoothly. But if faith is lacking, every thing is wrong, necessarily and eternally so.
- 9. It is common for skeptics to sneer at Christianity because it makes so much account of faith. They seem to assume that they have no need of faith, in anything. It would be easy to show that of all men, religious skeptics

must be most credulous and must have most faith, of some sort. The chief peculiarity in their case is, that having rejected the light and the evidence of truth through their radical enmity of heart against it, they are shut up to the necessity of believing things without evidence and against evidence as their only resort. They are compelled to believe that to "leap into the dark" at death is the best ending of human life.

But I must pass from this subject and proceed to inquire,

II. What is religious faith?

- 1. It differs from other faith in its objects, but not essentially in its nature. But I ought first to say that Christians have naturally faith like other men and women. They have the same faith in a general sense which is common to society and to human nature every where.
- 2. They have also more than this; they have a Christian faith, by which they live a Christian life. The secret of this Christian life is the faith they have in the Son of God. This faith "works by love." Their confidence in Christ, in all he says and does, weds their souls to him and begets unceasing love.
- 3. Their confidence in Christ's benevolence makes it a present reality to their souls, and hence the influence of such a presence of love cannot fail to inspire a corresponding love in their hearts towards Christ and his people, and indeed, towards all creatures. Thus they become conscious of both affectional and emotional love. Without confidence in God and in Christ, they could not live such a life of faith. The motive would be wanting. How could they have peace with God, except through faith in Christ's atonement as the ground of reconciliation? How could they walk in the strength of the Lord without faith in his exceedingly great and precious promises? How bring their hearts under the influence of all the great truths of the gospel, unless they have a religious faith in those truths?
- 4. Many Christians complain of the lack of emotion in their religious exercises, but overlook the great reason of their deficiency. They do not seem to see that the fountain out of which proceeds the strong, deep, flow of emotion, is no other than faith. See that daughter. She sits down to write

to unbosom her soul. See how her faith in her mother's love opens the great fountain of her emotions. That mother's character is before her mind a present reality. She never can question the strength or the fulness of her mother's love. Hence when her attention turns to her mother, a thousand thoughts rush upon her mind, "and tears unbidden start."

Is it any wonder that a Christian's faith should in like manner inspire his affections and quicken his emotion?

- 5. By faith, the just live a life of obedience. Faith works by love, and love inspires the heart to obey. Faith brings the soul into such union and harmony with God that love and obedience become a second nature. Nothing can be more easy and natural than to obey where there is love and faith. If you confide in your Heavenly Father you will of course try to please him.

Again, by faith, you will love a life of submission to all God's providences. Adverse providences will of course cross your path in this earthly state; but if you confide in your Heavenly Father, you will pass smoothly along, submissive and satisfied that he who rules all does all things well. Said a man to me, only the other day--"I hold to this--that whatever occurs to me and mine will work for my good. If any loss befalls me, do I not know it shall be in some way for my gain? I know it must be. If one of my horses dies, it is all best. God will make it up in some spiritual good." Another man said to me--"If I set my heart upon accomplishing any object, make efforts for it, and succeed, it is well; and if I do not succeed, than it is well. I know the failure must be better than the success, else God would have given me the success. Do I not know that He will give me the best thing? It does not follow that He was displeased with me for making the efforts which He saw it best to frustrate. He expects me to act according to my best light and judgment; then if He sees a still better way and frustrates my way, all is well." Now I ask you, how could these men feel this repose and this submission to God's providence without faith?

- 6. So a man learns to adjust himself to the providence of God, as a ship at sea on the tops of the bounding waves. If anything comes dashing across his path and blasting his plans, gradually by his faith in God he adjusts himself to the blast and sings, "all is well, for it is my Father!" He trains himself from his first conversion to this self-adjustment by faith, even as the infant

on his new and untrained limbs, learns to balance himself on the center of gravity, gaining new skill by each day's practice, until you are surprised to see what evolutions he can make with the utmost apparent ease and safety. So in the Christian's life; the trustful Christian learns to adjust himself suddenly to the blasts that strike him under the vicissitudes of God's providence, and keep his mind upright and on its balance, however sudden may be the changes which pass over him. He learns to apply every where those great truths he has learned of God. He holds practically that all God does is best. Hence he can pass through trials with calm and heavenly resignation. He expects to come out at last as Jacob did. You recollect Jacob began with saying--"Joseph is dead, and Simeon is dead; and ye will take Benjamin away also; all these things are against me." Did man ever make a greater mistake? Joseph was not dead, but was sent onward to the granary of the world to provide means of subsistence not for Jacob's family only, but for the whole nations. Simeon was not dead. All these things were not against him but for him, in the highest sense; and the good old man lived to see how sadly he had misinterpreted the ways of God towards himself and his house. So the fierce blast smites many a soul, and the poor man, weak in faith, staggers under the blow and trembles through great fear; but soon he gathers up his confidence, and lifting his head above the surging billows, he cries out, "All is well!" What though the lightnings flash and the thunders roar; what though darkness and storm combine their terrors; why shall he tremble? Is not God on the throne, high above and over all?

So the Christian lives exempt from care, bearing his burdens without distraction because he rolls them over upon the Lord. In the midst of business ever so complicated, his mind rests sweetly in the Lord--his faith causing his soul to have rest.

- 7. He has peace in God because he is justified by faith. His own soul has internal peace, because through faith he is sanctified. How could he have peace in either of these respects if he did not embrace Jesus Christ and his revealed plan of atonement by his blood and of cleansing by his Spirit?
- 8. In like manner by faith men live a joyous life, and a useful life. Faith lays the foundation for both the silent influence of a good example and for the active influence of direct efforts. You can look for neither without a living

faith.

- 9. By faith men live a humble life. By faith they learn to take a low place. Indeed the very idea of faith involves humility; just as the idea of doing all yourself and trusting to no one for help, implies self-sufficiency and independence. The Christian is emptied of self-reliance ere he can be filled of Christ. He sees he has nothing to be proud of; that humility becomes him; and that his spirit must accept this low position ere he can receive all fulness of grace from his Lord.
- 10. By faith he lives a cheerful life. Generally the tenor of the life of faith is cheerful. Satisfied with God and his providence, why should he not be cheerful? He has occasion to rejoice evermore. God will bring out such glorious results, and his faith so distinctly anticipates them; he cannot but know that the church is safe, and that all he loves on earth is safe.
- 11. By faith he lives a self-denying life. If he has faith he will not make much of the little petty comforts of this life. His soul is upon far greater and better things. Why should he care for these little things when souls are to be saved or lost? He can afford to deny himself of almost every earthly comfort in order to save a soul, or to please his Lord and Master. When he encounters labor and toil, glad to go to the very ends of the earth on the gospel mission, he knows he has nothing to fear and no reason to anticipate loss to himself. It is true he does not go for the sake of personal gain; but he goes, deeply conscious that he is pursuing the most truly valuable objects and pursuing them because they are most truly valuable. As for his own reward, he knows he finds it in large measures in his work itself, and as for the future, he cheerfully leaves it with God. Without faith, such a life would be hard indeed; but with faith, why should he fear poverty, or persecution or shame? All is right--all is well enough. Who cannot afford to submit to all this, so long as his soul reposes in faith on his God?
- 12. By faith he lives a spiritual life, and not a merely natural one. His life is spiritual, not in the abused and perverted sense in which modern necromancers use the word, but in the sense of being in real communion

with the Father and with the Son and with the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of God dwells in his heart by faith.

- 13. By faith he lives a prayerful life. It is natural for him to pray. He loves prayer, and breathes it even as he breathes the atmosphere. He has confidence in God and expects blessings in answer to prayer. Such a man has reasons enough for much prayer.
- 14. His life of faith is hopeful. He is not easily discouraged, for his confidence rests in the mighty God. He expects to succeed in doing all that God would have him do; and why should he wish to do more? Is he a minister of the Gospel, going forth to preach? He goes hopeful. Why should he not? He expects success in the name of the Lord if he has faith.
- 15. He will by faith lead an active life. Faith will spur on his activities. Under an earnest faith in divine truth, how can he help being active and zealous? If he believes God's word, he will believe in the fearful peril of sinners, and in the awful doom that awaits them. How can he desist and abstain from labor for souls so long as he sees them stand on slippery places, with fiery billows rolling below? Will he not devote himself with untiring diligence to pluck whomsoever he can from the ruin of a lost sinner?
- 16. Faith secures sympathy with God. Confidence in any man ensures your sympathy with him. So if you have confidence in God, you will give him the warm and earnest sympathies of your heart. Unbelief locks up the heart against sympathy with God; but faith opens it wide. It is wonderful to see how true faith in God opens the gate ways of the soul and lets in the waters of spiritual life and power.
- 17. Faith makes the Christian's life humane. It trains him to look on all as God's children and to love them and care for them as such. Seeing how much pity and forbearance God has towards his sinning creatures, he is drawn by his faith to exercise the same.

- 18. By faith he lives a life of Gospel liberty. He is not in bondage to law or to fear. He does not pray because he is obliged to, but because he trusts and loves. All right mental exercises are spontaneous, God by his Spirit writing his own law on the heart. It would be easy to show that a life of faith secures all these results.

These results constitute real life. Hence we see how eminently and how universally it must be true that the just shall live by faith.

REMARKS.

1. Natural faith--such as unconverted men have in men and things--is useful to society--to the ends of business--to the comfort, not to say, the subsistence, of families. It is always useful so far as it goes, yet it is not virtue, for it does not have respect to God, to his character, or his law. It may be good and useful, yet not be virtue, for it co-exists with selfishness and with enmity to God. Pirates may, nay must have it; yet are pirates, therefore, good citizens!

It is not saving faith, for it does not save men from sin, does not fit men for heaven.

2. Both in its ground and exercise, faith is perfect in heaven. Faith being perfect there, the state of society and the happiness of sentient beings there must be perfect. If faith were not perfect, society even in heaven could not be. All is right there because faith is perfect and universal.

3. All men who come to the knowledge of the gospel ought to live a life of faith. Strange that men do not see its value and its excellence. In my early life I took this view of faith and of the Christian life. In studying the great truths which they claim to believe, I said, I can account for the way Christians live by the nature of what they believe. Believing that Christ died for them, how can they do otherwise than love him and live to please and serve him? Believing thus, they must, rationally, act thus. This belief must be of the utmost value to them, so long as they live in this world, whether the things they believe are true or false. This reasoning of mine did not assume the truth of the Bible, but merely brought out the relations of the Christian life to those statements, whether true or false.

But after a little more reflection on the matter, it occurred to me that the very fact of the universal utility of this faith proves its divine origin and the divine truth of the things believed. Christian faith does in fact fit men for heaven; this proves its

doctrine to be divine. It cannot be a lie; for no lie could have such results. It is impossible that a system can be false, which, believed, makes men so pure and holy. The fruits of Christian faith prove the Bible true, therefore, unless we accept the absurdity that to believe a lie will lift men above the world, will renovate their hearts and restore them to God's own image; and who can believe this?

4. That man is far from being a philosopher as from being a Christian who does not know that true Christian faith is the essential condition of perfect society either in this world or the world to come. It must be the necessary condition of the mind's being in a perfect state. It must be ever present in that society which constitutes heaven.

5. The life of faith in Christ is too peculiar to be mistaken. It is said of Christians that they are a "peculiar people." They have a peculiar faith. They believe things which elevate the soul, purify the heart, raise the mind above the influence of sordid things and place it aloof from the debasing influences of sensuality, and all things low and mean. Faith in Christ must produce a life which will be its own witness. Look over society any where, and your eye must recognize the man who lives by faith. Such faith as the true Christian has must create a life so peculiar as to be readily distinguished from every other life.

6. Saving faith is in its very nature saving. Many think of this saving as only future--as only rescuing the soul at death from final perdition. This is a great and a grievous mistake. This Christian faith is that by which men live, not that by which they die. They are saved here first, and saved hereafter, because they are first saved here. If faith ever saves the soul, it must be first here. It saves them into happiness in heaven because it has first saved them into holiness on earth.

7. All men, not grossly ignorant, can see the nature and value of gospel faith. A man must be exceedingly stupid who can live in a world where faith is exhibited before his eyes, talked of all around him; and yet not be interested in the inquiry--What is this? How are these results produced? If he looks into this matter, he cannot but see that the truths taught in the gospel need only be believed, and the results will be of the very greatest value to the soul. Let me ask that sinner whose aims hitherto have never risen above the mere enjoyments of time; suppose you were not to believe the gospel for yourself, understanding it in a good degree as it is; you give it full credence, embracing it with all its precious provisions and promises; do you think it would be strange if you should then say,

"I have enjoyed more in one hour than in all my life before"? Ye who are in your sins can know but little yet of the great things of the gospel. You have never yet believed things which could give you more than a feverish pleasure, transient and deceptive. You have never yet believed any thing high, inspiring, ennobling. Now take your stand-point of vision above the great ocean of truth. Ascend the "Delectable Mountains," from whence you can take in a broad and clear view of the "Celestial City." Lo, there is a palace, built of God, for his saints from earth. Did you ever see a royal palace? Have you ever scanned the lofty walls, the glittering towers, the artificial lakes, the gardens, lawns and trees and flowers? Then if so, you said--how noble to be owner of this! To be able to survey it all and say--this is mine! But when you become a true Christian and open your heart to a Christian's faith, you can say--All this will not begin to compare with my Master's palace to which He will take me home after a few days. This, compared with that, is only as the merest dunghill! "In my Fathers' house are many mansions." Jesus said he was going to get them ready for us, and then would take us all home. They we shall indeed be "at home in the presence of Jesus." He can tell us ten thousand things that took place ages before we were born. If you believed that you were to be there, would it be strange if you were too happy to sleep tonight? How many times have I heard it said within a few months by one and another--I have been too happy in God to sleep! One of the most active business men of the city who had been skeptical was brought to see his sins and to be greatly concerned for himself. After attending meetings many evenings, he finally said to his wife--It does me no good to go to these meetings; I must stop. I am going out of town today. He went accordingly to meet the cars, but lo, they had gone! Upon his return his wife said--Now please go with me to the meeting once more. He consented; the truth took hold of his soul with power. She had been praying for him for many years; and now he is converted. What is the result? She is too happy to sleep and so is he! They have a thousand things to talk over, to recount the mercies of the Lord and to celebrate his love. There was no sleep in that house for at least one night. And here was another most beautiful result; their two children are also converted, and they "rejoice, believing in God, with all their house."

The reason why people live as they do is that they lack faith. They fail to trust in God. They do not realize the great things of God's promises and of his love.

Finally, none can be happy even in heaven, without faith. Unless they can confide in God, it were vain to suppose they can be quiet and blessed even there.

For, in that world, perhaps even more than in this, there will be things brought before their minds which they cannot understand. Under the government of an infinite God there must always be things done or permitted by the Great Ruler of all which minds so small and short-sighted as ours can by no means fathom. There is no alternative then but either to trust, or to rebel. Faith or sin--this is the only alternative. How wise, therefore, that God should train his children to faith before he ventures to take them up to heaven? And let them all take care that they do not even ask to go there, until they have faith enough to trust God as revealed here! It must be a fearful thing to go to heaven unprepared to endure its discipline. God will take none there, till He sees they can bear it.

[Back to Top](#)

God's Commandments Not Grievous

Lecture IX

June 21, 1854

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 John 5:3: "His commandments are not grievous."

The commandments here spoken of are God's. The whole verse reads--"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous." It is elsewhere said, we may know we love God because we love His children. Here the order is reversed;--"we know we love the children of God when we love God and keep His commandments." Both statements are true. If we truly and rightly love men we shall love God also; and if God, then we shall love His children too.

"Grievous," in our text means oppressive, heavy to be borne; yet not heavy in the physical, but in the moral, sense.

I. When a commandment may be said to be grievous.

II. When a commandment is not grievous.

III. I am next to consider in special the commandments of God, to see whether they can rightly be deemed grievous.

IV. What God's law does require.

I. And here in the outset we must enquire when a commandment may be said to be grievous, and how we may know whether it is truly so regarded or not.

What are those qualities and relations which constitute a commandment really grievous? Have we any certain test, any sure means of knowing?

We have. God has given us a moral nature by which we may judge, and by

which indeed we cannot but judge. Indeed, God requires us to judge by the decisions of this very nature, a requisition which assumes that His written word imposes no precepts on us inconsistent with the moral nature He has given us. It should not be overlooked that God has given us two volumes of revelation, the one written; the other implanted in our constitution. It is safe therefore to assume that the precepts of the one cannot be in conflict with the unquestionable decisions of the other.

Upon this principle, we know,

- 1. That a commandment, impossible to be fulfilled, must be pronounced grievous. We cannot help pronouncing it so, let who ever will affirm the contrary.
- 2. The same is true of a commandment that is unreasonable, one which our moral sense affirms to be so.

A commandment may be unreasonable in many respects; e.g. if it be manifestly unnecessary; the result of capricious severity. If we say this, we should say, that the command is unreasonable, and therefore grievous.

Supposing we know beyond question that the commandments are unnecessary, then if they require great things under great and solemn penalties, they are a great grievance; if under infinite penalties, then they are infinitely grievous; if under light penalties, then they are a light grievance. If the things required are not important, and yet are enforced by grave and fearful penalties, the commands are clearly grievous. Every sane mind necessarily affirms this to be the case.

- 3. A partial commandment is grievous. If it requires different things of persons under the same circumstances; if it has respect of persons, we condemn it as grievous.

Again, if it were difficult to be obeyed, even by the well disposed, and great penalties were attached to disobedience; if under the best circumstances and with the utmost facilities, obedience were scarcely possible, and failure almost certain, this would be grievous.

Again, if we were required to secure any given end and the requisite means

were not within our reach, and are not furnished us by the Power that makes the requisition; if we were required to make brick without straw, or to convert the world without the requisite agencies and powers, and the commands were enforced by heavy penalties, this must be regarded as greatly grievous.

- 4. Or, if the command were unadapted to our nature or opposed to our highest and best interests; or if the possibility of obeying it were precluded by our circumstances, or by our relations, and we are laid under the burden of heavy penalties to do these things, this would be truly grievous. We could not possibly regard it otherwise.
- 5. We should regard a commandment grievous if it required anything more than honest intention and best endeavor, inasmuch as whatever lies outside of and beyond this must be impossible to us. What we cannot do with the best intention and the utmost endeavor, we cannot do at all. This, therefore, would be grievous.
- 6. Or yet again, if the interests to be protected by law were of vast importance, and yet were protected by only a slight penalty, such a law might well be deemed grievous by those who had interests demanding protection. You would regard it as a most grievous law which should propose to protect your life by a penalty of only 37 1/2 cents.
- 7. Or if a trifling end were set up, but a fearful penalty were attached, this also would be grievous.

II. When a commandment is not grievous.

- 1. It is not grievous merely because it conflicts with our unreasonable desires. If the desires are contrary to reason, it is not unreasonable that laws should cross them.
- 2. Law is not grievous because opposed to the selfishness of men. A precept may be perfectly, infinitely opposed to selfishness, and yet be far from being grievous.

- 3. It is not grievous because of its being opposed to our self-will. A self-will that is arbitrary and capricious is no standard by which to judge of law.
- 4. Law is not grievous when it merely opposes what conscience also opposes. If law does not conflict with a good and sound conscience, all is right, for conscience is the reason judging on moral subjects--the faculty constituted of God for this end. If conscience be for it, therefore, it cannot be grievous.
- 5. No law is grievous which requires only that which is for our highest good. This, our reason necessarily affirms.
- 6. If the object of the precept is to secure our own highest good, it cannot be regarded by us as grievous, for its spirit is altogether good.

Now do not say that in these statements I am dogmatizing. I am only affirming self-evident propositions. They need only a clear statement to appear to every mind self-evident.

- 7. If the law forbids nothing except what would be injurious to us, it is all right.
- 8. If it requires us to deny ourselves for the good of others, all is right, provided this self-denial will be for our own highest good. If it will be greater good to us than the sacrifice is an evil; if the self-denial, though real and great, gives us back more than an equivalent, the law which requires it is by no means grievous. Especially is this true if the self-denial not only gives us a greater good, but is an essential and only means of securing our highest good. By no means can this be deemed grievous, requiring of us a self-denial, of which the more we exercise, the greater good we secure.
- 9. A law is not grievous where it requires of us simple honesty--a regard to the rights of others, equal to our regard for our own. This cannot be grievous. This may be honest and right if it requires no more of us than we require of others conscientiously. Who can pronounce such a

commandment to be grievous?

I shall proceed by and by to enquire whether God's commandments have these qualities and this character; but at present, I am discussing the subject only in its general and abstract form. So doing, we may perhaps better establish the principles that underlie the subject.

- 10. A command cannot be said to be grievous when it requires of us only the reasonable employment of all we have and are. For so much is reasonable, no matter what the particular service may be under the circumstances. It were a contradiction to say it is unreasonable to require a reasonable service of active powers, made for useful action, or of means of usefulness, put in our hands by our Creator.
- 11. That cannot be unreasonable or grievous which simply requires of us a right voluntary state. We know ourselves to have a free will, the power to originate our own volitions. This is a thing of which we are absolutely certain from our consciousness. We do not certainly know that we can move our own muscles. The law of connection between the will and the muscles is sometimes suspended. You might find it to be so in any effort you might make. But you know you can control your own will. You may try this at any time; and you will find it so. You also believe and assume it to be so, of everybody else, of sane and sound mind.
- 12. Now, therefore, if God's love requires of you only a right state of your will, and those acts and states which follow naturally from a right state of the will, no man can reasonably feel that this is grievous, or can honestly pronounce it to be so.
- 13. A commandment is not grievous when it requires nothing capricious, nothing unnecessary, nothing hard to the well-disposed; and threatens disobedience with only the proper penalties.

Again, it cannot be deemed grievous when we could not be satisfied if it required nothing less than it does; when we ourselves, in all honesty, are constrained to say, it is all right; but if anything less were required, or if its requisitions were enforced by a less penalty, we should say--it is wrong.

Especially if we are aware that any other course than that indicated in the precept would be hard or even ruinous--hard in the sense in which sin is hard, and ruinous in the sense in which sin is ruinous.

Again, if it requires us to do nothing for which help is not provided--all the help requisite in the case--this is not grievous. If it tenders to us all the appropriate instrumentalities necessary to make us practically obedient, we cannot regard it as grievous.

Nor again, when it is easily understood by the well disposed. If the law were above our reach, as the ancient king nailed his on a pillar too high to read,--you might complain; but since the law is made so plain that he who runs may read it, you cannot regard it as grievous. Especially you cannot so regard it, since the will is taken for the deed, and it is always accepted if there be a winning mind and a good intention. e.g. Suppose the command be to convert the world. You set yourself to do it. You live for this purpose. You honestly intend to do all you can for this end. You fail only because, having exhausted your powers, the work has proved too great for your strength. Very well; you shall have your reward, as if you had succeeded and done all. What! say you, is the will taken for the deed? Yes; when the whole heart is in it and you do your utmost. Ah, said that missionary, as he returned with ruined health and blighted hopes, "I have failed! My mission purpose and endeavors have been a failure!" Perhaps not. You have been to Africa, and are driven back by the climate. Very well, you have obeyed the command and you shall not fail of your reward.

III. I am next to consider in special the commandments of God, to see whether they can rightly be deemed grievous.

Negatively, as to what they are not and do not require.

- 1. Not one of them requires anything above the use of our own powers, and nothing which goes beyond the dictates and approval of our own reason. The precepts of the law and of the gospel are identical in spirit and in general character, neither requiring of us anything more than we can do, nor anything not in harmony with our reason.
- 2. God's law does not require us to undo anything we have done that is

wrong--in the season of putting it back to its position before being done. This might be, and usually would be, impossible. God only requires us to undo our present wrong purposes and states of mind; the wrong deeds of the past. He has provided a way to forgive; the present wrong of our heart He makes our concern.

- 3. He does not require us to make satisfaction for the wrong done, either by atonement, or by making up for the wrong we have done.
- 4. He does not require us to save ourselves and secure the salvation of our own souls, without His aid and grace. He neither requires or expects that we shall save anybody else by our own wisdom or efforts. He knows this is naturally impossible.
- 5. He does not ask us to work out a legal righteousness for the future. He does not make perfect obedience to law the condition of our salvation. This, if required, would be grievous, inasmuch as we have entirely broken the law and forfeited all hope in that direction.
- 6. Nor does He require us to fulfil the law in the future without reference to His grace, and without His aid, presented in the gospel. Nor does He demand that we shall bear our own burdens, overcome our temptations, and fight our spiritual battles--without His grace, guidance and strength. He does not expect us to be our own guide, to find our own way, and to create our own success.

Again, God requires nothing that will in the least mar our own happiness, or interfere with our true interests. Nothing inconsistent with our highest progress in true improvement; nothing that naturally retards our rapid advancement in all that is good.

- 7. He does not require us to love Him above our ability.

The law specifies--"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind and with all thy strength." With whose mind--and whose strength? Only thine own. And with how much of this mind and

strength? Only with all. Nothing more. It were simply absurd to say that this is impossible; and therefore it is impious to think or speak of it as grievous.

- 8. The law does not require us to regard and treat our Heavenly Father in any respect better than He deserves to be treated, and never better than we know He deserves, or than we affirm that we ought to treat Him. When we can honestly and conscientiously be satisfied with ourselves as to our treatment of God, He will be satisfied. No one shall ever be able, honestly, to say--"I think Thou requirest me to obey to love Thee more than Thou deservest to be obeyed and loved." There is nothing in either law or gospel which requires anything beyond the legitimate demands of our own reason. Nay more; the law appeals to him in its own vindication and makes his own conscience the rule. God appeals to every moral agent to judge for himself what is right. "Are not My ways equal, says He; are not your ways unequal?" "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God?" So throughout the Scripture God makes His appeal to man's own mind to judge for himself of the rectitude of the law imposed on him and of the equity of the threatened penalty. Who then should say that the spirit of His government is overbearing, capricious, unreasonable? Who can regard His commandments grievous?

Again, God never requires His interests to be estimated above their real value. Yet some think God to be very selfish, in requiring everybody to love Him. But what less could He require? God does not ask you to love Him more than He deserves to be loved; nor more than it is right you should love Him. This love which God requires of you towards Himself is good-willing, and it has intrinsically for its object the happiness of sentient beings, and should be in proportion to the amount of being, so to speak, which each individual may have; or (which amounts to the same result) to the amount of happiness each is capable of enjoying. Now God's capacity for happiness is infinite and therefore is an end of infinite value and rightly claims the utmost good-willing of all created beings. When God asks you to love Him supremely, He only asks you to love Him in proportion to the importance of the object--on His own happiness. If His interests are supreme, why not accord to them your supreme regard?

- 9. But He requires of you also the love of complacency; a delight in His

character as good. He asks that this should be supreme, and why should He not? Is He not infinitely worthy of your complacency and regard?

- 10. Yet further; God never requires us to regard any interest not known, or which we are not capable of knowing; nor does He ask us to regard any interest beyond its perceived or perceivable value. Thus universally, God measures His demands by our powers of obedience, love and service. He never requires us to do things we cannot reach and grasp; never, to treat Him with any more confidence than He deserves, nor to love Him when He is unworthy of our love, or at all beyond His worthiness.
- 11. God's requisitions upon us never go beyond our honest convictions of what they should be. He does not require things, the propriety of which is to our own minds questionable. He is never despotic, never tyrannical. His intelligent creatures are always under the conviction that God's will ought to be obeyed and ought to be the universal law. He requires of no creature of His in any world more obedience or love than His own intelligence sees and affirms to be right.
- 12. No one can rightly ask of us any more or other feelings than those which naturally result from right intentions and a right state of the will. The feelings, it should be considered, are involuntary and therefore are not directly controlled by the will; yet they are so related to the will that certain feelings naturally follow a right state of the will and certain other feelings, a wrong state. Hence moral responsibility truly attaches to the state of the will; and it is on this principle that God acts, declaring that "if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted."
- 13. In accordance with this, God never requires any other action or course of life except what naturally flows from right intention. Hence He lays His requisitions on the will or heart, requiring only that this be right and thus virtually requiring its natural results and out-flowings.

IV. What God's law does require.

- 1. An equitable state of mind; one that regards every known interest

according to our judgment of its value. God requires us to regard the universal good of each being according to its perceived value. This is an equitable and right state of mind. It is a voluntary and a simple state of mind, a mere unit. Instead of being embarrassed with points of casuistry, it comes to you asking only that you give your heart to God and merge your will in homage to His because His is infinite reason. It simply requires you to regard all interests according to their perceived value. If your neighbors interests are equal to your own, regard them so; if less, regard them less; if greater, regard them more. God never requires any being to sacrifice his own interest for a less valuable interest of another. Hence, when He requires of us universal benevolence, this does not demand that we love others and not ourselves--God and not ourselves; but only each, according to its value. Hence this law never drops from regard our own interest, but most effectually secures it.

- 2. This Christian, virtuous, life, is the natural and certain result of the state of mind which drops selfishness, and puts self and all other interests in their proper places. You have only to maintain that state of mind and abide in it; then your acts and state will meet the entire demands of the law.
- 3. Let us now look into the gospel. This requires the same as the law, and something more. It comes, in most inviting and impressive form, to win us back to the love and obedience which the law enjoins. Its special requisition for this end is that we receive the Holy Ghost as the condition and means of practical obedience and a practical realization of the great result of holiness in heart and life. Man needs such an influence; therefore God provides it. Whatever else did or did not occur at the fall of man in Eden, it is plain that the Holy Ghost was grieved. Man tore himself away from his God and from communion with Him, so that God no longer dwelt within him. But now God is seeking to restore that state of communion and fellowship. He now returns to man in the person of His Spirit, and asks of the sinner to open his heart and make this Heaven agent welcome.
- 4. I need not here speak of the case of those who know not the gospel, only to say that all such are plainly under the law only, and not under the gospel. They have the work of the law written in their heart; and by this light they

stand or fall. But of us, who have the gospel, God requires that we should receive the Holy Ghost. Some will say--is not this unreasonable? No; for the Holy Ghost is not far away in some remote quarter of the universe where you cannot reach Him, but is present, and needs only be made welcome and He will take up His abode with you. He comes in connection with His word, to teach, enforce and impress it; and the thing for you to do is to yield yourself to the conviction of the truth, thus revealed. To yield to truth, is to yield to God. When the Bible shows you that you ought to believe and trust God, then to do this is to yield to the Spirit of God and to welcome His presence to your heart. When you know that you ought to give up your sins, then to yield to this conviction is to consent to the claims of His Spirit and to receive it to your soul. Else you resist the Holy Ghost. He does not expect you to rise of yourself and without His aid from the state of death in which you are plunged, but requires you to receive the Holy Ghost, and continually, to yield to every conviction of duty. By presentation of the truth, He draws; you are to yield; He constrains; you acquiesce. He requires you to be led and filled with the Spirit; to lean on Him and to avail yourself of His help. He bids you obey His perfect law; and by this divine agency, offered through the Spirit, He provides all requisite aid and strength for this purpose. This provision is both full and free. If it were otherwise, you might find or feel it hard to be required to be filled with the Holy Ghost. If you must needs ascend into heaven to bring Him down, or descend into the deep to bring Him up, this might be grievous. But only to receive a present and offered Spirit; how can you think this hard? Jesus comes to restore and reinstate you in holiness and love; does He require you to do all this unaided? He neither expects nor requires it. He tenders to you His advocacy; proposes to advocate your cause without cost. Are you rich? Give to your suffering fellow men and please God therein; Are you poor? He requires of you only according to what you have.

- 5. He does not require you to live an anxious distracted life, bearing all your own burdens alone, but has permitted you to be "without carefulness," casting all your care upon Him. He gives you the fullest permission to let the peace of God rule in your heart; and is this a hard thing? Is this state of mind a hard and grievous one? Jesus said--"My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you." The men of the world give sparingly, grudgingly; they give today and take back tomorrow; but not so does Christ

give to His friends. Is this grievous?

- 6. He says--"Rejoice always." Many seem to think religion only fit for sick-beds and funeral occasions, and they say, "What have we to do with a religion so gloomy? Must we forego all our enjoyments? How grievous that would be!" The "righteous should make their boast in Him and be glad." In His salvation, let them "exceedingly rejoice." God invites them to look up to Him hopefully, never desponding, much less despairing. If He had required you to rejoice in worldly pleasure and be happy in the good things of earth, this were indeed a hard saying and a grievous commandment.
- 7. But I have heard some of you say--"God wants nothing to do with me; He has utterly cast me off; How then can I believe and trust in Him? I have abused Him too long." Mark; God asks of you no such feelings, no such thoughts. On the contrary He only asks you to take Him at His word and welcome to your soul a full salvation. He gives you the full consolation of believing. Is this grievous?
- 8. He requires you to embrace every dispensation with a kiss; to believe that all things shall work together for your good; and so believing, to rejoice in all your afflictions and tribulations.
- 9. Of you, sinner, He requires that you should come today and bring all your load of guilt to Him. Come, however deeply conscious of much past sin; come and hold your soul under the flowing stream of His redeeming blood. And is this hard? Is this too bad? Is it too bad that He should forgive so freely and tender you the waters of life without money or price? He does not require you to hear a great many sermons or make a great many impenitent prayers.

But you say--"Lord, if I were a Christian, I would come at once to Thee; but now, I must certainly make myself better before I come." "No," says your Savior; "come now. Make no delay; offer no excuses for refusal." "Can I come, you say, without His help?" Is He not helping you even now? Suppose I should sit sullenly down and refuse to move, when everything is ready and nothing wanting but the action of my own will? Suppose I should then plead

that I lacked the power and that I must wait! What nonsense!

Now He offers you His hand and asks you to take hold of it with your own. There must be a reciprocal taking hold of hands, the Spirit's agency working together with your own. The hand of your faith must take hold of the hand let down from heaven to you. And is this hard or grievous?

REMARKS.

1. What could God have required less than He does? Nothing. What could He have required which would be more easy? I appeal to every sinner in this house; can you think of anything more easy, more feasible, more available? Of course you cannot think of His saving you in your sins. This would be no salvation. Do you complain that Christ's commands are grievous? In what one particular could He have done better?

2. You know that Christ has always done as much as He could for your salvation. Can you suggest a better, or more available system? Can you devise anything better than for you to take hold of His strength? He gives you the entire influence of His example, the utmost virtue of His blood and of His dying love; can you think of anything more favorable?

Let me ask these young women, can you think of anything better? Has He made salvation less easy than He might? Did you ever tell Him so? Do you say--"Why did He not over-rule my freedom?" If He had, He could not have saved you any how. Could He have done anything more that would have been of service towards your salvation? Has He refused to make any sacrifices that if made, would have done you good? Did He avoid the cross? Did He shun the shame? Did He stay in heaven and bask in its bliss? Oh No! He came down; He flew to your relief; although He saw how many groans and how much blood it would cost Him.

Have you thought of any expression of love which He has not made? Of any words of tenderness and forbearance He should have uttered, but did not? Have you acquainted yourself with what He has said? Is it said guardedly? Is the fulfillment uncertain? What is wanting?

How wicked of you if you complain! What have you to complain of? He has done the best He could; and have you any right to complain of that? How wicked to regard and treat His service and His gospel as if it were a hard thing!

A young woman said to me, "I am trying to become a Christian." What does that mean? Real honest trying implies the full consent of the will, and that is all that God requires. This consent is, being converted. People commonly deceive themselves when they talk thus about trying.

3. How great a mistake, to suppose that we cannot obey God. If our circumstances and nature were such that we absolutely could not obey Him, it would indeed be very grievous for Him to require it. But how can it be difficult now, since the thing He requires is only right willing? To say that a moral agent tries to will right and yet cannot is a downright absurdity. Nobody ever tried to will right and found it hard. This would be a contradiction in terms.

4. Inasmuch as the Spirit of God is freely given to us, it must be easy and not hard for us to get it. The command therefore to "be filled with the Spirit" is by no means grievous.

5. Only those complain of its being difficult to obey the law who would fain do it without accepting the help offered in the gospel. With the heart all wrong, they try to render an external obedience. This is always a hard up-hill business.

6. Without being at all aware of it many are trying to get along without Christ. Their effort is to make themselves good enough by dint of resolutions and efforts of their own, made quite in their own strength. Such persons, of course, will find it hard to be religious.

7. In a little different mode, some try to get grace by works of love. They want to come to Christ, but in order to get Christ, they try to work up a certain state of feeling and perform some legal works. All this is quite aside from the simplicity of gospel faith.

In like manner many try to get the Spirit without yielding to His present teachings. Overlooking and disobeying these, they wait for more light and pray for more of the Holy Spirit, while they refuse to obey what they have.

In fact, such persons fail to use a present offered Savior; do not realize how near, and how free, and how rich, are His gifts, nor how truly they are available--that they may as truly have and use the strength of Christ as they can use the strength of their own muscles. You may hear them crying and shouting aloud for the Holy Ghost, as if He were as far off as the fixed stars, not aware that He is really within them, trying to bring them to take hold of His present help. Such people

make religion a hard and grievous matter. They do not understand its great simplicity and its ineffable richness and adaptation to human want.

8. Those who refuse to take Christ at His word will find it hard to get religion. You will hear them saying--

"Reason I hear, her counsels weigh,

And all I hear I approve;

but still I find it hard t'obey,

And harder still to love."

Is that your experience? If so, then you do not believe one word of Christ's promises. You have failed to reach the simplicity of gospel faith. While Christ is trying by every means to woo and to wed your heart to Himself, and lets down an almighty arm to rescue and save you, what reception does He meet with! Each Sabbath evening in this place, we meet persons who think it one of the hardest things in the world to become Christians; who say--"I am trying to find Christ, but I must conclude He is not to be found. I cannot come to Him." Are not all these conceptions of Christ unkind to Him? Are they not false, injurious to Christ?

9. The great mass of professors of religion take ground directly opposed to our text. Whereas the inspired word declares--"His commandments are not grievous," they represent God's service as very hard and full of grief. Reason; they are in legal bondage, and have never broken out into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Let me ask these sinners, have you not received the impression from what you have heard Christians say, that it is a very difficult thing to get religion and that its service is so hard and God's law so high, it requires an angel's heart to keep it? Whereas the truth is, God requires nothing in anywise unreasonable. It is easier to be well-disposed than ill-disposed. How then can you say, it is easier to rebel than to obey? O sinner, all such notions are utterly false. His commandments are not grievous.

Look at that young man who says--"If I become a Christian I shall be compelled to preach the gospel, and O, what dull work and poor pay!" Does he forget that they who "turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars forever and ever?" Is this too hard?

But he says--"I must be a missionary and go to Africa; be sick there and die an early death." Well; "he that will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it."

"But I am not eloquent." Oh, not eloquent! Can you not stammer out the gospel story? If it were really in your heart filling all your soul with its rich experience, could you not give some utterance to its glorious yet simple message? Beware of ambition! If you could be the first preacher in all the land--the most eloquent and the most applauded, that would do! Oh, that unholy ambition! You make your religion insufferably hard if you try to serve both God and your own ambition!

[Back to Top](#)

The Wages of Sin

Lecture X

July 5, 1854

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 6:23: "The wages of sin is death."

The death here spoken of is that which is due as the penal sanction of God's law.

In presenting the subject of our text, I must,

I. Illustrate the nature of sin;

II. Specify some of the attributes of the penal sanctions of God's law;

III. Show what this penalty must be.

I. An illustration will give us the best practical view of the nature of sin.

- 1. You have only to suppose a government established to secure the highest well-being of the governed, and of the ruling authorities also. Supposed the head of this government to embark all his attributes in the enterprise--all his wealth, all his time, all his energies--to compass the high end of the highest

general good. For this purpose, he enacts the best possible laws--laws which, if obeyed, will secure the highest good of both subject and Prince. He then takes care to affix adequate penalties; else all his care and wisdom must come to naught. He devotes to the interests of his government all he is and all he has, without reserve or abatement.

But some of his subjects refuse to sympathize with this movement. They say, "charity begins at home," and they are for taking care of themselves in the first place. In short they are thoroughly selfish.

- 2. It is easy to see what this would be in a human government. The man who does this becomes the common enemy of the government and of all its subjects. This is sin. This illustrates precisely the case of the sinner. Sin is selfishness. It sets up a selfish end, and to gain it, uses selfish means; so that in respect to both its end and its means, it is precisely opposed to God and to all the ends of general happiness which He seeks to secure. It denies God's rights; discards God's interests. Each sinner maintains that his own will shall be the law. The interest he sets himself to secure is entirely opposed to that proposed by God in his government.
- 3. All law must have sanctions. Without sanctions, it would be only advice. It is therefore essential to the distinctive and inherent nature of law that it have sanctions.

These are either remuneratory, or vindicatory. They promise reward for obedience, and they also threaten penalty for disobedience. They are vindicatory, inasmuch as they vindicate the honour of the violated law.

Again, sanctions may be either natural or governmental. Often both forms exist in other governments than the divine.

- 4. Natural penalties are those evil consequences which naturally result without any direct interference of government to punish. Thus in all governments, the disrespect of its friends falls as a natural penalty on transgressors. They are the natural enemies of all good subjects.

In the divine government, compunctions of conscience and remorse fall into this class, and indeed many other things which naturally result to obedience on the one hand and to disobedience on the other.

- 5. There should also be governmental sanctions. Every governor should manifest his displeasure against the violation of his laws. To leave the whole question of obedience to mere natural consequences is obviously unjust to society. Inasmuch as governments are established to sustain law and secure obedience, they are bound to put forth their utmost energies in this work.
- 6. Another incidental agency of government under some circumstances is that which we call discipline. One object of discipline is to go before the infliction of penalty and force open unwilling eyes, to see that law has a government to back it up and the sinner a fearful penalty to fear. Coming upon men during their probation, while as yet they have not seen or felt the fearfulness of penalty, it is designed to admonish them--to make them think and consider. Thus its special object is the good of the subject on whom it falls and of those who may witness its administration. It does not propose to sustain the dignity of law by exemplary inflictions. This belongs exclusively to the province of penalty. Discipline, therefore, is not penal in the sense of visiting crime with deserved punishment, but aims to dissuade the subject of law from violating its precepts.
- 7. Disciplinary agency could scarcely exist under a government of pure law, for the reason that such a government cannot defer the infliction of penalty. Discipline presupposes a state of suspended penalty. Hence penal inflictions must be broadly distinguished from disciplinary.

We are sinners, and therefore have little occasion to dwell on the remuneratory features of God's government. We can have no claim to remuneration under law, being precluded utterly by our sin. But with the penal features we have everything to do. I therefore proceed to enquire,

II. What are the attributes of the penal sanctions of God's law?

- 1. God has given us reason. This affirms intuitively and irresistibly all the great truths of moral government. There are certain attributes which we know must belong to the moral law, e.g. one is, intrinsic justice. Penalty should threaten no more and no less than is just.-- Justice must be an attribute of God's law; else the whole universe must inevitably condemn it.

Intrinsic justice means and implies that the penalty be equal to the obligation violated. The guilt of sin consists in its being a violation of obligation. Hence the guilt must be in proportion to the magnitude of the obligation violated, and consequently the penalty must be measured by this obligation.

- 2. Governmental justice is another attribute. This feature of law seeks to afford security against transgression. Law is not governmentally just unless its penalty be so graduated as to afford the highest security against sin which the nature of the case admits. Suppose under any government the sanctions of law are trifling, not at all proportioned to the end to be secured. Such a government is unjust to itself, and to the interests it is committed to maintain. Hence a good government must be governmentally just, affording in the severity of its penalties and the certainty of their just infliction, the highest security that its law shall be obeyed.

Again, penal sanctions should be worthy of the end aimed at by the law and by its author. Government is only a means to an end,--this proposed end being universal obedience and its consequent happiness. If law is indispensable for obtaining this end, its penalty should be graduated accordingly.

- 3. Hence the penalty should be graduated by the importance of the precept. If the precept be of fundamental importance--of such importance that disobedience to it saps the very existence of all government--then it should be guarded by the greatest and most solemn sanctions. The penalties attached to its violation should be of the highest order.
- 4. Penalty should make an adequate expression of the law giver's views of the value of the end he proposes to secure by law; also of his views of the sacredness of his law; also of the intrinsic guilt of disobedience. Penalty aims to bring forth the heart of the lawgiver--to show the earnestness of his desire to maintain the right, and to secure that order and well-being which depend on obedience. In the greatness of the penalty the lawgiver brings forth his heart and pours the whole influence of his character upon his subjects.

The object of executing penalty is precisely the same; not to gratify revenge, as some seem to suppose, but to act on the subjects of government with

influences toward obedience. It has the same general object as the law itself has.

- 5. Penal sanctions should be an adequate expression of the lawgiver's regard for the public good and of his interest in it. In the precept he gave some expression; in the penalty, he gives yet more. In the precept we see the object in view and have a manifestation of regard for the public interests; in the penalty, we have a measure of this regard, showing us how great it is. E.g. suppose a human law were to punish murder with only a trifling penalty. Under the pretense of being very tender-hearted, the lawgiver amerces this crime of murder with a fine of fifty cents! Would this show that he greatly loved his subjects and highly valued their life and interests? Far from it. You cannot feel that a legislator has done his duty unless he shows how much he values human life, and unless he attaches a penalty commensurate in some good degree with the end to be secured.

One word as to the infliction of capital punishment in human governments. There is a difference of opinion as to which is most effective, solitary punishment for life, or death. Leaving this question without remark, I have it to say that no man ever doubted that the murderer deserves to die. If some other punishment than death is to be preferred, it is not by any means because the murderer does not deserve death. No man can doubt this for a moment. It is one of the unalterable principles of righteousness, that if a man sacrifices the interest of another, he sacrifices his own; an eye for an eye; life for life.

We cannot but affirm that no government lays sufficient stress on the protection of human life unless it guards this trust with its highest penalties. Where life and all its vital interests are at stake, there the penalty should be great and solemn as is possible.

- 6. Moral agents have two sides to their sensibility; hope and fear;--to which you may address the prospect of good and the dread of evil. I am now speaking of penalty. This is addressed only to fear.
- 7. I have said in substance that penalty should adequately assert and vindicate the rightful authority of the lawgiver; should afford if possible an adequate rebuke of sin and should be based on a just appreciation of its

nature. God's moral government embraces the whole intelligent universe, and stretches with its vast results onward through eternity. Hence the sweep and breadth of its interests are absolutely unlimited, and consequently the penalties of its law, being set to vindicate the authority of this government and to sustain these immeasurable interests, should be beyond measure dreadful. If anything beyond and more dreadful than the threatened penalty could be conceived, all minds would say-- "This is not enough." With any just views of the relations and the guilt of sin, they could not be satisfied unless the penalty is the greatest that is conceivable. Sin is so vile, so mischievous, so terribly destructive and so far-sweeping in its ruin, moral agents could not feel that enough is done so long as more can be.

III. What is the penalty of God's moral law?

- 1. Our text answers, "death." This certainly is not animal death, for saints die and animals also, neither of whom can be receiving the wages of sin. Besides, this would be no penalty if, after its infliction, men went at once to heaven. Such a penalty, considered as the wages of sin, would only be an insult to God's government.
- 2. Again, it cannot be spiritual death, for this is nothing else than a state of entire disobedience to the law. You cannot well conceive anything more absurd than to punish a man for disobedience by subjecting him to perpetual disobedience--an effort to sustain the law by dooming such offenders to its perpetual violation--and nothing more.
- 3. But this death is endless misery, corresponding to the death-penalty in human governments. Every body knows what this is. It separates the criminal from society forever; debars him at once and utterly from all the privileges of the government, and consigns him over to hopeless ruin. Nothing more dreadful can be inflicted. It is the extreme penalty, fearful beyond any other that is possible for man to inflict.
- 4. There can be no doubt that death as spoken of in our text is intended to correspond to the death-penalty in human governments.

- 5. You will also observe that in our text the "gift of God" which is "eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord," is directly contrasted with death, the wages of sin. This fact may throw light on the question respecting the nature of this death. We must look for the antithesis of "eternal life."

Now this eternal life is not merely an eternal existence. Eternal life never means merely an eternal existence, in any case where it is used in scripture; but it does mean a state of eternal blessedness, implying eternal holiness as its foundation. The use of the term "life" in scripture in the sense of real life--a life worth living--i.e. real and rich enjoyment, is so common as to supersede the necessity of special proof.

The penalty of death is therefore the opposite of this--viz., eternal misery.

I must here say a few words upon the objections raised against this doctrine of eternal punishment.

All the objections I have ever heard amount only to this, that it is unjust. They may be expressed in somewhat various phraseology, but this is the only idea which they involve, of any moment at all.

- (1.) It is claimed to be unjust because "life is so short."

How strangely men talk! Life so short, men have not time to sin enough to deserve eternal death! Do men forget that one sin incurs the penalty due for sinning? How many sins ought it to take to make one transgression of the law of God? Men often talk as if they supposed it must require a great many. As if a man must commit a great many murders before he has made up the crime of murder enough to fall under the sentence of the court! What! shall a man come before the court and plead that although he has broken the law to be sure, yet he has not lived long enough, and has not broken the law times enough to incur its penalty? What court on earth ever recognized such a plea as proving any other than the folly and guilt of him who made it?

- (2.) It is also urged that "man is so small, so very insignificant a being that he cannot possibly commit an infinite sin." What does this objection mean? Does it mean that sin is an act of creation, and to be measured therefore by the magnitude of that something which it creates? This would be an exceedingly wild idea of the nature of sin.

Does the objection mean that man cannot violate an obligation of infinite strength? Then his meaning is simply false, as every body must know. Does he imply that the guilt of sin is not to be measured by the obligation violated? Then he knows not what he says, or wickedly denies known truth. What! man so little that he cannot commit much sin! Is this the way we reason in analogous cases? Suppose your child disobeys you. He is very much smaller than you are! But do you therefore exonerate him from blame? Is this a reason which nullifies his guilt? Can no sin be committed by inferiors against their superior? Have sensible men always been mistaken in supposing that the younger and smaller are sometimes under obligations to obey the older and the greater? Suppose you smite down the magistrate; suppose you insult, or attempt to assassinate the king; is this a very small crime almost too excusable to be deemed a crime at all, because forsooth, you are in a lower position and he in a higher? You say, "I am so little, so very insignificant! How can I deserve so great a punishment?" Do you reason so in any other case except your own sins against God? Never.

- (3.) Again, some men say, "Sin is not an infinite evil." This language is ambiguous. Does it mean that sin would not work infinite mischief if suffered to run on indefinitely? This is false, for if only one soul were ruined by it, the mischief accruing from it would be infinite. Does it mean that sin is not an infinite evil, as seen in its present results and relations? Suppose this admitted; it proves nothing to our purpose, for it may be true that the sum total of evil results from each single sin will not all be brought out in any duration less than eternity. How then can you measure the evil of sin by what you see to day?

But there are still other considerations to show that the penalty of the law must be infinite. Sin is an infinite natural evil. It is so in this sense, that there are no bounds to the natural evil it would introduce if not governmentally restrained.

If sin were to ruin but one soul, there could be no limit set to the evil it would thus occasion.

Again, sin involves infinite guilt, for it is a violation of infinite

obligation. Here it is important to notice a common mistake, growing out of confusion of ideas about the ground of obligation. From this, result mistakes in regard to what constitutes the guilt of sin. Here I might show that when you misapprehend the ground of obligation, you will almost of necessity misconceive the nature and extent of sin and guilt. Let us recur to our former illustration. Here is a government, wisely framed to secure the highest good of the governed and of all concerned. Whence arises the obligation to obey? Certainly from the intrinsic value of the end sought to be secured. But how broad is this obligation to obey; or in other words, what is its true measure? I answer, it exactly equals the value of the end which the government seeks to secure, and which obedience will secure, but which sin will destroy. By this measure of God the penalty must be graduated. By this the lawgiver must determine how much sanction, remuneratory and vindicatory, he must attach to his law in order to meet the demands of justice and benevolence.

- 6. Now God's law aims to secure the highest universal good. Its chief and ultimate end is not, strictly speaking, to secure supreme homage to God, but rather to secure the highest good of all intelligent moral beings--God, and all his creatures. So viewed, you will see that the intrinsic value of the end to be sought is the real ground of obligation to obey the precept. The value of this end being estimated, you have the value and strength of the obligation.

This is plainly infinite in the sense of being unlimited. In this sense we affirm obligation to be without limit. The very reason why we affirm any obligation at all is that the law is good and is the necessary means of the highest good of the universe. Hence the reason why we affirm any penalty at all compels us to affirm the justice and necessity of an infinite penalty. We see that intrinsic justice must demand an infinite penalty for the same reason that it demands any penalty whatever. If any penalty be just, it is just because law secures a certain good. If this good aimed at by the law be unlimited in extent, so must be the penalty. Governmental justice thus requires endless punishment; else it provides no sufficient guaranty for the public good.

Again, the law not only designs but tends to secure infinite good. Its tendencies are direct to this end.-- Hence its penalty should be infinite. The law is not just to the interests it both aims and tends to secure unless it arms

itself with infinite sanctions.

- 7. Nothing less than infinite penalty can be an adequate expression of God's view of the value of the great end on which his heart is set. When men talk about eternal death being too great a penalty for sin, what do they think of God's efforts to restrain sin all over the moral universe? What do they think of the death of his well-beloved Son? Do they suppose it possible that God could give an adequate, or a corresponding expression to his hatred of sin by any penalty less than endless?
- 8. Nothing less could give an adequate expression to his regard for the authority of law. O, how fearful the results and how shocking the very idea, if God should fail to make an adequate expression of his regard for the sacredness of that law which underlies the entire weal of all his vast kingdom?

You would insist that He shall regard the violation of his law as Universalists do. How surely He would bring down an avalanche of ruin on all his intelligent creatures if He were to yield to your demands! Were he to affix anything less than endless penalty to his law, what holy being could trust the administration of his government!

- 9. His regard to the public good forbids his attaching a light or finite penalty to his law. He loves his subjects too well. Some people have strange notions of the way in which a ruler should express his regard for his subjects. They would have him so tender-hearted toward the guilty that they should absorb his entire sympathy and regard. They would allow him perhaps to fix a penalty of sixpence fine for the crime of murder, but not much if anything more. The poor murderer's wife and children are so precious you must not take away much of his money, and as to touching his liberty or his life--neither of these is to be thought of. What! do you not know that human nature is very frail and temptable, and therefore you ought to deal very sparingly with penalties for murder? Perhaps they would say, you may punish the murderer by keeping him awake one night--just one, no more; and God may let a guilty man's conscience disturb him about to this extent for the crime of murder! The Universalists do tell us that they will allow the most High God to give a man conscience that shall trouble him a little if he commits murder--a little, say for the first and perhaps the

second offence; but they are not wont to notice the fact that under this penalty of a troubling conscience, the more a man sins, the less he has to suffer. Under the operation of this descending scale, it will soon come to this that a murderer would not get so much penalty as the loss of one night's sleep. But such are the notions that men reach when they swing clear of the affirmations of an upright reason and of God's revealing Word.

- 10. Speaking now to those who have a moral sense to affirm the right as well as eyes to see the operation of law, I know you cannot deny the logical necessity of the death-penalty for the moral law of God. There is a logical clinch to every one of these propositions which you cannot escape.
- 11. No penalty less than infinite and endless can be an adequate expression of God's displeasure against sin and of his determination to resist and punish it. The penalty should run on as long as there are subjects to be affected by it--as long as there is need of any demonstration of God's feelings and governmental course toward sin.
- 12. Nothing less is the greatest God can inflict, for He certainly can inflict an endless and infinite punishment. If therefore the exigency demands the greatest penalty He can inflict, this must be the penalty--banishment from God and endless death.

But I must pass to remark that the gospel everywhere assumes the same. It holds that by the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified before God. Indeed, it not only affirms this, but builds its entire system of atonement and grace upon this foundation. It constantly assumes that there is no such thing as paying the debt and canceling obligation; and therefore that the sinner's only relief is forgiveness through redeeming blood.

Yet again, if the penalty be not endless death, what is it? Is it temporary suffering? Then how long does it last? When does it end? Has any sinner ever got through; served out his time and been taken to heaven? We have no testimony to prove such a case, not the first one; but we have the solemn testimony of Jesus Christ to prove that there never can be such a case. He tells us that there can be no passing from hell to heaven or from heaven to hell. A great gulf is fixed between, over which none shall ever pass. You may

pass from earth to heaven, or from earth to hell; but these two states of the future world are wide extremes, and no man or angel shall pass the gulf that divides them.

- 13. But you answer my question--What is the penalty? by the reply--It is only the natural consequences of sin as developed in a troubled conscience. Then it follows that the more a man sins the less he is punished, until it amounts to an infinitesimal quantity of punishment, for which the sinner cares just nothing at all. Who can believe this? Under this system, if a man fears punishment, he has only to pitch into sinning with the more will and energy; he will have the comfort of feeling that he can very soon get over all his compunctions, and get beyond any penalty whatever! And do you believe this is God's only punishment for sin? You cannot believe it.
- 14. Universalists always confound discipline with penal sanctions. They overlook this fundamental distinction and regard all that men suffer here in this world as only penal. Whereas it is scarcely penal at all, but is chiefly disciplinary. They ask--what good will it do a sinner to send him to an endless hell? Is not God perfectly benevolent, and if so, how can He have any other object than to do the sinner all the good he can?

I reply, punishment is not designed to do good to that sinner who is punished. It looks to other, remoter, and far greater good. Discipline, while he was on earth, sought mainly his personal good; penalty looks to other results. If you ask, Does not God aim to do good to the universal public by penalty? I answer, even so; that is precisely what he aims to do.

- 15. Under human governments, the penalty may aim in part to reclaim. So far, it is discipline. But the death-penalty--after all suspension is past and the fatal blow comes, aims not to reclaim, and is not discipline but is only penalty. The guilty man is laid on the great public altar and made a sacrifice for the public good. The object is to make a fearful, terrible impression on the public mind of the evil of transgression and the fearfulness of its consequences. Discipline looks not so much to the support of law as to the recovery of the offender. But the day of judgment has nothing to do with reclaiming the lost sinner. That and all its issues are purely penal. It is strange that these obvious facts should be overlooked.

- 16. There is yet another consideration often disregarded; viz., that underlying any safe dispensation of discipline, there must be a moral law, sustained by ample and fearful sanctions, to preserve the law-giver's authority and sustain the majesty and honour of his government. It would not be safe to trust a system of discipline, and indeed it could not be expected to take hold of the ruined with much force, if it were not sustained by a system of law and penalty. This penal visitation on the unreclaimed sinner must stand forever, an appalling fact, to show that justice is realized, law vindicated, God honored; and to make an enduring and awful impression of the evil of sin and of God's eternal hostility against it.

REMARKS.

1. We hear a great many cavils against future punishment. At these we should not so much wonder, but for the fact that the gospel assumes this truth, and then proposes a remedy. One would naturally suppose the mind would shrink from those fearful conclusions to which it is pressed when the relations of mere laws are contemplated; but when the gospel interposes to save, then it becomes passing strange that men should admit the reality of the gospel, and yet reject the law and its penalties. They talk of grace; but what do they mean by grace? When men deny the fact of sin, there is no room and no occasion for grace in the gospel. Admitting nominally the fact of sin, but virtually denying its guilt, grace is only a name. Repudiating the sanctions of the law of God and laboring to disprove their reality, what right have men to claim that they respect the gospel? They make it only a farce--or at least a system of amends for unreasonably severe legislation under the legal economy. Let not men who so traduce the law assume that they honour God by applauding his gospel!

2. The representations of the Bible with regard to the final doom of the wicked are exceedingly striking. Spiritual truths are revealed by natural objects: e.g., the gates and walls of the New Jerusalem, to present the splendors and glories of the heavenly state. A spiritual telescope is put into our hands; we are permitted to point it towards the glorious city "whose builder and Maker is God;" we may survey its inner sanctuary, where the worshipping hosts praise God without ceasing. We see their flowing robes of white--the palms of victory in their hands--the beaming joy of their faces--the manifestations of ineffable bliss in their souls. This is heaven portrayed in symbol. Who supposes that this is intended as

hyperbole? Who arraigns these representations as extravagant in speech, as if designed to overrate the case, or raise unwarrantable expectations? No man believes this. No man ever brings this charge against what the Bible says of heaven. What is the object in adopting this figurative mode of representation? Beyond question, the object is to give the best possible conception of the facts.

3. Then we have the other side. The veil is lifted, and you come to the very verge of hell to see what is there. Whereas on the one hand all was glorious, on the other all is fearful, and full of horrors.

There is a bottomless pit. A deathless soul is cast therein; it sinks and sinks and sinks, going down that awful pit which knows no bottom, weeping and wailing as it descends, and you hear its groans as they echo and re-echo from the sides of that dread cavern of woe!

4. Here is another image. You have a "lake of fire and brimstone," and you see lost sinners thrown into its waves of rolling fire; and they lash its burning shore, and gnaw their tongues for pain. There the worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched, and "not one drop of water" can reach them to "cool their tongues"--"tormented in that flame."

What think you? Has God said these things to frighten our poor souls? Did He mean to play on our fears for his own amusement? Can you think so? Nay, does it not rather grieve his heart that He must build such a hell, and must plunge therein the sinners who will not honour his law--will not embrace salvation from sinning. through his grace? Ah, the waves of death roll darkly under the eye of the Holy and compassionate One! He has no pleasure in the death of the sinner! But He must sustain his throne, and save his loyal subjects if He can.

5. Turn to another scene. Here is a death-bed. Did you ever see a sinner die? Can you describe the scene? Was it a friend, a relative, dear, very dear to your heart? How long was he dying? Did it seem to you the death-agony would never end? When my last child died, the struggle was long; O, it was fearfully protracted and agonizing! Twenty-four hours in the agonies of dissolving nature! It made me sick; I could not see it! But suppose it had continued till this time. I should long since have died myself under the anguish and nervous exhaustion of witnessing such a scene. So would all our friends. Who could survive to the final termination of such an awful death? Who would not cry out, "My God, cut it short, cut it short in mercy!" When my wife died, her death-struggles were long

and heart-rending. If you had been there, you would have cried mightily to God, "Cut it short! O, cut it short and relieve this dreadful agony!" But suppose it had continued, on and on, by day and by night--day after day, through its slow moving hours, and night after night--long nights, as if there could be no morning. The figure of our text supposes an eternal dying. Let us conceive such a case. Suppose it should actually occur, in some dear circle of sympathizing friends. A poor man cannot die! He lingers in the death--agony a month, a year, five years, ten years--till all his friends are broken down--and fall into their graves under the insupportable horror of the scene: but still the poor man cannot die! He outlives one generation--then another and another; one hundred years he is dying in mortal agony and yet he comes no nearer to the end! What would you think of such a scene? It would be an illustration--that is all--a feeble illustration of the awful "second death!"

God would have us understand what an awful thing sin is and what fearful punishment it deserves. He would fain show us by such figures how terrible must be the doom of the determined sinner. Did you ever see a sinner die? And did you not cry out--Surely the curse of God has fallen heavily on this world! Ah, this is only a faint emblem of that heavier curse that comes in the "second death!"

6. The text affirms that death is the "wages of sin." It is just what sin deserves. Labour earns wages and creates a rightful claim to such remuneration. So men are conceived as earning wages when they sin. They become entitled to their pay. God deems Himself holden to give them their well-deserved wages.

As I have often said, I would not say one word in this direction to distress your souls, if there were no hope and no mercy possible. Would I torment you before the time? God forbid! Would I hold out the awful penalty before you, and tell you there is no hope? No. I say these things to make you feel the need of escaping for your life.

Think of this: "the wages of sin is death!" God is aiming to erect a monument that shall proclaim to all the universe--Stand in awe and sin not! So that whenever they shall look on this awful expression, they shall say--What an awful thing sin is! People are wont to exclaim--O, how horrible the penalty! --They are but too apt to overlook the horrible guilt and ill-desert of sin! When God lays a sinner on his death-bed before our eyes, He invites us to look at the penalty of sin. There he lies, agonizing, groaning, quivering, racked with pain,

yet he lives, and lives on. Suppose he lives on in this dying state a day, a week, a month, a year, a score of years, a century, a thousand years, a thousand ages, and still he lives on, "dying perpetually, yet never dead:" finally, the universe passes away; the heavens are rolled together as a scroll--and what then? There lies that sufferer yet. He looks up and cries out, "How long, O HOW LONG?" Like the knell of eternal death, the answer comes down to him, "Eternally, ETERNALLY." Another cycle of eternal ages rolls on, and again he dares to ask, how long? and again the answer rolls back, "Eternally, ETERNALLY!" O how this fearful answer comes down thundering through all the realms of agony and despair

7. We are informed that in the final consummation of earthly scenes, "the judgment shall sit and the books shall be opened." We shall be there, and what is more, there, to close up our account with our Lord and receive our allotment. Which will you have on that final settlement day? The wages of sin? Do you say, "Give me my wages--give me my wages; I will not be indebted to Christ?" Sinner, you shall have them. God will pay you without fail or stint. He has made all the necessary arrangements, and has your wages ready. But take care what you do! Look again before you take your final leap. Soon the curtain will fall, probation close: and all hope will have perished. Where then shall I be?-- And you, where? On the right hand or on the left?

The Bible locates hell in the sight of heaven. The smoke of their torment as it rises up forever and ever, is in full view from the heights of the Heavenly City. There, you adore and worship; but as you cast your eye afar off toward where the rich man lay, you see what it costs to sin. There, not one drop of water can go to cool their burning tongues. Thence the smoke of their torment rises and rises for evermore. Take care what you do to-day!

Suppose you are looking into a vast crater, where the surges of molten lava boil and roll up, and roll and swell, and ever and anon belch forth huge masses to deluge the plains below. Once in my life, I stood in sight of Etna, and dropt[sic.] my eye down into its awful mouth. I could not forbear to cry out "tremendous, TREMENDOUS!" There, said I, is an image of hell! O, sinner, think of hell, and of yourself thrust into it. It pours forth its volumes of smoke and flame forever, never ceasing, never exhausted. Upon that spectacle the universe can look and read--"The wages of sin is death! O, sin not, since such is the doom of the unpardoned sinner!" Think what a demonstration this is in the government of

God! What an exhibition of his holy justice, of his inflexible purpose to sustain the interests of holiness and happiness in all his vast dominions! Is not this worthy of God, and of the sacredness of his great scheme of moral government?

Sinner, you may now escape this fearful doom. This is the reason why God has revealed hell in his faithful Word. And now shall this revelation, to you, be in vain and worse than in vain?

What would you think if this whole congregation were pressed by some resistless force close up to the very brink of hell: but just as it seemed that we are all to be pushed over the awful brink, an angel rushes in, shouting as with seraphic trump, "Salvation is possible--Glory to God, GLORY TO GOD, GLORY TO GOD!"

You cry aloud--Is it possible? Yes, yes, he cries, let me take you up in my broad, loving arms, and bear you to the feet of Jesus, for He is mighty and willing to save!

Is all this mere talk? Oh, if I could wet my lips with the dews of heaven, and bathe my tongue in its founts of eloquence, even then I could not describe the realities.

Christian people, are you figuring round and round to get a little property, yet neglecting souls? Beware, lest you ruin souls that can never live again! Do you say--I thought they knew it all? They reply to you--"I did not suppose you believed a word of it yourselves. You did not act as if you did. Are you going to heaven? Well, I am going down to hell! There is no help for me now. You will sometimes think of me then, as you shall see the smoke of my woe rising up darkly athwart the glorious heavens. After I have been there a long, long time, you will sometimes think that I, who once lived by your side, am there. O remember, you cannot pray for me then; but you will remember that once you might have warned and might have saved me."

O methinks, if there can be bitterness in heaven, it must enter through such an avenue and spoil your happiness there!

[Back to Top](#)

The Wants of Man and Their Supply

Lecture XI

July 19, 1854

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Luke 15:14: "He began to be in want."

Text.--Matt. 5:6: "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

The parable of the prodigal son is intended to illustrate the case of the sinner, coming to himself, opening his eyes to his true condition, and feeling himself destitute, empty, and wretched.

I. Man, in consciousness, is a wonderful being.

II. Man has also an intellectual nature.

III. Man has another side to his nature--the moral and spiritual department.

I. Man, as he stands revealed to himself in consciousness, is a wonderful being.

- 1. By the earliest teachings of consciousness he finds himself to be a duality, consisting of body and soul. Farther revelations made in consciousness show him to be in some respects a tri-unity. For example, he has three classes of mental attributes: sensibility, intellect, and will. Still further, and yet more important in its bearings, he finds himself a tri-unity, inasmuch as he has three sides to his nature; one related to the material universe around him; another to all objects of thought and knowledge; and still another, related to God and to duty. He has first a body, and through this, peculiar relations to the world he lives in. He has appetites for food, and numerous wants that terminate on the physical universe. These wants crave their appropriate supplies, and cannot be satisfied with anything else. In the order of time, these are earliest developed. They are few in number, that is, they may be; and those which are real are so. This class alone cease at death. Yet while they exist, they must be supplied.

- 2. Another fact deserving notice in reference to this class of wants is that man immediately assumes the existence of the objects to which his physical wants are correlated. The infant assumes this by instinct. There is no need that you should prove to man that these objects exist. He assumes this, and has only to inquire where they may be found. By a necessity of his nature he assumes their existence, and sets himself forthwith to search for them.

II. In the next place, let it be noticed that man has also an intellectual nature.

- 1. He is made capable of knowledge, and has also an intense desire to know. These are real wants of his being. God has provided for their supply in the illimitable ocean of truth which invests him on every side. God has also breathed into his soul a spirit of inquiry, and acting out its deep impulses, he must inquire into the truth and reason of things. It is curious to notice the difference between children and other animals. If you had never seen an infant before, and were to study his developments for the first time, you would be forcibly struck with these remarkable traits. The little one begins to notice, and to look inquiringly almost as soon as it begins to look at all. See him fix his eyes upon his little hands, as if he would ask, What are these? He looks into his mother's eye as if he would ask a thousand questions, long before he can utter a word. But you can find no such manifestations of thought and inquiry in the kitten and the lamb. Give them enough to eat and scope for rest and play, and they are satisfied. They will never seem to ask you the reasons of things. Nay more, you cannot awaken within them a spirit of inquiry by any appliances you can employ. It is not in them, and you cannot get it in.
- 2. But the infant is a philosopher by birth. He has intellectual wants lying in his very nature, and he cannot be satisfied without their supply. He must know the reasons of things. This is the true idea of philosophy. The lower animals will lie down perfectly satisfied without knowing the reasons of things, or anything more about things than just suffices to meet their animal wants. But man, even from infancy, has wants pressing upon him in this direction, and he rouses himself like a lion from his lair, to grasp the good his inner being craves in this direction. He cannot be satisfied without. He

finds himself related to the whole universe of matter, and O!, what a world is opened to him for inquiry and knowledge! How naturally he looks up and abroad! It is not easy for the horse or the ox to look up. Their eye is prone; but man's is outward and upward. Man is made for inquiry.

- 3. It is this spirit of inquiry which leads so many young people to this place. They come here to get knowledge. How they hang on our lips, and press on us for the reasons of things, as if they could not be satisfied till they have penetrated to the bottom of every subject.
- 4. Men assume that there is an explanation of everything. They assume that these innate demands for knowledge were created, not to be denied--not to remain ungratified, but to be gratified. Hence they grasp after knowledge, searching for it as for silver, and as if they deemed it more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold. What young man or young woman has not felt such curiosity excited, as to extort the cry--I must know: I must find out the facts on this subject, and the reasons of the facts besides!

III. Thirdly, man has yet another side to his nature--the moral and spiritual department, correlated to God, to his attributes and law, and to great questions of duty and destiny.

- 1. Man learns from consciousness that he has such a side to his being--such a department in his nature. Hence he inquires after God. He raises questions about right and wrong, and asks to know the nature of virtue and vice. Often he finds in himself a great uneasiness of which he cannot well define the cause. It puts him upon pressing these inquiries into his responsibilities and his mission in this state of his existence.
- 2. Let it now be especially observed that man instinctively assumes the existence of those things which stand related to each of these three sides of his nature. The infant begins to feel after his food with no thought of question as to the fact of there being food provided for his wants. When intelligence opens, the same assumption is made, that there are verities to be known, and the reasons why these things are so rather than otherwise. In like manner, when the eyes of the moral man begin to open, he assumes his own immortality, and assumes also the existence of a God. This is, indeed,

the true account of his knowledge of this truth. Some have supposed that the idea of God in the human mind is wholly a thing of education. It is so in the same sense in which much of our intellectual knowledge is. There are many things about God which we need to learn from his word and from his works. But no man needs to have it demonstrated to him that there is a God, any more than a child needs to have it proved that there is food provided for him in the physical world, or the adult, that there are things to be known. The great cardinal truths pertaining to the existence of God, accountability, and duty, are assumed as readily and surely as men assume that there are truths correlated to their intelligence, or supplies in nature for their animal wants. It is of no use to say that some men are atheists and therefore this doctrine cannot be true. Some men have, by speculation, befooled themselves into the belief (so they say) that there is no physical universe. But they believe in its existence none the less, and crave the good it proffers, and cannot live without it. Each one of these philosophers, although he may deny the existence of any physical universe, and declare there is no such thing as matter, yet expects his dinner at the appointed hour, and needs it for his comfort full as much as if he had not denied the existence of any such thing. So these atheists only know there is a God, although they say, "in their heart," there is none.

- 3. It is vastly difficult for any man to feel at ease while he is resisting the constitutional demands of any department of his nature. "Alas!" said a young and ambitious lawyer, who was driving his business and his books and his briefs,--"alas!" said he, "what is the matter with me! I try to study, and cannot. I try to be happy, but I am not. What do I want? Wherein is the lack that, with all I have, yet leaves me so wretched?"

It was this strain of inquiry which led him to see that he needed God for his portion, and could not find a paradise without Him.

- 4. Men need not wait for the proof of their immortality, or for proof of the necessity of virtue as a means for happiness. They know these things by a spontaneity of their moral nature. They know that holiness is a great want of their moral nature. How plainly do they see and know that they need such a being as God, to love and to obey, to trust and to adore!

I appeal to these students. If you have cultivated the habit of self-study, you

have learned that you cannot find out yourself without finding God. Tracing out the problems of your own existence reveals to you your Maker. An irresistible conviction will force itself upon you that there is a God, and that you have everything to hope from his favor, and everything to fear from his frown. A view of yourself and of your own spiritual wants will show you that nothing else can supply your need but God. Have you not already found that the more you study, and the more you cultivate the habit of reflection, the less you can make yourself happy without God? Most of you find it impossible to enjoy yourselves in sin as you were wont to do before you gave yourselves to thought and reflection. The higher you ascend in the grade of moral and intellectual culture, the more intensely will you feel the want of moral culture and moral enjoyments. It is impossible for you to rise as a man without feeling a growing demand for the presence and influence of God, as your Father and Friend.

- 5. Commonly, as the human mind opens to surrounding objects, and as its powers successively develop themselves, attention is first turned to physical wants, and next to intellectual. In one or the other of these pursuits, or in both, man is wont to become so engrossed as mainly to overlook the moral side of his nature. Yet the wants of his moral being will develop themselves, often in such a way at first as to make him exceedingly wretched, while yet he does not see what ails him, and quite fails to comprehend the reason of his unhappiness. No amount of knowledge or purely mental culture can make him happy. On the contrary, the more he knows the more he wants, and the more intensely dissatisfied he becomes with himself.

The objects that supply his bodily wants are at hand. He meets them on every side, and in abundance. So also, pushing his efforts for this end, he finds ample materials for supplying his intellectual wants. He finds enough for mind to feed upon--enough to exercise his faculties, and interest him in studious thought and earnest research.

- 6. So also with his moral and spiritual wants. These have their correlated objects. God is all around him. In the kingdoms of nature he sees the handiwork of an intelligent, designing Maker; and in the ways of providence, he cannot help seeing the agency of a kind and beneficent Father. As his natural eye gives him the material world, so his spiritual eye would give him God in everything--were it not for the blinding influence of

a bad heart. This fearfully darkens his vision to those great spiritual truths he so much needs to know. While he might be advancing hour by hour in the knowledge of God and of spiritual truth, going down into the great depths of sympathy with God, he finds instead a fearful conflict between his depraved impulses and his conscience, under the influence of which, truth gains but a slow access to his soul. Moreover, the moral side of his nature being latest developed, he often becomes so engrossed with sensual or intellectual pursuits, that he scarce has any power left for effective thought upon moral subjects. How fearfully some give way to worldly interests and claims, and others also to intellectual pursuits, some of you must know but too well.

- 7. Yet those moral wants you have neglected will some day arise and make their demands heard. It is well if they assume this urgency while yet their supply is possible. The prodigal son was a case of one who felt the pressure of these wants. He said--"I must go home to my father." David entered on record his testimony--"My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is." "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" The mind thus becomes deeply conscious of cravings and aspirations which have God for their object, and which nothing but God can supply. If you examine the nature of these wants, you find them in part social. The mind craves communion with other minds. It thirsts for society, and wisely concludes that no society, no fellowship with other minds, can in any wise compare with communion with God. Perhaps he has tried the fellowship of mortals, and found it still unsatisfying. Hence he craves the richer, far richer, fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. He longs to rise above communion with the finite to hold communion with the Infinite. Weary of drawing instructions from erring man, he thirsts for the pure fountains of knowledge as they flow from the Infinite Intelligence. Conscious that he must himself exist forever, he craves the acquaintance and sympathy of his eternal Maker and Father. As he comes to know something of his great and glorious Friend, he feels that he needs an eternity in which to study God in his multiform and wonderful works and ways. And when he comes to breathe the atmosphere of purity which invests the glorious Presence, how intensely does he long for deliverance

from all moral corruption! O, how does his soul thirst for an ever-growing conformity to God! The language of holy men on the sacred page is exceedingly strong on these points, as we may see from David's Psalms and Paul's Epistles. The latter declares, "Yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ and be found in Him." No one can read these strong utterances of feeling, desire, and purpose, without seeing that the mind may develop itself with amazing intensity in this direction. There is scope and occasion for its utmost energies and aspirations.

REMARKS.

1. He must be wretched who neglects to supply his physical wants. He must pay the stern penalty of his neglect, as he will soon learn to his sorrow. Each organ of the body needs its appropriate development, exercise, and nutriment. He who should disregard the laws of his constitution in respect to the proper supply of these constitutional demands will find ere long that the penalty of such neglect is fearful and sure.

In like manner, if he stultifies himself and takes no pains to inquire after truth and knowledge; if he never troubles himself to know, and denies to his intellectual nature all its just demands, he must be far more wretched than a brute can be. But let a man neglect all spiritual culture and training, he becomes far more wretched still. Physical demands cease with the death of the body; the spiritual must continue during his entire existence, stretching on and still on forever, and probably forever increasing.

2. How cruel for a man to consider himself as merely a brute. Giving himself up to a grovelling life, regardless of his spiritual nature and even of his intellectual nature also, what a wretch he must be! Ye, who are students, know how to pity, and how to despise him! You can understand what he loses, for you know what satisfaction is taken in finding out the reasons of things. But see the mere animal who never looks abroad, never raises an inquiry. Why does he not set himself to study and think? Why not cast his thoughts abroad for knowledge? Why does he live a fool and a dunce, when he might be a man?

3. How cruel to treat anybody else as a mere animal! This is the most cruel thing you can do towards a fellow-being. You deny the existence of those great

qualities which constitute him a man. You feed him as you would a horse, withholding all aliment for his intelligent mind. You feed him and your horse, each for the same reason;--you want to keep him in working order to serve your selfish purposes. You regard all knowledge beyond what your horse needs as only so much injury to him. Holding your slave as his master, do you send him to school? Never. Do you teach him to read? Never. Do you provide him any means of instruction? No. In the same manner you shut down the gate upon his moral nature. You close up the windows of his soul and keep it as utterly dark as possible to the light of heaven. You tighten the thumb-screws down on every inlet of knowledge, so that he shall never know that he is anything more or other than a beast! Is not this horrible? What then shall we say of the man who does just this upon himself!

4. The more a man develops his intellectual faculties, yet neglects moral culture, the more miserable he becomes. It is striking to see how wretched the most highly cultivated men become. During all the latter years of his life, Daniel Webster was never seen sober, but he was wretched. While in his senses, his mind was deep in sorrow. Look in upon Congress and see there the great men of our land and of other lands; not a man of them is happy without piety and sound moral culture. Go and ask Byron if his gigantic mind, and almost superhuman genius, made him an angel of bliss. Ask him if he found this world a paradise. Perhaps no man ever cursed his fellow-beings more intensely, or enjoyed less in their society, than he. All such men, with high intellectual culture, make themselves wretched because they leave their moral powers in a state of utter wreck and distortion. There is no escape from this result. High intellectual culture must inevitably develop the idea and the claims of God. Let them turn their inquiries which way they will, they find God, and must feel more or less convicted of obligation to love and obey him. Repelling these obligations, it is impossible that they can be otherwise than wretched. I alluded to the case of a young lawyer who asked--"What makes me so unhappy? I feel myself thoroughly wretched, and surely I can see no reason for it." The secret was this. All his life long he had neglected God. His studies had more and more brought God to view, and his sensibilities, under the action of conscience, had become exceedingly acute. How could he be otherwise than wretched? He might not see the reason of his unhappy state; yet if he had well considered the laws of his moral nature, he would have found the reason lying there. Many of you begin to find the same results in your experience, and you must realize them more and

more if you remain alienated in heart from God while yet your intelligence is more and more revealing God and his rightful claims on your heart.

5. Neglecters of God are not well aware either of the cause or the degree of their wretchedness. The wants of their physical nature are all met. They are fed and clad, and have every comfort that their physical system craves. Their social wants too are met. They have friends and society. They have also cultivated taste and any desired amount of objects for its gratification. There is a library and books in plenty. There are works of art from the masters in every profession. What more could they need? Yet they are wretched. What is the matter? How many thousand times has this inquiry been made--What can be the matter with me? I have everything heart can wish, or the eye desire; books, teachers, unbounded sources of information, yet I am unhappy; what does ail me?

I can tell you what. There is another side of your nature, more important than all the rest, and more craving, yet you shut off all its demands, and deny its claims. You have a conscience, yet you resist its monitions. You have desires, correlated to God, yet you deny them their appropriate gratification. No fact is more ennobling to human nature than this, that man has desires correlated to God even as he has to his fellow men, so that he can no more be happy without God than he can be without the sympathy and society of man. We all understand this law of human nature. We see man thirsting for companionship with his fellow man, longing for society, and we cannot fail to see and to say that man is so constructed in his very nature that he must have society. Deprive him of it and he is wretched. Now the striking fact is that man has an equally strong demand in his very constitution for sympathy and fellowship with God. Unless this too be supplied, he cannot be happy.

Suppose you were to meet a man as ignorant of his physical wants as most men are of their spiritual. He does not understand that he must have food for his stomach; clothes for his body; heat to warm him in the winter frosts. Ah! you would see the reason of his misery. Strange he does not know enough to supply his wants!

Or suppose him equally ignorant of his intellectual wants. He starves his soul of knowledge. Lean and barren, he seems to be panting for something higher and better, yet unaware both of the nature of this craving and of the proper source of supply. How easily could you tell him that "for the soul to be without knowledge is not good."

So there is also a moral side to man's nature, and he can never be supremely happy till he becomes morally perfect. He struggles to get out of his moral agony; feels as if he should die if he cannot get out from under this moral load. Who has not felt this loathing of his abominable self, because he did not and would not search after God! Never did any man long for food or water more intensely than the man, who suffers himself to attend to the inner voice of his moral being, thirsts after God.

6. Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst, for when they cry unto God to be filled, He will fill them. Let them cry unto God for bread and water; does He not hear their cry? Ah, verily,--He hears the young ravens when they cry, and the young lions when they roar and suffer hunger; and the infant voices of his intelligent creation are not less sure to come up into his ear. Does He not love to supply these wants which grow out of the nature He gave them? Indeed He does. He spread out the fair earth and its rich fields of lovely green. He meant to fill the earth with supplies for man and beast, yea, for every living thing.

In like manner, of the mental wants of his intelligent creatures. He loves to meet these with open hand;--loves to excite the spirit of inquiry and then supply to us the means of gratification. The things we need to know He loves to teach us.

But our moral and spiritual wants, he is infinitely more ready to supply. Does not your inner heart say,--verily, this must be so? It is so. No sooner does the soul go forth after God, than He is near--ineffably near. It is wonderful to see how soon God is found when once the soul begins in true earnest to inquire after Him. Is it not striking that God should so love to reveal himself and should take such pains to insinuate himself into our confidence, and, as it were, work himself into universal communion and contact with our whole souls, so as to fill every moral want of our being? In view of this desire and effort on his part, and in view also of the means provided and promised for this result, we can see why God should command us to "be filled with the Spirit." Such infinite supplies provided and such earnest desire manifested on the part of God to have us appropriate these supplies to their utmost extent;--it is as if an ocean of water were suspended above our heads, and we have only to lift the valve and let down these ocean waters upon our needy souls. There is the promise, let down like a silken cord; what have we to do but to take hold of it and pull down infinite blessings!

7. Until man feels his spiritual wants, he will resist all attempts you may make to

bring him to God. Hence the necessity of touching the mainspring of danger,--of arousing his fears, and developing his moral sensibility. Hence the need of appeals to his conscience and to his sense of danger. Until you can make his moral nature sensitive and rouse up his dark and dead soul to moral feelings, there is no hope for him. But when you can touch this side of his nature and quicken him to feeling and even to agony under the lash of conscience, and make him really appreciate his wants, then he begins to feel his wants, and to ask how they can be met and supplied. This is the true secret of promoting revivals. You must go around among these dark, insensible minds and pour in light upon this side of their nature. You must wake them up to earnest thought--you must rouse up the man's conscience and soul till he shall cry out after God and his salvation.

I always have strong hopes of students; for although they sometimes get wise in their own conceits, and sometimes render themselves ridiculous by their low ambition, yet, taken as a class, there is great hope of them. If suitable means are used, very many of them will be converted. Probably no class of students ever passed through college, the right means of instruction and influence being used with them, without deeply feeling the power of truth, and many of them becoming converted. They must, almost of necessity, feel every blow that is struck; every truth, brought home clearly through their intelligence upon their conscience, wakens a response; and impels the soul to cry out after God. Hence I have strong hopes of you. Yet many of you, I know, are not now converted. God grant you may be soon! I hope the hearts of this Christian people will reach your case in strong effectual prayer. You can indeed resist every effort made to save you--if you will; you can reject Christ, however earnest his entreaties or tender his loving kindness; but you cannot change your nature so that it shall be happy in rebellion against God and his truth; you cannot hush the rebukes of an abused conscience forever; these wants of your inner being must be met, or what will become of you? Your bodily wants will soon cease; and you need not care much therefore for them. Your intellectual pleasures also must ere long come to an end; for how can they pass over with you into the realm of outer darkness where are weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth? Doubtless that is a state not of light, and truth, and joy in pursuit of knowledge; but of delusions, and errors, and of knowledge agonizing its possessor with keenest pangs forever and ever! I do not believe sinners will have any intellectual pleasure in hell. It cannot be possible that they will enjoy any knowledge they will have there, or any means

of attaining knowledge. The very idea is precluded by the relations that conscience must sustain to everything they know. All possible knowledge must have some bearing upon God, duty, and their moral relations, and hence must serve only to harrow up their sensibilities with keenest anguish. O how will they gnash their teeth and gnaw their tongues in direst woe forever! "There is no peace," saith my God, "to the wicked!" More and more deeply dissatisfied to all eternity! Execrating and cursing their insane selves for the madness of rejecting God and his gospel when they might have had both. Now it only remains for them to wail in bitterness and anguish, lifting up their unavailing cries, to which the thunders of Jehovah's curse respond in everlasting echoes--"Woe to the wicked; it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him."

O sinner, will you yet press on into the very jaws of such a hell!

[Back to Top](#)

Where Sin Occurs God Cannot Wisely Prevent It

Lecture XII

August 2, 1854

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 18:7: "It must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh."

Text.--Luke 17:1: "It is impossible but that offences come; but woe unto him through whom they come!"

An "offence" as used in this passage, is an occasion of falling into sin. It is anything which causes another to sin and fall.

It is plain that the author of the offence is in this passage conceived of as voluntary and as sinful in his act; else the woe of God would not be denounced upon him.

Consequently the passage assumes that this sin is in some sense necessary and

unavoidable. What is true of this sin in this respect is true of all other sin. Indeed any sin may become an offence in the sense of a temptation to others to sin, and therefore its necessity and unavoidableness would then be affirmed by this text.

The doctrine of these texts, therefore, is that sin, under the government of God, cannot be prevented. I purpose to examine this doctrine; to show that, nevertheless,

I. Sin is utterly inexcusable as to the sinner;

II. Then answer some objections, and conclude with remarks.

I. Sin is utterly inexcusable as to the sinner.

When we say it is impossible to prevent sin under the government of God, the statement still calls for another inquiry, viz.: Where does this impossibility lie? Is it on the part of the sinner, or on the part of God? Which is true; that the sinner cannot possibly forbear to sin, or that God cannot prevent his sinning?

- 1. The first supposition answers itself, for it could not be sin if it were utterly unavoidable. It might be his misfortune; but nothing could be more unjust than to impute it to him as his crime.

But we shall better understand where this impossibility does and must lie, if we first recall to mind some of the elementary principles of God's government.

- 2. Let us then, consider that God's government over men is moral, and known to be such by every intelligent being. By the term moral, I mean that it governs by motives, and does not move by physical force. It adapts itself to mind, not to matter. It contemplates mind as having intellect to understand truth, sensibility to appreciate its bearing upon happiness, conscience to judge of the right, and a will to determine a course of voluntary action in view of God's claims. So God governs mind. Not so does He govern matter. The planetary worlds are controlled by quite a different sort of agency. God does not move them in their orbits by motives but by a physical agency.

I said, all men know this government to be moral by their own consciousness. When its precepts and its penalties come before their minds,

they are conscious that an appeal is made to their voluntary powers. They are never conscious of any physical agency coercing obedience.

- 3. God's government implies in man the power to will, or not to will;--to will right, or to will wrong;--to choose or to refuse the great good which Jehovah promises. It also implies intelligence. The beings to whom law is addressed are capable of understanding it. They have also, as I have said, a conscience, by which they can appreciate and must affirm its obligations.
- 4. You need to distinguish broadly between the influence of motive on mind and of mechanical force upon matter. The former implies voluntariness; the latter does not. The former is adapted to mind and has no adaptation to matter; the latter equally is adapted to matter but has no possible application to mind. In God's government over the human mind, all is voluntary; nothing is coerced as by physical force. Indeed it is impossible that physical force should directly influence mind. Compulsion is precluded by the very nature of moral agency. Where compulsion begins, moral agency ends. If it were possible for God to force the will as he forces the moon along in her orbit, to do so would subvert the very idea of a moral government. Neither praise nor blame could attach to any actions of beings, so moved. Persuasion, brought to bear upon mind, is always such in its nature that it can be resisted. By the very nature of the case, God's creatures must have power to resist any amount of even his persuasion. There can be no power in heaven or earth to coerce the will, as matter is coerced. The nature of mind forbids its possibility. And if it were possible, it would still be true that in just so far as God should coerce the human will, He would cease to govern morally.
- 5. God is infinitely wise. Men can no more doubt this than they can doubt their own existence. He has infinite knowledge. He knows everything--i.e., all objects of knowledge; and knows them all perfectly. He is also infinitely good, his will being always conformed to his perfect knowledge and always controlled by infinite benevolence.
- 6. His infinite goodness implies that He does the best He can, always, and every where. In no instance does He ever fail to do the very best He can do,

so that He can appeal to every creature and say--What more can I do to prevent sin than I am doing! Indeed, He does so appeal to every intelligent mind. He made this appeal through Isaiah to the ancient Jews--"And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?"

Every moral agent in the universe knows that God has done the best he could do in regard to sin. Do not you know this, each one of you? Certainly you do. He himself, in all his infinite wisdom could not suggest a better course than that which He has taken. Men know this truth so well, they never can know it better. You may at some future day realize it more fully when you shall come to see its millions of illustrations drawn out before your eyes; but no demonstration can make its proof more perfect than it is to your own minds today.

- 7. Now sin does in fact exist under God's government. For this sin, God either is or is not to blame. Every man knows that God is not to blame for this sin, for man's own nature affirms that He would prevent it if He wisely could. Certainly if He was able wisely to prevent sin in any case where it actually occurs, then not to do so nullifies all our conceptions of his goodness and wisdom. He would be the greatest sinner in the universe if, with power and wisdom adequate to the prevention of sin, He had failed to prevent it.
- 8. Let me here note, also, that what God can not do wisely, he cannot, (speaking morally,) do at all. For He cannot act unwisely. He cannot do things which wisdom forbids. To do so would be to undeify himself. The supposition would make him cease to be perfect, and this were equivalent to ceasing to be God.

Or thus; if He were to interpose unwisely to prevent a sinner from sinning, He would sin himself. I speak now of each instance in which God does not, in fact, interpose to prevent sin. In any of these cases, if He were to interpose unwisely to prevent sin, He would prevent a man from sinning at the expense of sinning himself. Here then is the case. A sinner is about to fall before temptation, or in more correct language, is about to rush into some new sin. God cannot wisely prevent his doing so. Now what shall be done? Shall He

let that sinner rush on to his chosen sin and self-wrought ruin; or shall He step forward, unwisely, sin himself, and incur all the frightful consequences of such a step? He lets the sinner bear his own responsibility. Why should not He? Who would wish to have God sin?

This is a full explanation of every case in which man does in fact sin and God does not prevent it.

And this is not conjecture, but is logical certainly. No truth can be more irresistibly and necessarily certain than this. I once heard a minister say in a sermon--"It is not irrational to suppose that in each case of sin, it occurs as it does because God cannot prevent it." After he retired from the pulpit, I said to him--Why did you leave the matter so? You left your hearers to infer that perhaps it might be in some other way; that this was only a possible theory, yet that some other theory was perhaps even more probable. Why did you not say, This theory is certain and must necessarily be true?

Thus the impossibility of preventing sin lies not in the sinner, but wholly with God. Sin, it should be remembered, is nothing else than an act of free will, always committed against one's conviction of right. Indeed if a man did not know that selfishness is sin, it would not be sin in his case.

- 9. Once more, sin is always committed against and in despite of motives of infinitely greater weight than those which induce to sin. The very fact that his conscience condemns the sin is his own judgment on the question, proving that in his own view the motives to sin are infinitely contemptible when put in the scale to measure those against the sin in question. Every sinner knows that sin is a willful abuse of his own powers as a moral agent--of those noblest powers of his being in view of which he is especially said to be made in the image of God. Made like God with these exalted attributes, capable of determining his own voluntary activities intelligently if he will;--in accordance with his reason and his conscience if he will;--he yet in every act of sin abuses and degrades these powers, tramples down in the very dust the image of God enstamped on his being, and with the capacities of becoming an angel, makes himself a fool. Clothed with a dignity of nature akin to that of his Maker, he chooses to debase himself to the level of brutes and of devils. With a face naturally looking upwards--with an intelligence that grasps the great truths of God;--with a reason that postulates and affirms the great necessary principles involved in his moral

duties and relations;--with capacities which fit him to sit on a nation's throne; he yet says--Let me take this glorious image of God and debase it in the dust! Let me cast myself down, till there shall be no lower depth of degradation to which I can sink!

- 10. Sin is in every instance a dishonoring of God. This every sinner must know. It casts off his authority, spurns his advice, maltreats his love. Truly does God himself say--"A son honoreth his father and a servant his master; if then I be a father, where is mine honor? and if I be a master, where is my fear?"

What sinner ever supposed that God neglects to do anything He wisely can do to prevent sin? If this be not true, what is conscience but a lie and a delusion? Conscience always affirms that God is clear of all guilt in reference to sin. In every instance in which conscience condemns the sinner, it necessarily must and actually does fully acquit God.

These remarks will suffice to show that sin in every instance of its commission, is utterly inexcusable.

II. We are next to notice some objections.

- 1. "If God is infinitely wise and good, why need we pray at all? If He will surely do the best possible thing always and all the good He can do, why need we pray?"

I answer. Because his infinite goodness and wisdom enjoin it upon us. Who could ask a better reason than this? If you believe in his infinite wisdom and goodness, and make this belief the basis of your objection, you will certainly, if honest, be satisfied with this answer.

But again I answer. It might be wise and good for him to do many things if sought unto in prayer, which he could not wisely do, unasked. You cannot therefore infer that prayer never changes the course which God voluntarily pursues.

- 2. Objecting again, you ask why we should pray to God to prevent sin, if He can not prevent it? If under the circumstances in which sin exists, God cannot, as you hold, prevent sin, why go to him and pray him to prevent it?

I answer--We pray for the very purpose of changing the circumstances. This is our object. And prayer does change the circumstances. If we step forward and offer fervent effectual prayer, this quite changes the state of the case. Look at Moses pleading with God to spare the nation after their great sin in the matter of the golden calf. God said to him--"Let me alone that I may destroy them, and I will make of thee a great nation." Nay, said Moses, for what will the Egyptians say? And what will all the nations say? They have long time said, The God of that people will not be able to get them through that vast wilderness; now therefore, what will thou do for thy great name? "Yet now, if thou wilt, forgive their sin;--and if not, blot me, I pray thee out of thy book which Thou hast written."

This prayer, coming up before God, greatly changed the circumstances of the case. For this prayer, God could honorably spare the nation--it was so honorable for him to answer this prayer.

- 3. Yet further objecting, you ask--"Why did God create moral agents at all if He foresaw that He could not prevent their sinning?"

I answer. Because He saw that on the whole it was better to do so. He could prevent some sin in this race of moral agents; could over-rule what He could not wisely prevent, to as to bring out from it a great deal of good, and so that in the long run, he saw it better, with all the results before him, to create than to forbear; therefore wisdom and love made it necessary that He should create. Having the power to create a race of moral beings--having also power to convert and save a vast multitude of them, and power also to over-rule the sin he should not prevent so that it should evolve immense good, how could He forbear to create as He did?

- 4. But if God can not prevent sin, will He not be unhappy?

No; He is entirely satisfied to do the best He can, and accept the results.

- 5. But some will say--Is not this "limiting the Holy One of Israel?" No. It is no proper limitation of God's power to say that He cannot do anything that is unwise. Nor do we limit His power when we say--He cannot move mind just as He moves a planet. That is no proper subject of power which is in its own nature absurd and impossible.

Yet these are the only directions in which we have spoken of any limitations

to his power.

But you say, could not God prevent sin by annihilating each moral agent the instant before he would sin? Doubtless He could; but we say if this were wise He would have done it. He has not done it, certainly not in all cases, and therefore it is not always wise.

But you say, Let him give more of his Holy Spirit. I answer, He does give all He can wisely, under existing circumstances. To suppose He might give more than He does, circumstances being the same, is to impeach his wisdom or his goodness.

Some people seem greatly horrified at the idea of setting limits to God's power. Yet they make assumptions which inevitably impeach his wisdom and his goodness. Such persons need to consider that if we must choose between limiting his power on the one hand, or his wisdom and his love on the other, it is infinitely more honorable to him to adopt the former alternative than the latter. To strike a blow at his moral attributes is to annihilate his throne. And further, let it be also considered, as we have already suggested, that you do not in any offensive sense limit his power when you assume that he cannot do things naturally impossible, and cannot act unwisely.

Let these remarks suffice in the line of answer to objections.

I know that you who are students will say that this must be true. You are accustomed to notice the action of your own moral powers. You have a moral sense, and it has been in some good degree developed. You know it is utterly impossible that God should act unwisely. You know He must act benevolently, always doing the best thing he can do. He has given you a nature which affirms, postulates, intuitively these truths. Else there could be no conscience. The presence and action of a conscience implies that these great truths respecting the moral nature of God are indisputably affirmed in your soul by your own moral nature.

I address you therefore as those who have a conscience. Suppose it were otherwise. Suppose all that we call conscience--the entire moral side of your nature, should suddenly drop out, and I should find myself speaking to a shoal of moral idiots--beings utterly void of a conscience! How desolate the scene? But I am not speaking to such an audience. Therefore I am sure that

you will understand and appreciate what I say.

REMARKS.

1. We may see the only sense in which God could have purposed the existence of sin. It is simply negative. He purposed not to prevent it in any case where it does actually occur. He does not purpose to make moral agents sin; not for example, Adam and Eve in the garden, or Judas in the matter of betraying Christ. All He purposed to do Himself was to leave them with only a certain amount of restraint--as much as He could wisely impose; and then if they would sin, let them bear the responsibility. He left them to act freely and did not positively prevent their sinning. He never uses means to make men sin. He only forbears to use unwise means to prevent their sinning. Thus his agency in the existence of sin is only negative.

2. The existence of sin does not prove that it is the necessary means of the greatest good. Some of you are aware that this point has been often mooted in theological discussions. I do not purpose now to go into it at length, but will only say that in all cases wherein men sin, they might obey God instead of sinning. Now the question here is--If they were to obey rather than sin, would not a greater good accrue? We have these two reasons for the affirmative: (1.) that by natural tendency, obedience promotes good and disobedience evil: and (2.) that in all those cases, God earnestly and positively enjoins obedience. It is fair to presume that He would enjoin that which would secure the greatest good.

3. The human conscience always justifies God. This is an undeniable fact--a fact of universal consciousness. The proof of it can never be made stronger, for it stands recorded in each man's bosom.

Yet a very remarkable book has recently appeared--"The Conflict of Ages"--which is obviously built upon the opposite assumption--viz., that the human conscience does not unqualifiedly condemn man; but except under the light of this peculiar theory, does in fact condemn God. This theory, adopted professedly to vindicate God as against the human conscience, holds that there was a pre-existent state in which we all lived and sinned, and there forfeited our title to a moral nature, unbiased toward sinning. There we had a fair probation. Here, if we suppose this to be the commencement of our moral agency, we do not have a fair probation, and conscience therefore does not, and in truth cannot, justify God except on the supposition of a pre-existent state.

The entire book, therefore is built on the assumption of a conflict between the human conscience and God. A shocking assumption! A brother remarked to me of this that it seemed to him to be the most outrageous and blasphemous indictment against God that could be drawn. Yet the author intended no such thing. He is undoubtedly a good man, but in this particular, egregiously mistaken.

The fact is, conscience does always condemn the sinner and justify God. It could not affirm obligation without justifying God. The real controversy therefore, is not between God and the conscience, but between God and the heart. In every instance in which sin exists, conscience condemns the sinner and justifies God.-- This of itself is a perfect and sufficient answer to the whole doctrine of that book. It knocks out the only and whole foundation on which it is built. If that book be true, men never should have had a conscience until that book was published, read, understood, and believed. No man should ever have been convicted of sin until he came to see that he had existed in a previous state and began his sinning there.

Yet the facts are right over against this. Everywhere in all ages, with no deference to this book, and no disposition to wait for its tardy developments,-- everywhere and though [sic.] all time the human conscience has stood up to condemn each sinner and compel him to sign his own death-warrant; and acquit his Maker of all blame. These are the facts of human nature and life.

4. Conversion consists precisely in this: the heart's consent to these decisions of the conscience. It is for the heart to come over to the ground occupied by the conscience, and thoroughly acquiesce in it as right and true. Conscience has a long time been speaking; it has always held one doctrine; and has long been resisted by the heart: now, in conversion, the heart comes over, and gives in its full assent to the decisions of conscience; that God is right, and that sin and himself a sinner, are utterly wrong.

And now do any of you want to know how you may become a Christian? This is it. Let your heart justify God and condemn sin, even as your conscience does. Let your voluntary powers yield to the necessary affirmations of your reason and conscience. Then all will be peaceful within because all will be right.

But you say--I am trying to do this! Ah, I know it to be the case with some of you that you are trying to resist to your utmost. You settle down as it were with

your whole weight while God would fain draw you by his truth and Spirit. Yet you fancy you are really trying to yield your heart to God. A most unaccountable delusion!

5. In the light of this subject we can see the reason for a general judgment. God intends to clear Himself from all imputation of wrong in the matter of sin, before the entire moral universe. Strange facts have transpired in his universe, and strange insinuations have been made against his course. These matters must all be set right. For this He will take time enough. He will wait till all things are ready. Obviously He could not bring out his great trial-day till the deeds of earth have all been wrought--till all the events of this wondrous drama have had their full development. Until then He will not be ready to make a full expose of all His doings. Then He can and will do it most triumphantly and gloriously.

The revelations of that day will doubtless show why God did not interpose to prevent every sin in the universe. Then He will satisfy us as to the reasons He had for suffering Adam and Eve to sin and for leaving Judas to betray his Master. We know now that He is wise and good, although we do not know all the particular reasons for his conduct in the permission of sin. Then, He will reveal those particular reasons, as far as it may be best and possible. No doubt He will then show that his reasons were so wise and good that He could not have done better.

6. Sin will then appear infinitely inexcusable and odious. It will then be seen in its true relations toward God and his intelligent creatures, inexpressibly blameworthy and guilty.

Take a case. Suppose a son has gone far away from the paths of obedience and virtue. He has had one of the best of fathers, but he would not hear his counsels. He had a wise and affectionate mother, but he sternly resisted all the appeals of her tenderness and tears.--Despite of the most watchful care of parents and friends, he would go astray. As one madly bent on self-ruin, he pushed on, reckless of the sorrow and grief he brought upon those he should have honored and loved. At last the issues of such a course stand revealed. The guilty youth finds himself ruined in constitution, in fortune, and in good name. He has sunk far too low to retain even self-respect. Nothing remains for him but agonizing reflections on past folly and guilt. Hear him bewail his own infatuation. "Alas," he cries, "I have almost killed my venerable father, and long ago I had quite broken my mother's heart. All that folly and crime in a son could do, I have done

to bring down their gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. No wonder that having done so much to ruin my best friends, I have plucked down a double ruin on my own head. No sinner ever more richly deserved to be doubly damned than myself."

Thus truth flashes upon his soul and thus his heart quails and his conscience thunders condemnation.--So it must be with every sinner when all his sins against God shall stand revealed before his eyes and there shall be nothing left for him but intense and unqualified self-condemnation.

7. God's omnipotence is no guaranty to any man that either himself or any other sinner will be saved. I know the Universalist affirms it to be. He will ask--Does not the fact of God's omnipotence, taken in connection with His infinite love, prove that all men will be saved? I answer, No! It does not prove that God will save one soul. With ever so much proof of God's perfect wisdom, love, and power we could not infer that He would save even one sinner. We might just as reasonably infer that He would send the whole race to hell. How could we know what His wisdom would determine? How could we infer what the exigencies of His government might demand? In fact the only ground we have for the belief that He will save any sinner is not at all our inference from His wisdom, love, and power; but is wholly and only His own declarations as to this matter. Our knowledge is wholly from revelation. God has said so; and this is all we know about it.

Yet further I reply to the Universalist, that God's omnipotence saves nobody. Salvation is not wrought by physical omnipotence. It is only by moral power that God saves, and this can save no man unless he consents to be saved.

8. How bitter the reflections which sinners must have on their death-beds, and how fearfully agonizing when they pass behind the veil and see things in their true light. Did you ever think when you have seen a sinner dying in his sins what an awful thing it is for a sinner to die? You mark the lines of anguish on his countenance; you see the look of despair; you observe he can not bear to hear the word of the awful future. There he lies and death pushes on his stern assault. The poor victim struggles in vain against his dreaded foe. He sinks, and sinks, his pulse runs lower, and yet lower; look in his glassy eye; mark that haggard brow; there, he breathes not; but all suddenly, he stares as one affrighted; throws up his hands wildly, screams frightfully; sinks down and is gone to return no more! And where is he now? Not beyond the scope of thought and reflection. He can

see back into the world he has left. Still he can think. Alas, his misery is that he can do nothing but think! As said the prisoner in his solitary cell: I could bear torture or I could endure toil; but O, to have nothing to do but to think! To hear the voice of friend no more--to say not a word--to do nothing from day to day and from year to year but to think! that is awful. So of the lost sinner. Who can measure the misery of incessant self-agonizing thought? Now, when at any time your reflections press uncomfortably and you feel that you shall almost go deranged, you can find some drop of comfort for your fevered lips; you can for a few moments, at least, fall asleep, and so forget your sorrows and find a transient rest; but oh! when you shall reach the world where the wicked find no rest--where there can be no sleep--where not one drop of water can reach you to cool your tongue: Alas, how can your heart endure or your hands be strong in that dread hour! God tried in vain to bless and save you. You fought Him back and plucked down on your guilty head a fearful damnation!

9. What infinite consolation will remain to God after He shall have closed up the entire scenes of earth! He has banished the wicked and taken home the righteous to his bosom of love and peace. I have done, says He, all I wisely could to save the race of man. I made sacrifices cheerfully; sent my well-beloved Son gladly; waited as long as it seemed wise to wait, and now it only remains to over-rule all this pain and woe for the utmost good, and rejoice in the bliss of the redeemed forevermore.

There are the guilty lost. Their groans swell out and echo up the walls of their pit of woe:--it is to the holy only so much evidence that God is good and wise and will surely sustain his throne in equity and righteousness forever. It teaches most impressive lessons upon the awful doom of sin. There let it stand and bear its testimony, to warn other beings against a course so guilty and a doom so dreadful!

There, in that world of woe, may be some of our pupils, possibly some of our own children. But God is just and his throne stainless of their blood. It shall not mar the eternal joy of his kingdom, that they would pull down such damnation on their heads. They insisted they would take the responsibility and now they have it.

Sinner, do you not care for this to-day? Will you come to the inquiry meeting this evening to trifle about your salvation? I can tell you where you will not trifle. When the great bell of time shall toll the death-knell of earth and call her

millions of sons and daughters to the final judgment, you will not be in a mood to trifle! You will surely be there! It will be a time for serious thought--an awful time of dread. Are you ready to face its revelations and decisions?

Or do you say, Enough, ENOUGH! I have long enough withstood his grace and spurned his love; I will now give my heart to God, to be his only, forevermore?

[Back to Top](#)

The Ways of Sin Hard; Of Holiness, Pleasant

Lecture XIII

August 16, 1854

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

The following passages present the subject on which I propose to speak.

Text.--Prov. 13:15: "The way of transgressors is hard."

Text.--Acts 9:5: "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

Text.--Isa. 57:20, 21: "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." "'There is no peace,' said my God, 'to the wicked.'"

Text.--Matt. 11:29-30: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Text.--1 John 5:3: "And His commandments are not grievous."

Text.--Prov. 3:17: "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

You will at once perceive the drink and meaning of these passages, many of which are found in all parts of the Bible. Their general doctrine is that the ways of sin are full of trouble, but that the ways of holiness are pleasant and peaceful. It will be my present object to illustrate this doctrine; to show that it must of necessity be true; and hence that whatever claims to be true religion and yet dissents from this doctrine cannot be true.

To compass these ends I must,

I. Enquire what true religion is;

II. What is implied in it;

III. What sin is;

IV. What a life of sin implies;

V. Show that religion is naturally easy and delightful;

VI. That on the contrary a course of sin is and must be, hard, oppressive, delusive and self-ruinous.

I. What is true religion?

To say all in a word, it is true devotion of heart and life to God. It supposes that

instead of living to yourself, you live to God. You seek to consecrate all your powers to His service only. According to the Bible, true religion is supreme love to God, and equal, impartial love to man. It is not a state of passive emotion, but of supreme devotion to God. It manifests itself in good will to all beings, and in a voluntary committal of all our powers to God and to the good of all His creatures, so far as they become known to us.

II. True religion implies many things.

- 1. In all the case of all sinners it must imply repentance--the turning of the heart away from all iniquity, and the utter rejection of all sin. This must be the first great step from sin to holiness.
- 2. It also must imply confidence in God and in His general veracity. When the heart turns round to become God's friend, it must confide in Him as good and as truthful.
- 3. There will also be a state of warm and lively confidence in Jesus Christ, embracing all those points in which He reveals Himself as our Savior from sin and condemnation.
- 4. There will also be a state of universal acquiescence in the providence of God. Believing in the fact that God rules in nature over all the external and internal worlds, the mind accepts this fact with joy and with trust. The mind being in a state of trust towards God and of true devotion to His will, this acquiescence in His general providence sits easy and is natural. Hence there will be an earnest sympathy with God in all His ways.

III. On the other hand, we must enquire, What is sin?

- 1. Sin is devotion to self. Sin puts self in the place of God as the supreme object of regard and affection. It values nothing except as related to self. It makes self-gratification its first law.
- 2. Of course this implies opposition to God and stubborn impenitence. The man cleaves pertinaciously to self, and is ready to sacrifice everything else to promote selfish ends. He is utterly distrustful of God, and has no

sympathy with His character, government and ways.

IV. Sinning, unrestrained by gospel grace, and made the law of life as it always is in the unrenewed soul, will of course imply a supreme devotion to some forms of selfish gratification.

The man aims to provide for himself. His passions and appetites may be more or less elevated; his choice among numerous modes of self-gratification is a matter of taste and training; but he may always be known by the fact that whatever his heart craves he gives himself up to obtain and enjoy. The sum of the whole matter is that his soul is selfish.

V. Religion is altogether a natural state of mind, easy, peace-giving and delightful. Its exercises are in entire accordance and with our constitutional nature and with the nature and relations of things.

- 1. In a religious state of mind, man is in harmony with himself. Each function of his active powers performs its appropriate work, without friction and irritation. The affirmations of reason and the monitions of conscience are heard with quiet joy and are duly honored. The legitimate demands of animal nature are met, and the soul is not thereby brought into bondage. The social law of his nature finds ample scope in the new and glorious field of communion with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ. A truly religious man is in harmony with God and with all His manifestations. He loves the law; he loves the gospel. Seeing God in all the ways of His providence he rejoices to know that here too is the land of his Father, doing all things well. Thus coming into contact with God in every point, and being at peace and in harmony with all God is and does, how can he be otherwise than blessed?
- 2. By the same natural law, his relations towards his fellow beings are all easy and naturally peaceful. He accords to them, to each and to all,--their rights, and does it with real gratification. He enjoys seeing and making them happy. Hence he does not come into collision with them, as a selfish man is likely to, everyday. In reference to them also, his own mind feels self-respect, instead of being harassed with self-reproaches. Thus he finds himself at peace with all the universe of created beings, and each one, as he becomes known, heightens the peace and joy of his soul. His mind works in

harmony with all true motives; conscience smiles on his soul all along his way. It is a sunny way; for God sheds the light of His face upon it; all holy beings shine and smile upon it. This representation is true not occasionally and under special circumstances only, but necessarily and always where true piety prevails.

- 3. Old bad habits are molded and yielded as soon as the will and conscience come fully under the power of this law of love to God and man. Consequently, the tone of his mind becomes more and more easy and flowing, as the selfishness that chafes and irritates is subdued and rooted out. His bosom becomes the natural home of peace and joy, intruders and disturbers being thrust out.
- 4. The Bible represents this course as like the shining light of morning, which, from the faintest streaks, shineth more and more unto the perfect day. This is its natural law. Joy and peace must advance with progress in obedience and self-subjugation to God's will. This state must be intensely delightful because all the work in which God calls the Christian to engage is pleasant, and just what he most of all loves. These are not the labors of a slave, but of a free man, working for an object, with a heart and therefore "with a will." He makes God's glory his own end, the very thing in which he chiefly delights. Hence all he has to do is to promote his own highest interests, for he has identified his own highest interests with God's honor.
- 5. He has a glorious fellowship. No longer in universal warfare with God, and all the good in heaven and in earth, he is at peace with all, and in most refreshing sympathy. His enemies now are not the good and the mighty, but the bad and the weak. God is on his side, and his friends have God on their side. Against him are the world, the flesh and the devil; but for him are friends, more and mightier,--God, his angels, and all the good in earth or heaven. Well and fitly does the Bible speak of him as "more than a conqueror through Him who has loved us."
- 6. The scriptures do not deny that the good man has conflicts. No, they really recognize this fact; but they provide for him all the armor he wants;

and pledge him the strong aid of the Almighty God besides.

I am speaking now of a state of true religion, not of legality. Many seem to misunderstand this subject. They talk as if this world must be dull and comfortless, and as if God had made it as bad as He well could. But this is a most blasphemous representation. When the Bible speaks of the present state as a warfare, it always represents the believing soul as gaining victories through Jesus Christ, his Lord. He conquers through abounding grace, and thus finds peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

VI. On the contrary a course of sin is a hard state.

- 1. The way of transgressors, we have the best authority for saying, is hard. It is all unnatural, in the sense of a violation of the laws of our being. It deranges and tramples down each and every one of these laws. The mind conflicts with itself and wars perfectly against its own judgment and conscience. It also wars upon its own best interests; and not least, against the truth. God made the human mind to move in harmony with truth. But sin is a state of eternal antagonism against truth, and therefore must inevitably be one of disquiet and wretchedness.
- 2. This state of sin is necessarily one of warfare with all the wicked, for selfish men are by natural law at loggerheads with each other. Each man, having a supremely selfish interest to maintain, finds himself thoroughly in conflict with every other supremely selfish man. Notice their locks and bolts and bars. See how they build up their walls of protection against each other. The laws they make against all forms of selfish aggression upon property and the care they manifest to put everything in writing, show that they have no confidence in wicked men as generally honest. Surely God does not make men to devour each other like beasts of prey. Nor did He make man to live like the swine, regarding the indulgence of his appetites and passions as his chief concern. Surely such a course of living must be for man, such as he is made, most unnatural.
- 3. Sin is, of course, a constant warfare against God and against all the interests of God's great family and kingdom.

I said it was a state of universal warfare. And truly there is not a being, not a

creature under heaven, against whom the sinner is not at war. He fights every man, every beast. He would lay the whole universe under contribution to minister to his own selfish enjoyment. He would lay his commands on God if he could. If he resorts to prayer instead of command, it is only because he finds he cannot command to any purpose. He prays only in hope thereby to make God his own servant. He cares no more for God than for the devil, only as His aid may be of more value to himself. If he could, how soon would he engross the universe to make it subservient to his own selfish ends! Gladly would he command and appropriate all the fishes of the sea and the cattle of a thousand hills. If it might subserve his own selfish ends, he would blot out the sun in the heavens, little caring how many equally good with himself were thereby doomed to eternal darkness. But you say--"Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" "I never thought of doing such things!" Stay! Let me tell you the only reason why you have not. It is only because you have never supposed you could. Just as you have never thought of being king of England or President of the United States; yet if the way were open and you could reach either of these summits or power by a little sacrifice of your conscience, would you not do it? Certainly you would! Who would trust you to be disinterested and to act according to a sound conscience? No man. But what have you not done? A man who would do a little meanness for a sixpence would do a great villainy for a kingdom. A man who would quibble for a cent would do more than quibble for governmental office and patronage.

Thus sin throws everything into utter and interminable disorder. It is war, war, WAR on all interests--against God and against all created beings! Of course, there can be no rest to the guilty soul, day or night. Forcefully does the Bible say of the wicked--"He is like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." Did you ever stand on the shore of the sea and look down upon its restless waters, as they rolled up masses of mud and filth, boiling and surging perpetually? I have, and as I looked I thought of this striking and beautiful passage, and have sighed to think how truthful its representations are.

- 4. Sin is a constant failure. The sinner never can realize his own expectations. You find it so, and the more as you advance the farther in your career. Some of you are yet young and have not yet had so much bitter experience of disappointment as you are destined to have if you still press

on in your career of sin. Now you dance along on the top waves of pleasure; yet you must confess you have already seen one bubble burst after another, just at the moment when you thought you had almost seized a treasure. But you still expect to catch the most of them and to find ample enjoyment yet in sin. Alas, you need not hope to outdo all the sinners who have gone before you! You need not flatter yourself you shall yet baffle the Almighty and disprove His fearful threats against the sinner!

These older men and women; have they found their fill of joy in sin? Oh no. Your desire has enlarged itself as hell and is never satisfied. The more you get, the more you fail in your purpose as to real happiness. You are working against all the relations in which you are placed. The whole of your wicked selfish life is a struggle for vanity, and must therefore, inevitably, prove a failure. John Jacob Astor said, near the close of his life, after he had amassed millions--"My life has been a perfect failure." Perhaps few men have meant more by these words than he. Indeed the more you think you get, the more you make yourself wretched. With great wealth comes great care and trouble. Solid happiness is not there.

- 5. Political ambition is a great snare to the soul. A young student says, "I will study law and become a statesman." Suppose you try and suppose you succeed even to your highest expectations. By incessant scheming and unwearied effort you get up step by step, till you become a member of the State Legislature, and at last, of Congress. What now? Pause and ask how much you have really gained in the line of the happiness you are so earnestly seeking. Are you a whit more happy than when you had your first election and were made a constable? Not at all more. The higher you ascend, the more you must become the tool of a party, and consequently the more really degraded you must be. You are after honor. Think of that--after honor! Look at the career and final end of Daniel Webster! Who ever struggled harder to climb the steep of official preferment than he! Yet he is dead; and now it comes to this that the greatest and the best thing which can be said of his commendation is that he died a Christian! There seems to be no point which his eulogists are more anxious to make out than this; with how much difficulty, I need not stop to say.

But, did he live a happy life? I am not aware that anybody claims this for him. And how, of Clay and Calhoun? Does any man claim that they were

happy men while they lived? No. Every intelligent man knows the contrary. Webster ran away from religious life and gave himself up to political aspirations; but what is the result after all? There is no higher or better thing sought to be proved of him than that he died a Christian. Andrew Jackson retired from the Presidency and made profession of religion. This was the acme of his honor. Nothing else do his eulogists seize upon with so much interest after his death. And verily, "the Christian is the highest style of man." I was once struck with the remark made by the President of a college. He said he should honor his station and do nothing to its discredit. I thought then, "Is this true honor?" Is this a correct principle? Is the honor of being President of a college to be one moment compared with the honor of being a Christian, a son and an heir of God? But to pass by this as comparatively nothing and to speak of the honor of a President's station as if this were to be made law in morals and propriety, is surely anything but reasonable.

A course of sin is a course of constant failure to realize present expectations. Sinners are always aiming at what they never attain. With unwearied diligence they seek happiness, but evermore in those directions where it is not to be found. Their life is made up of constant lusting, sometimes for one thing, sometimes for another. Even the young who have least experience in the disappointments of earth, are fully aware, whenever they allow themselves to think, that their pursuits of real good are futile. The entire course of sin is hard work and poor pay, and poor keeping besides; and to make the case yet worse, incessant rebukes from his conscience and his better judgment, all his best friends. It must be seen that this is a bad case.

I have said that sin is an unnatural state. But you will perhaps say to me, I find it very natural for me to sin.

What do you mean by that? I am aware that, if you set your heart upon selfish good, it may be very natural, in one sense, for you to use means to secure it. Yet it is utterly impossible that this should be a natural course in reference to your own constitution, or to your relations to God, to man, or to your own conscience.

REMARKS.

1. It is easy to see why the Bible always represents sinners as being fools. "Madness is in their hearts while they live." "The fool hath said in his heart,

there is no God." Such is its language; and the reason of it we can realize in their vain and foolish labor. Solomon set his heart to exhaust every fountain of earthly good. No man can hope to have better facilities for the work than he, or more ample resources. He left on record the results of all his experiments. One word tells the story: "Vanity!" "Vanity of vanities;--all is vanity!" It was not through any failure of means for making a fair trial: it was a necessary failure; a failure founded in the nature of things; in the utter lack of adaptation in such objects, so sought, to satisfy a being so constituted. Man's nature cannot be altered. His relations as a subject of God's government, and as a member of society, are changeless. Hence, if he gives himself up to selfishness, he defeats himself, and only all the more certainly by how much the more ample his resources and elevated his position. The higher he stands, the more he interferes with other interests, and the more palpably he violates the laws of social order.

2. This is not saying that the world has no good in it, provided it be used as it should be. I will not disparage the pleasures of this world, nor anything else God has made. God has not put creatures here to starve them to earthly good. The failure grows wholly out of abuse. Let a man of Solomon's means take an opposite course from his; fall directly and fully in with God's great plan; set himself to do all the good he can; and he will enjoy everything. The very flowers of his garden, which before rebuked his selfish heart, will now smile upon him and regale him with their fragrance. The fact is, a man may enjoy any virtuous course of life, in any sphere of activity, only let him live for God, and serve his generation according to God's will. Take any of the professions or pursuits in common life--suppose the young man enters life as a lawyer, and devotes all his powers to doing the highest general welfare. He must succeed. People will push him forward, step after step; they will put him up because they, as a public, have interests to be served, and they know that he is the man to be trusted to serve them. They see he is not ambitious. This lawyer need not violate his conscience. He rises as fast as any man need to, without. He lives in peace with his own conscience, and dying, he can lie down in peace. His experience presents a case of one who uses the world as not abusing it. He does not live so that after his death, the living tax their wits to the utmost to persuade themselves that he has not gone down straight to hell. Every man spontaneously says, he has gone to his heavenly reward.

3. We see that legalists and formalists labor under a great delusion. They claim to be serving God, but they find His service intolerably hard. I must, he says, I

must do this and I must do that. O, it is a hard service! So many meetings--how can he stand it? So much to be done in order to be on good terms with his conscience, and to keep up a good Christian name; what can he do? Now suppose this legalist had a great deal more of this same religion; suppose his time were filled up with it from early morn till the hour of sleep--nothing but meetings and religious duties; and all felt to be intolerably hard; would this become the life and bliss of his soul, or its misery? Would this be heaven, or hell? Now, is it not obvious that such a religion is altogether a delusion?

4. These legal and formal religionists are a great stumbling block to the church and to the world. They misrepresent religion and scandalize it before both saints and sinners. How remarkable is the fact that they introduce a new sort of phraseology into Christian experience, in which you hear continually of burdens, trials, crosses; but never, as in the scriptures, of "joys that pass all understand," and "peace as a river," and "fellowship with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ."

5. It is easy to see why sinners think religion must conflict with their present happiness. It is because they see so little of the genuine article, and so much of the counterfeit. It is rare, for example, that they see a mother whose mild, Christian influence throws a heavenly charm over the entire circle of her family and of the society in which she moves. But on the other hand, you find those whose piety is hard, whose souls are in bondage, who go to prayer meeting full of complaints, and who, regarding religion as all of grace, yet assume that this grace is almost unattainable; that God is exceedingly slow to grant it; who in fact will tell you, that since the fall of mere man has been able, with all the grace He could get or God could give, to obey the whole law, but must daily break it in thought, word and deed. How different is this from the Bible. This affirms that "His commandments are not grievous." This promises, "with every temptation, to provide a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it." According to the Bible, it is the sinner's life which is hard; but the Christian life is as the shining light, a walking with God, a joy unspeakable and full of glory. It is indeed represented as a warfare; yet one, which through grace, may be a simple succession of victories and triumphs. It is no doubt true that those who are not converted until they have formed strong habits of vicious indulgence, must have conflicts before they can eradicate and subdue their propensities to sin; but if they take hold of promised grace as they may, they shall go on from strength to strength. As faithful Christians grow older, they usually find greater peace. They

know that Christ will bruise Satan under their feet shortly, and the flesh also. At worst, their warfare is not to be compared with that of the sinner. See the sinner smitten of affliction--the hand of God heavy upon him--wife or husband low in death, where can he go for refuge? Alas! there is no hand to bind up his wounds! He cannot look to God--he has no Savior!

But the Christian, smitten of affliction, flies to his Savior's bosom. Does his property "take wings?" Let it go; his chief treasures are ensured in heaven. Losses cannot crush him as they do the sinner. Often you see him greatly joyful under trials so severe as might drive a sinner to distraction.

Sometimes the sinner throws a loose rein on his selfishness, and allows himself in little dishonesties in business. Soon he finds himself uneasy, suspected, and withal, troubled in conscience. A hard time has he, when his old friends begin to say in under tones, "It is best to look out for him; he may possibly be an honest man, but we had better look sharp." Soon there comes down upon him a chilling suspension of confidence, and if he never did before, he does now find that the way of the transgressor is hard.

How often we see sinners afraid of God's hand in providence. "A dreadful sound is in his ears." There is a fearful thunder-storm abroad; the cold chills run over him; dread horrors fill his soul; to whom can he fly for refuge? Ah! he knows nothing of that peace, which, even amid such scenes, the true Christian enjoys!

Compare the sinner with the Christian under the sudden rush of great calamity. There was Job, a venerable Christian. He staggered a moment under the dreadful pressure of so many and so heavy afflictions; yet see how his soul rallied and still held on trustfully to the arm of the Lord. A worldly man, so tempted, would no doubt have cursed God and died! But having true faith, the afflicted soul will say, "God knows why this comes upon me. Surely I can trust all my case in His hands. Sickness and death cannot come otherwise than by His permission."

The great peace which reposes at the bottom of the Christian's mind under the pressure of great affliction is most admirable, and often really sublime. Property, health, friends, are swept away; yet their anchor lies deep among the great rocks of Jehovah's attributes, and the mighty ship holds steady amid the storm. Like a vessel whose great keel lies so low in the deep waters, that it heeds not the ruffled surface of the sea, so his soul reposes deeply in God, and knows little of the storms that howl or the waves that dash upon the surface. When you thought

to find him walking his room in anguish, you are surprised to find him sleeping peacefully as a babe on its mother's bosom. Angels fan him with their wings, and the spirit of faith and promise soothes his brow.

Many forget that sin is in any respect a warfare and a conflict. If they could only be safe in sin, they think all would be well. Hence they speak only of the danger, not of the wrong and wickedness of a life of sin. How great is their mistake! Let it never be granted, that a life of sin, in its best estate, is better than holiness in its place, even for its present results. By the necessary laws of mind, so long as the mind acts benevolently, and is right towards God, the present results will be pleasant, and even blessed. Hence, sinners need not assume that in becoming Christians, they forego the pleasures of life and submit to the bitterness of religion! They need not think of religion as they do of the surgeon's amputating knife; as if religion were little else but sacrifice, hard labor, a hard life and poor pay at that.

Sinners have their trials too, as well as Christians; but without those precious consolations. But in comparison with each other, a sinner and a Christian--take each from the same walks of life, with the same culture, and the same nervous constitution--you see the Christian full of sensibility, but cleaving to Christ; tried sorely, yet deeply reposing on the bosom of Jesus. The other is tossed perpetually, yet not comforted; has no resting place--is full of trouble. He cries out, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." But the Christian says--God has prospered me and I have enjoyed all He has given me. Everything has been doubly dear to me because it has been the gift of God. O! he says, my life has been a sunny way. I have indeed been sick, and I have been well; but everything I have received has been good for me, and has worked out good for my soul. The sinner, right over against this, can only say, "I have had a great deal of trouble; all trouble! trouble!" You have had some good things? "Yes, but--but--" You have had some honors? "Yes, but--but--"

Come to the Christian's couch of death; wipe away the cold sweat, and mark how his face is radiant with joy and peace. He can hardly talk about his trials, so sweetly has he enjoyed them all. Has your time come? "Yes," and turning away he says, "I am ready to go. May God give me patience to wait all His appointed time till my change come!" When Elder Marks was near death, he was called upon to sign his name. He made the effort, but found himself unable to do it. "Glory to God!" cried he, "I am so near heaven, I cannot even write my own

name! Are you not glad? Cannot you all rejoice with me?"

Now go, see the sinner. See how bitter his life has been. He lost his wife, and it nearly killed him. His children died, and where could he go for consolation? "Alas," said he, "I had prosperity, but it seemed only to curse me. I had health, but I abused it. I had wealth, but it did me no good. Dark, dark! all is dark in the past. All, too, is dark in the present." Don't tell him he is about to die--his physician dare not trust it, lest it shock his nerves and destroy all the good effect he hopes to get from his medicines. Be silent as the grave; suppress your tears; turn away from this heart-rending scene. God will soon "drive him away in his wickedness; but the righteous hath hope in his death."

It only remains that I ask you why you will go on in this course. You have nothing to gain by sin. Why should you throw away your immortal soul?

[Back to Top](#)

The Indications and The Guilt of Backsliding

Lecture XIV

October 11, 1854

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rev. 3:14-20: "And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth: Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eye with eye-salve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and

will sup with him, and he with Me."

This is one of the Asiatic churches to which Christ sent letters by His amanuensis John. This church had not been long established, yet had even so soon begun to backslide; hence this letter of rebuke and warning.

In discussing this subject I propose,

I. To show what lukewarmness is;

II. To present some unmistakable indications of this state of mind;

III. Show that it is a most guilty state;

IV. Explain the threatening--"I will spew thee out of my mouth;" and

V. Show that its folly is no less great than its sin.

I. What lukewarmness is.

The persons addressed were professors of religion. In this sense they were not cold;--as men who make no professions of attachment to Christ. Yet though professing much, they had none of that zealous love which belongs to the true Christian life. Indeed they were neither the one thing, nor the other;--were not what Christians should be, nor were they avowed enemies, as open transgressors are. Not as cold as they might be, and not as warm as they should be--they held a position if possible more loathsome than even the cold and the dead.

II. I am to present some indications of this state.

In doing this, I shall naturally give a more definite view of what the state is.

- 1. A profession of religion with a worldly conversation. Christ said no new thing when He said--"But out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh," Everybody knew this before. Everybody must know it. The tongue was made to give utterance to the heart's abundance. Hence that which abounds in a man's heart and fills it will seek utterance in the natural channel. Let the heart be full of the things of God, and the mouth will reveal it. When the heart is full of the world, does not the mouth show it? No matter what the particular form of worldly interest may be, whether stocks, or lands, or trade, or office, or honor, the tongue is not wont to be

slow in revealing the abundance of the heart. Why should not the same law obtain in regard to a heart full of religious interest and love?

- 2. Neglect of the Bible. This is emphatically the Christian's Book. He will have one if he can, and having it, will read and study it. Religion presupposes a supreme interest in the Bible. Hence, when the Bible is neglected, you may be sure religion is not much in the heart. To the Christian the Bible does not wear out as other books do. It suffices to read most other books once. You get all they have at one reading, and can then recall whatever you want to reflect upon and use further. Not so with the Bible. No man ever exhausted that at one reading. To the Christian it is a well of water. He does not drain it dry at one draught; in fact he never drinks it dry; nor does it suffice for his wants to drink but once. His wants reoccur continually, and therefore he comes, and still comes again to draw. It is his daily business to draw water out of the wells of salvation.

Or still to vary the figure, the Bible is his compass, chart and guide: how then can he think to make the voyage of life heaven-ward without keeping this roll in his bosom? Hence, if he neglects his Bible, it must be regarded as an unmistakable evidence of a heart not full of religion.

- 3. When he can read his Bible without interest--when he goes to it as a task, and has no conscious sympathy with its spirit and no love for its principles, he is surely lukewarm. See that professor doing up his Bible reading as the Catholic tells his beads, in a hurry to get through and be off. Is his heart full of religion?
- 4. Neglect of secret prayer. What would you think of a wife who should shun, or should even neglect to seek and improve all opportunities of the society of her husband? Or of a husband who should neglect the society of his wife? In either case, do you think such neglect could be consistent with pure and strong affection? Suppose you were yourself the party neglected; what would you think of professions of love, carried out by such manifestations?

Ask yourself--what is secret prayer? It is the earnest outpouring of the heart to God. Alone with God you enter into deep and unobstructed communion

with him. If you love God, you will surely love and seek such communion. If you are debarred the possibility of retirement, still your inward heart will pray. Its inner chamber will become a closet and an altar from which the continual incense will ascend to God. The professed Christian who can neglect such communion with God may know that he is far from warm and earnest love to God.

Or if not altogether omitting the form, he yet does it as a mere duty and a task, in which his heart takes no interest, he may equally know that his first love is gone. If prayer has become a burden, surely his heart lacks warm and earnest love. Do you remember the days of your first love? Where were you then? Not dreading and trying to avoid prayer.

Again, if prayer meetings fail and die out, it is a startling evidence that the church is in a lukewarm state. When Christians can live in the same neighborhood, under the same responsibilities, and yet sustain no meetings for social prayer, you may know they have but little of the light and power of godliness. Surely I need not say that when prayer meetings have fallen into decay, religion has fallen fearfully low. Hearts in which religion lives will make prayer meetings. If they take no interest in seeking and getting up such meetings, they are fearfully lukewarm.

- 5. Christians are lukewarm when they do not naturally care for the salvation of souls. When they feel and express more interest for anything else than for the souls of their friends, you cannot but know they are lukewarm towards Christ. Suppose these room-mates take less interest in each other's souls than in the health and welfare of the body; or suppose a teacher feels less interest for the souls of his class than for their progress in study, what must you think? Or of a parent who never speaks of the souls of his children? In short, if it be natural to neglect the soul, you know the cause, who does not know that the love of God and of souls forbids this neglect and this unconcern? If religion lives in the heart it is impossible there should be such neglect of souls.

Again, neglect to inquire into the state of religion, reveals the same state of heart. He who never inquires whether there be any revivals, or conversions--who is not interested to know how these matters progress--is certainly lukewarm. If his heart is full of Christ, this will be his theme of chief interest. He will not inquire half so quick whether they have had rain as whether they

have God's Spirit. He naturally wants to know whether the cause he loves is prosperous. You may know the man is lukewarm if his heart does not burn to know how religion prospers, and whether souls are turning to the Lord.

- 6. In like manner, persons are proved to be lukewarm if they neglect to pray for a revival and for the salvation of souls. Or if when they pray, it is for themselves only, you must make the same inference. If they do not pour out their hearts for others, but confine their supplications to themselves alone, you may know them to be lukewarm.
- 7. More still, if they pray for themselves in a manner that indicates present impenitence. Sometimes even professors of religion plainly indicate this. If they confess sin, their manner shows they do not repent of it, nor mean to forsake it. Sometimes they merely pray for conviction, or for that which if genuine would be mere conversion. Often after hearing persons pray for a season, I have had occasion to say to them--"If your prayer is answered, you will be converted. That is all you prayed for. Is that what you mean? Your prayer calls for just that, and no more. Instead of praying as inspired men do pouring out the heart of praying for the Zion they love, you are only praying that you become a Christian." Of course I do not allude to the case in which a Christian is speaking in behalf of others, using words in which they may join. In such a case, he will use language which calls for convicting and converting grace. Excepting such cases, you will often notice in prayer meetings that the very manner of their prayers and confessions shows that they are far from God. The very tone and laziness of their prayer shows how lukewarm they are.
- 8. You have another indication in the absence of a spiritual zeal. If you see no zeal for spiritual religion, no deep interest for the progress of Christian experience, no solicitude for that which constitutes the substance and essence of religion, none of that wakeful spiritual sympathy which seems ready to devour truly spiritual conversation--a state of feeling that naturally looks to the Bible for its spiritual food, which loves to talk about prayer and communion with God;--if these things are wanting, you may know that genuine piety runs low. Those professors are lukewarm.

Again, it is no less an indication when there is other zeal, but not a spiritual

zeal. Some professed Christians have much zeal for objects in common with infidels, but none for objects in which infidels have no sympathy. It is a zeal of nature, not of grace. Often you observe there is no lack of zeal, but all in other than a right direction. It is the great peculiarity of our age that ungodly men are zealous in certain social reforms. Many of our most zealous reformers are professedly impenitent. Their zeal is such as one may have without any interest in the true spiritual life of the soul. In fact, there is often no God at all in it. He has no proper recognition of God and no sympathy with His pure benevolence.

- 9. It is remarkable that this zeal manifests itself only against certain forms of sin. By how much the more these reformers zealous in their special reforms, do they lose their interest in religion, their confidence in the Bible, their charity for mankind and for Christian people, their interest in the conversion of souls and in revivals of religion. They have the greatest zeal against certain forms of sin, but against those forms only. They have no zeal against commercial speculation, none against a worldly spirit, nothing to say against neglect of prayer or neglect to save the souls of men. They have no zeal against those terrible forms of sin which have done more mischief in the world than all things else combined. Nothing else that can be named has done so much mischief in the world as lukewarmness. This single sin has done more to curse the world than all the slavery and intemperance of the world ever have. But I cannot pursue this subject just here, it being my present purpose only to show you how to discriminate the lukewarm. I was saying, they may have a zeal of nature originating in natural constitution, instead of a zeal of the heart, originating in divine grace. It shows nature active, but grace dead.
- 10. Yet another indication of lukewarmness is, being blind to the true spiritual state of themselves and others. A deep interest in spiritual life makes persons sharp, eagle-eyed, wide awake to both a spiritual state and to those influences that bear upon it. Such persons cannot be indifferent, and of course will not be blind to any powerful agencies which bear on the great ends they love.
- 11. But this involves my next remarks, viz., that a most decisive indication is a want of concern about the interests of spiritual religion. If they can be

remiss and can neglect to make efforts to promote religion and save souls, you may know them to be lukewarm. If this is your own conscious experience, you may know that you are yourself lukewarm.

I wish I had asked you at every point to question yourself and see how each test applies to your own heart and life. You can do this now. Pause and review this entire list of unmistakable indications and see how they apply to your own soul. This is the chief use you can make of these texts -- not to search other people, but to search yourself. I beseech you to do this in all fidelity to your own soul as you value its spiritual health and even life.

- 12. Yet another indication is, reluctance to give money for Christ's cause. Men give their money to the objects their hearts love. When you are called on to give for Christ's cause freely, do you meet the call cheerfully?

Again, every one who has any true religion alive in his heart is in an earnest state of mind. God is in earnest; the great depth and intenseness of His benevolence forbid anything less than this. Angels are in earnest. See them wherever you will in the sacred volume, they are full of the most intense activity and emotion. Saints in heaven are intensely wakeful and active. What did Isaiah see when the upper temple was opened to his astonished vision? Were those holy seraphs asleep? Mark their intense excitement. They cried one to another, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory." The very nature of religion is love, and love arouses and fires the sensibilities as nothing else can do. Its objects are so vast, its scope so broad, its emotional excitement so pure and so intensely delightful, it has in itself all the qualities requisite for becoming naturally more intense than any other class of emotions can be. Hence the zeal of the Christian must be an intense state of mind. But the zeal of lukewarm souls would freeze heaven. Mark it--as cold as the north pole; one would suppose it could never have felt the warmth of the sun of righteousness.

- 13. Now I do not imply that religion consists in excitement, yet such is its blessed nature, and such is the hold it takes upon the soul, that it stirs up the sensibility intensely, and this intense action of the sensibility imparts amazing energy to all the powers of the mind. Hence religion makes everybody intensely active. Mark one of those living Christians,--his very sleep is so full of religion, he seems to sleep on the very borders of wakefulness; he can scarcely find time for needful repose. His mind is

supremely interested in this subject. When you hear him talk or pray, you will see that his soul is full of intense feeling and tireless activity in God's work. Can he be full of the Spirit and yet not be intensely alive to all that concerns the kingdom of his Lord?

- 14. If you see one more easily interested on other subjects than on religion, -- if you find it almost impossible to awaken any interest in spiritual things, you may regard it as an unmistakable indication of lukewarmness.
- 15. Where persons do not care to learn about revivals, you must note it as indicating a similar lack of religious life. If they are full of the Spirit of God, you might see them take up a religious paper and run their eye over it for the word "Revival;" omitting everything else, they would look first for the column of revival news, and then for whatever else is most spiritual and tends to bring them nearest to Christ. If you see the opposite of this, you will of course know that that man's interests in religion is only subordinate--not supreme. Suppose you had a brother or a child in California;--how would you watch the steamers, and how anxiously you would run your eye over the list of deaths, and see if the loved name is there! But why this anxious eagerness? You have an interest there. So, if you had an interest in God and in Jesus Christ, you would watch for everything in respect to those objects of your warmest love.

There are some papers, professedly religious, which, show on their very face, either that the men who control their columns are sadly lukewarm themselves, or that they judge the churches to be so, and therefore fill their sheet to suit a fallen, backslidden state of Christian feeling among their readers. For months past I have taken up a religious paper, and read at the head of its first column--"Swiss Scenery"--"Scenes in Switzerland" --&c.,&c. The soul that thirsts for the waters of life is turned off with "Swiss Scenery," and travels, and things that come no nearer the gospel than the religion of nature. I will send that paper back. Why should I try over and over again to feed my soul on such food? And what a state of religion there must be in the country when editors can expect to feed and satisfy Christian people thus! How utterly dry and barren! If the religious readers of such papers depended on them for spiritual food, they must be starved to death!

Again, if people do not kindle up with interest when efforts are to be made for a revival, you must regard it as an unmistakable indication of lukewarmness. If you are not ready for these efforts, you are certainly in a miserable state.

Now in view of all these indications, will you be so kind to yourself, each of you, as to ask--Is this my state? Can you go on your knees before God and say--O, my God, thou knowest I am not lukewarm. How is this?

- 16. I have still to name one more indication--a life which fails to make the impression on all who see it that religion is your chief business--the one thing needful. For if religion is your chief concern and the thing of deepest interest with you, it is most certain and inevitable that your life will show it. Your life will make the impression on all who know you, that your heart is full of God and of love. The true Christian is a light which cannot be hid. His life will make its impression. He will be known as a zealous man, a self-denying man, as a charitable man, as a holy man--as one who lives in God and God in him.

But I must pass now to say,

III. That a lukewarm state is a most guilty one.

- 1. As a general thing, these professors of religion are enlightened. The fact that they have publicly professed religion evinces this. By how much the greater their light, by how much the greater their guilt.
- 2. It is also a most hypocritical state. Backsliders are hypocrites I do not mean that they have never been converted, but I do mean that they profess towards God what is not true. Their heart and their life belie their profession. They are living, walking hypocrites!
- 3. It is, moreover, a perjured state. That Christian has taken his oath to love and serve God, and has done it under most solemn circumstances--even at the communion table with the symbols of Christ's body and blood in his very hands! What has he sworn? to live for God; to observe all His statutes and all ordinances; often the very terms of his covenant specify attending to all the general meetings of the church, and performing each and all of his

duties as a member of the body. Thus he solemnly swears--but thus he never does. At each successive communion season he renews his oath, only to break it again during all the next succeeding interval. He solemnly swore that he would renounce all ungodliness and every worldly lust--that he would walk soberly, righteously and godly in this evil world;--yet how constantly and universally does he violate each point in the solemn affirmation! Do I speak too strongly when I say that this man perjures himself? I am well aware of the technical distinction made in courts of law whereby it is held that there may be much falsehood without perjury--it being essential to perjury that the accused should deliberately swear falsely on a point material to the issue. But let me ask you if the oath of the backslider is not taken deliberately? What could be more so? Let me also ask if it is not to a point most material to the main issue? Surely it is. The very thing he swore he would do is the very thing he does not do. How horrible must such perjury be! Suppose you go into court and you see there a witness taking the stand and swearing to a lie--to what you know is a lie--and to what you know he knows is a lie! Would you not cry out, How awful!--What have we come to! But what is this compared with that we see at the communion table? See there;--the table is spread, God's holy presence is solemnly invoked--the minister takes the holy Bible, and expounds the nature of the oath to be taken;--then backsliders come forward and solemnly swear to perform all their Christian duties;--solemnly avow their allegiance to Jesus, the crucified--profess supreme love to him, solemnly testify that they believe in his blood as the ground of their forgiveness and that they owe him the devotion a thousand hearts and lives;--they solemnly covenant to walk with their brethren in labor and prayer--to attend the prayer-meetings;--but when the hour comes, he is not there! Another season comes round; he is not there! He almost never comes. It is a very rare thing that he even pretends to do any one of the many overt tangible things embraced in his vow. He does indeed come to meeting occasionally on the Sabbath. But this costs him no particular self-denial. On the Sabbath there is nothing else he can do. He may not work his farm, or drive his trade, or open his store. So on the Sabbath he will come to the house of God. But really, and in the spirit of it, he breaks every material point of his solemn covenant. At the next communion he is ready as ever to renew it; the communion season once past, he is ready to trample it under his heedless foot again! Is not this a most guilty state?

- 4. Still further, it is guilty because it is a most injurious state. It does infinite mischief. Nothing so discourages a minister as to be shut up to the necessity of reaching the impenitent over the heads of backsliders. He preaches that religion is the chief concern; they deny it. He says, it is and should be the principal business; they give him the lie. He says, religion gives its possessor peace; they reply--that is all a lie. He holds forth that Jesus has died for sinners, and those who are bought with his blood must devote their whole life and heart to his service; they reply--we don't hold, in practice, to any such things. He preaches to sinners that the hearts of Christians are bleeding with sympathy for them; they can very promptly say--that is utterly false, for we know better. Let the minister say what he will to paint the glories of heaven, or portray the woes of hell; to urge the need and the value of gospel salvation, or to exhibit the power and the reality of religion;--the backslider rises before him and gives the lie to all he can say. Alas, it is almost a hopeless task to preach so! For to make the matter still worse--these professed Christians are supposed to know from experience. They have tried it and have gone back to the world again. The minister may have a good theory, but it don't work in practice, and there is the proof. Or he may have some professional motive for such preaching; but, say they, do we not know that the proof of these things must lie in experience!

Hence, when backsliders come upon the stand and swear that not one word of God's can be believed--that all His promises are a humbug--that all the time prospects and hopes of the young convert are blasted, and he must needs return to the world again for life and joy; how fearfully injurious must this be!

- 5. It must be most injurious, because it hardens sinners in the worst way, and begets in them a contempt for religion. They see those who profess it go to the communion table and carefully maintain the forms of religion; but then they also see these same persons perjure themselves on all these vital points of their profession. They know that these professors have no deep interest in religion--no feeling about it; they see enough to convince them that their profession is nothing better than a blasphemous humbug. When they see masses of those who have made the solemn professions, absenting themselves from prayer-meetings, and really doing nothing to promote the

objects they profess to love so deeply, is it any wonder that they are hardened? Is it strange that they are made skeptics? I know, and everybody who examines the subject must know, that the backsliding of professed Christians does more to beget skepticism than all the writings of infidels. I have seen places--I have been called to preach in places, where the conduct of professors has begotten an almost universal skepticism, so that the very foundations of Bible truth had to be laid over again. Nothing could be done in preaching the gospel till you had gone back to first principles; till you had rolled baleful influence of so much backsliding and apostasy, and shown people that they must examine the Bible for themselves and on their own responsibility--let apostates believe it as they might.

- 6. Backsliding does more injury to souls than any thing else, because it leads to false hopes. Men will form their notions on what religion is from the life of his professors. If this life believes religion, giving a false view of it, multitudes are deluded. Thus the backslider does much to confirm both himself and others in a false hope. Suppose a pastor becomes lukewarm, and that then his deacons also become lukewarm, their life and spirit still remain the general standard of piety. The masses, thinking themselves as good as the deacons and the minister, feel very much at ease in their state, and so go down in vast numbers to the depths of hell.

It is expected that young converts will be led by older and leading minds. The latter virtually say--We are older and have more experience than you; it befits you to follow rather than to lead us; modesty and humility are altogether becoming in the young. Thus backsliders throw themselves directly in the way of young converts. Twice within a few years have I heard ministers say--"O, if I could only take these young converts away by themselves, how easily could I train them up for God and form in them habits of earnest Christian activity. But now, what can I do? If the older, backslidden members are not kept foremost, they will become chafed, restive, and perhaps will wound the feelings of the young converts; while if the converts are kept back and under their influence, they will be frozen to death. If we could only take these young converts along as they now wish to go, what a noble church they would make, and what living, working Christians?"

Again, backsliding is fraught with mischief because it bewilders and stumbles inquirers. When they see professed Christians absent from church-meetings, and meetings for prayer, full of worldly interest and conversation, how fearfully does it retard God's work of grace in their souls!

- 7. Backsliding is fraught with guilt and unbelief because it naturally and greatly disheartens laboring Christians. Nothing discourages them more. Often have I heard such laborers mourn over the mischievous influence of backsliders, and say--How can we bear up against it? We cannot live so! We shall die!

IV. Explain the threatening--" I will spew thee out of my mouth."

Backsliding grieves Christ. What could grieve Him more? You may judge of His feelings by the language He uses towards them--"I would thou wert cold or hot; because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth." Nauseated with a thing so loathsome, He will throw them off with unutterable loathing!

V. Show that its folly is no less great than its sin.

- 1. It gratifies the devil. What could they do to please him more! He would rather have a few backsliders in a church than scores of infidels and Universalists! What can infidelity do in the midst of a living Christianity? If his people lived religion, the minister would never need to open his mouth to defend the divine authority of the Bible. If there were a living, breathing, speaking Christianity abroad among the people, they would not need one word of preaching to withstand infidelity. Yet how common it is for a lukewarm professor to rebuke and deplore the prevalent infidelity of the times; when it is a fact that all the infidels of his town do not work so fearful an influence against religion as he and his associate backsliders!
- 2. The Bible describes this class of people in most affecting and forceful terms. They are "clouds without water," clouds indeed--things that promise water and raise high hopes; but they bring no rain. We have had striking illustrations of this during the past weeks. Clouds have arisen upon the face of the sky--full of promise they were, and every man looked hopefully, perhaps confidently, to see them roll up their dark volume and pour out

their crystal floods; but alas, the winds are up and tear the clouds to pieces; and we get not one drop of rain! So of the religion of these backsliders. At the communion table they renew their solemn oath; they seem to do it in all solemnity, and people say--now we may surely expect a religious life; now we shall have prayer and zeal and faith and labor;--but alas, the wind gets into that hopeful cloud! The spirit of worldliness is still there, and it scatters those hopeful clouds to the four quarters of the heavens! They are clouds without rain, carried to and fro by tempests.

- 3. Still varying the figure, the Bible describes them as "wells without water." We can begin to understand this. At every corner you hear the complaint, "My well is dry; my cistern has failed me; can you give me a pitcher full of water?" So in the backslidden church you might take your empty pitcher all around for a few drops of the water of life, and alas you find none!

How impressive these Bible figures! The Bible was written in a country subject to great and fearful droughts; and hence when we come to experience similar droughts we are thrown at once into circumstances to feel the force of those figures. Suppose yourself in an eastern desert; the whole caravan are famishing for want of water; they come to the wells of the country--no water there; after long marches and many raised hopes, they reach the spot--only to be once more disappointed. Alas, when the troubled sinner goes round among backslidden Christians, holding forth his empty pitcher for some precious drops of the water of life--and finds none, he understands the force of this figure!

- 4. Backsliders betray Christ with a kiss. Following Judas, they come to his table with fair promise,--they go away to blast those raised hopes in bitterest disappointment.

Look at Judas. He had been at the communion table; the solemn Passover had been enacted; he rises hastily--slips away to the Jewish officers,--gets a band of soldiers, and guides them stealthily to the place where he knew Jesus was wont to retire for prayer. See him coming! His men fall back and he advances; as if glad to welcome his Lord again, he rushes up to embrace him crying, "Hail Master," and kisses him. Jesus rebukes the traitor--"Judas," said he, "betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?" So does each backslider. He

comes to the communion table to greet his Lord with a kiss; then turns away to betray him!

- 5. By another Scripture comparison, they are "wolves in sheep's clothing;"-- clad like a sheep, but really a wolf. They look so fair, no one fears them; the ewes will almost invite them to lie down among their tender lambs--but how long before he has those tender ones in his bloody jaws!
- 6. There is yet another illustration, not from scripture, yet too pertinent to be omitted. Along the coast it is common for reefs of rocks to project into the sea. To lessen the dangers to the navigator, especially in storms, lighthouses are erected to indicate the harbors which vessels may safely make in a storm. Now there are human beings so lost to humanity and so full of Satan, that they build fires on a stormy night to allure vessels upon those dreadful rocks, that they may revel in the plunder! The fog is dense, the spray thick, the night dark and the mariner cannot distinguish these lure-fires from the genuine lighthouse; so on he comes, bearing down upon those roaring breakers! The wreckers are on the look-out; they see the lights of the vessel as she bounds over the billows; they hear the last fearful crash as she strikes, and as the wails and shrieks rise above the roar of the storm--but they are ready for their work. What is it to them that human beings are dashed upon the rocks of ocean! They want plunder--at any cost!
- 7. Backsliders are spiritual wreckers. They set mountain fires for the mariner. They say--We are spiritual guides; we will lead you in the way of life. See them in all the solemnity of an oath, professing to live and labor as Christians, and to lead the multitudes to God!--Whither do they in fact lead them! See the man come up to the communion table in presence of the ungodly. Hear him; he says, "I am a Christian; mark my Christianity and take it as your model. I am in the way to heaven; follow me." They follow till he has lured them along and dashed them on the rocks of damnation! Let him not say--"I ask no man to follow me; I can take no responsibility for their being misguided;"--the fact is, his very profession does the mischief; his very profession proclaims--"This is a Christian life, and whoever will follow me shall reach heaven." So he need do nothing more than be a Christian backslider, and he becomes a spiritual wrecker, luring souls upon the rocks of spiritual death.

But again; backsliding is great folly as well as great guilt. The backslider gains nothing. His life is utterly inconsistent, odious, loathsome; indeed the Bible describes it as insupportably odious and disgusting. Christ says--"I will spew thee out of my mouth." He cannot hear them, and will quick relieve himself of the dreadful nausea! Some of you know what it is to drink tepid water to produce nausea and vomiting, and you can appreciate the force of this figure of speech.

What is there more loathsome than fair professions and a false life? I have suffered but too much from this very thing myself. Many a man begins with saying I am Mr. Finney's friend; I esteem Mr. Finney highly;--but--but--I cannot approve his measures--I cannot endorse his course." So having begun with gaining public confidence, they end by using it all to injure me and my usefulness in the worst possible way. They come up to salute with a kiss--and then give the fatal stab! This is the surest way to do mischief. This is the backslider's course. He says--See how I love the dear Savior! Then he goes his way and lives out the utmost dishonor against His name. Some writer has said -- "Protect me from my friends; I can withstand my enemies myself." No wonder Christ should feel so, as to His backslidden people.

REMARKS.

1. This course is a most deceptive, because a most hardening process. You may take any number of infidels or Universalists, people of most irreligious, prayerless character, place them under the same preaching and the same influences for conversion with an equal number of backsliders, and none of the former will be converted to one of the latter. Where did infidels or Universalists ever resist faithful instruction and warning, as backsliders have done in this congregation? The reason is, backsliders deceive themselves to their fearful hardening and sudden destruction. Hear what Christ said to the Laodiceans -- "I will spew thee out of my mouth." So he did. He warned; they repented not; and now their candlestick is removed from its place. For long ages past, the Mussulman has muttered his blasphemies on the very spot where those churches stood. Yet who heeds the warning!

2. The absence of religious zeal is scarcely considered a sin. If you speak to people about their great sin, they look up in surprise and say--what! whom have I cheated? Whom have I overreached or slandered? They will tell you of David's great sin, of the awful dishonor which he brought upon God. True, David's sin

was a horrible affair; doubtless his heart felt it most deeply; but he did not begin to dishonor God as the backsliders of our day are doing it. He was in the main a good man, and a laborious and useful Christian; and all the nation knew it. The closing scene of that sad transaction shows it. A humble prophet could come to the lofty monarch of Israel and pierce him through and through with the arrows of convicting truth, and even be received gratefully. His repentance and future life told the story. From his smitten heart flowed strains of sorrowing penitence and holy resolve all along down the history of the church to this day! Reproach him for dishonoring Christianity? His case is not to be named in comparison with modern backsliders.

3. It is most remarkable that churches now tolerate backsliders, while Christ spewed them out of his mouth. Angels know them as outcasts, and pass them by; but the church retains them, and allows them still to come to her holy table with mummeries and lies. They go on, swearing falsely, full of levity and worldly mindedness. Do you think this is saying too much against them? The very thought shows where you are.

4. "Whom I love, says Christ, I rebuke;" "Behold, he says, I stand at the door and knock"--ready to enter and to bless. I come even to your house and to your heart; if you will but hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and all the past shall be forgiven and forgotten. We shall be friends again as ever, and you shall have all the precious tokens of my love.

Who of you stand here today convicted of backsliding and lukewarmness--having these indications manifest in your spirit and life--saying, My peace of mind is gone; I have lost my light, lost my way. And are you willing to acknowledge it? Will you confess it to yourself--and confess it also before earth and heaven? Many know they are in a lukewarm state, yet would as soon die as confess it. Are you convinced of your sin in this matter? Then "be zealous and repent." Nothing short of earnest zeal to repent will suffice. Shrink not back in cold unbelief. Hear the tender appeal--"Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord."

[Back to Top](#)

The Christian's Genuine Hope

Lecture XV

October 27, 1854

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 John 3:3: "Every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself even as He is pure."

The connection of this passage shows what its meaning must be. With admiring wonder the apostle calls our attention to that love bestowed on us by the Father in calling us sons of God. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called sons of God!" This is a present blessing. "Behold, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." The thing known and present is our sonship -- that we are the sons of God; the thing future and not yet known pertains to what we shall be. This will come to light when Christ shall appear; because, then, seeing Christ as He is, we shall certainly, by the very laws of mind, and in accordance with the divine plan, be like Him. This is the thing we hope for. This precisely constitutes the Christian's hope -- that he shall see Christ as He is, and be eternally like Him.

1. In discussing this subject, I must first define the psychological nature of hope. It is compounded of two elements -- desire and expectation. Plainly there must be desire, for an event we dread and fear, we cannot say we hope for. For example, death. The mind that dreads death cannot be said to hope for it, however certain that it must come. So there must also be expectation, at least some degree of it; for no man hopes for what he knows or believes to be impossible.

It should be farther remarked that desire, as an element of hope, should be taken in its broad and comprehensive sense, as implying more than a mere action of the sensibility. It should involve such a state of mind as calls the will into action. The man not only wishes and wants, but is willing to work for what he honestly hopes to attain.

2. Hope is always a condition of effort to secure its object, and a powerful stimulus to such effort. The object must be desired and chosen; else, it is impossible for the mind to make efforts to attain it. The will must be fixed and fully purposed to secure the object, if possible; else, no proper exertion will follow. And there must be also expectation; otherwise, the mind will not put forth its energies. A man cannot exert himself sanely and wisely for a thing he knows or even believes to be impossible and not to be at all expected. The object must be deemed possible to be attained; and there must be at least some degree of expectation of its attainment. These elements are not only the conditions, but are the natural stimulus to effective effort. In fact, they necessitate effort. When you apprehend an event or result as a great good, and are led to regard it as attainable, you must of necessity put forth efforts to attain it. This is only the result of a fixed law of mind.

3. A specific hope must secure a corresponding course of life. This follows by necessity from the principles above stated. There are many specific objects of desire and expectation; consequently there must be a great many specific objects of hope. For example, you may hope to get an education. If so, you set your will upon it. Your hope, in proportion to its strength, stimulates your effort. So of wealth, fame, office, honor; when the elements of hope are present, your efforts are called forth, and you try to attain the hoped for object. So I might go over a vast field, showing that hope invariably does and must produce special effort.

4. The Christian hope is one specific form, and the general laws of mind compel us to apply the principles above explained, to this form also. In fact our text is a distinct affirmation of this sentiment, and gives it a universal application. "Every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself." The apostle positively affirms that every instance of this hope will be manifested by the appropriate effort. How can it be otherwise? The object before the mind is the being like Christ. You hope to be like Him when you shall see Him as He is. Now you can see at once that this hope must beget a constant endeavor to become like Christ now. For what is this hope, and what does it imply? Study this point with care. A true hope of heaven implies a realization of what heaven is; for a man deceives himself if he thinks he has a Christian hope and yet does not rightly apprehend what heaven is. I knew a lady who long time thought she had wanted to go to heaven, and had enjoyed, as she supposed, a Christian hope. But in process of time truth broke in upon her

mind and she began to see, as she had not done before, the holiness of heaven. At length the subject came fully before her mind as it were in a blaze of heaven's own light; and she said to her husband, "You know I have long been hoping for heaven, and have supposed myself in a measure prepared for it; but my mind is entirely changed. I do not want to go to heaven; they are so holy there!"

It is most evident that you must have a deep sympathy with heaven, its society, and its employments; else you cannot by any means have a Christian hope. The Christian hope, is the hope of being like Christ; and for this, you must understand His character -- must see its excellence, and the possibility of being like Him; this will impel you to labor to be transformed into His likeness.

REMARKS.

1. Many have no just idea of the Christian hope. They talk of hoping that they are Christians, as if this were the Christian hope. They hope they are converted, and they take this to be the hope of the Christian; but obviously they have no just conception of what the Christian hope is. Theirs is not a Christian hope, for it has not the right object. They hope they shall escape punishment; they hope they shall not be doomed to hell; but this is by no means the true end of a Christian hope. And furthermore, they have not the right expectation of attaining the true end; they do not expect to become like Christ; so that both elements of the Christian hope are wanting.

2. A good hope is of priceless value. It is the very secret of holy living. One never lives holy while in despair of attaining to the image of Christ. No man lives holy unless he has the conception of holiness and of heaven. On the other hand a true hope fires the soul with its desire and expectation, and sets it upon mightily energizing to attain the desired object. Hence this is the secret of holy living. I do not say it will produce a holy life without the aid of the Spirit of God; but I do say that the Spirit cannot produce a holy life without this hope. The agency of this hope as a means and an instrumentality seems naturally indispensable.

Without hope none can attain holiness. You cannot attain sanctification without first having the hope of attaining it, and then being stimulated by this hope to make appropriate efforts. Hence, you must expect to attain as a condition of attaining.

3. A good hope naturally secures its object. For example a young man hopes to become a good minister. What will be the effect of this hope? First, he will get before his mind the true ideal of a good minister. He cannot intelligently hope for such a result without this ideal. The very ideal is a first and necessary step towards the attainment of the end. Then, his hope will set him upon efforts. It will make him ever wakeful and ever earnest in the attainment of his object. His hope becomes both condition and stimulus of attainment.

4. A false hope must and will reveal itself in many ways. It will reveal itself by its obviously mistaken end. Suppose it to be the common hope of being a Christian. A man has a hope, he says; you ask him what he hopes for, and he tells you he hopes he is a Christian. This man, perhaps, does not at all conceive what constitutes eternal life. He has never thought of it as being an eternal likeness to Jesus Christ, and an eternal sympathy with Him. On the contrary, he thinks of it only, or at least chiefly, as an escape from hell. Now, by natural consequence, this hope will reveal itself as we so often see it -- no energizing after holiness -- no laboring to be prepared to live forever with Christ; but anything else, rather than this. Yet who does not see that the result of the Christian hope must be a most earnest preparation for the employments of heaven?

A young lady of my acquaintance received a proposal of marriage. She frankly confessed her interest in the proposal, for really she felt the highest esteem for the gentleman who made it. It was indeed this very esteem, coupled with a deep sense of her own deficiencies, which led her to reply -- I am not prepared now to become your wife, because I cannot be to you all that a wife ought to be. I can accept your proposal only on the condition that it shall not be consummated for some time to come. Her condition was accepted, and the engagement made. Then the young lady entered upon an era of hope. She thenceforth expected to become his wife, and earnestly desired to become all that the wife of such a man should be. What must be the effect of this hope on her mind? Obviously, it puts her upon most earnest efforts to make all those improvements in her habits and character which she is conscious she needs. Now this illustration touches the very point in hand. The Christian says -- I must be prepared to dwell with Christ. I must be in readiness for those Divine joys and employments which constitute heaven. The heart is set upon it, and the assured hope of it inspires intense efforts. Such a hope will make a Christian avoid everything that can displease Christ. Suppose that young woman, betrothed, yet delaying marriage with a man she highly respects and warmly loves, should nevertheless pay no attention to

preparing herself for her anticipated married life; what would you think of her? The supposition is incredible. The things supposed could never all co-exist in a sane mind. The very laws of mind forbid their actual co-existence. So of the Christian. It is utterly impossible that a hope of being like Christ, and of seeing Him as He is, should fail to quicken the heart to realize the very result hoped for.

5. Eternal life is nothing else but sympathy with Christ and its consequences. Becoming like Christ in spirit and temper, you have the life that dwells in Him. Your soul is essentially transformed into His moral image.

Some of you have known the personal history of a somewhat distinguished editor of a religious paper, who, after editing it for a season, relapsed into a career of scandalous vice, and finally died a horrible death. It is said that his religious hope, and its action upon his spiritual state, were just such as I have been representing as the spurious hope. He only hoped for an imaginary heaven - - not for the fitness which the real heaven requires -- not that he might see Christ as He is, or be like Him. It operated on his mind thus. When his hope became strong, he became careless, gave himself up to the power of temptation, and relapsed into shameful sin. Then, conscience roused itself; he became alarmed; his hope faded away; he set himself to his religious works, preaching and praying, till he regained his hope, and then fell back again into the same careless and prayerless state as before, only each time a little worse. Then, convicted of sin, he aroused himself once more -- went over the same routine, vibrating perpetually from a delusive hope to utter licentiousness of heart and life, until at last death found him, and terminated the scene. Strange he did not see that such a hope revealed at once its utter rottenness! If his had been the true Christian hope, its very nature would have rendered it impossible that he should relapse into sin under its influence. People do not backslide because they have a Christian hope, but because their hope is not genuine. They lose sight of the true object of a Christian hope. Their hope is radically spurious because it has a mistaken object.

6. A good hope must reveal itself in holy living. What can an unsanctifying hope be good for? It can only deceive and curse its possessor. A hope that makes a man careless and prayerless -- what is it good for? Just nothing at all -- save to ruin his soul. Such a hope is sheer presumption. So far from being any title to heaven, it is certainly a lure to hell. It is a nuisance to him and to everybody else. If his hope leads him into sin, it is the greatest curse he can have upon him. It is a nuisance to all his acquaintances. The existence of false hopes in the church, is

one of the greatest evils in the world. They beget a vast amount of spurious religion. They lead men naturally and of necessity, to misconceptions of what true religion is. By false hopes, as I now use the phrase, I mean those that do not purify the heart. This is the certain mark of their spurious nature.

7. In the face of our text, and in defiance of the very nature of the case, many persons will hold on to an unsanctifying hope. Despite of the Bible, regardless of the very nature of the Christian hope, both of which forbid them to suppose their hope to be good for anything, they yet persist in the most confident expectation that all will be well. They will even regard any man as their enemy who shall try to tear their hope away, in order to save their soul. It is the greatest presumption possible to hold on to a hope which fails to renew the heart unto holiness.

Many are too proud to confess their hope to be false, when they inwardly know it to be so. They can see that they are surely deceived -- but alas, the pride of their heart rebels against any confession of the humiliating truth. I knew the case of a lady who had been a professor of religion for eight years, and had been regarded as a good Christian, but being present on one occasion where a sermon was preached on the holiness of God, the truth came home to her mind with great power. She sunk upon her seat apparently helpless. The people brought her out at the close of service; I spoke to her, but she was quite unable to make any reply. After being in this state of overwhelming conviction and mental conflict for sixteen hours, she came out into the full light of the Savior's countenance, and then told us how her mind had been exercised. She said, "I say that I had never known God. When you described His holiness, I saw that I had not the least degree of it myself, and indeed, that I did not wish to have any. I knew then that my character was utterly unlike God's. Then all my Christian hope perished. My whole soul drew back from God, as if it refused to have anything more to do with a Being so holy and pure. Then followed convictions of my own sin and guilt -- a fearful conflict -- until grace triumphed and my soul bowed.

Such experiences are not uncommon. Persons who indulge the Christian hope, do not know how holy God is -- have no just appreciations of His character, and therefore do not strive to become like God in this respect. Under this delusion they live, and thus they die, with no suspicion of their mistake until they open their eyes in hell. I have before my mind another case -- that of a man who was altogether a leader in the church, and very intimate with the minister who frequented the place. On one occasion, as I was at his house, he asked me what I

should think of a man who, day after day, prayed for the Holy Ghost, yet never received it. I replied, I should conclude that he prayed from wrong motives. But, continued he, suppose his motive was, to be happy, what then? That would be altogether selfish, I replied. What motive should he have? he asked. I answered, the same that David had when he prayed for pardoning and restoring grace; "Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee." "O Lord, open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise." He turned suddenly away -- said nothing; but, several hours afterward, he came to me and confessed that he turned away, mad at the truth I had presented, and deeply offended that God should require such self-renunciation. He saw himself in his real nakedness, but felt for some time that he had rather die than have it known that he had been deceived. At length he passed safely over that point where so many make shipwreck and are lost.

Backsliders always have false hopes, never a true one, as the very fact of their backsliding shows. If a man backslides, his hope must be bad, for he could not backslide if his hope were "an anchor to his soul, sure and steadfast" -- if it were of the scriptural stamp, "a hope that maketh not ashamed." A hope under the influence of which he would "purify himself, even as Christ is pure." The backslider has only the hope that he shall be converted, and this only serves to confirm him in his state of backsliding/ just as the sinner's hope of being one day converted, prevents him from being converted now. If you can tear away this hope, you may save his soul. So, if you can tear away the backslider's hope, you may save his soul; else, it is certainly lost beyond hope. The very idea of backsliding is inconsistent with a gospel hope -- such as our text describes.

What is your hope? Some of you hope for an education; some of you for fame; some for respectable connections in society; but have you the Christian's hope? If you have, then your heart is set upon being like Christ. Is it so? Is your heart thus set? Does your hope beget most earnest striving to be like Christ? You have some religious hope of some sort -- but is it a true Christian's hope? Many are so entirely in the dark, they hold on to a hope, supposing it all right, when, in the light of the Bible, there is not the first element of a Christian's hope in it. Their hope is their curse and their ruin.

We are compelled to conclude that there are but few of all the professed Christians of our world who have the true Christian's hope. I do not say, that there are but few real Christians -- taken absolutely; but I do say their number is

small relatively to the great mass who think themselves Christians. There are but few relatively, whose life and spirit show their hopes to be scriptural -- but few who are really purifying themselves, even as Christ is pure.

No good hope can be kept secret. Some people talk of having a secret hope, and speak of others as having a secret hope. The fact is, a hope that can be kept secret, shows itself to be poor and vain. For if it were a good hope, it would lead its possessor to purify himself. No man can throw the energies of his being into the struggle after Christian purity, and still keep his religion a secret. The world will know him; Christian brethren will feel the warmth of his heart.

Some of you have a hope, which, instead of leading you on to a holy life, makes you quiet and easy in your sins. It does not tend at all to make you purify yourself from sin, but on the contrary, it makes you careless and dead in your sins. You know you live in sin, yet you have a hope that you shall be saved at last. Is it not a fact on the very face of it, that your hope is bad, and that your soul is on the way to hell? It has precisely the opposite influence to what it should have; it works more sin rather than more holiness; it fits you for hell -- not for heaven; yet you hold on to it as if it were your very life. Do you not see that it must inevitably drown your soul in destruction? It helps you to live careless and prayerless. It impels you after everything else but Christ. Surely you must see that it is leading you down to hell! Unless you abandon it as a nuisance, a curse and a lie, you can never be saved! Put it away as an abomination that is leading your soul down to hell! Why not put it away? What good can it do you? You may just as well have a good hope, in a glorious gospel -- a hope that shall purify your heart, and lift you upward to heaven. Why will you have the counterfeit, while the good coin can be had just as well and as cheap? Why cleave to delusion and death, when the truth is free, and eternal life in Christ comes without money and without price?

[Back to Top](#)

The Primitive Prayer-Meeting

Lecture XVI

November 22, 1854

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Acts 1:14: "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication."

In the context we have an account of Christ's last interview with his disciples. They had assembled at his request; he met them, "spoke to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God;" commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, assuring them that they "should be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence;" and then was taken up from their sight. They returned to Jerusalem, went into an upper room, and there "all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." These, in brief, are the circumstances of this wonderful prayer-meeting.

I propose to notice,

I. The object of this prayer-meeting;

II. Its characteristics;

III. Its results.

I. The object of this prayer-meeting.

The special object of this meeting was to pray for the outpouring of the Spirit upon themselves and the world. It had been promised, even from Abraham, down the long line of holy seers, that in connection with the advent of Christ, the Spirit should be given. Christ reminded his disciples of this great promise and bade them tarry in Jerusalem and wait for its fulfillment. He had given them their great commission, to go forth into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature; but he would have them plainly understand that they could do nothing without his Spirit, and therefore they must by all means wait in Jerusalem till they had received this anointing of the Father. That they might the better understand this baptism he referred to John's mission and work, saying--"John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence." That baptism was only a type; this was to be the very thing symbolized.

This meeting to pray for the descent of the Spirit continued not less than ten days. From the Passover at which Christ suffered, he met with them on various occasions during forty days; then ascended to heaven. The feast of Pentecost was, as its name imports, just fifty days after the Passover. The interval from the ascension to the Pentecost, ten days, was the duration of this remarkable prayer-meeting; for we are told that when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were still "all with one accord in one place."

II. Its characteristics.

- 1. Of the characteristics of this meeting, the first to be noticed is that the brethren and sisters were all present. This is a prominent peculiarity, and deserves distinct and special notice. The sacred historian is careful to call attention to the fact. "Peter stood up among them, the number of the names together were about an hundred and twenty." All the eleven were there, "with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brethren." Not one could be spared. What, suppose ye, Christ would have thought, if only two or three had come, and the rest had been too indifferent or too much engrossed in other business to be there? They did not allow any other business to detain them. They honored God enough to meet on his special call and to stay till the object of the meeting was accomplished.
- 2. They were all interested in the object. This is manifest in the fact that they all came and all remained together so long, and indeed until the object was attained. Not only were they all there, but all held on through those long sessions. This shows them really in earnest.
- 3. They expected the promised blessing. They knew Christ had promised it, and they believed his promise. Of course their faith became a strong and definite expectation.
- 4. Yet again, they were united. Over and over again, we are told they were all with one accord in one place. United in the one desire to obtain this great blessing, and of one heart in regard to the motives which led them to pray, there was the most entire unanimity, as if the whole company had but one heart, and that were strong and true in its impulse and purposes.

- 5. They were united in fraternal confidence. There is no hint of any loss or lack of confidence in each other. Hence they could edify each other. Their communion of soul was deep and precious.
- 6. They persevered. "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." They were instant in their prayer until the object was gained. They could not think of giving up and abandoning their effort before the blessing came. They said as Jacob in his wrestlings, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." What could they do without the Spirit! Besides, Christ had distinctly told them not to go until the blessing came.
- 7. I said that the brethren and sisters both were there. this was contrary to the doctrine and practice of the Jews then, and indeed is so to this day. They do not admit women to sit with themselves in their holy places, in their seasons of worship. They are allowed to occupy only the galleries, from which they may look down as spectators, not being expected to join as associate worshippers. In public acts of devotion they might have no part. Not so under the gospel. In Christ there must be no distinction between bond and free, male and female. All were to be one in him. All their old Jewish prejudices were discarded. This was a most important fact in the constitution of the Christian church. Until Christ came, no such meeting of brethren and sisters on the same level had been known. The particularity with which this circumstance is recorded, shows that a new era had opened. No partition wall is henceforth to thrust the female sex into the court of the woman, or into the distant galleries; all sexes are counted alike as brethren in Christ Jesus.
- 8. Observe also that there is no sectarian spirit or party spirit or party strife among them. No party prejudice was there; all were true Christian brethren. The division of the Christian church into parties and sects, now so great an evil, was then unknown. Men were not then stickling for little things, were not building up new denominations on a basis so unworthy as a mere difference in forms or even in the forms of a form. The controversies of later days about ordinances had not yet begun to distract and rend the body of Christ. Nor was there then any strife for leadership. Diotrephes and his

sect had not then appeared in the Christian church.

You may think me censorious in having intimated that the ambition of leadership makes sects. I wish there was no truth in this intimation. But who does not know it to be but too sadly true!

- 9. Moreover, there was no caviling against the truth, or against judiciously proposed measures. Suspicion had no room in their kindred bosoms. They had no disposition to resist each other's prayer; there were none to whisper-- I am not edified with this brother's prayer, or by the prayer of that sister. All with one accord, as well as all in one place! this must have been a charming season--a meeting in which loving hearts blended in holy sympathy.
- 10. It was, finally, a deeply earnest meeting. No apathetic souls were there, lagging and hanging as dead weights on the general heart of the assembly. All seemed to take as equally deep and warm interest in the great supplications they were convened to pour out before their ascended Lord for the great blessing of the Christian dispensation.

III. Results.

In brief, these are soon told. Three thousand were converted under one short sermon. The Holy Ghost fell on the disciples with great power, and from them the blessing diffused itself on every hand to the thousands who believed. The little band found themselves launched forth upon the greatest enterprise ever undertaken by mortals; and withal, drawn into such relations of faith and sustaining strength towards God and their ascended Savior as had never been realized on earth before. The conversion of the world to Jesus had fairly begun and the mission of the Spirit was opened.

REMARKS.

This is doubtless to be taken as a model prayer-meeting--substantially, in its spirit and leading circumstances, what a prayer-meeting ought to be. Why not? There is nothing here that should not be in all prayer-meetings for objects of similar importance.

1. Yet who can fail to notice that most prayer-meetings are nearly the reverse of this, in all their characteristic features? What do you see now in prayer-meetings

appointed to pray for the conversion of sinners? Only a little handful of Christians present; the rest of the church pouring contempt on the very call for a meeting! It is easy to see that this must be regarded by Christ as a real insult. A meeting is called, yet but few have interest enough to attend! What would you think if, a notice being given out for a meeting at our church to invite some distinguished personage to come and visit us--say LaFayette, or Kossuth, or some one to whom the nation were under the very greatest obligations; the call for a meeting is given out; it appears in the daily papers; but when the hour arrives, only a very few are present! The people do not come! Suppose this distinguished stranger is informed how thin this meeting is; will he come? Will he not deem the very call an insult? So when meetings are appointed to invite the Lord Jesus, and almost none attend, will he come? Nay, verily; why should he come? There is no unanimity in the invitation. The understanding is they are not unanimous in inviting him to come. You will say, perhaps, that you did not intend your absence to mean just that. You did not mean to say that you did not want the Savior to come. You had your special reasons for being absent. You had an excuse; but do you think such excuses would avail in the case of any distinguished personage? Suppose the meeting had been called to invite General Washington; but very few attend; yet they send on to him their excuses for non-attendance; they tell him they were all very busy; some had sickness in their family, and some were taking care of various home concerns; they really felt the highest respect for him, &c., &c. Would their apologies avail? Would it not be regarded as a downright insult to ask so great a man to come among us, and yet in a called meeting to invite him, have only a mere handful present?

Now does not this apply in the case of prayer to God? Indeed it does. The prayer-meeting is specially called for the purpose of inviting him to come among us. It is important to know who want him to come; how many they are; and how much they desire his coming. The call of a meeting is the proper way to test and determine all these points. If the result shows that but very few care enough about it to even appear at the meeting, what can be expected but a failure in the great object of inducing him to make us a visit? Suppose the meeting at the day of Pentecost and during those previous days had been very thin, would the blessing have descended? Who can suppose it would?

We may have a prayer-meeting and urge the very strongest reasons for the descent of God's Spirit; but what avails it--if we are only a small minority of those who are in the church?

2. How much worse still is the case in our modern prayer-meeting if even those who do attend are manifestly not by any means earnest in prayer! How often we see this to be undoubtedly the case. They do not press their plea for a visitation of mercy from on high. They do not struggle long and earnestly as those praying souls did in the first great primitive prayer-meeting. These pleas and prayers are as different from those as can well be imagined. Let no one wonder that these movements are so unavailing!

3. Prayer is wont to be offered now with very little expectation. So great a lack of expectation denotes lack of faith in God, and therefore must fail to please him.

4. People think they cannot take time for continuous prayer. To keep up a prayer-meeting a whole week, is quite too much to think of! They have by no means brought their views up to the point of praying till the blessing comes. They do not feel earnest enough, nor are they sufficiently pressed with a sense of want to make this seem a small thing compared with the greatness of the blessing sought. They think they do well if they pray a little at one meeting per week, keep up one weekly meeting, and spend even that mostly in something else than prayer. What can be expected from such efforts?

5. Perhaps there is not unanimity enough, nor brotherly love enough to sustain even one weekly prayer-meeting. This is the case in many churches and in many neighborhoods. Is it so here in some portion of this great church?

6. Even where general prayer-meetings can be kept up, and are so, yet neighborhood prayer-meetings fall through. Alienations of feeling arise among brethren and sisters; bickerings, bad blood and bad words are there; they lose confidence in each other, and cannot pray together! How awful! How different from the spirit of the day of Pentecost! There, all the assembled brethren and sisters were of one heart and one soul! The tears were scarcely dry on the cheek of the penitent Peter; Thomas had not recovered from the deep mortification, shame and grief of his unbelief, yet even these feelings did not stand in the way of the most entire union of heart and soul in prayer for the great promised blessing.

7. Yet in how many churches you are astonished to find the prayer-meeting abandoned; the hearts of brethren soured and alienated; confidence almost gone, and worse than all the rest, few left to mourn over this deplorable state of Zion. You may find, here and there, a brother or a sister mournfully asking, "What

shall we do for a prayer-meeting in our neighborhood? There is not brotherly love and confidence enough here to sustain one." You would be astonished to know how often this is the case. Sometimes a family prayer-meeting drops to pieces in the same way. Alienation in some form arises; they lose confidence in each other's prayers, and interest in each other's welfare; and, of course, they cease to pray with and for each other. Under such influences, Christians are not interested in each other's prayers, and are not led onward and edified by mutual prayer. Where alienation exists, and mutual sympathy is lacking, there can be no union of heart in prayer, and no spiritual edification. You have often noticed in a prayer-meeting that the brethren and sisters will be greatly quickened and edified by one brother's prayer, and not at all by another's. When one prays, it is most manifest that the hearts of all are moved; there is a sighing, an uplifting of heart, a general response; but when another leads, you see no such tokens of general sympathy. You can tell who can lead the hearts of the brethren in real prayer. You will always notice that no one can do this unless they have confidence in him, and unless they feel the deep pulsations of his heart moving upon their own. Sometimes this is seen in the family. The head of the family prays, but all have lost confidence in him, and are doing anything else and everything else but unite in his words of prayer. Is it wonderful that such prayer avails nothing? Indeed, the very expressions which such a man may use in prayer, will be interpreted as only so much hypocrisy! Alas, the spirit of prayer cannot be there! The spirit of dissent, and not the spirit of union, is there; they do not pray together, and cannot; they are not united in prayer; a spirit of alienation exists, unexpressed, but deep; perhaps their will is up about something. Even husband and wife do not pray together; they are chafed in their feelings toward each other, and are indulging a state of mind which forbids a spirit of mutual prayer. Often our prayer-meetings die out by reason of little bickerings and heart-burnings.

Brethren and sisters, will you not look to this?

Often, when people stay away from meetings for prayer, they assign other than the true and real reason. They do not say frankly, I stay away because I cannot hear this or that brother pray. They profess to be too busy--too much and too urgently occupied; but really they do not assign even to themselves the true reason--the very thing which has kept them back from the meeting.

At the Pentecost meeting, they neglected all other business. Yet they were poor in this world's goods, and had, no doubt, business enough to do; their women,

also, had enough to do; yet they were all there. But suppose it had been the case that they felt their business to be too important to be dropped. Suppose they had said--"O, it cannot be necessary for us all to go; we are so full of business, and so pressed every way, and so fatigued withal;" do you believe that, making such excuses for neglect of prayer, they could have had the blessing? If they could not fulfill the condition, could they hope to receive the promise? If they would not meet the demand made by the condition, obviously the way would not be open for Christ to fulfill his promise. he could not grant them the blessing without virtually giving a bounty to remissness and unfaithfulness.

The fact is, brethren, our modern prayer-meetings are too cold and too constrained. Christians are not earnest in prayer. Their souls cannot become deeply burdened and earnestly agonized in supplication; they do not thirst enough for spiritual blessings, and have not the deep communion with God which is requisite for prevailing prayer. You know what a burden is felt in a prayer-meeting when the heart is thoroughly broken; when pride is abased, the soul humbled, and the entire energies are drawn out in earnest supplication. But there are few such meetings for prayer now. There is a lack of sustaining unanimity. It is a law of mind that union of heart sustains the interest and power of prayer. Did you never observe how you can sustain another in prayer, if you enter deeply into his sympathies? You uphold his faith and his fervor. I have often thought that the practice common among the Methodists, is useful if not abused. The responses that truly come from the heart serve to quicken and sustain genuine prayer. The responses introduced in the service of the Church of England are excellent, provided only that the heart be in them. I love to hear these sustaining responses and to know that I have the sympathizing heart of those who profess to be praying with me. Often our prayer-meetings are cold and profitless because there is no liberty and no free utterance. The spirit of prayer is straitened, because the natural expressions of deep feeling are repressed. Said an English Congregationalist, "I do wish our people could learn of the Methodists how to have a prayer-meeting." He felt the need of an unconstrained utterance and of a free expression of feeling. Now I would not sanction heartless noise and vociferation; that is not prayer and cannot help real prayer. There is a wide difference between that and a meeting in which the heart had free scope, and the Spirit of God is not straitened, but ranges with free scope and melting power. I have seen prayer-meetings in which manifestly the whole congregation went forth before God in mighty prayer. Some of you have seen such prayer. The

hearts of the people were moved as the trees of the forest before a mighty rushing wind. Words seem as if freightened with irrepressible emotion. You can see that God is there. Everyone feels it. An awe of the Holy Presence pervades each heart. And yet they are not afraid, but are drawn into sweet confidence and most earnest pleading. Literally they seem to pour out their hearts before him. This is true prayer, and meets the idea of social praying. It is a union of hearts before God's mercy-seat, the Spirit coming down to make intercession with their spirit with groanings that cannot be uttered. Every prayer-meeting should bear this character, modified only according to the type of those circumstances that call for prayer.

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

1. **Complacency, or Esteem:** "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.
2. **Disinterested Benevolence:** "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of

His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

3. **Divine Sovereignty:** "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.
4. **Election:** "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.
5. **Entire Sanctification:** "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.
6. **Moral Agency:** "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
7. **Moral Depravity:** "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because

it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

8. **Human Reason:** "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
9. **Retributive Justice:** "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.
10. **Total Depravity:** "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
11. **Unbelief:** "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

End of the 1854 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1855
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Lecture I. [On Prayer](#)
- Lecture II. [On Persevering Prayer for Others](#)
- Lecture III. [On Being Almost Persuaded to be a Christian](#)
- Lecture IV. [On Neglecting Salvation](#)
- Lecture V. [On Prayer for The Holy Spirit](#)
- Lecture VI. [Conscience and The Bible in Harmony](#)
- Lecture VII. [God Has No Pleasure In The Sinner's Death](#)
- Lecture VIII. [On Being Searched of God](#)
- Lecture IX. [On Injustice To Character](#)
- Lecture X. [God's Goodness Toward Men Basely Required](#)
- Lecture XI. [Losing First Love](#)

Lecture XII. [Men, Ignorant of God's Righteousness, Would Fain Establish Their Own](#)

Lecture XIII. [Adorning the Doctrine of God Our Savior](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

On Prayer

Lecture I

January 3, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Luke 18:1: "He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

In discussing the subject of prayer, presented in our text, I propose to inquire,

I. Why men should pray at all;

II. Why men should pray always and not faint;

III. Why they do not pray always;--with remarks.

I. Why men should pray at all.

1. Our dependence on God is universal, extending to all things. This fact is known and acknowledged. None but atheists presume to call it in question.

2. Prayer is the dictate of our nature. By the voice of nature this duty is revealed as plainly as possible. We feel the pressure of our wants, and our instincts cry out to a higher power for relief in their supply. You may see this in the case of the most wicked man, as well as in the case of good men. The wicked, when in distress, cry out to God for help. Indeed, mankind have given evidence of this in all ages and in every nation;--showing both

the universal necessity of prayer, and that it is a dictate of our nature to look up to a God above.

3. It is a primitive conviction of our minds that God does hear and answer prayer. If men did not assume this to be the case, why should they pray? The fact that men do spontaneously pray, shows that they really expect God to hear prayer. It is contrary to all our original belief to assume that events occur under some law of concatenation, too rigid for the Almighty to break, and which He never attempts to adjust according to his will. Men do not naturally believe any such thing as this.

4. The objection to prayer that God is unchangeable, and therefore cannot turn aside to hear prayer, is altogether a fallacy and the result of ignorance. Consider what is the true idea of God's unchangeableness. Surely, it is not that his course of conduct never changes to meet circumstances; but it is this--that his character never changes; that his nature and the principles which control his voluntary action remain eternally the same. All his natural--all his moral attributes remain for ever unchanged. This is all that can rationally be implied in God's immutability.

Now, his hearing and answering prayer, imply no change of character--no change in his principles of action. Indeed, if you ask why he ever answers prayer at all, the answer must be, because he is unchangeable. Prayer brings the suppliant into new relations to God's kingdom; and to meet these new relations, God's unchangeable principles require him to change the course of his administration. He answers prayer because he is unchangeably benevolent. It is not because his benevolence changes, but because it does not change, that he answers prayer. Who can suppose that God's answering prayer implies any change in his moral character? For example, if a man, in prayer, repents, God forgives; if he does not repent of present sin, God does not forgive;--and who does not see that God's immutability must require this course at his hands? Suppose God did not change his conduct when men change their character and their attitude towards him. This would imply fickleness--an utter absence of fixed principles. His unchangeable goodness must therefore imply that when his creatures change morally, he changes his course and conforms to their new position. Any other view of the case is simply absurd, and only the result of ignorance. Strange that men should hold it to be inconsistent for God to change and give rain in answer to prayer,

or give any needed spiritual blessings to those who ask them!

5. Intercourse with God is a necessity of moral beings, demanded by creatures as a necessity of their natures. No doubt this is true in heaven itself, and the fact that this want of their natures is so gloriously supplied there, makes heaven. The Bible represents spirits in heaven as praying. We hear them crying out--"How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev. 6:10). True, their subjects of prayer are not in all respects the same as ours; we have things to pray for which they have no occasion to ask for themselves. They are neither sick nor sinful; but can you suppose they never pray, "Thy kingdom come?" Have they lost all sympathy with those interests of Zion? Far from it. Knowing more of the value of those interests, they no doubt feel more deeply their importance, and pray more earnestly for their promotion. From the nature of the case, God's treatment of the inhabitants of heaven must be conditioned on their voluntary course in regard to him and his kingdom. It must be governed and determined by their knowledge, their progress in knowledge, and their improvement of the means and powers at their command. Obviously their voluntary worship, gratitude, thanksgiving, and service of every sort, must vary their relations to God, and consequently, his course towards them. He will do many things to them and for them which he could not do if they did not pray, and praise, and love, and study, and labour. This must be true even in heaven, of apostles, and prophets, and of all glorified saints. God makes to them successive revelations of himself, each successively higher than the preceding, and all dependent on their voluntary devotion to him and to his glory. They are for ever advancing in his service, full of worship, praise, adoration, and this only prepares them the more to be sent on missions of love and service, and to be employed as the interests of God's kingdom require. Hence, we see that God's conduct towards saints in heaven depends on their own voluntary course and bearing towards him. This is a necessity of any and every moral system. If saints in heaven are moral agents, and God's government over them is also moral, all these results must follow. In this world sin exists; and in this fact we see an obvious necessity for this law of moral administration. But the holy in heaven are no less moral and responsible than the sinning on earth. The great object of God's administration is to assimilate moral beings to himself; hence, He must make his treatment of

them depend on their moral course towards him.

In regard to saints on earth, how can God do them any good unless he can draw them to himself in prayer and praise? This is one of the most evident necessities that can be named. Men irresistibly feel the propriety of confession and supplication, in order to achieve forgiveness. This feeling lies among the primitive affirmations of the mind. Men know that if they would be healed of sin they must seek and find God.

II. But why pray so much and so often? Why the exhortation to pray always and not to faint?

The case presented in the context is very strong. Whether it be history or supposition does not affect the merits of the case as given us to illustrate importunity in prayer. The poor widow persevered. She kept coming and would not be discouraged. By dint of perseverance simply, she succeeded. The judge who cared not for God or man, did care somewhat for his own comfort and quiet, and therefore thought it wise to listen to her story and grant her request. Upon this case our Lord seized to enforce and encourage importunity in prayer. Hear his argument. "Shall not God,"--who is by no means unjust, but whose compassions are a great deep--"shall not such a God avenge his own elect, who cry day and night unto him, though he seem to bear long" in delaying to answer their prayers? "I tell you he will avenge them speedily."

1. Men ought to pray always, because they always need the influence of prayer. Consider what is implied in prayer and what prayer does for you. Prayer bathes the soul in an atmosphere of the divine presence. Prayer communes with God and brings the whole mind under the hallowed influence of such communion. Prayer goes to God to seek pardon and find mercy and grace to help. How obvious, then, that we always need its influence on our hearts and lives. Truly, we need not wonder that God should enjoin it upon us to pray always.

2. God needs prayer from us as a condition of his doing to us and for us all he would. He loves us and sees a thousand blessings that we need, and that he would delight to bestow; but yet he cannot bestow them except on condition that we ask for them in Jesus' name. His treatment of us and his bestowment of blessings upon us must depend upon our views and conduct, whether we feel our dependence on him, whether we confess and forsake

all sin--whether we trust him and thoroughly honour him in all things. His action towards us must depend upon our attitude towards him. It is essential in the management of a moral system that we should pray and trust, in order that he may freely and abundantly give, and especially that he may give in a way safe to us and honourable to himself. Nothing can be substituted for our own praying, either in its relations to God or to ourselves. We cannot get along without the personal benefit of prayer, confession, trust, and praise. You cannot substitute instruction, ever so much or so good; for these things must enter into the soul's experience; you must feel them before God, and carry out the life and power of these truths in your very heart before the Lord; else they are worse than unknown to you. You are not likely to understand many of these things without prayer; and even if you were to understand them, and yet not pray, the knowledge would only be a curse to you.

3. What can be so useful to us, sinners, as direct communion with God--the searching of the heart which it induces--the humility, the confessions, the supplications? Other things have their use. Instruction is good; reading God's word may be a blessing; communion with the saints is pleasant;--but what are they all, compared with personal intercourse with God? Nothing else can make the soul so sick of sin, and so dead to the world. Nothing else breathes such spiritual life into the soul as real prayer.

4. Prayer also prepares us the better to receive all blessings from God, and hence should be constant.

5. Prayer pleases God as governor of the universe, because it puts us in a position in which he can bless us and gratify his own benevolence.

6. Search the history of the world, and you will find that where there has been most true prayer, and the soul has been most deeply imbued with the divine presence, there God has most abundantly and richly blessed the soul. Who does not know that holy men of old were eminent for usefulness and power according as they were faithful and mighty in prayer?

7. The more we pray, the more shall we be enlightened, for surely they are most enlightened who pray most. If we go no farther in divine things than human reason can carry us, we get little indeed from God.

8. The more men pray, the more they will love prayer, and the more will they enjoy God. On the other hand, the more we pray--in real prayer--the more will God delight in us. Observe this which I say, Delight; the more will God truly DELIGHT in us. This is not merely the love of benevolence, for God is benevolent to all; but he delights in his praying children in the sense of having complacency in their character. The Bible often speaks of the great interest which God takes in those who live near him in much prayer. This is naturally and necessarily the case. Why should not God delight in those who delight in him?

9. The more we pray, the more God loves to manifest to others that he delights in us, and hears our prayers. If his children live lives of much prayer, God delights to honour them, as an encouragement to others to pray. They come into a position in which he can bless them and can make his blessings on them result in good to others--thus doubly gratifying the benevolence of his heart.

10. We can never reach a position in which we shall not need prayer. Who believes that saints in heaven will have no need of prayer? True, they will have perfect faith, but this, so far from precluding prayer, only the more ensures it. Men have strangely assumed, that if there were only perfect faith, prayer would cease. Nothing can be more false and groundless. Certainly, then, we never can get beyond prayer.

11. If I had time I should like to show how the manner of prayer varies as Christians advance in holiness. They pray not less, but more, and they know better how to pray. When the natural life is mingled largely with the spiritual, there is an outward effervescing, which passes away as the soul comes nearer to God. You would suppose there is less excitement, and there is less of animal excitement; but the deep fountains of the soul flow in unbroken sympathy with God.

12. We can never get beyond the point where prayer is greatly useful to us. The more the heart breathes after God, and rises towards him in heavenly aspirations, the more useful do such exercises become. The aged Christian finds himself more and more benefitted in prayer as he draws more and more near to God. The more he prays, the more he sees the wisdom and necessity of prayer for his own spiritual good.

13. The very fact that prayer is so great a privilege to sinners makes it most honourable to God to hear prayer. Some think it disgraceful to God. What a sentiment! It assumes that God's real greatness consists in his being so high above us as to have no regard for us whatever. Not so with God. He who regards alike the flight of an archangel and the fall of a sparrow--before whose eye no possible event is too minute for his attention--no insect too small for his notice and his love,--his infinite glory is manifest in this very fact that nothing is too lofty or too low for his regard. None are too insignificant to miss sympathy--none too mean to share his kindness.

14. Many talk of prayer as only a duty, not a privilege; but with this view of it they cannot pray acceptably. When your children, full of wants, come running to you in prayer, do they come because it is a duty? No, indeed! They come because it is their privilege. They regard it as their privilege. Other children do not feel so towards you. And it is a wonderful privilege! Who does not know it and feel it to be so? Shall we then ever fail to avail ourselves of it?

15. Finally, we are sure to prevail if we thoroughly persevere and pray always, and do not faint. Let this suffice to induce perseverance in prayer. Do you need blessings? And yet are they delayed? Pray always and never faint; so shall you obtain all you need.

III. Our third general inquiry is, Why do not men pray always? Many reasons exist.

1. In the case of some, because the enmity of their hearts towards God is such that they are shy and dread prayer. They have so strong a dislike to God, they cannot make up their minds to come near to him in prayer.

2. Some are self-righteous and self-ignorant, and therefore have no heart to pray. Their self-righteousness makes them feel strong enough without prayer, and self-ignorance prevents their feeling their own real wants.

3. Unbelief keeps others from constant prayer. They have not confidence enough in God as ready to answer prayer. Of course, with such unbelief in their hearts, they will not pray always.

4. Sophistry prevents others. I have alluded to some of its forms. They say, God being immutable, never changes his course; or they urge that there is

no need of prayer, inasmuch as God will surely do just right, although nobody should pray. These are little sophistries, such as ignorant minds get up and stumble over. It is wonderful that any minds can be so ignorant and so unthinking as to be influenced by these sophistries. I can recollect how these objections to prayer came up many years since before my mind, but were instantly answered and set aside, they seemed so absurd. This, for instance,--that God had framed the universe so wisely that there is no need of prayer, and indeed no room for it. My answer was ready. What was God's object in making and arranging his universe? Was it to show himself to be a good mechanic, so skilful that he can make a universe to run itself, without his constant agency? Was this his object? No! But his object was to plant in this universe intelligent minds and then reveal himself to them and draw them to love and trust their own infinite Father. This object is every way noble and worthy of a God. But the other notion is horrible! It takes from God every endearing attribute and leaves him only a good mechanic!

5. The idea that God mingles his agency continually in human affairs, prevails everywhere among all minds in all ages. Every where they have seen God revealing himself. They expect such revelations of God. They have believed in them, and have seen how essential this fact is to that confidence and love which belong to a moral government. It seems passing strange that men can sophisticate themselves into such nonsense as this! Insufferable nonsense are all such objections!

On one occasion, when it had been very wet and came off suddenly very dry, the question arose--How can you vindicate the providence of God? At first the question stung me; I stopped, considered it a few moments, and then asked, What can his object be in giving us weather at all? Why does he send, or not send, rain? If the object be to raise as many potatoes as possible, this is not the wisest course. But if the object be to make us feel our dependence, this is the wisest course possible. What if God were to raise harvests enough in one year to supply us for the next ten? We might all become atheists. We should be very likely to think we could live without God. But now every day and every year he shuts us up to depend on himself. Who does not see that a moral government, ordered on any other system, would work ruin?

6. Another reason is, men have no real sense of sin or of any spiritual want; no consciousness of guilt. While in this state of mind, it need not be

expected that men will pray.

7. In the other extreme, after becoming deeply convicted, they fall into despair and think it does no good to pray.

8. Another reason for not praying much is found in self-righteous conceptions of what is requisite to success in prayer. One says, I am too degraded, and am not good enough to pray. This objection is founded altogether in self-righteous notions--assuming that your own goodness must be the ground or reason for God's hearing your prayer.

9. A reason with many for little prayer is their worldly-mindedness. Their minds are so filled with thoughts of a worldly nature, they cannot get into the spirit of prayer.

Again, in the case of some, their own experience discourages them. They have often prayed, yet with little success. This brings them into a skeptical attitude in regard to prayer. Very likely the real reason of their failure has been the lack of perseverance. They have not obeyed this precept which urges that men pray always, and never faint.

REMARKS.

1. It is no loss of time to pray. Many think it chiefly or wholly lost time. They are so full of business, they say, and assume that prayer will spoil their business. I tell you, that your business, if it be of such sort as ought to be done at all, will go all the better for much prayer. Rise from your bed a little earlier, and pray. Get time somehow--by almost any imaginable sacrifice, sooner than forego prayer. Are you studying? It is no loss of time to pray, as I know very well by my own experience. If I am to preach, with only two hours for preparation, I give one hour to prayer. If I were to study anything--let it be Virgil or Geometry, I would by all means pray first. Prayer enlarges and illumines the mind. It is like coming into the presence of a master spirit. You know how sometimes this electrifies the mind, and fires it with boundless enthusiasm. So, and much the more, does real access to God.

Let a physician pray a great deal; he needs counsel from God. Let the mechanic and the merchant pray much; they will testify, after trial of it, that God gives them counsel, and that, consequently, they lose nothing and gain much by constant prayer.

2. None but an eminently praying man is a safe religious teacher. However scientific and literary, if he be not a praying man, he cannot be trusted.

A spirit of prayer is of much greater value than human learning without it. If I were to choose, I would prefer intercourse with God in prayer before the intellect of Gabriel. I do not say this to disparage the value of learning and knowledge, for when great talents and learning are sanctified with much prayer, the result is a mind of mighty power.

Those who do not pray cannot understand the facts in regard to answers to prayer. How can they know? Those things seem to them utterly incredible. They have had no such experience. In fact all their experience goes in the opposite direction. State a case to them; they look incredulous. Perhaps they will say--You seem to think you can prophesy and foreknow events! Let them be answered, that "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." Those who keep up a living intercourse with God know many things they do not tell, and had better not tell. When I was a young convert, I knew an aged lady whose piety and prayer seemed to me quite extraordinary. You could not feel like talking much in her presence; there was something in it that struck you as remarkable. The subject of sanctification came into discussion, and meeting me on one occasion, she said--"Charles, take care what you do! Don't do things to be sorry for afterwards." A son of hers became a Christian and was astonished at the manifestations of his mother's piety. She had prayed for him long and most earnestly. When, at length, his eyes were opened, she began to say--"I did not tell anybody my experiences, but in fact I have known nothing about condemnation for thirty years past. In all this time I am not aware that I have committed a known sin. My soul has enjoyed uninterrupted communion with God, and constant access to his mercy-seat in prayer."

3. Prayer is the great secret of ministerial success. Some think this secret lies in talent or in tact; but it is not so. A man may know all human knowledge, yet, without prayer, what can he do? He cannot move and control men's hearts. He can do nothing to purpose unless he lives in sympathy and open-faced communion with God. Only so can he be mighty through God to win souls to Christ. Here let me not be understood to depreciate learning and the knowledge of God. By no means. But prayer and its power are much greater and more effective. Herein lies the great mistake of Theological Seminaries and of gospel ministers. They lay excessive stress on learning, and genius, and talents; they fail

to appreciate duly the paramount importance of much prayer. How much better for them to lay the principal stress on bathing the soul in God's presence! Let them rely first of all on God, who worketh mightily in his praying servants through his Spirit given them; and mediately, let them estimate above all other means, prayer--prayer that is abundant, devout, earnest, and full of living faith. Such a course would be an effectual correction of one of the most prevalent and perilous mistakes of the age.

[Back to Top](#)

On Persevering Prayer for Others

Lecture II

January 17, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Luke 11:5-8: "And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves: for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity, he will rise and give him as many as he needeth."

I. Prayer offered for others, and the encouragement we have for such prayer;

II. Why should we pray for others?

III. Perseverance in prayer.

IV. But why do not men pray more for others?

I. I propose, in speaking from this passage, to treat the prayer offered for others, and the encouragement we have for such prayer.

1. This passage seems to have been designed to encourage us to pray for our friends and for others in general. The same is true of the Lord's prayer, since many of its petitions obviously contemplate blessings upon others not less than upon ourselves. Indeed, the whole Bible is replete with instances and examples of prevailing prayer for others. I might begin with the case of Abraham interceding, now for Ishmael, anon for Abimelech, and yet again for Sodom; and then I might pass on to speak of Moses and of Samuel; of Jeremiah also, and of other prophets; of the Apostles moreover, who are continually in prayer for the churches. The Bible is full of this, and must make the impression on every attentive reader, that intercession for others is a natural development of the Christian spirit.

2. It is equally a dictate of nature to pray for others as to pray for one's self. Who does not sometimes experience the spontaneous and irresistible impulse to cry out to God for others? It is utterly impossible for a parent to see a child in a house on fire, or sinking in deep waters, or in any great peril without crying to God for help. You who read the Bible must notice how God's people are continually in prayer for his church and his cause on earth. You see there how parents pray for their children, how one prays for another under any circumstances of want. This lies out on the face of the whole Bible. None can fail to notice it who read their Bibles with any attention.

3. From the mere light of nature we expect God to hear our prayer for others. Consider this point and you will see it to be so. Even the wickedest of men and of women pray for their children in distress, and indeed for others besides theirs. They have an innate conviction that God should be sought in prayer, and that he will hear and help. Sometimes the impulse to pray for others is irresistible and insuppressible. You cry out spontaneously--May God have mercy on their souls! I doubt whether there is a man in our nation, however wicked, who could have stood by and have seen the cars at Norwalk plunge off into the river, without crying out, May God save their souls! This is quite as natural as to pray for ourselves, and shows fully the instinct of our minds. You may say what you please about there being no virtue in prayer, and you may try to believe what you will; yet none the less this sort of prayer will come with the occasion that calls for it. The fact remains the same, despite of all that men may strive to do by false philosophy to excuse themselves for praying so little. I am aware that some

men object, saying it is of no use to pray for others; but this objection is utterly shallow and groundless. It assumes that prayer never influences God, but ourselves only. They say the influence of prayer is wholly subjective--i.e., on the person who prays; never objective--i.e., upon God. Strange that men should ever adopt a notion so absurd. This subjective influence never could be gained if men did not believe in the objective influence. How much good would it do your own heart to pray if it were the fact and you absolutely knew it to be, that God never hears and answers prayer! Think how ridiculous for a man to go before God and say to him--"Lord, I don't expect my prayer to influence thee in the least, for I know that thou canst not hear prayer at all; but I want to get a certain subjective effect on myself by this prayer, and therefore I obtrude myself before thy throne." How strange! Any man would be shocked at his own folly and absurdity.

But some of you perhaps did not fully understand me when I said in my last sermon that prayer did not change God's nature and purposes. Some men say--"Prayer must change God's plans if he answers it." No, never. It has always been God's plan to hear and answer prayer. This has always entered into his purposes.

Again, God's immutability implies that he will answer prayer. It would be strange indeed if God should not change his course in answer to prayer, if he be indeed immutable. If he were not to change for right prayer, it would prove him to be not good--it would imply that he had ceased to be benevolent; indeed, it would undeify him at once. When you come to resolve this idea into its elements, you will see that it subverts the whole idea of God and of his attributes. It must imply that God's creatures might come into any position before him, and he can never answer their prayers.

But many say--I can see how prayer may benefit myself, but cannot see how it can benefit others. I reply, the latter can easily be seen. No man can read the Bible without seeing that this is the fact--prayer does benefit others. No man can study his own convictions without seeing evidence of it. If prayer never could benefit others, the fact would belie all our innate convictions.

4. I have said that to pray for others is a spontaneity of our nature. Even when our enemies are in sudden danger and trouble, we lift up our cry for them spontaneously. I doubt whether even an infidel could see a child

struggling in pain and peril, without crying out--May God help! Sometimes men in their sins have fallen into fearful circumstances, and have cried mightily to God, and God has interposed so signally as to astonish them. I have heard of many cases of this sort. I recollect one, of a wicked man, on the point of drowning, who cried to God for help. It was remarkable that all his sins seemed to be concentrated into one present mass. He saw them--saw himself that great sinner who had sinned so grievously; saw that he must turn from all his sins to God, as he would ever hope for mercy;--did turn to God, saying, I yield, and I will be thine forever. At once after this, he rose to the surface, and floated ashore.

I have heard of another case, of a man in his sins, praying for a sick child. God heard, and wonderful to say, God answered, and the case made an impression on his mind which terminated in his speedy conversion.

5. So God hears the young ravens when they cry. So he heard those heathen sailors who were in the ship with Jonah. So he often hears sailors in distress as his word most impressively declares. "God commandeth and raiseth the strong wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven; they go down again to the depths; their soul is melted because of trouble. Then they cry unto the Lord, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then they are glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven." Ps. 107:25-30. Many a sailor knows that God has heard him in his cry of distress. Some of them can gratefully testify--God heard my cry and spared my life; now, therefore, I will serve him as long as I live. How often does God hear such prayer so manifestly as to leave no doubt, and no possibility of reasonable doubting!

II. Let us now ask--Why should we pray for others? Why has God so constituted us that we feel that we may and must pray for others? I answer,

1. They need our prayer. They may be mentally incapable of prayer; or their prayers for themselves may be utterly unavailing. Hence, they need the aid of some one who has power with God to pray for them. I can well remember that, in my own case, full one year before I was married, I had an irresistible conviction on my mind that I should lose my soul if I were to marry any other than a pious wife. I knew I could not pray for myself. An ungodly wife would not pray for me, but would only strengthen me in my

sins. I therefore came fully to the conclusion that I should never marry any other than a pious woman. I had never heard my father or my mother pray, and had no reason to suppose they ever prayed for me. Hence, perhaps I felt the more need of a praying wife. But I have often heard other men say the same in regard to marrying pious wives. This may doubtless be abused; persons may depend too much on others' prayers; children often do, upon the prayers of their parents.

2. We need the exercise of praying for others. It will do us as well as them great good. This we may readily learn from our own experience.

3. Viewing God in his governmental relations and capacities, he needs this intercessory prayer for its influence on his creatures. He wants to interest his people in each other, and to cement their many hearts, as it were, into one. It is his great desire to bring all his people to care for each other and to love each other. Place before your mind the case of a great family. Suppose the father should not encourage his children to ask favors for each other. You say at once this would be very bad. Certainly a wise father would encourage that for the sake of strengthening the bands of mutual sympathy in his household. Some of the best families I ever knew have been remarkable for this. Each of the children were in the habit of asking favors not for himself, but for his brothers or sisters. You can easily see the value of this in a family. Surely its value cannot be less in Gods' great family. It cannot be strange, therefore, that God should encourage his children to expect to be heard when they pray for their brethren and sisters. You can see how important it is that a father should encourage in his children the benevolent spirit of asking favors for each other, and should induce them to do so for the very purpose of cultivating benevolence in their hearts. It certainly is a most salutary arrangement in any family, or indeed in any government. Any good ruler loves to see his people interested in each other. What do you think of that family, ten in number, with which I was acquainted, who were accustomed, when they met each evening around the family altar, to detail briefly the state of their minds to each other, and if anyone was in darkness or in sin, all would unite to pray for that one, or even, if the case seemed to call for it, would set apart an entire day for fasting and prayer in his behalf. Was not that a most admirable practice? Or what would you say of that church which should in this way pray for each other, and help those especially who were in any affliction? And will not

God encourage this spirit among his people? Most assuredly you know it must be so.

Again, prayer for each other draws us into a deeper consideration of each other's wants. When you begin to pray for another, you are compelled to study his character, his temptations, his wants. This opens the way for a richer heart-union.

Again, prayer for others draws us into sympathy with God's love, and with his feelings towards his people. We may blame them more, or may pity them more; or it may be that we shall simply love them more;--but, however this may be, we shall be more likely to have the same mind towards them that God has.

Again, it is intrinsically fit and proper that God should manifest his pleasure in every case of disinterested importunity for the souls of others. The case may be that of a stranger to you, yet your heart becomes deeply engaged and your very soul takes hold of the case; God sees it with delight. What do you want, my child, says he. I want this soul should be converted, you reply. Is there not some propriety in God's being pleased with this prayer? God looks on this suppliant, saying--"You come not to plead for yourself, not for life, not for any temporal good; but for your enemy. You come to pray for your enemy and you want I should convert his soul. I will do it." Indeed, I suppose that, other things being equal, a sincere prayer offered for any enemy is more sure to be granted than any other prayer. But whether offered for an enemy, or for a friend, it is impossible that God should not be greatly influenced by self-sacrificing, really benevolent prayer. He must be if he loves real benevolence, and seeks to promote it among his creatures.

Again, prayer for others needs this encouragement. If we were to pray earnestly for others and God did not regard it, we should lose confidence in prayer, not to say also in God himself.

4. This condescension on his part, is of the utmost importance to the whole universe. They need to know that they can influence the Infinite Mind by prayer for fellow creatures, for this will encourage them to try to help each other by prayer, and will serve to knit the bonds of mutual affection and interest.

5. It is striking to notice how our dependent relations upon each other and upon God multiply the occasions of prayer for each other. It would seem that God loves to create these occasions and to multiply them continually. So he shuts us up by his providence, straitens us all round about, and thus compels us to feel the necessity of prayer. O how he loves to multiply these occasions, and bring up one subject of prayer after another, keeping our hearts ever warm with benevolent interest in our fellow-beings, and drawing us also exceedingly near to himself. All this time he is never weary of giving us audience, and of inviting us into the secret chamber of his love.

6. Prayer for others supplies one important condition in the government of God upon which he can show mercy without detriment to any governmental interests. Every one can readily see that a king might grant a favor to an offender for the sake of a mutual friend, which he could not grant for the offender's sake alone. Suppose a man here in Oberlin has committed a great crime; the Government cannot pardon him on the strength of his own prayer only; but if all Oberlin were to unite their petitions, he might, perhaps, for their sakes, grant the pardon. This principle has a wide and well-known application. Thus a parent might get a blessing for his child. The child may be guilty of high treason, but his father may have rendered so great services to the government, that for the sake of these, and in answer to his prayers, the Governor may honorably and safely pardon him. The Governor would reply to the guilty son--I cannot pardon you for your own sake, but for your father's sake I can. This principle has always been exercised in God's government. For Abraham's sake God could bless Abimelech, and Sarah, and almost Sodom. Noah, Daniel and Job are cited as examples of intercessors whom God would hear except under the extreme circumstances of guilt, when the nation had become really ripe for judgments. God's language to Moses is striking and most significant. It was on the occasion of the golden calf, that the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people; now, therefore, let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them; and I will make of thee a great nation." (Ex. 32:9-10) God could not hear the people, but did hear Moses; indeed, he speaks as if he could not go on in the course of just judgment against the people unless Moses would withdraw his intercession and let him go on. How strong is the view thus given us of the power of prevailing prayer!

7. To pray for others, and to be heard and answered of God in our prayer, serves greatly to increase our love to God in the form of affection, and our love to man in the form of benevolence. No one ever prayed for another, with real prayer, without feeling an increase of love towards that person, no matter whether it be for a stranger or an acquaintance. So if a community or a church pray for some individual, the more they pray, the better they will love. Prayer creates a bond of union between our souls and the souls of those whom we love. Let one pray for others till he prevails; it results in a wonderful sympathy, like that between parent and child. I have seen extraordinary cases of prayer for others, in which a most mysterious connection seemed to be established between the party praying and the party prayed for, the latter seeming to know that blessings came through prayer, and almost adoring and idolizing the source through which they came.

8. We can often obtain for others what they cannot for themselves. Abraham prayed for Abimelech, and obtained for him blessings, for which Abimelech's prayers might have been made in vain. Job prayed successfully for his friends and God heard him when he could not hear them. Moses, in like manner, prayed for Aaron and Miriam, and God's hearing him, when he could not hear them, became a loud rebuke of their envy and pride. This illustrates a great principle in God's government, showing both that God means to encourage intercession for others, and that in order to pray acceptably, persons must stand in favor before God--in a position which does not demand his rebuke, but which does at least justify manifestations of his favor. It is on this principle that God can and will hear the prayers of his humble, obedient, trusting children.

III. I come next to speak of the importance of perseverance in prayer.

1. This text, like that of my last sermon, is designed to teach this doctrine. You will notice how strong the case is made in our present text. "I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity, he will rise and give him as many as he needeth." This, however, does not teach that God's friendship for his people fails to induce him to give, but it is a strong case to show that Christians get for their importunity what they could not get without. There are cases where nothing short of importunity gains the desired blessing. The case of

the Syrophenician woman is to the same point. If she had desisted after the first or the second rebuff, she had surely failed of the great blessing. Daniel prayed on one occasion twenty-one days, and could not give up. At last deliverance came. This being obliged to press out suit so long compels us to study and to understand our case. It leads us into a deeper sympathy with God and with all his views and policy.

2. We can better appreciate the value of the blessing, by how much the more it costs us and the longer we have to pray for it. The more intensely we feel in our prayer for a given case, the more fully we appreciate the blessing when it comes. It supplies a deeper want of our souls and comes with a more refreshing consolation.

3. Such persevering prayer develops all the Christian graces. Especially it develops benevolence, the mother of all the rest. It brings this out in all its rich and varied phases.

4. It is often important that he who prays for another should have time and inducement to remove all obstacles out of the way. It does not, by any means, consist with God's plans of moral government to hear your prayer for the conversion of a soul, so long as you yourself are laying a stumbling-block in his way. God will surely give you time by delaying to answer, for you to search out and remove all such hindrances. Besides, providences must have time and scope to operate. Providential difficulties must be removed out of the way, and time may be requisite for this.

5. Often God delays that he may bring us lower in the dust before him. He leads us into such views that we shall not be puffed up, and such that the blessing, given, shall not injure us. To secure this object, often delays the answer long. We are not low enough, so that he can give us the blessing without mischief to ourselves. Study carefully the case of that Syrophenician woman. Some said, "Send her away, for she crieth after us." Even Christ said he was not sent save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. This was a dash of cold water upon her warm hopes, for it seemed as if Christ intended to discourage her. As if even this were not enough, he finally went so far as to say--"It is not suitable to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs." Did it not seem to her cruel that he should throw this foul Jewish prejudice into her teeth? But mark, what did she do? Did she resent it? Did she turn away discouraged? By no means. She seemed to say-

-You don't mean to put me away; you cannot do that, I know the goodness of your heart too well. So she turned the very rebuke into an argument for her case. Truth, said she, but I do not ask for children's bread; I only want the crumbs that fall from the table, and those it is surely proper to give to dogs. Now look at our blessed Lord. All overcome by such blended humility and importunity and faith, he yielded and cried out, "O, woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." You see the great value of this importunity. All the world over wherever this story has been read, what rich lessons it has taught men on this subject.

The case of Jacob struggling with the angel of the covenant, is in point here. It was only after he had safely passed the crisis, and said, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me," that the Lord blessed him as he prayed.

6. Sometimes God delays for the sake apparently of drawing us into more and mightier prayer. We become straitened, and agonized. Then God puts it into our hearts to do something yet more for the soul prayed for. Our experience in prayer reveals this. Then when we have done it, and are in every respect prepared, God sends an arrow and does the work.

7. Another reason for delay may be, that you may become more deeply unified with the subject of your prayer. Sometimes you pray for a person till you become so unified with him that you say--If that soul goes to hell, I must go with him. I have heard men say this as their own experience in prayer. So Christ himself seems to have prayed for his dying people. He grasped the masses, saying--I must save them or sink to hell with them. Paul had a like experience when he said--"I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." So, often God waits and delays his answer to prayer till the suppliant becomes so unified that in sympathy they cannot be separated. Moses said--"Save this people, or blot my name from this book." I have seen precisely this in many cases. The Holy Ghost gives them such sympathy with the person they pray for, and such a hold of God's promise in prayer, they cry out--I cannot live unless God hear and save! How can I live and see this people die! Now, God loves this spirit and often waits till it comes up. In the case of parents, God frequently waits till they take hold of the case of their children in this very way. I well remember the striking case of a father who was so agonized in prayer for his children he told them he could not live unless he

could see the salvation of the Lord among them.

IV. But why do not men pray more for others?

1. Mainly because they are not benevolent, but selfish only. They are selfish in all the little prayer they do make.
2. Or, sometimes, they are skeptical and unbelieving, and for this reason they do not lay out their strength in prayer. Or, they are presumptuous, and assume that somebody else will pray enough to answer all purposes. Or, they are too carnal to have any spirit of prayer. Ah, they do not care for the souls of the perishing. Their tender mercies even, are cruel. They see sinners going to hell, but are too carnal to pray for them. They offer no earnest, no agonizing prayer.

REMARKS.

1. Brethren, what is your state of mind in regard to the various objects of prayer around you? How do you feel for the young people gathered here? Do you sympathize earnestly in prayer for the elder members of the church? What is your state of mind towards the impenitent? Are you praying in earnest for those who have long time remained impenitent among us? Do you feel deeply for the strangers who are coming among us? Will you allow me to ask you in all faithfulness, have you the spirit of prayer for others? As a preacher, I think I can tell when you pray by the light I experience in my own mind when I study my sermons, and by the effect my words produce on the minds of my hearers. Do you not know that when some are agonizing in prayer, some sinners are correspondingly struggling under conviction? Just in proportion to the amount and power of struggling prayer will be the struggles of those who are smitten with arrows of convicting truth.

2. Some of you who once prayed with earnestness and power, I fear have lost that spirit, or have let it sorely languish. Let me ask you all--Have you as much of the spirit of prayer as you once had? Do you feel bowed down with grief because God's work revives no more? Some of you can answer in the affirmative; but some of you cannot. Some of you must say in truth, there has been a great falling off in prayer, and in interest for souls. On one occasion, as I was preaching on this subject, a man who was represented to be one of the most pious men in the church rose and said, "I am the man--Mr. Finney, you need not

say another word; I am the Achan in this camp of Israel; you need not look any further for the Achan--I am he." What he said seemed to have more effect than everything else in the meeting, and was the commencement of a glorious revival.

3. To the students present, let me say--Are you aware how much you can do by praying for each other? Are you in the habit of meeting in little circles for this purpose? Are some of your classmates in their sins, and can you let them live and die so? Are you not in fault for their impenitence? Have you set your heart so intensely upon the conversion of these souls that you cannot live unless they are converted?

4. And will you not all pray for your teachers and stay up their hands and make their hearts strong by your sympathies and your prayers in their behalf? Cry unto God for them that they may be made mighty through God for the converting and saving of precious souls. O, if all the church were filled with the spirit of prayer, what a rush we should see towards the kingdom of heaven, even this very night! What is your practice during our meetings of enquiry? Are you instant in prayer then? It always alarms me in a church to find that few or none enquire about the state of these meetings with anxious sinners. It shows that the hearts of the people are not there. Brethren, do you pray for those who have set their faces enduringly towards Zion?

[Back to Top](#)

On Being Almost Persuaded to be a Christian

Lecture III

March 14, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Acts 26:28: "Agrippa said unto Paul -- almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

Discussing the subject presented here, I shall,

I. Notice the fact that men are made Christians by persuasion.

II. Show what are not reasons why they are not altogether persuaded.

III. What are the reasons why they are only almost and not altogether persuaded.

I. Men are made Christians by persuasion.

1. You recollect the connection, which gives us the occasion and the circumstances of this remark. Paul had been arrested and brought before Agrippa to defend himself against the Jews. In this defense he gives his early history, a sketch of his conversion to the faith of Christ, then, of his labors and persecutions subsequent to that event, and finally appeals to Agrippa himself, as if assured that one, familiar with Judaism as he was, must believe the ancient prophets, and hence could not reasonably reject Jesus of Nazareth. "King Agrippa, said he, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest." "Agrippa answered, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." To which Paul nobly responds, "I would to God that not only thou, but all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds."

2. Paul had so preached that Agrippa felt almost persuaded to become a Christian. Of course under Paul's preaching, men naturally inferred that the change from being a sinner to being a Christian is wrought by persuasion. Assuming that Paul preached not only the true gospel, but in the truest method and with the soundest philosophy, we infer that men become Christians by means of persuasion. Consequently, they do not become Christians by virtue of any physical change in the substance of either soul or body. It is not, strictly speaking, by any act of creation, an act which gives existence to either substance or qualities, not existent before. Persuasion requires no new creation of faculties. It supposes a mind already in existence and in action, capable of appreciating truth as a motive. Men are persuaded by truth -- truth which addresses the intelligence and appeals to conscience or to some form of self-interest. Thus men are persuaded to become Christians.

3. Now here I do not by any means intend to say that this persuasion is merely human. Far otherwise. It is far more divine than human. There is such an interposition of divine agency as sets truth in order before the mind,

and brings forth its strength. Thus to human persuasion is superadded the divine. Yet the influence is altogether of a moral nature.

4. We are compelled to the same conclusion by the nature of this change. If the change were in the substance of the soul, or in any of its original, created powers, we might then assume that the power by which the change is wrought is creative, not moral. But since the change consists entirely in the voluntary attitude of the mind towards God, we infer that it is caused by those agencies which are adapted to produce voluntary change in the mind's free action -- viz., truth and argument, assuming the form of motive. Hence, in every point of view, it is plain that men are made Christians by persuasion.

II. It is next pertinent to inquire what are not the reasons why men fail of being persuaded to become Christians.

Ordinarily, it is not for want of intellectual conviction that they ought to become Christians. For the most part, in Christian lands, the gospel has been preached so fully and so truly that the general intelligence is enlightened, and all men know that they ought to put away sinning and embrace the salvation provided for them in the gospel. They fail to do this, not for want of sufficient reasons to carry conviction that they ought to. Especially, we may say, that almost everyone has light enough before his mind to carry conviction of this duty, if he were honest and would weigh this question seriously and with candor.

The real and exact difficulty is, they do not make up their mind to obey the decisions of conscience and their better judgment. They are not so persuaded as to determine to act now. For the most part they hope to become Christians at some time. As Agrippa, so they, do not yield to their convictions. Selfish considerations overrule their better judgment.

Here I may safely appeal to your own consciences. Let me come very near to you, even as if I were alone with you and were to urge upon your honest hearts this plain question. Is it not a matter of fact that you are in reason and conscience convinced that you ought to become Christians, but yet you suffer some selfish reasons to prevail over you, and deter you from doing manifest duty? You know you ought to do it; you know the reasons why you do not are utterly unsound -- radically selfish!

III. Let us see what these reasons are -- the reasons why you are only almost persuaded to become a Christian.

1. Ambitious schemes. This is the case especially with the young, and particularly with students. Often the young become students for the sake merely of distinction. They cherish worldly aims. They are determined that, for themselves, they will become something. They are to be prominent. Hence, when you come to such a young man with the gospel offers, his first thought is -- how will my reception of these offers affect my cherished plans of aggrandizement? Ah, how can I become a Christian at the sacrifice of the favorite object of my life and labors? You exhort him to yield his will to God's so that henceforth he shall have no schemes but such as please God. Alas, he says, but I have schemes of my own that are too dear to my heart to be relinquished yet. Is it not even so with you who are yet young, but not converted? Have you not some ambitious schemes which you seek to realize, and which you suppose are in conflict with the higher claims of the gospel?

This is for many reasons more often the case with young men than with young women, yet is sufficiently apt to occur with the latter, in some seductive form, and of such power as to overrule all the demands of conscience.

2. Many are kept back from a full persuasion by some subtle form of self-righteousness. He cannot quite affirm to himself or to others that he has no sin; and yet he does allow himself to think he has never done anything so very wrong, but has always done about right. He has not been a liar, nor an adulterer. He can almost say with Saul of Tarsus, "I have lived in all good conscience before God." He thinks, and perhaps truly, that he has had many good feelings; kindly, humane impulses, and these he is sure are good. Really he has no heart to renounce all his self-righteousness as filthy rags that cannot profit. He might consent in a very general sense to be indebted to Christ for his salvation, but to renounce all self-righteousness and do all that is implied in being a Christian, he cannot.

3. Some have too much self-will. Often and for a long time, have they been urged and have resisted, until habitually ascendancy of the will has given it giant strength, and it can easily overrule every appeal which conscience or God can make.

4. Some even indulge resentment against God, or against His servants. Supposing themselves to have been abused because something has been done by somebody, they fancy they do well to be angry. Thus they harbor a spirit directly opposed to the spirit of the gospel, and this suffices to overrule all the arguments which are presented to induce them to become Christians.

5. Those who have advanced in age to middle life, have their schemes of ambition, or their plans of business, so that when you make your appeal to them, they have interests that repel it. To you who occupy this period of life, I appeal, if it be not even so. When the gospel has come to you, demanding your attention, and even the warmest reception you can give it, has not some scheme of business or ambition stood in your way and held you back? The political aspirant has too many hopes excited, and has committed himself too fully to his political friends; how can he turn away to be religious? Some years ago, I knew a young man of fine talents and extra-ordinary powers of persuasion, who, from a course of preparation for the ministry, was drawn into public life; studied law -- lost his piety -- claimed at first that benevolence called him into that department of labor, but soon he showed that he was ambitious as Caesar, and that really he had no conscience, but that of saleable politicians. Such men are in political bondage. Like Agrippa, they owe their place to some higher functionaries, and are intensely sensitive to their own position and standing as before that higher influence. Agrippa held his place under Rome; so did Pilate; therefore neither of them had independence of soul enough, in a position of so much dependence, to be a whole man. Many now, like them, are in political bondage to Caesar. Mark how Pharisees and rulers of synagogues bore themselves towards Jesus and His cause, and you see, as in a mirror, true to nature, how most political men are in such bondage that they will not break away enough to comply with their sense of duty. I have in mind the case of a gentleman who became greatly disturbed in respect to his salvation. I saw him often and urged him to give himself to the service of God. That, he replied, is a step I can by no means take, without the consent of my political friends. I have long been in the habit of consulting them in all matters which might affect my standing before the community. Furthermore, all my religious friends think differently from you. And my worldly friends, I am quite sure, would be opposed to my becoming a

Christian in this revival. How, said he, can I look my friends in the face if I were to become a Christian? I answered, "how can you look God in the face, if you do not?" He said. "I am always in the habit of consulting my friends in matters so important; I will do so in the present case, and then will see you again." I told him I already knew how such a course would result, and had no hopes that could be disappointed. And so it proved. I mention the case only as an illustration of the political bondage into which many fall.

6. Some men have a pride of personal character which prevents their becoming Christians. One says, "My wife has become converted, and I shall be deemed weak as a woman if I change now." I have heard men taunt one another, asking, "Will you be persuaded to be religious by such and such a preacher? Will you be one of his disciples?" So it might have been said to Agrippa, "Are you almost persuaded by the prisoner, Paul? By a man who stands before you in chains, and you the honorable judge upon the bench? Will you change your religion and go over to one whom all Jews hold to be a heretic?"

7. In some cases, the hindering cause is sheer infatuation. They know the truth on all important points; they will say, "I know it all." Why, then, don't you yield? "I can't tell why." Then, the reason is, simple infatuation in sin.

8. Another reason is a spirit of deep contempt for God.

Those who feel this may not be fully conscious of it; but such is the fact. God's rights do not weigh, in their minds, as a straw. You may talk to them of God's right to govern them; you make no sort of impression. What is the reason of this? It is not that they regard God's claims as a dream of somebody's imagination, and deny the fact; but it is because they have a deep and overpowering contempt for God, and therefore no appeal on that ground reaches their sensibility -- nothing arouses them to action. So deep and so utter is their want of moral honesty, every appeal based on God's rights falls powerless. In their esteem, moral obligation is equivalent to no obligation at all. There is in their minds a total lack of all honorable sentiments, feelings and principles of action, as towards God. Not one sentiment of honor toward the great God! Does honor bind the child to revere his parent? What would you say of one who had been dependent on you for everything, and yet should totally disregard all his obligations to you? Suppose the obligation to

be the greatest possible from man to man; and the disregard to be as utter as the sinner manifests towards God, how would you feel? Horrified! You would have such feelings of indignation, you could scarcely think of the offender with calmness. And yet what are the utmost obligations of man to man, compared with those of all men towards God?

9. Add to this a total destitution of true self-respect. What? shall I shame my own face by refusing to do my duty? Can a man have true self-respect, who, knowing his obligation, refuses to become a Christian? Certainly if he respected himself, he never could disobey, refuse, and dishonor his God! What! shall I be such a wretch as to abuse my God? No! I would as soon leap into hell as dishonor Christ and pour contempt on my infinite Father! The very thought of so outraging His feelings is horrible. Sooner would I suffer anything in the world than the self-aborrence and self-condemnation which must result from such contempt of God!

10. Add to this a total destitution of all benevolence, which must of course be the case with all those who will not become Christians.

11. Next, a total recklessness in regard to the evils of a course of impenitence. Said one man, as his eyes began to be opened to see himself, "The thought that I was giving my whole influence against Christ and against the salvation of souls, came home upon my conscience as an awful sin! I was appalled at myself!" Suppose a man could sit in his window, open towards the street, and there load and fire his rifle into the thronging masses, just for amusement. How horrible must his state of mind be! You, sinner, may not be firing leaden balls into quivering flesh, but you are sending forth streams of influence that damn souls to eternal death! You reply, "I do not tell them not to become Christians." Aye, not with your lips, perhaps, but with your life! -- a thing far worse, more surely fatal and more widely and terrible destructive! Not those who say most, or sin most openly, do most hurt; but your most moral sinners, who are quite intelligent, and know best their duty, yet are far -- O how far from doing it! A fair moral man, of high standing -- what can he not do for mischief? Look at that young man, accomplished, popular and moral; he has such control over the minds of the young people in his village, that you can do nothing to turn them from sin to God. Is it said -- then pray for him? You cannot. It will do no good. Preach a sermon to meet his case; he will pick it all to pieces. You

cannot talk to him, he knows so much and frames his objections so skillfully. What makes all this mischief? That young man happens to possess the very attributes that give him the power to do great mischief. He can do more harm than all the rowdies in town.

So of a young woman who is accomplished and moral, yet withholds her heart from God. She is altogether in the way of saving souls, and all the more because she has so much morality. I saw a young lady of this description enter a sick room where lay one of her young associates, just passing away to the realities of another world. Calling forward this moral sinner, she reached forth her pale hand, saying, "I am not a Christian because I leaned on you. You were so moral and so happy in sin, you had the greatest influence over me, and I easily put off the claims of my God and Savior." That young lady trembled and begged to be excused that she might retire from such a scene, but the dying girl said, "No, no; you must hear me now, my last words. How could you let me go on in my sins! Oh, my soul is lost!"

The great difficulty with sinners is that they take a selfish view of the whole subject. Having fully committed themselves to their own interests, all considerations are viewed in a selfish light. They regard nothing, save as it addresses either their hopes or their fears. If this striking fact were properly considered, it would show the need and the character of the divine Spirit's influences.

Sinners, taking only a selfish view of God's claims, are not at all prepared to take a disinterested view of the subject. They are not prepared to become Christians, although they are quite prepared to look around and see if they cannot become more happy.

12. Once more, many are not fully persuaded now because they expect in some way to have another call and a better opportunity. Full of hope as to this, they consequently deceive themselves. Often conscious that they egregiously trifle with their own souls, they yet are so reluctant to meet God's claims today that they let it slide over. They say, "I am not yet persuaded to become a Christian, but when God's resistless power comes down upon me, then I shall yield."

13. In fact, when you get at the bottom of the case, you find they are desperately depraved. Their depravity is so deep, so radical, it bids defiance

to all your motives for persuasion. Sometimes the sense of being greatly obliged, breaks down a really hard heart. But even this consideration many sinners can resist. The sense of being loved and pitied of God, makes some impression on their hearts, but often fails to move them much. So dead are they to the attractions of the morally beautiful and true, that much of the most glorious truth concerning God, seems to fall powerless upon their hearts. They seem incapable of being moved by anything save it be some hope of greater selfish good. For the honor of God they care not. If they could get anything from Him to promote their own selfish good, they would be ready to grasp it. For God, they care not. They would not care if He were dead. If their course were to bring mischief on Him, they would not care. They know they act meanly, cruelly, wickedly towards God; yet they are not persuaded to desist from this course and forsake their sins. Specify some particular form of sin; bring it before their mind; convince them they had better forsake it, yet they will not. In fact, a besotted will not is the only reason why they do not.

REMARKS.

1. Sin is the greatest mystery in this world. How can it be accounted for? I have often wondered at the case of men convinced of duty, who yet will persist in their sins, despite the utmost reason to forsake them. Sometimes they seem to be infatuated. In fact, they are. It is a spiritual infatuation!

2. How strange to hear sinners object to the mysteries of religion. Indeed! They assume that there is something vastly mysterious in religion, and therefore they cannot embrace it! There can be no greater mystery than sin! All the mysteries in religion are as nothing compared with the mystery of sinning! It is safe to say that if we had not facts to prove it, nobody could believe that men would persist in sin as they do, despite all conceivable reasons to the contrary course. What can be more strange? Sin is indeed a mystery so deep, who can tell what it is and why it is? Surely, no sinner can tell. See that sinner hold his soul, as it were, in his hand, play with it as with a top, and then in the face of Calvary, throw it into hell! Knowing full well that sin brings him no good, but only evil; assured, too, that all good is given by piety, he can yet throw his soul away, for nothing! Truly, this is one of the mysteries of the universe, to be resolved into the sovereignty of a free agent abusing his liberty of free action, having been created with power to abuse it at his own option.

3. The infatuation of the sinner is an obvious fact. People may abuse Adam and other agencies tending to sin, as much as they please. Yet they cannot help knowing that this infatuation is a matter of their own, and that whatever relation it may bear to any other beings or agencies in the universe, themselves alone are to blame for their own sin. They inwardly know that they are the sole authors of their own sin, how much so ever other agencies may have been its occasions and temptations. The dreadful infatuation lives and reigns in their own souls. Suppose you were to see thousands of people rushing towards and over a precipice, and should also see all sorts of influences thrown in their way to stop them; fathers and mothers rushing in before them with imploring cries, beseeching them to stop -- pleading, rebuking, yet all in vain; on they go, and over, and down, down they plunge, with eyes wide open; how astonishing! Whole oceans of men, rushing down the steep of death -- an army of maniacs! No wonder that when Christians get their eyes open to this fearful scene, they almost die! They would if they were long subjected to this dreadful view without some sort of alleviation. You hear them saying, "Lord, I shall surely die unless Thou interpose to save these sinners, or in some way relieve me from this dreadful position of seeing souls perish before my very eyes!"

4. How shocking to hear sinners claim that they are doing about right, while yet they live in utter sin against God and the Lamb! They claim that they have none but honorable feelings and sentiments, and even talk of their moral honesty! What a burlesque upon the truth is all such talk as this! Especially, how strange is it that such sinners should set themselves up for reformers! There is something supremely ridiculous in these pretensions to be reformers. They, who have not the first particle of genuine benevolence -- who can rob God of everything they owe Him, yet profess to love the poor slave and the poor inebriate! How deep does this love go down? Is there any moral bones in it at all? If I am morally honest, can I rob and abuse my own mother? Having done just this and all this, can I then turn around and make pretensions to honor and propriety? Yet the sinner, having robbed God all his life-time, pretends to honor, and even to practice, righteousness!

5. When a man has all needful convictions of duty, he is then and thenceforth, without excuse. Every honest man's position is this: Show me what I ought to do, and I will do it. No other question need be asked than this one -- Ought I to do this? This question settled, nothing more is needed. To settle the question of oughtness, and then stop there without doing duty, is to tempt God. It is to

provoke Him to consuming wrath! Such a sinner is utterly without excuse. "I know, says he, that I ought to do this." Then you must do it -- as you would be a man, and would acquit yourself of a man's responsibilities! Say -- "Anything that is my duty, I will do at all hazards; if it be my duty, I will begin now!" But to see intelligent and moral beings throw all these obligations and convictions to the winds -- how fearful!

6. For sinners to wait God's time to repent, is infinitely absurd. God's time is now; you wait, just to miss His time and provoke Him to deny you any more time at all. You are persuaded of your duty now. What more do you ask of God than this? What more can you in reason desire of God than that He should reveal to you your condition, your peril, your way of escape, and the reasons which urge you to flee for help to the Lamb of Calvary? All this He has done; and now, in tones of love and pity, calls on you to give heed to His call. Will you do it?

[Back to Top](#)

On Neglecting Salvation

Lecture IV

April 11, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Heb. 2:3: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

Every thing about this question invests it with solemn interest and presses us to ask--What does it mean? Escape what? If we neglect so great salvation, what shall we not escape?

The question itself plainly implies that there is danger of something, and presupposes that you are likely to neglect, and if so, are certain to incur some fearful evil. His very mode of asking the question shows that there can be no answer--none of such sort as would show how an escape can be secured. You must be saved from something;--must make an effort to secure that salvation;--neglecting this effort, you cannot escape.

The writer conceives of this salvation as great. If you attend carefully to the context you will see that he had in eye a particular reason for representing this salvation as great. You will notice that he opens his epistle by saying--"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son"--"appointed heir of all things," "by whom He made the worlds"--above all the angels--spoken of often in the scriptures as really God. "Therefore, says the writer, we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard lest at any time we should let them slip." For if--under the old economy--the word revealed from God to men by means of angels, was sanctioned of God, and every form of disobedience was visited with retribution; "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" This salvation was first distinctly preached by the Lord Himself, and has since been confirmed unto us by those who heard Him, and by many miracles wrought of God to endorse their mission.

From this hasty sketch of the context , it is plain that the apostle conceived of Christ as infinitely above the angels through whom God revealed His law under the old economy. Indeed, the Father called Him God, and commanded all the angels to worship Him. Then turning to the history of the Jewish dispensation he alludes to the well-known fact that every insult shown to the word as published by angels was sternly punished, and on this fact, coupled with the transcendent greatness of the Son of God, he bases his appeal--How can we escape if we neglect so great salvation? If sin against God's word by angels was so surely and fearfully punished, how much more, sin against the word that comes through His equal Son!

This was obviously the particular thing before Paul's mind when he pronounced this salvation great;--yet he does not by any means imply that this salvation is great in this respect only. I shall therefore proceed now to designate certain other respects in which this salvation may be seen to be great.

I. The greatness of this salvation must correspond to the greatness of that evil from which it saves us.

II. It must correspond, also, to the greatness of that positive good which it confers.

III. Neglect of salvation.

IV. Reasons for this neglect of salvation.

I. The greatness of this salvation must correspond to the greatness of that evil from which it saves us.

1. By how great soever the ruin wrought and threatened by sin, by so much must this salvation be great; and again, by how great soever the glory to which it exalts the saved sinner, by so much is it great. Its greatness then, is well and truly measured by the woes of hell and the bliss of heaven.

2. But to enter somewhat more into particulars;--This gospel saves from sinning;--yea, from endless sinning. It must be a great thing for a man to be saved from endless sinning, and the more apparently great after he has reached a point in his career of sinning where he is borne along by his passions, and under the influence of an iron habit, from which there is not the least hope that he will extricate himself. This is the condition of many sinners. Of all sinners, it is true that they never will turn from sin of themselves alone; but of some, it seems more emphatically and terribly true, for their habits become so fixed, that they seem almost to defy Omnipotence. For such to be saved from sinning is truly by a miracle of mercy and of power.

3. This is also a great salvation because it saves from endless suffering. There have been great speculations about the nature and degree of this suffering. For example, it has been asked--Will it be (in the future world) merely governmental,--consisting in some form of punitive infliction; or will it be wholly natural, resulting naturally from sin itself?

But what difference does this make in regard to the comfort or discomfort of the suffering? Pain is pain, and it matters little to the sufferer whether it comes in one form or in another. In the sinner's case, the suffering comes ultimately from God as punishment for his sin;--how then can it much concern him whether it comes directly from Jehovah's hand in the form of inflicted penalty, or indirectly, through such a constitution, physical and mental, that sin brings its own consequences of sorrow and woe? God creates the constitution, and of intent makes it such that sin begets pain,--to some extent,--here;--to an infinite extent, hereafter. Small difference, indeed, does it make to the sufferer. If the suffering be eternal, and eternally increasing,

this is sufficiently awful, let it come in one form or in another; and if so much be granted, it makes only the least imaginable difference in which form it may come.

(1.) Another question is raised--to wit: in respect to the degree of this suffering. Some years since, I preached a sermon touching this point, which was reviewed, In that sermon I assumed that the capacity for suffering must increase with the increase of knowledge and of suffering also. To this the reviewer replied that, in the present life, men make progress to a certain point, but no farther; and hence, he argued that progress here fails to prove eternal progress there.

(2.) It is enough to say in reply to him, that the fact he adduces results so obviously from physical causes, and causes connected with the general laws of decay and dissolution in this mortal state, that no inference can be drawn from it to abate the force of the general law of progress which obtains in regard to mind in all positions which admit of progress.

(3.) But suppose all that the reviewer contended for to be true. Suppose the suffering to be endless, yet not eternally increasing, but on the other hand, unchanging and a constant quantity. Nay, go farther if you please in that direction, and suppose it to be in degree, the very least possible. Even so, how dreadful must an eternity of such suffering be! Think how long! Consider how utterly even this supposition cuts the soul off from real bliss through the entire period of its existence

An illustration, given by some divine of other days, may help you to gain some conception of the duration of eternity, suppose this earth to be a mass of sand, and God sends, once in a thousand years, a small bird to take away, in its little bill, just one grain. At the end of one thousand years, he comes and takes away another grain--and so on, till the earth is all removed, This would be only time, not eternity, This, even, would by no means, measure eternity.

(4.) But suppose, further that all the bodies in the solar system were, in like manner, composed of sand-particles, and one by one, at a thousand years' interval, they should be removed till they were all gone. This too, would only be time, not eternity, Nay, advance still to a

supposition indefinitely more vast: suppose that every star in the universe is a sun in its system, and that not one of these systems is less vast than our own; and then let the period necessary for the removal,--or, if you choose so to regard it--the annihilation of this universe of matter --one grain each thousand years--be made our measure of duration; this, too, is time, not eternity. For this vast duration must come to an end. The poor, forlorn sufferer would have at least this small consolation--I shall surely live to see an end of this long and bitter woe But now, he has outlived the entire period necessary in this supposed process for the complete annihilation of the material universe, he must still say--My woe is only just begun. It has not made the least approach towards its termination. There is just as much duration to suffer as when he began.

O, what an idea is that, of eternity!

Now it matters not, as I have already said, whether the suffering is in its nature governmental, or is merely natural. If one grain of earth's sand measures each thousand years, and all the material universe were sand, eternity is long enough to remove it all. Think of an endless duration, and what have you before your mind! There being no limit in that direction, it matters little whether the suffering be of the sort or of another. Of very little consequence, indeed, must it be if a man could make it appear that all this suffering is natural, or that it is all governmental; or even that it does not eternally increase. The amount in any given period may be greater, or it may be less; but the great final result is, to our conception but slightly affected, by any of these things, so long as it is eternal. This infinite duration is the dreadful fact! If the soul must exist endlessly, the final result is substantially the same. Think of this scene of woe, so long that even the tallest angel cannot remember when it began! No matter how small its amount in any given period;--if endless in duration, how awful!

II. But this salvation is by no means merely negative.

1. It does not merely save from this inconceivable amount of misery; it bestows endless and immeasurable blessedness.
2. On this side of the scale, also, we may say--if it be endless, it matters little how small it be in amount, for any given period. But when you

consider that the scriptures place it before us as blessedness, rich, full, deep, ever-flowing, everyone's cup swelling, enlarging to all eternity, and always full;--what a sublime and thrilling idea is this!

III. Neglect of salvation.

1. It is a wonderful fact that this great salvation is neglected by so many persons. It is one of the most unaccountable things that occur in this strange world! What a mystery!--that men should neglect this salvation is when they admit the reality of those evils and dangers from which it saves them. They admit this salvation to be a good thing, nay more, an indispensable thing; that, considered as a remedy it is not one which will come, whether they attend to it, or not. They know that the evil impending forces itself upon them, even as death does--as a thing that can by no means be averted, only as they accede to God's mode of deliverance.

2. Further, they admit the guilt and danger of neglect to be very great;--they know that every moment's delay may be fatal -- that any single moment of their lives may seal their destiny and consign them beyond hope to everlasting destruction; and that this is true not only of delay in general, but of this present moment's delay--and yet they strangely linger. Now, is it not strange that men should delay so ! Suppose the interest at stake were the title to a man's estate. If one moment's delay might prove fatal, what a rush would be made to secure it! Just in proportion to the greatness of the interest at stake, and the imminence of danger from delay, would be the eagerness to ensure the prize. O how would men rush to the means of ensuring an earthly treasure! On every other subject but this of salvation, men would act rationally, and would by no means let slip a great treasure by default of vigorous exertion;--but on this subject you cannot move them!

3. The strangeness of the sinner's course is seen yet more fully in the fact that he will postpone attending to the salvation of his soul for the sake of giving his attention to the merest trifles. If men were to neglect their souls for great and good reasons only, it were not so strange, but that they should do so for trifles is beyond measure strange.

4. It is yet more strange that men should deliberately shape their plans to neglect this salvation, while they as deliberately plan to get for themselves every sort of inferior good. They plan to eat, to sleep and to journey--to get

riches, and learning, and fame; but they leave no place to attend to this greatest of all concerns. Having laid all their plans so as effectually to exclude this, they then make their business their excuse for not attending to their souls. Devotees of pleasure excuse themselves, for they are entirely occupied; and men of business, of course, are under too much pressure to think of turning aside for such a matter as the salvation of their soul. Thus they make one sin their excuse for still doing wickedly!

5. Many students make no sort of calculation for attending to their own salvation. They definitely plan out their time so as to exclude attention to their hearts. When they have filled up every hour, they plead that they have no place left for the concerns of their souls.

6. Many professed Christians even seem to lay their plans so as to make no progress in spirituality. They definitely calculate on getting all other things that they deem valuable--learning, wealth, all earthly good; but they put their religion last and lowest in the scale. When everything else has had all the attention they care to give it, then they may be ready to cultivate their spirituality. It is most remarkable that such persons never do much to purpose for either their own souls or the souls of others.

7. It is affecting to observe how difficult it is, when men have laid their plans for worldly good, to get them to change, and seek first their God. Even of professed Christians this is often true. They cannot go, with cheerful steps, even to a prayer-meeting. If they go at all, they are very late, to make the time as short as possible, and then they come with hearts full of the world. Instead of giving up their worldly plans and saying--"I must have salvation; my plans are all wrong from the beginning--all selfish in their spirit--and I must wash out all the past and begin a new life;"--instead of this, I say they cling ever more to their cherished plans. Perhaps I have told you how my mind became pinched under the pressure of this sort of question, after I had accepted the Bible as from God. When God's claims began to come home to my conscience, I said to myself, How do I know but God will want me to give my profession,--(to which I was very much attached,) and of so, what shall I do? This question grasped my conscience terribly, for I saw that becoming religious implied giving up my business, or, at least, making it entirely subject to God's control. Perhaps, said I, God will want me to go on a mission, or, at least, to preach the gospel. Can I

consent to do it? The impression came down heavily on my mind--God wants you to preach his gospel! He does not want you to follow the law. Then I said--I have never consulted God at all in reference to the business of my life, though He has given Christ to redeem me and watch over me all my life long to do me good. I must do so now and henceforth! I ought to know what God would have me do, and I must know. I must not go on in this way.

The great point was now gained; I began to act as a rational being should, and God shed light on my path. Now, perhaps some of you, young people, have never asked God whether He wants you to get an education, and for what purpose. Some of you may have asked this question prayerfully; others not. If you have not, how do you know what God would have you do? Is it not plain that this neglect, on your part, amounts to moral insanity? Who of you all does not admit that you ought to attend to the great business for which God sent you into this world? Have you ever asked God to show you what your special errand in this world is? Suppose an angel should meet you today and should say--have you attended yet to the great business for which you were sent into the world? In the stillness of the midnight hour, you open your eyes and lo, an angel of God is before you--and he asks if you have done anything, after so long towards executing the mission for which you were sent into the world. O, how you are smitten with dread and horror when he tells you that, if you have not, he is commissioned to demand your soul! "This night," he cries, "thy soul is required of thee! "Then, you will readily believe that to neglect the great business of life, when you knew what it was, is indeed the worst insanity! O, take care of your soul; don't lose it; the treasures of eternity are in its welfare--and how can you throw them all away!

IV. What are your reasons for this neglect of salvation?

1. Not ignorance, for you know your duty. Not the force of circumstance, for they have not excluded you from God and from due attention to his claims. There is no important reason. Could you study better without religion? Not so well. Would you be more happy without it? Nay, but far less so. Can you assign any reason for this neglect? What can it mean? Is it not moral insanity?
2. The only reason you can assign is that you love what God hates. You are

not willing to be saved from your sins. The gospel comes to save you from your sins, but you are not willing to be saved from what you so much love!

3. You care not how much evil you do by neglecting this great salvation. The evil you inflict on your classmates and near friends is often fatal--yet how little do you care! suppose one of those friends should die this night! You have seduced him along in sin, and have really made him neglect the salvation of his soul. He is about to die. Looking up earnestly into your eye, he says--My soul is lost! Feel of my pulse. In a few minutes I shall be in hell!

He is gone! There; he opens his eyes in hell! My room-mate, my class-mate; my dear friend--in hell! O! Alas! a soul is lost, and that, through my influence, I have done nothing to save him. I might have saved him if I had done my duty. Alas, that a soul should be in hell through my neglect! Example is the highest influence. If you neglect this great salvation, you are doing all that you can to induce others to do the same. Your example urges them on in that course, with greater power than anything else you can do or say.

4. Do not presume upon God's forbearance. You probably think you may presume without losing your soul. You think God is too good to cut you down in your sins;--but you may find He is too good to spare you--too good to let you allure others down to hell -too good to let you accumulate more guilt, and make your eternal doom more dreadful. Ought He not to be afraid lest your example should ruin other souls? Ah, you may provoke Him to pass His hand over your pale brow and take your equity, oh, mighty man! So a man might vainly presume that he could burn down buildings, and murder innocent people, and yet escape punishment, because the magistrate is a good-hearted man. Take care, sinner, lest the very goodness you rely on to save you should secure your destruction! It is the worst of all folly to neglect this great salvation because you know that God is merciful.

5. Mere neglect secures the soul's ruin.

6. Many seem to suppose that heaven is a place, and of such sort that access to it turns not at all on fitness of character. Some, also, suppose that death has great sanctifying power, and will, of itself, make them quite fit for heaven, Or, they think God is so good He will take them to heaven without

insisting on a new heart. Yet the very least consideration ought to show men that they must be radically changed in character, and be sanctified by the truth of the gospel, or they can never see the Lord. According to the plain and uniform teaching of the Bible, this renewal must take place in this life. The means for it are to be used here, and here they must take their effect. What is death but the gate-way to the eternal world--to the sinner, the door by which he passes from earth and goes down to hell. There is nothing in the door to change his character or his destiny! Neither to expect this. Then why do men live on in this way?

7. Neglect ought to be fatal. There is not a conscience in the universe which does not say it ought to be. If men will neglect the richest provisions God could make for their salvation, there is a moral fitness in His holding them to the legitimate results of their folly, and giving them the doom they so richly deserve.

8. Neglect, even so long as through the period of youth, is generally fatal. Young persons are prone to assume that they can safely neglect their souls for a season, while amusements press on their attention, and other engagements engross their regard; but while they sport and God is waiting, time flies away, and often the day of grace shuts down upon them, closing in hopeless night. The day of hope is gone, and their neglect has proved fatal.

9. To make up the mind only for once to neglect salvation, often proves fatal. It may be your intention to delay but one hour, or till you can go from the house of God to your home: and yet that one short delay may be just once too many. That call from God may have been the very last! You turned away, and soon you found that your soul was left in darkness--that your moral sensibilities were dead--that a deep spiritual desolation had come over you, consequent on that one fatal purpose to delay. It was said of one--"He wist not that the Lord had departed from him." So, many a sinner, after he has turned God away. It often happens that those who are guilty of one deliberate act of turning away from God find themselves devoid of moral sensibility and utterly without conviction of sin.

10. Persons may as well neglect wholly as to give attention in the way many do. They attend just enough to deceive themselves, yet not enough to make any real progress. This is true of some professors of religion. They

make no progress in sanctification; they grow no better; but rather worse. They keep up the forms of family prayer, and just enough of the forms of religion generally to keep up the strong delusion that they are on their way to heaven. Thus they manage to quiet their fears, and prop up a ruinous hope. No doubt hundreds of thousands are doing this continually. Many of you, I fear, are in this very career of self-deception--just giving attention enough to delude yourselves along on a hope that must perish when God shall take away your soul. You do not half enough to keep your souls in the atmosphere of God's love; but only enough to coast along under the trade winds of death, hard upon the rocks of damnation! All along your course, you might, if you would listen, hear the roar of the breakers under your bow. Ah, ere you are aware you are gone!

You know you are not laboring for souls. Really, you are doing nothing at all in that great work, although you know God has told you to "have compassion on them," and "pull them out of the fire." What are you doing? Only just enough to keep alive your hope. The devil wants you to do so much -- just enough to work out your own destruction, and encourage others along in the same path by your example. He desires this, not only that he may be sure of you, but that he may use you to ruin other souls. He would encourage you to pray just enough to keep your hope good, and to be a stumbling-block to others. So, you please Satan; but Christ has the utmost abhorrence of your course. Ye who profess religion -- how many of you are only servants of the devil -- doing no other work but his? How many of you maintain a spirit and conversation altogether worldly ?

11. Finally, the excuses men make for not attending to their soul's salvation are the grossest insult to God. At bottom they assume that God's interests and honor are not worth their regard. They do not care for His feelings. It matters nothing to them how much they slight His authority, or grieve His love. And is this the rational way to secure His good will? Would it be strange if God should not turn out of His onward course of governing the world for the sake of accommodating such sinners with more time to sin unpunished, or with greater measures of His Spirit to abuse? A career of sin, so guilty, must come to a bitter end! How shall they escape who neglect so great a salvation.

[Back to Top](#)

On Prayer for The Holy Spirit

Lecture V

May 23, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Luke 11:11-13: "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or, if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

These verses form the concluding part of a very remarkable discourse of our Lord to his disciples on prayer. It was introduced by their request that he would teach them how to pray. In answer to this request, he gave them what we are wont to call the Lord's Prayer, followed by a forcible illustration of the value of importunity, which he still further applied and enforced by renewing the general promise--"Ask and it shall be given you." Then, to confirm their faith still more, he expands the idea that God is their Father, and should be approached in prayer as if he were an infinitely kind and loving parent. This constitutes the leading idea in the strong appeal made in our text. "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or, if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or, if he shall ask an egg, will he give him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

I. The gift of the Holy Ghost comprehends all we need spiritually.

II. It is supremely easy to obtain this gift from God.

III. Injurious and dishonorable to God are the practical views.

IV. How to account for the impression that the Holy Spirit can rarely be obtained in satisfying fullness.

V. How can we reconcile this experience with Christ's veracity.

I. The gift of the Holy Ghost comprehends all we need spiritually.

1. Remarking upon this text, I first observe that when we rightly understand the matter, we shall see that the gift of the Holy Ghost comprehends all we need spiritually. It secures to us that union with God which is eternal life. It implies conversion, which consists in the will's being submitted to God's control. Sanctification is

(1.) this union of the will to God perfected and perpetuated;

(2.) the ascendancy of this state of the will over the entire sensibilities, so that the whole mind is drawn into union and sympathy with the mind and heart of God.

II. It is supremely easy to obtain this gift from God.

In other words, it is easy to obtain from God all spiritual blessings that we truly need. If this be not so, what shall we think of these words of Christ? How can we by any means explain them consistently with fair truthfulness? Surely, it is easy for children to get really good things from their father. Which of you, being a father, does not know it to be easy for your children to get good things from you? You know in your own experience that they obtain without difficulty, even from you, all the real good they need, provided it be in your power to give it. But you are sometimes "evil," and Christ implies that, since God is never evil but always infinitely good, it is much more easy for one to get the Holy Spirit than even for your children to get bread from your hands. "Much more!" What words of meaning in such a connection as this! Every father knows there is nothing in the way of his children getting from him all the good things they really need and which he has to give. Every such parent values these good things for the sake of giving them to his children. For this, parents toil and plan for their children's sake. Can they then be averse or even slow to give these things to their children?

Yet God is much more ready to give his Spirit. My language, therefore, is not at all too strong. If God is much more ready and willing to give his children good things than you are to give to yours, then surely it must be easy and not difficult to get spiritual blessings, even to the utmost extent of our wants.

Let this argument come home to the hearts of those of you who are parents. Surely, you must feel its force. Christ must be a false teacher if this be not so. It

must be that this great gift, which in itself comprehends all spiritual gifts, is most easily obtained, and in any amount which our souls need.

III. Injurious and dishonorable to God are the practical views.

1. How very injurious and dishonorable to God are the practical views of almost all men on this subject! The dependence of men on the Holy Spirit has come to be the standing apology for moral and spiritual delinquency. Men every where profess to want the Holy Spirit, and more or less, to feel their need and to be praying for this gift; but continually and every where they complain that they do not get it. These complaints assume, both directly and indirectly, that it is very difficult to get this gift;--that God keeps his children on a very low diet; and on the smallest possible amount even of that; that he deals out their spiritual bread and water in most stinted amount--as if he purposed to keep his children only an inch above starvation. Pass among the churches and hear what they say and how they pray;--and what would you think? How would you be shocked at the strange, may I not say, blasphemous assumptions which they make concerning God's policy in giving, or rather not giving, the Holy Spirit to those that ask him! I can speak from experience and personal observation. When I began to attend prayer-meetings, this fact to which I have alluded struck me as very strange. I had never attended a prayer-meeting till I had come to manhood, for my situation in this respect was very unlike yours here. But after I came to manhood, and prayer-meetings were held in the place where I lived, I used to attend them very steadily. It was a matter of great interest to me, more than I can explain, or well express. I was filled with wonder to hear Christians pray, and the more so as I then began to read my Bible, and to find in it such things as we have in our text today. To read such promises, and then hear Christians talk was surprising. What they did say, coupled with what they seemed to mean, would run thus: I have a duty to perform at this meeting; I cannot go away without doing it. I want to testify that religion is a good thing--a very good thing--although I have not got much of it. I believe God is a hearer of prayer, and yet I don't think he hears mine--certainly not to much purpose. I believe that prayer brings to us the Holy Spirit, and yet, though I have always been praying for this Spirit, I have scarcely ever received it.

Such seemed to be the strain of their talking and thinking, and I must say that

it puzzled me greatly. I have reason to know that it has often puzzled others. Within a few years past, I have found this to be the standing objection of unconverted men. They say--"I cannot hold out if I should be converted--it is so difficult to get and to keep the Holy Spirit." They appeal to professed Christians and say, Look at them; they are not engaged in religion; they are not doing their Master's work in good earnest, and they confess it; they have not the Spirit, and they confess it; they bear a living testimony that these promises are of very little practical value.

Now, these are plain matters of fact, and should be deeply pondered by all professed Christians. The Christian life of multitudes is nothing less than a flat denial of the great truths of the Bible.

2. Often, when I am urging Christians to be filled with the Holy Ghost, I am asked--Do you really think this gift is for me? Do you think all can have it who will? If you tell them of instances, here and there, of persons who walk in the light, and are filled with the Spirit, they reply:--Are not those very special cases? Are they not the favored few, enjoying a blessing that only a few can hope to enjoy?

3. Here you should carefully observe, that the question is not whether few or many have this blessing; but--Is it practically within reach of all? Is it indeed available to all? Is the gift actually tendered to all in the fullest and highest sense? Is it easy to possess it? These being the real questions, we must see that the teachings of the text cannot be mistaken on this subject. Either Christ testified falsely of this matter, or this gift is available to all, and is easily obtained. For, of the meaning and scope of his language, there can be no doubt. No language can be plainer. No illustrations could be more clear, and none could easily be found that are stronger.

IV. How to account for the impression that the Holy Spirit can rarely be obtained in satisfying fullness.

How shall we account for this impression, so extensively pervading the church, that the Holy Spirit can rarely be obtained in ample, satisfying fullness, and then only with the greatest difficulty?

1. This impression obviously grows out of the current experience of the church. In fact, but few seem to have this conscious communion with God

through the Spirit; but few seem really to walk with God and be filled with his Spirit.

When I say few, I must explain myself to mean, few relatively to the whole number of professed Christians. Taken absolutely, the number is great and always has been. Sometimes, some have thought the number to be small, but they were mistaken. Elijah thought himself alone, but God gave him to understand that there were many--a host, spoken of as seven thousand--who had never bowed the knee to Baal. Ordinarily, such a use of the sacred number seven, is to be taken for a large, indefinite sum, much larger than if taken definitely. It may be so here. Even then, in that exceedingly dark age, there were yet many who stood unflinchingly for God.

2. It is a curious fact that persons who have really the most piety are often supposed to have the least, so few there are who judge of piety as God does. Those who preach the real gospel are often refreshed to find some in almost every congregation who manifestly embrace it. You can judge by their very looks,--their eyes shine and their faces are all aglow--almost like the face of Moses, descended from the mount.

But theirs is not the common experience of professed Christians. The common one which has served to create the general impression as to the difficulty of obtaining the Holy Spirit, is indeed utterly unlike this. The great body of nominal Christians have not the Spirit, within the meaning of Romans 8th. They cannot say--"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." It is not true of them that they "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Comparatively few of all, know in their own conscious experience that they live and abide in the Spirit.

3. Here is another fact. Many are praying--apparently--for the Spirit of God, but do not get it. If you go to a prayer-meeting, you hear every body pray for this gift. It is so, also, in the family, and probably in the closet also. Yet, strange to tell, they do not get it. This experience of much prayer for this blessing, and much failure to get it, is every where common. Churches have their prayer-meetings, years and years in succession, praying for the Spirit, but they do not get it. In view of this fact, we must conclude, either that the promise is not reliable, or that the prayer does not meet the conditions of the promise. I shall take up this alternative by and by; just now, my business is to account for the prevalent impression that the Spirit of God is hard to

get and keep, even in answer to prayer,--a fact which obviously is accounted for by the current experience of nominal Christians.

4. It should also be said that the churches have been taught that God is a sovereign, in such a sense that his gift of the Spirit is only occasional, and is then given without any connection with apparent causes--not dependent, by any means, on the fulfilment of conditions on our part. The common idea of sovereignty excludes the idea that God holds this blessing free to all, on condition of real prayer for it. I say real prayer, for I must show you by and by that much of the apparent praying of the church for the Spirit is not real prayer. It is this spurious selfish praying that leads to so much misconception as to the bestowment of the Holy Spirit.

Some of you may remember that I have related to you my experience at one time, when my mind was greatly exercised on this promise,--how I told the Lord I could not believe it. It was contrary to my conscious experience, and I could not believe any thing which contradicted my conscious experience. At that time the Lord kindly and in great mercy rebuked my unbelief, and showed me that the fault was altogether mine and in no part his.

Multitudes pray for the Spirit as I had done, and are in like manner disappointed because they do not get it. They are not conscious of being hypocrites; but they do not thoroughly know their own spirits. They think they are ready to make any sacrifices to obtain it. They do not seem to know that the difficulty is all with them. They fail to realize how rich and full the promise is. It all seems to them quite unaccountable that their prayer should not be answered. Often they sweat with agony of mind in their efforts to solve this mystery. They cannot bear to say that God's word is false, and they cannot see that it is true. It is apparently contradicted by their experience. This fact creates the agonizing perplexity.

V. How can we reconcile this experience with Christ's veracity.

In the next place, how can we reconcile this experience with Christ's veracity? How can we explain this experience according to the facts in the case, and yet show that Christ's teachings are to be taken in their obvious sense, and are strictly true?

1. I answer, what is here taught as to prayer must be taken in connection

with what is taught elsewhere. For example, what is here said of asking must be taken in connection with what is said of praying in faith--with what is said by James of asking and not receiving because men ask amiss, that they may consume it upon their lusts. If any of you were to frame a will or a promissory note, binding yourself or your administrators to pay over certain moneys, on certain specified conditions, you would not think it necessary to state the conditions more than once. Having stated them distinctly once, you would go on to state in detail the promise; but you would not expect any body to separate the promise from the condition, and then claim the promise without having fulfilled the condition, and even perhaps accuse you of falsehood because you did not fulfil the promise when the conditions had not been met.

2. Now, the fact is that we find, scattered throughout the Bible, various revealed conditions of prayer. Whoever would pray acceptably must surely fulfil not merely a part, but all of these conditions. Yet in practice, the church, to a great extent, have overlooked, or at least has failed to meet these conditions. For example, they often pray for the Holy Spirit for selfish reasons. This is fearfully common. The real motives are selfish. Yet they come before God and urge their request often and long,--perhaps with great importunity; yet they are selfish in their very prayers, and God cannot hear. They are not in their inmost souls ready to do or to suffer all God's holy will. God calls some of his children through long seasons of extremest suffering, obviously as a means of purifying their hearts; yet many pray for pure hearts and for the Spirit to purify their hearts, who would rebel at once if God should answer their prayers by means of such a course of providence. Or, God may see it necessary to crucify your love of reputation, and for this end may subject you to a course of trial which will blow your reputation to the winds of heaven. Are you ready to hail the blessings of a subdued, unselfish heart, even though it be given by means of such discipline?

3. Often your motive in asking for the Spirit is merely personal comfort and consolation--as if you would live all your spiritual life on sweet-meats. Others ask for it really as a matter of self-glorification. They would like to have their names emblazoned in the papers. It would be so gratifying to be held up as a miracle of grace--as a most remarkable Christian. Alas, how many in various forms of it, are only offering selfish prayers! Even a

minister might pray for the Holy Spirit from only sinister motives. He might wish to have it said that he is very spiritual, or a man of great spiritual power in his preaching or his praying; or he might wish to avoid that hard study to which a man who has not the Spirit must submit, since the Spirit does not teach him, nor give him unction. He might almost wish to be inspired, so easy would this gift make his preaching and his study. He might suppose that he really longed to be filled with the Spirit, while really he is only asking amiss, to consume it on some unhallowed desire. A student may pray for the Spirit to help him study, and yet only his ambition or his indolence may have inspired that prayer. Let it never be forgotten, we must sympathize with God's reasons for our having the Spirit, as we would hope to pray acceptably. There is nothing mysterious about this matter. The great end of all God's spiritual administrations towards us in providence or grace is to divest us of selfishness, and to bring our hearts into harmony with his in the spirit of real love.

4. Persons often quench the Spirit even while they are praying for it. One prays for the Spirit, yet that very moment, fails to notice the Spirit's monitions in his own breast, or refuses to do what the Spirit would lead and press him to do. Perhaps they even pray for the Spirit, that this gift may be a substitute for some self-denying duty to which the Spirit has long been urging them. This is no uncommon experience. Such persons will be very likely to think it very difficult to get the Spirit. A woman was going to a female prayer-meeting, and thought she wanted the Holy Spirit, and would make that her special errand at that meeting. Yet when there, the Spirit pressed her to pray audibly and she resisted, and excused herself.

5. It is common for persons to resist the Spirit in the very steps he chooses to take. They would make the Spirit yield to them; He would have them yield to him. They think only of having their blessings come in the way of their own choosing; He is wiser and will do it in his own way or not at all. If they cannot accept of his way, there can be no agreement. Often when persons pray for the Spirit, they have in their minds certain things which they would dictate to him as to the manner and circumstances. Such ought to know that if they would have the Spirit, they must accept Him in his own way. Let him lead, and consider that your business is to follow. Thus it not infrequently happens that professed Christians maintain a perpetual resistance against the Holy Spirit, even while they are ostensibly praying

for his presence and power. When He would fain draw them, they are thinking of dictating to him, and refuse to be led by him in his way. When they come really to understand what is implied in being filled with the Spirit, they draw back. It is more and different from what they had thought. That is not what they wanted.

REMARKS.

1. The difficulty is always and all of it, in us, not in God. You may write this down as a universal truth, from which there can be no exceptions.
2. The difficulty lies in our voluntary state of mind, and not in anything which is involuntary and beyond our control. Therefore, there is no excuse for our retaining it, and it should be at once given up.

There is no difficulty in our obtaining the Holy Spirit if we are willing to have it; but this implies a willing ness to surrender ourselves to his direction and discretion.

3. We often mistake other states of mind for a willingness to have the Spirit of God. Nothing is more common than this. Men think they are willing to be filled with the Spirit, and to have that Spirit do all its own work in the soul; but they are really under a great mistake. To be willing to be wholly crucified to the world and the world unto us, is by no means common. Many think they have a sort of desire for this state, who would really shrink from it if they saw the reality near at hand. That persons do make continual mistakes and think themselves willing to be fully controlled by the Spirit, when they are not, is evident from their lives. The will governs the life, and therefore, the life must be an infallible index of the real state of the will. As is the life, so is the will, and therefore, when you see the life alien from God, you must infer that the will is not wholly consecrated to his service--is not wholly in sympathy with God's will.
4. When the will is really on God's altar, entirely yielded up to God's will in all respects, one will not wait long ere he has the Spirit of God in the fullest measure. Indeed, this very consecration itself implies a large measure of the Spirit, yet not the largest measure. The mind may not be conscious of that deep union with God into which it may enter. The knowledge of God is a consciousness of God in the soul. You may certainly know that God's Spirit is within you, and that his light illumines your mind. His presence becomes a

conscious reality.

The manner in which spiritual agencies, other than human manifest themselves in the mind of man, seems to some very mysterious. It is not necessary that we should know how those agencies get access to our minds; it suffices us to know beyond all question that they do. Christians sometimes know that the devil brings his own thoughts into the very chambers of their souls. Some of you have been painfully conscious of this. You have been certain that the devil has poured out his spirit upon you. Most horrid suggestions are thrust upon your mind--such as your inmost soul abhors, and such as could come from no other, and certainly from no better, source than the devil.

Now, if the devil can thus make us conscious of his presence and power, and can throw upon our souls his own horrid suggestions, may not the Spirit of God reveal his? Nay, if your heart is in sympathy with his suggestions and monitions, may He not do much more? Surely none can doubt that he can make his presence and agency a matter of positive consciousness. That must be a very imperfect and even false view of the case which supposes that we can be conscious of nothing but the operations of our own minds. Men are often conscious of Satan's thoughts, as present to their minds;--a fact which Bunyan well illustrated where he supposes Christian to be alarmed by some one whispering in his ear behind him, and pouring horrid blasphemies into his mind. Cases often occur like the following. A man came to me in great distress, saying, "I am no Christian; I know of a certainty. My mind has been filled with awful thoughts of God." But were those awful thoughts your own thoughts, and did you cherish them and give your assent to them? "No, indeed; nothing could have agonized me more." That is the work of the devil, said I. "Well," said he, "perhaps it is, and yet I had not thought of it so before."

So God's Spirit within us may become no less an object of our distinct consciousness. And if you do truly and earnestly wait on God, you shall be most abundantly supplied of his fullness.

5. To be filled with the Holy Ghost, so that he takes full possession of our souls, is what I mean by sanctification. This glorious work is wrought by the Spirit of God; and that Spirit never can take full and entire possession of our hearts without accomplishing this blessed work.

I do not wonder that those persons deny the existence of any such state as

sanctification who do not know anything of being filled with the Holy Ghost. Ignoring his glorious agency, we need not wonder that they have no knowledge of his work in the soul.

6. Often the great difficulty in the way of Christian progress is an utter want of watchfulness. Some are so given to talking that they cannot hold communion with the Spirit of God. They have no leisure to listen to his "still small voice." Some are so fond of laughter, it seems impossible that their minds should ever be in a really serious frame. In such a mind, how can the Spirit of God dwell? Often in our Theological discussions, I am pained to see how difficult it is for persons engaged in dispute and mutual discussion, to avoid being chafed. Some of them are watchful and prayerful against this temptation, yet sometimes, we see persons manifestly fall before this temptation. If Christians do not shut down the gate against all abuse of the tongue, and, indeed against every form of selfishness, there is no hope that they will resist the devil and the world so far as to be conquerors at last.

7. The Spirit of God troubles or comforts us, according as we resist or receive this great gift. The gospel scheme was purposed for the end of accomplishing this complete union and sympathy between our souls and God, so that the soul should enjoy God's own peace, and should be in the utmost harmony with its Maker and Father. Hence, it is the great business of the Spirit to bring about this state. If we concur, and if our will harmonizes with his efforts, he comforts us; if we resist, he troubles us;--a struggle ensues:--if, in this struggle, we come to understand God, and submit, then his blessings come freely and our peace is as a river; but so long as we resist, there can be no fruit of the Spirit's labor to us, but rebuke and trouble. To us he cannot be the author of peace and comfort.

8. How abominable to God it must be for the church to take ground, in regard to the Spirit, which practically denies the truth of this great promise in our text! How dreadful that Christians should hold and teach that it is a hard thing to be really religious! What abominable unbelief! How forcibly does the church thus testify against God before the world! You might as well burn your Bible as deny that it is the easiest thing in the world to get the gift of the Spirit. And yet, strange to tell, some hold that God is so sovereign, and is sovereign in such a sense, that few can get the Spirit at all, and those few only as it may happen, and not by any means as the result of provision freely made and promise reliably revealed on which any man's faith may take hold. O, how does this notion of

sovereignty contradict the Bible! How long shall it be so?

Do you, young people, really believe that your young hearts may be filled with the Spirit? Do you really believe, as our text says, that God is more willing to give his Spirit to those that ask him, than your own father or mother would be to give you good things? Many of you are here, far from your parents. But you know that even your widowed mother, much as she may need every cent of her means for herself, would gladly share the last one with you if you needed it. So would your earthly father. Do you really believe that God is as willing as they--as ready--as loving? Nay, is he not much more so? as much more as he is better than your father or your mother? And now, do you really need and desire this gift of the Spirit? And if you do, will you come and ask for it in full confidence that you have a real Father in heaven?

Do you find practical difficulties? Do you realize how much you dishonor God if you refuse to believe his word of promise? Some of you say--I am so poor and so much in debt, I must go away and work somewhere and get money. But you have a father who has money enough. Yes; but he will not help me. He loves his money more than he loves his son. Would not this be a great scandal to your father--a living disgrace to him? Surely, it would;--and you would be so keenly sensible of this that you would not say it if it were not very true, nor then unless some very strong circumstances seemed to require of you the painful testimony. If your mother, being amply able, yet would not help you in your education or in your sickness, you would hardly tell of it--so greatly would it discredit her character.

And now will you have the face to say--God does not love me; he does not want to educate me for heaven; he utterly refuses to give me the Holy Spirit, although I often ask him and beseech him to do so? Will you even think this? And can you go even farther and act it out before all the world? O, why should you thus dishonor your own God and Father!

[Back to Top](#)

Conscience and The Bible in Harmony
Lecture VI

June 6, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--2 Cor. 4:2: "By manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

The context shows that these words of Paul refer to his manner of preaching, and to the aim which he had in those labours.

I. Conscience is a moral function of the reason, or intellect.

II. The Bible and the human conscience are at one and entirely agree in all their moral decisions and teachings.

I. Conscience is a moral function of the reason, or intellect.

1. It is that department of our natural faculties which has to do with moral subjects--with morality and religion. This faculty gives us moral law and obligation; it has the idea of right and wrong, of praise or blame-worthiness; of desert of retribution. It comprehends all the intuitions of the intellect on moral questions. The term is sometimes used to include those states of the sensibility which are occasioned by, and connected with, the action of conscience; yet, strictly speaking, the term is confined to the intellect, and does not embrace the sensibility.

2. Every man has a conscience. This is implied in our text. How could Paul commend himself in presenting the truth to every man's conscience if every man had not a conscience--that is, if some men had no conscience at all? The existence of a conscience in every man is a fact of consciousness and one of its ultimate facts. Every man knows that he has a conscience, and it is impossible he should know any fact with higher evidence, or with greater certainty than he knows this. If he had no conscience, it would be impossible he should have the ideas of right and wrong, of good or ill desert, of virtue and of vice. No being could convey these ideas to his mind if he had not a conscience. No language could be of any use to convey such ideas if man had no conscience wherewith to apprehend and appreciate them.

3. These ideas of God, duty, right, and desert of retribution, belong to man--to all men; are found in all men, and cannot be expelled from the human mind.

4. This faculty distinguishes man from the lower animals. Obviously they have some intellect; but whether they know by direct intuition, or in some other way, it seems impossible for us to determine. For example, we cannot ascertain whether the bee, in constructing his cells on the most perfect mathematical principles, gets his knowledge of this most perfect method, by intuition or in some other process. Be this as it may, neither the bee nor any other of the lower animals has any moral law, or any ideas of moral character, of right and wrong, of good or ill desert, or of retribution. This is the great characteristic difference between these animals and man. Hence, if any man sets up the claim that he has no conscience, he claims to be a brute, for he denies of himself the great distinction between the man and the brute.

5. Metaphysicians are not agreed whether brutes have sensibility and will, or not; they do agree that brutes have no conscience and no moral responsibility; so that those men who claim this distinction for themselves, put themselves at once by that claim on a level with the lower animals.

II. The Bible and the human conscience are at one and entirely agree in all their moral decisions and teachings.

1. This fact proves conclusively that they both come from the same author.

2. Beginning with our text, I ask, what can Paul mean in saying that, by manifestation of the truth, he commends himself to every man's conscience? Obviously this--that by exhibiting to men the great truths of the gospel and of the law, he made his appeal to every man's conscience in a way, and with sentiments that enforced each man's approval. The truth commended itself as truth; the claims of duty, as right. No man who understood this truth could doubt its evidence--none who understood its moral claims could dispute those claims.

3. But this point is so important that it should be examined in detail. I, therefore, remark, that conscience reveals the same rules of duty and the same measure of obligation as God's revealed law does. Conscience

imposes the same law of love as God's law does--love supreme towards God, love equal and impartial towards our neighbour. Conscience never fails to affirm that each man is bound to love his neighbor as himself. There never was a human being of developed and sane powers, whose conscience did not impose this obligation upon him.

4. Conscience, also, postulates this law as binding on all moral beings, and as extending to all the activities of every moral being. In fact, conscience and reason show that this is the only possible law or rule of duty for moral beings; and the Bible teaches the very same in every particular. Both are entirely at one in all their teachings on this great subject.

5. Both conscience and the Bible harmonize, also, in this--that man, in his natural state, has entirely fallen from duty. Conscience universally affirms that men do not, apart from grace, love God with all their heart, nor their neighbours as themselves. The human conscience proclaims man in a state of total moral depravity. So does the Bible. Conscience affirms that nothing, short of full obedience to God's law of love, is real virtue; and so does the Bible. Conscience presses the sinner with a sense of guilt, and holds him condemned;--and so does the Bible. And each decides by the same rule in every respect. You may take each individual precept you find in the law and the gospel; go into the examination ever so minutely; canvass all the teachings of Jesus Christ, all those of the apostles and of the prophets;--you will find that conscience says amen to them all.

What a remarkable fact is this! Here is a book containing myriads of precepts--that is, if you enumerate all the specific applications; yet they are comprised under two great principles--supreme love to God, and equal love to our fellow man. But in all these countless specific applications of these great principles, whatever the Bible affirms, conscience endorses. This is a most remarkable fact. It never has been true of any other book, that all its moral precepts without exception are approved and endorsed by the human conscience. This book, so endorsed, must be inspired of God. It is impossible to suppose that a book so accredited of conscience can be uninspired. It is the greatest absurdity to deny its inspiration. A book so perfectly in harmony with conscience must come from the author of conscience.

Men said of Christ when he taught--"Never man spake like this man"--so wonderfully did the truths taught commend themselves to every man's

conscience. He spake "with authority," and "not as the scribes;"--for every word went home to man's conscience, and every precept revealing duty, was recognized and endorsed as right by the hearer's own convictions. This striking feature characterized all his teachings.

6. Both the Bible and conscience harmonize in respect to the requisition of repentance. Each affirms this to be every man's duty. Each rests this claim on the same ground--to wit: that God is right and the sinner wrong;--and, therefore, that the sinner ought to turn to God in submission, and not God turn to the sinner in a change of his course.

7. In like manner, both conscience and the Bible harmonize in the requisition of faith and of entire holiness. On all these great gospel precepts, the Bible affirms and conscience responds most fully. As to the demand of entire holiness, it is a clear dictate of our moral sense that we cannot enjoy God without being like him. When our intelligence apprehends the true character of God and of man, it recognizes at once the necessity that man should be like God in moral character in order to enjoy his presence. Beings possessed of a moral nature can never be happy together unless their spirits are congenial.

8. Conscience affirms man's position as a sinner to be wrong. So does the Bible. It is impossible for a sinner to believe that his sin is right and pleasing to God. This also, is the doctrine of the Bible.

9. Conscience affirms the necessity of an atonement. Mankind have always felt this necessity, and have manifested this feeling in many ways. Through all ages, they have been devising and practicing some form of sacrifice to render it proper for God to forgive the sinner. The idea has been in their mind that God must demand some sacrifice that would honor his law and sustain its injured majesty. That the law has been dishonored by the sinner, all have fully admitted. And obviously the idea has been in the minds of men that it would be dishonorable, degrading and injurious to God, to forgive sin without some atonement. They seem to have apprehended the great truth that, before God can forgive sin, he must demand some demonstration which shall sustain law and evince his own position and feelings as a lawgiver. How, but from these universal affirmations of conscience, can you account for the fact that all mankind have felt the necessity for some mediator between God and man? So universal is this felt

necessary that when men have had their conscience aroused, and have been in doubt or in darkness as to Christ, the Mediator, they have plunged into despair. If conscience sleeps, the sinner may pass along with little concern; but when it arouses itself like a mighty man, and puts forth its emphatic announcements, then no sinner can resist. It is a well-known fact that Unitarians, when thoroughly convicted of sin, can find no rest in their system of religious belief. I am well aware that so long as their conscience is not aroused to its functions, and they are in great darkness, they can say--"Man is pretty good by nature, and I see no need of a vicarious atonement. I accept Christ as a good man, an excellent teacher, and a fine example; but what do I want of an atoning sacrifice?" So he can say--till conscience wakes up its voice of seven thunders;--then he cries out, "I am undone. How can I live if there be not some atoning sacrifice for my sins?"

There never was a sinner, awakened to see his sins truly, who did not go into despair unless he saw the atonement. I could give you many cases of this sort which have fallen under my own observation, in which, persons, long denying the need of any atonement, have at length had conscience fully aroused, and have then invariably felt that God could not forgive unless in some way his insulted majesty were vindicated.

Indeed, God might be perfectly ready to forgive so far as his feelings are concerned, for he is not vindictive, neither is he implacable; but he is a moral governor and has a character, as such, to sustain. The interests of his created universe rest on his administration, and he must take care what impression he makes on the minds of beings who can sin.

In this light we can appreciate the propensity always felt by the human mind to put some Mediator between a holy God and itself. Catholics interpose saints and the Virgin--supposing that these will have a kind of access to God which they, in their guilt, cannot have. Thus, conscience recognizes the universal need of an atonement.

The Bible every where reveals the adequacy of the atonement made by Christ; and it is remarkable that the human conscience also promptly accepts it as sufficient. You may arouse the conscience as deeply as you please--may set it all on fire, and yet as soon as the atonement of Christ is revealed, and the mind understands what it is, and what relations it sustains to law and government, suddenly conscience is quiet; the sense of condemnation is

gone; the assurance of an adequate atonement restores peace to the troubled soul. Conscience fully accepts this atonement as amply sufficient, even as the Bible also does.

But nothing else than this atonement can satisfy conscience. Not good works, ever so many or so costly; not penance, not any amount of self-imposed suffering and sacrifice. Let a sinner attempt to substitute ever so much prayer and fasting, in place of Christ as an atoning sacrifice, it is all of no avail. The more he tries, the more he is dissatisfied. Conscience will not accept it. Neither will the Bible. Most wonderfully, we find it still true, to whatever point we turn, that conscience and the Bible bear the same testimony--take the same positions.

10. But how does this happen? Whence comes this universal harmony? This is a problem for those to solve who deny the inspiration of God's word. Those who admit its inspiration have only to refer both to the same Author. It is no strange thing on their theory, that God's voice in the Bible, and God's voice in the bosom of man, should utter the same notes, each responsive to the other, and each affirming or denying in perpetual unison.

11. Both the human conscience and the Bible teach justification by faith. I do not suppose the human conscience could have revealed to us the fact of the death of Christ; but the Bible having revealed it, the conscience can and does appreciate its fitness and adequacy, and, therefore, can and does accept this sacrifice as a ground of justification before God. It recognizes the sinner as brought into a state of acceptance with God on the ground of what Christ has suffered and done. What can be the reason that faith in Christ has such wonderful power to extract the smart of sin, take away the sense of condemnation, and give the consciousness of being accepted of God? The fact we see developed every day. You cannot make the mind afraid of punishment when once it rests in Christ Jesus. You cannot create a sense of condemnation while your heart has an active faith in the blood of Christ. By no methods you can employ, can you force it upon the soul. With faith there will be hope and peace, despite of all your efforts to dislodge them. When the soul really embraces Christ, peace will ensue. The truth is, the provisions of the gospel for the pardon of sin meet the demands of conscience. It affirms that God is just, and therefore is satisfied, while he justifies the penitent believer in Jesus. It is the province of conscience to

affirm the propriety or impropriety of God's moral conduct as well as man's; and hence, it moves only within its sphere when it affirms that God can rightly accept such a satisfaction as that made in the atonement of Christ for sin.

Conscience affirms that there can be no other conceivable way of justifying the sinner except by faith in Christ. You may try ever so much to devise some other scheme, yet you cannot. You may try to get peace of mind on any other scheme than this--as some of you have--but all is of no avail. I once said to a Roman Catholic--"When you went to confessional, you hoped to be accepted and to get peace?" "Yes." "But did you find it to your full satisfaction?" "Not certainly. I cannot say that I knew I was accepted."

There never was a Catholic who had been through all their ceremonies, and afterwards, being converted to faith in Christ alone, experienced the deep peace of the gospel, who did not see the wide difference between his experience as a papist and his experience as a gospel believer. His conscience so completely accepts his faith in the latter case, and gives him such deep, assured peace;--while in the former case there could be nothing of this sort.

12. The Bible and conscience agree in affirming the doctrine of endless punishment. Conscience could teach nothing else. At what period in the lapse of future ages of suffering would conscience say, "He has suffered enough. The law of God is satisfied; his desert of punishment for sin is now exhausted, and he deserves no more"? Those who know anything about the decisions of conscience on this point, know very well that it can conceive of no limitations of ill-desert for sin. It can see no end to the punishment which sin deserves. It can conceive of the man who has once thus sinned, as being nothing else but a sinner before God, since the fact of his having sinned can never cease to be a fact. If you have been a thief, that fact will always be true, and in that sense you must always be a thief in the eye of law. You cannot make it otherwise. Your suffering can make no sort of satisfaction to an offended law. Conscience will see more and more guilt in your course of sin, and your sense of guilt must increase to all eternity. You can never reach the point where conscience will say--"this suffering is enough; this sinner ought to suffer no longer." The Bible teaches the same.

Yet each agree in teaching that God can forgive the penitent through faith in

Christ, but can extend forgiveness to no sinner on any other ground.

REMARKS.

1. We see why the Bible is so readily received as from God. Few have ever read any treatise of argument on this subject; but as soon as one reads those parts which relate to morals, conscience at once affirms and endorses all. You need no higher evidence that he who speaks in the Bible is very God. The truth commends itself to every man's conscience, and needs no other endorser of its divine origin. Probably in all this congregation not one in fifty ever sat down to read through a treatise on the evidences of a divine revelation; and you can give perhaps no other reason for your belief in the Bible than the fact that it commends itself to your conscience.

2. You see why one who has seen this harmony between conscience and the Bible, cannot be reasoned out of his belief in the Bible by any amount of subtle sophistry. Perhaps he will say to his opponent--"I cannot meet your sophistries; I have never speculated in that direction; but I know the Bible is true, and the whole gospel is from God; I know it by the affirmations of my own mind. I know it by its perfect fitness to meet my wants. I know it has told me all I ever felt, or have ever needed, and it has brought a perfect supply for all my need." This he can say in reply to sophistry which he may have no other logic to withstand. But this is amply sufficient.

In my own case, I know it was the beauty and intrinsic evidence of the Bible which kept me from being an infidel. I should have been an infidel if I could, and I should have been a Universalist if I could have been, for I was wicked enough to have been either. But I knew the Bible to be true; and when I set myself to make out an argument against it, I could not divest myself of an ever present conviction that this was the wrong side. Just as a lawyer who sits down to examine a case and finds at every turn that his evidence is weak or irrelevant, and is troubled with a growing conviction that he is on the wrong side; and the more he examines his case and his law books, the more he sees that he must be wrong--so I found it in my investigations into the evidences of revelation, and in my readings of the Bible. In those times I was wicked enough for anything, and used to go out among the plain Christian people and talk to them about the Bible, and puzzle them with my questions and hard points. I could confound, even though I could not convince them, and then I would try to enjoy my sport at their expense. Sometimes afterwards, I would go and tell them I could show them

how they settled this question of the divine authority of the Bible, although they could not tell me.

I don't believe there ever was, or ever can be, a candid man who shall candidly examine the Bible, compare its teachings with the affirmations of his own conscience, and then deny its authority.

3. Neither Paul nor Jesus Christ preached sermons on the evidences of a revelation from God;--how was it then that Christ brought out the truth in such a way as to reach the conscience, wake up its energies, and make it speak out in fearful tones? He manifested the truth in such a way as to commend it to every man's conscience.

4. Just in proportion as a man fails to develop his conscience, or blinds, abuses, or silences it, can he become skeptical. It will always be so far only as his conscience becomes seared and blind; while, on the other hand, as his conscience has free scope and speaks out truthfully will his conviction become irresistible that the Bible is true and from God.

5. The Bible is sometimes rejected because misunderstood. I once fell in with an infidel who had read much (not in the Bible) and who, after his much reading, settled down upon infidelity. I inquired of him as to his views of the inspiration of the Bible, when he promptly replied--"I know it is not true, and is not from God, for it teaches things contrary to my conscience." Ah, said I, and pray tell me in what particulars! What are these things, taught in the Bible, that are contrary to your conscience?

He began thus:

(1.) "It teaches the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity." But stop, said I, is that Bible, or is it only catechism? He soon found that he had to look in his catechism to find it, for it was not in his Bible.

(2) "It teaches that human nature, as made by God, is itself sinful." I soon showed him that the Bible said no such thing. He declared that this doctrine was contrary to his conscience; I admitted it, but vindicated the Bible from such impiety as ascribing the creation of sin to God.

(3) "But," said he, "the Bible certainly does teach that men are naturally unable to obey God, and, especially, are unable to repent and believe the

gospel."

I replied, that is neither taught nor implied in the Bible, in the sense in which you urge it; but, on the contrary, the Bible both teaches and implies that sinners can obey God and are for that very reason responsible, and guilty if they refuse.

(4) There was one other point on which all the books were clear and strong, but which was utterly against his conscience--namely, "that Christ was punished for our sins. This punishing the innocent instead of the guilty," he said, "was one of the most unjust things that could be imagined." Well, said I, that is just what the Bible does not teach. It nowhere holds the doctrine that Christ was punished as a criminal. Punishment implies guilt, and is inflicted as penalty for crime,--neither of which is true in the case of Christ. He only suffered as an innocent being, and of his own free accord. You cannot say that this is wrong. If one man in his benevolence chooses to suffer for another, no principle of justice is violated. This he conceded.

(5) "According to the Bible," said he, "none can be saved without having their natures constitutionally changed. But no man can be held responsible for changing his own constitution."

Here, too, I showed him his misapprehension of the Bible. The change is only that which pertains primarily to the voluntary powers, and of course is just that which man is made capable of doing, and which he must do himself.

(6) He urged, I think, but one point more--namely, "that God has elected some to be saved, and some to be damned, and that none can escape their foreordained destiny."

To this you know I would reply that the Bible did not teach such an election, nor authorize such an inference, but everywhere implied the opposite. Such was our discussion.

You doubtless all know that such mistakes as these have led some men to reject the Bible. It is not strange that they should. I could never have received the Bible as from God if I had believed it to teach these things. I had to learn first that those things were not in the Bible, and then I was prepared to accept it in accordance with my conscience and reason, and from God.

6. Skepticism always evinces either great wickedness, or great ignorance as to what the Bible teaches, and as to the evidence on which its claims rest. Both the nature of the case and the testimony of observation conspire to prove this.

7. All the truths of natural religion are taught and affirmed both in the conscience and in the Bible. This is a most remarkable fact; yet easily shown in the fullest detail.

8. The conscience recognizes the Bible as its own book--the book of the heart--a sort of supplement to its own imperfect system--readily answering those questions which lie beyond the range of vision, which conscience enjoys. There are questions which conscience must ask, but cannot answer. It must ask whether there is any way in which God can forgive sin, and if so, what is it. Such questions conscience cannot answer without help from revelation. It is striking to observe how conscience grasps these glorious truths when they are presented, and the heart has come to feel its need of God's light and love. Mark how, when the moral nature of man has sent forth its voice abroad over the universe, far as its notes can reach, imploring light, and crying aloud for help, and listening to learn if any response is made;--then when it catches these responsive notes from God's written revelation, it shouts amen! AMEN! that brings me salvation! Let God be praised!

9. The skeptic is obliged to ignore the teachings of his own nature and the voice of his conscience. All those moral affirmations must be kept out of sight or he could not remain an infidel. It will not do for him to commune with his own heart and ask what testimony conscience bears as to duty, truth, and his God. All he can do to smother the spontaneous utterance of his conscience, he must needs do for the sake of peace in his sin and skepticism.

10. But these efforts must be ultimately vain, for, sooner or later, conscience will speak out. Its voice, long smothered, will break forth with redoubled force, as if in retribution for being abused so long. Many may live skeptics; few can die such. To that few you cannot hope to belong;--you already know too much on this subject. You cannot satisfy yourself that the Bible is false, and make yourself disbelieve its divine authority, so that it will stay disbelieved. Such a notion, resting on no valid evidence, but starting up under the stimulus of a corrupt heart, will disappear when moral realities shall begin to press hard on your soul. I am aware that in these latter times some young men make the discovery that they know more and are wiser than all the greatest and best men

that have ever lived. They think so, but they may, in divine mercy, live long enough to unlearn this folly, and to lay off this self-conceit. One thing I must tell you,--you cannot die skeptics. You cannot die believing that God can accept you without faith in Christ. Do you ask, Why? Because you have heard too much truth. Even this afternoon you have heard too much to allow you to carry such a delusion to your graves. No! you cannot die in darkness and delusion. I beg you to remember when you come to die, that I told you, you could not die a skeptic. Mark my words then, and prove them false if you can. Write it down for a memorandum, and treasure it for a test in the trying hour--that I told you solemnly, you could not die a skeptic. It will do you no hurt to remember this one thing from me; for if you should in that hour find me mistaken, you can have none the less comfort of your infidelity. It is not improbable that I shall be at the death-bed of some of you this very summer. Not a summer has passed yet since I have been here that I have not stood by the dying bed of some dear young man. And shall I find you happy in the dark discomfort of infidelity? There is no happiness in it;--and if there were, you cannot have it, for not one of you can die an infidel! Dr. Nelson once informed me that he said this same thing to a young infidel. Not long after, this infidel was sick, and thought himself dying, yet his infidelity remained unshaken; and when he saw the Doctor next, he cast into his teeth that prediction, which he thought had been triumphantly disproved. "Dr. N.," said he, "I was dying last month; and, contrary to your strange prediction, my infidelity did not forsake me." Ah! said the Doctor, but you were not dying then! And you never can die an infidel! When that young man came to die, he did not die an infidel. His conscience spake out in awful thunders, and his soul trembled exceedingly as it passed from this to another world.

But such fears may come too late! The door perhaps is shut, and the soul is lost! Alas that you should lose eternal life for a reason so poor--for a compensation so insignificant.

[Back to Top](#)

God Has No Pleasure In The Sinner's Death

Lecture VII

June 20, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Ezek. 18:23, 32: "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his way and live? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore, turn yourselves, and live ye."

Text.--Ezek. 33:11: "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil way, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

In speaking upon these texts, I am to show,

I. What this death is not;

II. What it is;

III. Why God has no pleasure in it;

IV. Why He does not prevent it;

V. The only way in which He can prevent it.

I. What this death is not.

1. The death spoken of in our texts cannot be that of the body. "It is appointed to all men once to die, and after this the judgment." I need not say that men die a physical death none the less surely because they turn to God and live.

2. This cannot mean spiritual death either, for this death is nothing else than a sinful state of mind -- a fixed habit and condition of sinning. If this had been the sense of the term death in these passages, they should have read -- Why are ye already dead! -- not, Why will ye die? The death referred to is manifestly an event yet future.

II. What it is.

Positively, this death must be the opposite of that life which they would have if

they would turn from their evil ways. Throughout the Bible we are given to understand that this is eternal life -- life in the sense of real blessedness. By the terms, death, and life, when used of the final rewards of the wicked and of the righteous, the Bible does not mean annihilation and existence. It does not teach that one class shall cease to exist and the other shall simply continue to exist; but most obviously implies that both alike have an immortal existence, which existence, however, is, in the one case, infinite misery; in the other, infinite blessedness.

III. Why God has no pleasure in it.

God has no pleasure in the death of the sinner. He avers this, and even takes His solemn oath of it. Surely, it must have been His intention to make himself believed; and certainly He ought to be believed. "When He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself." Such "an oath for confirmation should be an end to all strife" of conflicting opinions.

1. It is contrary to His very nature that He should take pleasure in the sinner's death. Indeed such is the nature of all moral beings that none of them can take pleasure in the misery of others, in itself considered. If any of them could, then might devils in hell find happiness in the misery of those whom they have brought into that place of torment. But the very laws of moral nature are such that it is painful to witness misery. Even the sufferings of the wicked in hell only aggravate, instead of lessening, the misery of the devil. He did not entice them there to enjoy their misery, but to vent his selfish spite against God. Yet, as always must happen, selfishness punishes itself, and the very thing Satan has done out of selfish hatred of God, will only augment his own eternal anguish. It is intrinsically contrary to the moral nature of any moral agent to enjoy the spectacle of suffering, apart from any other collateral source of enjoyment.

2. On still higher grounds is it contrary to God's nature that He should take pleasure in the sinner's death, for His benevolence forbids it. He takes infinite delight in the happiness of His creatures, and, therefore, cannot take delight in their misery -- in itself considered.

3. It is abundantly manifest that God loves sinners with the tenderest compassion. He pities them. So His word and His nature conspire to show. Christ manifested this towards the wicked Jews in most affecting words and

even with tears, when He beheld that doomed city and wept over it, saying -
-" If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that
belong unto thy peace? But now they are hid from thine eyes."

4. No doubt God will pity sinners in hell forever. He has given the highest evidence that He loves sinners. Think how long He spares them to live in their sins; at how great a sacrifice He sent His Son to die for them, even while they were yet enemies. What proof of love can be greater than this?

5. It must be that God regards the death of the wicked as a great evil in itself, for it surely is so, and He must regard things as they are, and according to truth. Misery is intrinsically a great evil in itself, and it must seem to Him to be so. Nay, more; it must seem a greater evil to Him than it can to you or to me, or to any other being besides Himself, in the universe. He never could have done what He has to save men if He had not viewed it so.

Again, God can have no pleasure in the sinner's death, because, after the penalty is inflicted, He can show the sinner no more favor forever. Under any efficient administration, after the authorities have passed the sentence of the law, they must not retract. The support of government forbids it. There could be no force in penalty, and no influence in law, if its penalties could be lightly set aside, or could be set aside for any other grounds than such as would amply sustain the dignity and the principles of the administration. Hence, after God has taken the sinner's life, in the sense of our text He can show him no more favor or mercy forever. This must be a sore trial to His feelings, mercy is so much His delight.

Sinners have had all their good things in this life. So Christ distinctly taught in the account He gives of the scenes after death, in the case of the rich man and Lazarus. He represents Abraham as saying to the rich man "Son, remember that thou, in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things." This you bear in mind, was said in answer to his earnest entreaty that Lazarus might be sent to him and might dip the tip of his finger in water and cool his tongue, for, said he, "I am tormented in this flame." To this Abraham replied, "Son, remember that thou, in thy life time, receivedst thy good things." It is affecting to think that he had exhausted all his good things so utterly that not one drop of water remained to be given him now -- not a drop! It must be greatly trying to God's feelings, after having so much

enjoyed doing good to even sinners in this world, that, after death He can do them no more good forever? Yet this is plainly the view which Christ gives of the case. It is the sinner's relations to God's government that preclude so utterly all further manifestation of mercy. He stands before that government in the relation of an enemy, one whom that government must punish as it would protect the rights and welfare of myriad's who depend on it for their happiness. It is truly an awful thought that the sinner must suffer so -- so intensely and without the least possibility of mitigation forever; and that God, when the sinner cries for one drop of water, must forever reply -- No, No, I have done you all the good I ever can do. You have had all your good things, even to the last drop of water!

6. Another reason why God can have no pleasure in the death of sinners is, that their depravity is henceforth unrestrained. To see this working itself out intensely and without restraint, as long as they exist, is sad indeed. Yet so it must be. God has done all He wisely could do to restrain it while yet they lived on the earth, and under all His efforts, it only waxed worse and worse. Now, therefore, He desists from all further efforts forever.

7. God can take no pleasure in the death of sinners, because, henceforward, their sufferings must be unmitigated and endless. Can God have any pleasure at all in this? What an everlasting accumulation of woe! Sorrow upon sorrow, swelling and expanding, deepening and strengthening, beyond all our powers of estimation or expression; -- verily God can take no pleasure in this and well does He take His solemn oath to this effect -- "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure at all in the death of the wicked.

IV. Why then, I am next to ask, does He not prevent it?

1. The answer in one word is, because He cannot and yet be good. In fact, if God could wisely prevent it, He should have done so; else He could not be a good being. What wisdom allows to be done for the relief or prevention of suffering, love requires -- else He forfeits His claim to goodness. In order to give virtue its utmost scope for development, moral agents are left free to obey or disobey, and then take the consequences. We cannot see how else a really moral government could be administered. Besides, the fact that God does govern thus, shows what He can wisely do, and all that He can wisely do. For it must be that God acts in accordance with His own sense of what is wise and good; -- else He is not wise and good, for to have wisdom and

yet not act according to its dictates, is by no means to be wise. So also, to claim to be good, and yet not act according to goodness, is an absurd claim. Hence, if God is really wise and good, we know that all His acts must be in harmony with His own ideas of what is wise and good under the circumstances of every case. Hence, nothing that ever occurs under His government can be wisely prevented. If it could be, He would prevent it. No improvement can be made in His actual administration. You cannot suppose it to be changed for the better.

2. Hence, God cannot deal with sinners otherwise than He has without violating His own sense of what is wise and good.

Again, the death that sinners die, though so great an evil, is yet a less evil than any change in His government which might be necessary in order to prevent it. For example, it may be said that God could annihilate moral agents, instead of punishing them in hell eternally. To this, I answer, if this were a better way God would certainly have adopted it. Hence, we are driven to the conclusion that it is a less evil to let His government go on, and let penalty take its course. In fact, to annihilate moral agents, for their sin, instead of punishing them in hell, would be to abandon the idea of moral government, administered under law, by rewards and penalties. It would amount to an acknowledgment of a failure under this system.

Again, God knows He can make a good use of the sinner's death. He can turn it to good purpose. Such a manifestation before the universe of the terrible evil of sin, may be indispensable to the best interests of the masses -- being the very influence they need to preserve them from falling themselves into sin. Under a government where so much depends upon developing and making all realize the idea of justice, what finite mind can fully estimate the useful results God may educe from the eternal death of sinners? This glorious idea of justice is manifestly most vital to a system of moral agents. Its importance to the universe is such as must greatly over-balance all the evil that can accrue from the punishment of sin.

These propositions I take to be altogether self-evident -- so much so, that none who understand the meaning of the terms, can deny them. If you admit the attributes of God, all the rest follows by the strictest logical necessity. If God is admitted to be holy, just, wise and good, then He must govern moral agents as He does; -- and must reclaim to obedience and induce to accept of

pardon.

V. How can the death of sinners be avoided?

1. In no way that is inconsistent with the nature and character of God, or with His relations to His creatures. This is plain. You cannot expect that God will act inconsistently with His own attributes of character in order to save sinners from death, or that He will suffer any thing to be done that is thus inconsistent. Nothing can He either do or suffer to be done that shall interfere with the best interests of His government. It were the merest folly to expect this. Hence, it is plain that if the sinner would be saved at all, he must turn from his evil ways. He cannot expect God to turn from His good ways and ought not to desire it. Hence, the only alternative is -- repent, or die. Every sinner must cease to sin and must meet God's conditions of life, or he must take death as his certain doom. To turn from his sin is the naturally necessary condition of being saved from eternal death. Who can doubt this? Who can rationally suppose that any sinner can possibly escape death unless he turns from his sins to God?

2. That this is the only possible way of life is further evident from the fact that sinners, continuing in their sins, must be wretched from the very nature of sin. The death of the body removes them from all physical enjoyment. Sin itself will then be left to bring forth its legitimate fruits of disquiet, trouble, remorse of conscience, -- so that even if there were no punitive inflections from God, and no misery to be endured beyond the natural consequences of sin, the wicked would be only wretched.

3. But, let it be considered, we cannot set aside the governmental infliction of suffering, for this is a necessity of government that it should have a penalty attached to the violation of its laws, and should inflict this penalty. No government can exist which does not punish when justice demands it. Its authority is at once gone, and it ceases to be any government at all. Hence, God must punish as long as the sinner refuses to turn.

REMARKS.

1. The goodness of God is no argument against the punishment of sin, but the very reverse of this; -- it is a reason why sin should be punished and will be. Men may say that God is too good to punish sin and may profess to hold that His

goodness explodes the doctrine of future punishment. But really not one of these men is ever afraid that God will be unjust. Yet they fear him. And the thing they at heart fear is that He is good and too good to let sin pass unpunished. They are afraid He is good, and so good, that He cannot fail to punish sin.

2. Some will ask -- Will not the great misery of sinners in hell abridge God's happiness? I answer no. God has done all He can wisely do to save them. So He solemnly avers;-- "What more could I have done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?" Why, then, should He be unhappy in the death of sinners?

3. Having done all He wisely could, He will be content with this. To do the best and the utmost that infinite love and power can do, satisfies Him, and He will not be restive and uneasy, so long as this conviction reposes on His bosom.

4. He will rejoice in the realization of the great idea of justice, and in the results of its manifestation before all finite minds. He does not rejoice in the misery, but does rejoice in the other results which accrue from the sinner's death. He rejoices that the great idea of justice is brought out before the universe so that they shall see what sin is, and what an exceedingly bitter thing it is to rebel against God and goodness.

God will rejoice none the less really in this immense good resulting from punishment, because of the conditions under which it is realized. It costs something to develop the great idea of justice; -- it necessarily must; it always does in any government. But the results are cheap even at such a cost. Hence, God rejoices in the use He can make of the sinner's death. Why should He not? He will be satisfied with Himself in view of all He has done, and satisfied with the results as a whole. Beholding them all He will say as of His original creation -- all very good. There are indeed incidental evils, but the good so indefinitely overbalances the evil that He cannot but be satisfied.

The death of the wicked will not abate the happiness of heaven. They will say that it could not have been wisely avoided. They know that every sinner richly deserves all the punishment he receives, and hence they will be content. They will not rejoice in the suffering, but will rejoice in the results of glory to God, stability to His throne -- good influence over all the unfallen. According to the scriptures, they shout, Alleluia, as they see the smoke of their torment ascend up forever and ever.

There is a moral beauty in the display of justice and holiness that will enrapture all the inhabitants of heaven. It will seem to them so infinitely fit and right and wise that God should reign and should sustain His law by means of penalty, so as to secure the highest possible moral power to promote holiness and deter from sin; -- how can they do otherwise than acquiesce and ever rejoice? But they discriminate -- as we also should -- between rejoicing in misery and rejoicing in its results. They rejoice, not in the misery, but in those glorious results which are so signally brought out before the universe.

5. It will be seen in heaven and felt throughout all eternity that God could have done no other way, wisely, than to punish sinners as He does. Hence, there will be no complaining.

Their sense of the wrong and mischief of sin is so just and so deep, and their sense of its ill-desert, also, will be so intense, that it will not abate from the eternal calmness of their souls to witness the execution of the law.

6. They will also see that it is the lest of two evils -- a less evil than to use any other means, possible to God, such, for example, as annihilating the wicked. Hence, they will not regret that God should do the best He can. Any change that should set aside punishment for actual sin would only be a greater evil than the punishment it sets aside, and hence they could not desire it. They will always see that a good use is made of punishment, and that positive good is educed from it. Just as we see that good use is made of the gallows in civil government. It is made conducive to the greater influence of the law to deter men from crime. Life is rendered more secure, and thus every important interest of life is promoted.

7. Here it should be borne in mind that it is not the object of government to do good to the criminal who is executed. In capital executions its only object is to do justice to the government. Punishment never has for its object to do good to the criminal. In so far forth as it is punishment, it has no aim specially towards the criminal, only to make of him an example for the good of the government and of the governed. That which aims at the good of the criminal is discipline. In this world God is administering discipline towards all sinners, and even towards His own children when they sin. In the next world all His treatment of the wicked will be penal, none of it disciplinary.

It is true that in human government, punishment and discipline are often blended, as in State's prison, where the criminal is undergoing the penal sentence

of law, and yet the law also aims at his good, using means so far as may be for his correction of life and manners. But in capital executions all idea of discipline is dropped -- especially it is so after the fatal hour has come. After that hour, government does all it can by delay of execution, to impel the sinner to prepare to meet his God. Persons often confound discipline and punishment, failing to make those essential discriminations to which I have now adverted. It is important to notice distinctly that all those features in God's administration towards sinners which contemplate their good are discipline, not punishment.

8. It is a great thing under God's government to execute His law. This is immensely important in its bearings upon the sentiments and feelings of moral agents, and upon their continued obedience. It is especially in this administration of God's law that they see God revealed and learn to regard Him as the great Father of His creatures, evermore watchful to secure their highest obedience and blessedness. This execution of law is indeed done at a great expense of suffering to the criminal; but the fact that they all deserve it -- that there is no other way of sustaining law and its influence, and that an indefinitely great amount of good results from it, -- these facts conspire to hush every murmur and will by no means allow the blessedness of heaven to be interrupted by the execution of law on the wicked.

9. God will make sinners very useful in life and in death; in this world and in the next. They do not mean it; they mean only evil; but God means all the good, and will take care to insure it. He can over-rule their sin so as to bring out great good from it, all along through the whole course of their existence. He will so control it that they shall not have lived in vain; so that they shall not die in vain, and shall not make their bed in hell forever, in vain. No thanks to them. They have done nothing meritorious. No thanks to Satan that he laid the corner-stone of human salvation when he tempted Judas to betray Jesus, that he might be put out of the way. God's plans went too deep for Satan; for, while Satan thought to frustrate those plans, he only fulfilled them. He did not understand God's scheme for saving sinners, else he had not taken a step so directly adapted to promote it. So always, God lays His plans too deep for sinners. They try to frustrate God's plans, but to their confusion, at length find that they only promoted those plans the more. It was said in reference to the plans laid by Joseph's brethren, -- Ye meant it for evil, but God meant it for good, to save many people alive. God suffered their plans to go forward and seem to be fully executed but then He put forth His hand and turned the whole to the utmost good. So God is wont to do in

regard to the plans of the wicked.

But it is time that I should present distinctly before you and press on your immediate regard the great question of my text, -- "why will ye die?" To all who have not yet turned from your sins, God makes this earnest appeal. Fain would He know of you why it is that you will die. What answer will you give to this appeal? -- What can you say? That there is no help for you, and therefore you must die? But that is not true, for glorious help is laid on one who is mighty to save.

Will you insist that there is none to pity you? That too, is utterly false. Does not the great God pity you? And Jesus Christ too; and every angel in heaven? And indeed all the holy in God's universe?

Or will you say, there is no mercy for me? That also is alike false. There has been most abundant mercy shown you in the gospel. Nothing can exceed that mercy and compassion; and even today, after so long an abuse of it, you may perhaps yet find it waiting to bless you.

Or will you say -- I can't help myself? How can I turn to God? Doubtless you think you can turn at any time, or you would not so long have put it over to a convenient season. You intend at some time to turn to God; but when? Perhaps when it shall be forever too late! One day, or perhaps only one hour, too late!

I have perhaps mentioned in the hearing of some of you the case of a young man whose converted sister earnestly besought him to repent, and come at once to Christ. He put her off; she still entreated. Especially she pressed him one Sabbath, and felt that she could not be denied. At length, as he could not well do less, he said to her -- I have to make a short journey on Monday, and shall return on Tuesday; when this is over, I will attend to it. On Wednesday I promise you, I will devote myself to this work. Thus he promised. Monday came, he started on horseback to accomplish his business and get all things ready to turn to the Lord. God had done waiting on him! He was thrown from his horse, brought home a corpse, and on Wednesday, his set day for repentance, his funeral was attended by sad friends, and his body committed to the grave. Alas, who shall give the history of the spirit that God summoned so fearfully away?

Many cases of a similar character I have met with, painfully showing that God is not well pleased that sinners should deliberately set aside His proposed time and

adopt their own. I once heard a young lady say that she meant to be converted just before she graduated. In fact she had her plans laid very definitely. On the Sabbath before commencement, she was to unite with the church and sit down with them to the table of the Lord. See there! how she proposed to take her own course and set aside God's earnest call to repent now! But God will surely have His way and will as surely defeat your plans. You cannot have your way against God, labor for it ever so much. It would be wrong for God to endorse your plans when they designedly disown His, and you ought not to wish Him to do so. You ought rather to say -- Lord, I do not wish Thee to come over to my wicked schemes. Let Thy perfect will be done! God forbid that I should die, if He has no pleasure in it. If thou, O God, hast no pleasure at all in my death, why should I have? Does not God know how awful a thing it is to die eternally?

Do you think, sinner, that God means to trifle with you? Ye who say that there is no danger of dying eternally for sin -- say how is this, -- that God should so solemnly ask you why you will die and under His solemn oath affirm that He has no pleasure in your death? Does God do all this to frighten you, when as you insinuate, there is really no death to fear? Is the great God deceiving you, or trying to disturb you with needless alarms? Is it not rather the case that you are deceiving yourself with hopes that are baseless and that must vanish away like the giving up of the ghost?

[Back to Top](#)

On Being Searched of God

Lecture VIII

July 4, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Psa. 139:23, 24: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

These words occur at the close of that wonderful Psalm, written under a vivid sense of God's omniscience and omnipresence, and which begins--"O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me."

In treating my text, I propose,

I. To show when this prayer, always appropriate, is especially and peculiarly so.

II. Why do men need divine searching?

III. I must next speak of the manner in which God answers prayer to be searched.

I. To show when this prayer, always appropriate, is especially and peculiarly so.

1. When persons are in spiritual darkness, and have low and faint conceptions of spiritual things. Then they have great reason to suspect that something is wrong, and should be searched out that it may be set right. It must be that something separates between your soul and God, and you should set yourself to urge this prayer unceasingly.

2. In a state of spiritual insensibility let men cry to God in like manner to be searched. When you do not feel the power of truth, you may be assured something is wrong, and you certainly should not rest till it be searched out.

Those who suffer themselves to remain in such a state, without enquiry for the cause, wrong their own souls.

3. When the mind is oppressed with a sense of guilt, but does not clearly see where the guilt lies, no one should remain at ease at all till the whole matter is searched to the bottom. Often persons carry a sense of guilt in their souls a long time, yet do not see the particular cause. Probably they will not see it, unless the Spirit of God search them thoroughly. Hence, they should cry mightily unto him for his searching power.

4. When in attempting to approach God, you find access denied you. You try to pray, but find no access to God. Your prayer seems to be shut off; it falls, but never rises toward God. Then you should enquire why your Father's door is shut against you, and why, when you try to come to a throne of grace you can get no access to it. Then ask God to search you.

Again, when you have no spirit of prayer. When you have no inclination to go to God; when you know you need blessings, but do not feel inclined to go to God and seek them in earnest prayer; then cry to God for the searching grace of his Spirit.

5. When prayer, instead of being spontaneous, costs you effort, and it seems a hard labor to bring your mind to prayer, then you should know that your heart does not pray--it is only your lips that pray at best; and, alarmed at such a state of things, you should fall back upon this preliminary prayer, and earnestly implore grace from God to search you and bring to your own view all the fearful wrong of your heart or life.

Some of you may be in this state; will you ask yourself how this is, and what the reason of it can be?

6. Equally so, if your prayers do not prevail with God. Then you should by all means enquire what can hinder your prayers before God. You may safely assume that there is something wrong in yourself; nothing wrong in God, nor has he even forgotten his promises.

Again, when you are not successful in your efforts to do good; when God does not animate your efforts and crown them with his blessing; then let not your soul rest, but arise and cry mightily to God that you may know wherefore his grace is withheld from your endeavors.

Again, when the Bible and religious truth in general, and gospel means, are not enjoyed; when you can neglect the Bible and not find it precious to your soul; and your soul is not deeply in earnest; then something is in the way; the Spirit of God is grieved, and you should awake to a most earnest search for this cause. This is an unnatural state of things for a Christian.

7. Indeed, whenever you are not filled with the Spirit, you should enquire why not? There is surely some valid reason why you are not, and it behoves you to search for that reason.

When the medium between our souls and God is not clear; when, instead of standing in his sunlight, there is plainly some thick cloud between God and your soul, and you cannot commune freely with him, then you need to be alive to your danger. If you are weak in faith, and your heart does not take hold of the great things of God and of salvation with earnest power, then something is wrong, and you should by no means suffer it to remain unsearched and still undermining your spiritual life.

II. Why do men need divine searching?

Many have supposed that they need the Spirit, not because they are not well disposed, but because there is some defect beyond and beneath their own activities and which therefore they cannot reach, and none but God can. Their need of divine aid is of such a nature that they can excuse themselves if they do not have it. Now in fact, if Christians examine themselves they will see that the very reason they need it lies wholly in themselves. This will appear, as I proceed to show what these reasons are.

1. The influence of prejudice. Men take up a one-sided view of the case, and they do this even under the influence of a dishonest prejudice, for if they were thoroughly honest, they would be careful about forming opinions, and would more often avoid serious mistakes. We are prone, under temptations, to adopt opinions with only a partial and one-sided view of the case, and yet may not be aware of the fact. The mind acts under its present views, but the reason why these views and no others are present, is due to prejudice. Those who form them do not know better, but they ought to know better. In such cases men should pray earnestly that God would reveal to them their prejudices, and they should cast themselves on God for his aid.

2. Again, men need the Spirit because they are prone to justify themselves on a false standard. Not having before their minds the love required in both the law and the gospel, they judge themselves, not by God's rule, but by some other rule. Whereas, if they would bring themselves under the light of the golden rule and require of themselves the same love every where in all relations, which they bear towards wives and children, brothers and sisters, they would soon see their mistake.

But men are not wont to use this golden rule in honest application. When you see a difficulty spring up between two men, each wrong, perhaps, yet each justifying himself, you will find they have a false standard of judgment. If you bring their conduct to the standard of gospel love, you will readily see that all is wrong.

I have been often shocked at my own mistakes in judging myself from a false point of view, neglecting and forgetting Christ's spirit, in which he could even die for an enemy. Instead of looking at it in that light, I found myself inclined to take quite another view, and therein, I learned my great need of the Holy Spirit.

3. Again, we are often blinded by our feelings. These have a wonderful influence on our opinions. Feelings control the intellect, and this acts towards the control of the will. Hence, we fall into errors because we are blinded by excited feelings.

Persons sometimes say--We have been so tried and abused, we have good reason for feeling excited. Yet, after all, they cannot be satisfied in a course which conscience condemns. Yet they manage to keep themselves blind, while really their excuse is no excuse at all. It avails nothing that men try to justify themselves in wrong-doing because others have done wrong first, arguing that we may rightly injure those who have injured us. Such a state of self-justification needs to be thoroughly searched out by the Spirit of God.

4. One peculiarity is often overlooked. It often happens that persons, when themselves the subject of abuse, bear it firmly, being on their guard; but when another is abused, then they think it noble to resist and repel the wrong, and often go into this with a spirit which they would at once condemn if it were aimed to repel a wrong done themselves. The devil gets great advantage over them. They think they are standing up in defense of

truth and right; but do it with a spirit altogether wrong. Many a man has pled for the slave in a spirit that shuts him off from God. Seeing despotism lording it over his fellow-man, he lets his indignation loose, and steps into the place of him who has said--"Vengeance is mine." God wants no such advocacy of even the oppressed. Let no man assume that God neglects his duty of avenging the wrongs of earth!

5. Often in this way men are led stealthily into a wrong spirit. They find themselves shut out from God and begin to enquire for the reason. They say--In such a case, I recollect I became greatly excited, but I had good reason, for that poor man was shamefully abused. Take care; you must not become uncharitable and grieve the heart of God!

6. We often need God's searching Spirit because we forget. We cultivate the habit of forgetting what we do not wish to remember. Under some influence, leading in that direction, we do not care to remember. God says, "They do not consider that I remember all their sins." Hence, it behooves you to cry--"O Lord, what is it?" We need some special providence, or some form of divine utterance, that shall wake us up to the remembrance of our deeds.

7. Men often shield themselves under some false principle, or some supposed fact, wither of which they admit to be true without sufficient care. Having once adopted the principle or the fact, the mind becomes incapable of seeing things as they are. This incapability is a great sin, because of the influence which the will has had in producing it. Thus blinded, men pass on till they plunge into an ocean of errors, all growing out of their self-will.

8. Often men are blinded by self-esteem. They have a much better opinion of themselves than they ought to have. Hence, they under-estimate their wrong deeds and over-estimate their right ones. By this means they must, of course, fall into darkness. Indeed, the spirit of egotism amounts sometimes to a sort of insanity. There is a species of egotistical insanity, in which the mind forever recurs to itself, and never sees anything pertaining to self in a just light. Let me not be understood to imply that this insanity is a misfortune and not a crime, for it certainly is a great crime, growing out of a culpable and sinfully indulged self-esteem. This egotism is one of the most difficult things to root out from the mind. There is little hope for him unless God interposes to open his eyes and reveal his own heart to himself

in its just light.

9. Persons are often blinded by self-interest. You are aware that courts of law will not allow a man to be either witness or juror, if he has any self-interest in the case. A judge will not even allow himself to sit and hear a case as judge if he has any personal interest in it. I knew the case of a man who had been consulted as a lawyer upon a case, and gave his opinion upon it, and subsequently coming upon the bench, the same case was brought before him in the court of appeals, and he refused to hear it, on the ground that he might be biased by his previously formed and expressed opinion. Persons often overlook this danger and get deeply involved in some sin and allow themselves to justify their own course, under the obvious influence of self-interest. In such a case, how earnestly should men cry out to God--"O my God, open my heart, and let thy light in! Draw me out lest I die in my sin!"

Again, we often need God's light because we are blinded by the fear or the love of man. The fear or the love of the creature more than the Creator leads us astray. I think I could name ministers who have lost their power with God and with man, by means of being led astray by the fear or the love of some of their congregation. Their prayers are cold as death, and their position on great moral questions plainly shows that they do not stand in God's counsels.

Again, men often fall into the habit of professing more in their prayers and otherwise, than is strictly true. Sometimes they remain professors of religion, when they knew they ought not to, for they have no heart in it. They may excuse themselves by pleading that they are about as good as their neighbors are, yet they know this excuse can avail nothing before God. Such persons must fall into great darkness. O how many ministers have continued on in all the forms of religion with hearts hard as a stone, their very professions altogether hypocrisy and deceit before God!

10. In this spirit men sometimes fill the office of deacon, holding it solemnly before God and the church, yet with none of the spirit of a true deacon. Some men hold on in this way year after year, and completely destroy their own souls. Sanctimonious in their professions, selfish, fast asleep, they never find that when they open their mouths there is a bursting out of feeling from the living fire in their souls. Cold, formal, speculative, dead, the heart with no mellowness--how plainly such persons ought to cry

out to God, "O my Strength, cast me not off; there must be something wrong in me; O tell me what it is! Search me till all is revealed."

Again, we need divine searching because we are so prone to attend to others' sins more than our own. We are in great danger of this, especially if we feel annoyed by others' sins, and get into a bad state of mind ourselves. Indeed, we are in the more danger precisely as we get farther away from God. Often this becomes a habit, insomuch that persons hear preaching in this way, neglecting entirely to take the part which belongs to themselves, and never allowing the truth to come close home to their hearts. Now unless God comes down to search such persons, they will never return to life and love again.

11. Men are exceedingly apt to rest in the letter without the spirit, satisfied with holding the truth without obeying it. The Jews of old stumbled on this rock. Such people are not aware of their danger, for those truths which they hold may be truly valuable, yet if this truth does not affect and even arouse them, it is all bad.

12. Men need God's searching Spirit because they are so liable to sear [their] conscience if it be abused. They see nothing on the field of consciousness, and therefore, think all must be right. Surely they will go to destruction unless God arouse them and search them thoroughly! By conscience, such persons understand a feeling of remorse; and hence, not feeling this, they think all is well. It is not strange, therefore, that they should live in a great sin a long time, and yet not see their real condition. Yet, none the less for their blindness do they lose their communion with God. There is little hope in their case unless they arouse themselves to cry mightily unto God for his searching Spirit.

13. Men are apt to overlook the sin of unbelief, perhaps confounding it with disbelief; and hence, not being conscious of denying the truth in disbelief, they assume that they are not guilty of resisting its power in unbelief. Really, they do not give God credit for veracity, and much less still do they earnestly trust him according to all their wants and to his grace to supply them. Only by God's searching Spirit are they likely to be recovered from this snare.

14. Often men mistake the will for the conscience. They think their

conscience is clear and right, when, in fact, in their case, conscience is seared and the will is up in its strength, and has assumed more than all the functions of conscience. If their conscience were in a healthy state, they would readily distinguish between the two; but now, having only a will in action, they must have their eyes thoroughly opened by the divine Spirit, or they will not discriminate between the will and the conscience.

15. Or, persons confound memory with imagination. Having passed through a course of doubtful conduct, they conceive what would excuse them, and then bring themselves to think it was so. The circumstances are suggested by the imagination, and are then supposed to be held as by simply memory. Such persons are very probably not aware of this deception, but go on, sinning and covering up their sin as they go. Unless God convince them of their sins, they wax worse and worse; get fearfully far away from God, even while assuming that all is right; while plainly, if they were to apply honestly even the simplest tests of Christian experience, they would find the bottom of their piety altogether fallen out.

16. Men are prone to take credit for what is of little or no real value. Often they do things only in the letter, without a particle of the spirit which God requires, and which only could make the outward doing, real obedience. Thus, men will attend religious meetings--right in the letter,--but with no heart of worship, and no regard to pleasing God--and hence, all is wanting in the spirit of the deed. Or, they give their money for a benevolent object, yet give it most grudgingly or selfishly, and therefore, in a spirit which God abhors. Now, if men take credit to themselves for such services, they are under a most radical mistake, and need God's Spirit to open their eyes to see it.

17. Often men overlook a multitude of dishonesties and hypocrisies. They go on in a course of professions towards God which, being empty, are unutterably loathsome to him. Who can save them from this delusion, but God himself!

18. Men are apt to resist and grieve away the Spirit without remembering when and how they did it. They were walking with God, up to a certain point; then they parted from him, but they did not at once notice the fact and do not subsequently recall the circumstances so as to see the reason why God there left them. The truth, doubtless, was that the Spirit urged

some point of duty, but they resisted. So they lost their life and peace, and passed on, so much interested in something else that they failed to notice that God had departed from them. In such a state man's only help is to cry to God for his searching Spirit.

19. We are apt to fail in fulfilling the conditions of prayer, and hence begin to doubt and become greatly discouraged. Parents praying for children fail to fulfill the conditions, and hence make no real use of the promises. Such persons greatly need God's searching Spirit to show them their own case.

20. Some men are at issue with God by reason of making excuses for their sins. How many have been in a terrible state of commotion, agonized, distressed, anxious to know wherefore it is thus with them, when really the fact is they are excusing some sin.

21. Men sometimes suppose themselves fully consecrated to God when they are not so. Some little idols are hid among the stuff, as in the case of Rachel. No matter how small--a finger ring, or a pin, if reserved as our own, and not heartily laid on God's altar, it mars your consecration to God. You are not a fruitful branch, but only a dry stalk. You can have no hold on God in prayer. In real consecration, the heart is full of God, and this full heart breaks forth in appropriate emotions and reveals itself in a rich spiritual life. If your case lack these evidences, you need to enquire, Lord, is this all? Is Christianity a powerless religion? You need to cry out--Tell me, O my Father am I really consecrated to Thee, or am I deceived?

22. Men are in great danger in the line of covering up sin, or refusing when convicted, to confess it. These causes involve them in great spiritual darkness.

23. Sometimes persons harbor resentment without being aware of it. They would not exactly like to inflict evil on another, but are more than willing it should befall him, no matter who does it. There is really an ill feeling. In this state of mind, you find yourself shut out from God and need to cry out for light.

III. I must next speak of the manner in which God answers prayer to be searched.

1. By directly calling our attention to the thing we need to see. He may do

this by the direct agency of his Spirit, bringing up some truth of his word with amazing power and applying it in a most searching manner to our hearts. It is not so much the Bible, as the Spirit of God in the Bible, and by means of the Bible, that brings such light.

A lady, having made a profession of religion and entered upon a Christian life, subsequently found herself so greatly tried, that she at length said, "I must give up all profession of piety and all attempt to live a Christian life unless I can succeed better. At that time she had not been taught that she might find deliverance through Christ. But at this juncture, the doctrine of sanctification was brought before her mind, and she felt her need of its provisions. She embraced it in theory, hoping, and for the time assuming, that this would bring her the desired relief. But this failed, and she was about to abandon the theory, when it was suggested that she had not faithfully put the doctrine in practice. One of her most besetting and powerful sins was in her temper. She began to see that she must have grace for a victory over this. Just at this crisis, her husband in family worship read the passage--"In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (Jn. 16:38) It thrilled her very soul. She cried out --"My temper is dead; through grace I have conquered, and my victory is complete." Many years afterwards, she said of herself--"Never since that hour have I felt any risings of unhallowed temper, and I no more expect to give way to that sin than I expect to cut my neighbor's throat."

2. Often God brings about the same result by the aid of his providences, these acting from without, and his Spirit, within. Together they reveal to the mind what was not seen before. One man meets with losses of property, and the loss shows him that this property was held as his, not as God's.

Only last winter, a lady told me she had fallen into a dreadful state of mind, bordering on despair, so that her friends even feared that she would kill herself. At length, providence showed her what the matter was. Her husband had refused to perform the duty of family worship, and she got angry about it. She was so full of zeal for God, as she thought, that she was not aware of her great sin. At length, God brought help by converting her husband. Then, seeing that she was parted from him, and that she had been sinfully angry, her heart was broken down into penitence, and her soul restored to the joys of God's salvation.

In conclusion, let me say--

REMARKS.

1. Having made this prayer, be careful not to resist the divine searching. Whatever means God may use, let him go on, unresisted on your part. When we most need to be searched, we are in greatest danger of resisting the process.
2. Having begun, be careful not to desist from praying and self-searching till the work has gone to the bottom. Cease not, till you find your soul filled with peace and power, such as will reveal itself everywhere.
3. As fast as God reveals light, we should use it. Many begin well and pray well, but defer repentance and reform till they shall have seen the whole. They want everything revealed before they begin to repent and reform. Or they look for the blessing before they have fulfilled all the conditions. They say--"Give me the blessing, and then I will repent." This is no way to deal with God. Let them rather deal honestly and put away all iniquity as fast as they discover it.
4. When persons pray that God would search them, they should use all fit means to search themselves. Not to do this shows that you are not really honest in desiring the blessing.

Some of you have lived here many years, and passed through many scenes of refreshing, and many agencies of both providence and grace, designed for your good, but now seem to have thrown off a sense of responsibility and to have wandered far from God. How greatly do you need to open your hearts before God and expose all to the light of his face and truth. It would be wonderful if amid so many excitements, some should not be very far out of the way. I am sure something must be wrong here. We need a general awakening of mind, in which each one shall fix his mind on his own sins. After such a sermon as this, some one will say--"That is the preaching we need; do not you think the church needs such preaching?" And yet this very man who cares so benevolently for the church, needs the sermon more than any other man in town. The thing most of all needed is, that each man should apply it to himself--asking--In what respect do I need this sermon? For what do I need to be searched, and to pray that God would search me and try me, and see if there be any evil way in me? Some of you, I am afraid, are in most perishing need of this personal treatment. Brethren, when shall this church be as holy as it professes to be; as it is supposed to be;

and as its theory leads people to assume that it is? When shall all our theories be reduced to practice?

5. It often happens that people most in the fog about their own state are most tried with the bad state of others. This is sometimes a great and sore delusion! Beware of it.

How many of you are in the habit of taking your spiritual reckoning every week, or even every month, to see where you are, and whether you may not be coasting along a lee shore, just on the rocks--heading towards them under wind and tide--the breakers roaring under your bow! Pray that God may search you all out, and leave nothing undisclosed! Pray that God may search all this people, each according to his need. This, more than anything else, is what the impenitent here need to see in every house and in every Christian--each one an epistle of Jesus Christ, known and read of all. So would the gospel be honored, and its truth be enforced with resistless power.

[Back to Top](#)

On Injustice To Character

Lecture IX

August 29, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 7:1-3: "Judge not, that ye be not judged, For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again, And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye."

This passage forbids us to judge persons; and our first inquiry should be --

I. What is not intended in this prohibition?

II. What is intended?

III. Wherein does character consist?

IV. How is character revealed?

V. What is the rule of judgment?

VI. What are the sources of injustice to character?

VII. Consider our danger of falling into this sin.

VIII. The great wickedness of this sin.

IX. The results of injustice to character.

I. What is not intended in this prohibition?

I answer,

1. It does not forbid forensic judgments, for this would make the passage forbid what God elsewhere requires, and what is obviously essential to the ends of justice among men.
2. Nor, does it prohibit all forming opinions as to others. If we have the means of forming a correct opinion, and of circumstances render it fit and needful that we should form an opinion, obviously it cannot be forbidden. Plainly it does not prohibit the forming of righteous opinions whenever we have the means and it becomes necessary to form an opinion.

II. What then does this passage mean?

I answer, it means to prohibit injustice to character. It forbids unjust judgments.

Here it becomes necessary to inquire --

III. Wherein does character consist?

I answer, in the voluntary state of mind of an active agent. I say by his state, rather than by any individual volition. You must take the man and his acts as a whole in order to estimate his character. His character is as the voluntary state of his mind. If this be committed to good, such is his character; if not evil, his character is to be estimated accordingly. Character always pertains to ultimate purpose and intention, and should never be predicated on individual, abnormal

acts, which are aside from the general strain of a man's life.

IV. How is character revealed?

In the habitual life and temper, and not in any one individual act. Our Lord reveals the true doctrine when he says -- "By their fruits ye shall know them,"

V. What is the rule of judgment?

Not to judge from single, insulated acts. To judge David only by his acts towards Uriah and his wife, would do him great injustice. In that transaction, David acted not in, but out of his general character. Hence, we are never to judge by occasional, irregular acts; such are aside from the common course of one's life; but by its general tenor. Some persons have their easily besetting sins, that do occasionally develop themselves; yet their general character should not be judged altogether from these. To do so, would greatly wrong them.

VI. What are the sources of injustice to character?

All prejudice towards character is injustice. It is prejudgment -- forming an opinion in advance of adequate grounds for it. This is always wrong.

As to the sources whence unjust judgments arise, we may trace them,

1. To human selfishness. Men judge others by themselves. Being themselves selfish, they judge others to be so likewise. Nothing is more common than for men to regard others as selfish who will not give in to their own selfish demands. It is through their own selfishness that sinners mis-estimate God and withhold from Him the credit due for His loving-kindness. In the same manner they mis-estimate better men than themselves. They mis-conceive everybody's motives if those motives are of a higher moral grade than they are conscious of possessing.
2. In the same manner self-will leads men to mis-estimate others. Becoming offended and irritated, they are in no state of mind to judge others fairly.
3. The selfish representations of others often mislead us into false judgments. We are little aware how often and how sorely we are misled in this way. Others mistake, and then lead us into the same false opinions. In such cases we are not responsible, provided we use our best judgment in all candor and kindness, being duly on our guard against being deceived and

making all due allowance for this liability.

4. Another source is the absence of that love which would forbid us to do injustice to character. It is unnatural to love to do injustice to others. Love in our hearts secures us against this liability; but if love be wanting, we are almost sure to err. The absence of love leads to a want of consideration as to the value and sacredness of character. Often we see persons treat the character of others with a reckless levity, as if they had no due regard to its value and sacredness. Such persons are always inflicting wanton wrong on character.

5. Often persons misjudge because they form opinions without sufficient knowledge. They judge before they have any right to judge. No man has any right to judge the character of another until he has sufficient data. Especially should he cautiously refrain from an unfavorable judgment, if compelled to form an opinion on slender acquaintance. In such cases, let his mind by all means lean towards a favorable opinion and not its opposite.

Again, men should never be impetuous and rash in forming judgments of others. We sometimes see this in a most alarming degree. It is often a fruitful source of great wrong.

6. Any form of dishonesty in us works mis-judgment in regard to others. A man given to lying will have no confidence in other men's veracity. A hypocrite has no confidence in other people's piety, but will have it that others are as hypocritical as himself. The licentious man thinks others licentious; the ambitious man suspects everybody else of ambition. If avaricious, he assumes that others are as much so; if given to over-reaching, he suspects others of the same tendency. Thus any special type of vice in his own character will surely affect his judgments of others.

Again, the state of one's feelings often prejudices the judgment. A wrong bias in one's feelings almost always results in injustice towards others.

7. Existing prejudice begets new and additional prejudice. One prejudice begets another. Under the influence of a first prejudice, it is almost impossible to avoid a second. A man already prejudiced, is in great measure incapacitated from right judgment, and consequently he goes on in one mistake and wrong after another, till he surrounds himself with an ocean of

prejudice.

VII. Let us next consider our danger of falling into this sin.

1. We are in danger of receiving too strong an impression from first acquaintance. Some are proud to say that they can read anyone's character on an acquaintance of five minutes. "Let me only see a person once -- hear a single remark -- I can read him through and through." They seem to pride themselves on their discernment, as if they had a superhuman power. But observe where you will, this is commonly a Satanic discernment -- sure almost to be a false one, and to do injustice to character.

2. We shall almost certainly misjudge if we form our opinion from single facts. Suppose men should judge David thus on the case of Uriah; how greatly would they wrong him and themselves too? Yet there are persons who, having heard of one thing, say, That is enough? I know him now. They refuse to hear anything more; but leap to an unjust conclusion at once.

3. Often we suffer ourselves to be influenced by that which is no fact at all. We accept it on testimony which would by no means, in our view, have condemned a husband or a wife, a parent or a child, or any whom we love as ourselves. Then it ought not to be accepted against a stranger.

4. Of course we are in danger of mis-judgment when we form opinions without knowing all the essential facts in the case. We are specially culpable when we rush to a conclusion without first learning all the important facts within our reach. For this rash conduct, God will by no means hold us guiltless. Manifestly we ought to suspend our judgment till we can and do know, and not be restive or rash. Some months since, I was favorably impressed with the course of a gentleman of deservedly high standing, to whom I had been presenting my views of the doctrine of sanctification. I had given him the outlines of the doctrine and of the grounds of it as it lay in my mind, and then asked him his opinion. He replied -- I have been a judge on the bench for many years, and I have learned that it is never safe to form an opinion without hearing the other side. In the present case, I have not thought on the subject enough to form a reliable judgment. You have made out a fair case, but I want to hear all sides. You may be right; but how can I say I think you are till I have given the subject a thorough and all-sided investigation?

Now, in this case, it was, doubtless, important to hear all sides and give the question a patient and full investigation. How much more, if the case had involved personal character?

5. Where the question turns on the quality of an individual act, we are in danger of misjudging it by omitting to consider the individual's general character. For example, here is a good man, whom you have known to be such, and it is now said he has lied. Now, whether this be so or not so, you should certainly be very slow to admit it, and should by all means give him the credit of his previous good character, on the side of innocence. If there be testimony to outweigh this presumption, see that you examine it candidly, and be sure there is enough of it.

6. Public men are liable to be placed in circumstances where they cannot give to others the reason of their conduct. Suppose you were to judge such men without regard to their general character, and without the means of knowing their reasons. You surely would wrong them greatly.

7. Sometimes we are in great danger because we overlook our own state of mind. In such cases we shall doubtless be misled. It is of the utmost importance that we should be aware of our relation to the facts in the case, and the influence which this relation may have on our own judgment. Disregarding this, we shall most surely do injustice to character. For example, suppose a friend of ours is accused of crime. Our friendship for him arouses our feelings, and must have a strong influence on our judgment in the case.

8. Often we are biased by an undue regard to our own consistency. If we are not aware of the influence which this feeling has on our minds, we shall most surely be misled by it in the formation of our judgments.

9. I need not urge that we are in danger of being biased by those who themselves make mistakes; or by those who are dishonest; or who are reckless; or by the general injustice to character which prevails among mankind, in the midst of which we are born and influence of which it must be exceedingly difficult for us entirely to escape.

VIII. I must now call your attention to the great wickedness of this sin.

1. Character, as a condition of happiness, is the most valuable treasure in

the universe. To each moral agent, his own character is the greatest good. If his character be not intrinsically upright, it must be a scorpion sting in his bosom. If it be bad in his own estimation, he can have no self-respect, and his very bosom becomes a sort of hell. Every man's happiness and usefulness, therefore, depend on his own character, and, to a great extent, on his reputation -- that is, on the estimate that others shall form and express of his character. God, in His word, assumes that His honor and great name are a most sacred treasure. How could He govern His moral universe without it? Many persons forget that God has a character to sustain, and that He must, therefore, most severely punish every insult and wrong inflicted upon it. In like manner they forget that, out of sympathy with the slandered, if for no other reason, God will surely take vengeance on those who traduce their neighbors.

2. Injustice to character is in every point of view a most detestable and infamous crime. God hates and denounces it; it is an abomination in the eyes of all the good in the universe. The stealing of money is nothing compared to it. "Who steals my purse, steals trash; but he who steals my name steals that which nought enriches him, but makes me poor indeed."

3. The greatest injury we can inflict on anyone is to rob him of his good name. So, the greatest injustice we can do to God is to manifest want of confidence in Him. It is like taking hold of the pillars of the universe and shaking them to their foundations. Everywhere, this sin involves serious consequence beyond any other. It inflicts the greatest evil on the wronged party; the greatest on society. Suppose it falls on the character of one who devotes his utmost powers to doing good; then it cripples his power, and wrongs the community out of the good he might otherwise do in it. No mischief that any moral agent can do is greater than this.

IX. Next, let us notice some of the results of injustice to character, and first - to the authors of this injustice.

1. Those who commit this great wrong are sure to quench the Spirit. If they are impenitent sinners, they are sure to grieve the Spirit away. God regards character as sacred; -- that of His own people, is to Him as the apple of His eye. "Touch not, says He, mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm." The Bible is full of indications like this of God's regard to the reputation of His people. Hence, we must infer that this sin is especially repugnant to the

divine Spirit, who comes under the gentle, loving emblem of a "dove."

2. This sin benumbs the religious sensibility. We should not wonder that one guilty of stealing should benumb his moral sensibility; and if he could bring his feelings to commit the crime of murder, we should expect him to be utterly callous to all tender and kind emotions; but it is too much overlooked -- strangely indeed -- that slanderers and all who can coolly inflict injustice on character, do utter violence to their own sensibility. They so benumb it that it refuses to move and act in its natural way. They become so hardened, they can sit under preaching that might almost electrify the very seats they sit on, and yet nothing moves their sensibility or their conscience. Go where you will among the churches, you see that this is one of their sorest evils. This sin fearfully stifles the voice of conscience, and perverts the moral judgment. Under its influence, men come to feel no compunction for this sin, and they also seem to lose that nice perception of evidence under which an unperturbed mind judges uprightly of character. It is amazing to see of how slight evidence they will take up an evil report against a neighbor, and how incapable they become of judging righteously.

Again it augments the selfishness of the will. It is wonderful to see how the soul, under the sway of this sin, becomes committed to selfishness, loses all regard to others' rights and interests, and thus shuts itself up to the eternal dominion of the basest, purest selfishness. There cannot be a worse obstacle to conversion or to sanctification than this.

3. It destroys one's influence. It wounds the feelings of others, and puts them beyond the reach of your influence. What good can a minister do, or a deacon, if they allow themselves to injure the good name of their people! Sometimes a whisper, or even a look, will paralyze all the power and influence which a brother may have. It may break the arm of its strength so that it shall ever after hang useless by his side.

4. Wrong done to the moral government of the universe spreads its mischief far and wide. Wrong done to the good name of God's people reaches indirectly His own good name and influence of His cause in the world, and thus favors hell and wrongs heaven!

REMARKS.

1. God sustains to the universe a very difficult and responsible position. The reasons of His policy cannot be fully explained to His finite subjects, and, therefore, are almost of necessity misunderstood. At least it is safe to say that His reasons for His course will not ever be fully understood. He cannot explain if He would; and often it may not be wise to explain all He could. On every side He has many and most unreasonable prejudices to overcome. No earthly monarch ever had such opposition to contend against; no, not all of them together have had so much trial, so much grief, so much strange and blind opposition from this source as God has had. In part, this is to be ascribed to human depravity, and in part to the relations of the Infinite to finite minds. Christ had occasion to say to His friends, "What I do ye know not now, but ye shall know hereafter." God often needs to say to His people -- I cannot explain this to you now; you must have faith in Me.

2. This reveals the importance of faith in finite minds towards their Infinite Father. We know God is infinitely wise, and makes no mistakes. We equally know Him to be perfectly good, and, therefore, that He always acts with the best intentions; yet we cannot know all His reasons -- cannot fathom all His plans. Here, then, is the struggle -- here between unbelief and faith. Will you embrace all God's character and ways, so as to give Him the fullest credit for all He is and for all He does? This is the highest style of virtue; this most eminently pleases God.

3. As I have already said, no being in all the universe is the subject of so much injustice to character as God. He has reason to complain of His subjects, and to hold them responsible for their great sin in this thing. Rulers in all governments are in a very trying position. Civil magistrates, parents, teachers, -- often have their motives impugned. Often they have reason to feel that theirs is a thankless position. They find it perhaps quite impossible to reconcile their convictions of duty with the wishes and expectations of their subjects. Persons in such relations must make up their minds to bear meekly all they are called to suffer. Every parent has this class of trials more or less. Sometimes they are unable to make their children appreciate their views.

Hence, both rulers and ruled should exercise great patience and forbearance, and should be slow to judge unfavorably of each other, even though there should seem to be real testimony looking towards an unfavorable decision.

4. Mutual love and consideration are demanded in all the relations of life.

Everything that may qualify the motives of others should be candidly considered. There should be an abounding fullness of that love which hopeth all things, -- since only this can prevent great injustice to character.

5. Violations of this precept are the greatest evils in general society. Who can bear to read the political newspapers? Sometimes the same objection lies equally against the religious papers. They are full of calumny; they reek with rankest abuse of character. Never since I have been a Christian have I been able to read a daily paper. I have never found one that was safe to read.

6. A great deal is said in professedly promoting reform which injures and retards reform. I have always supposed that the injustice done to character in the great reforms of the age has hindered these reforms more than everything else has done. For this reason, God is displeased with these movements, and suffers them to be frustrated, and truth, for the present, to fall to the ground; -- this being a less evil than for Him to seem to sanction a spirit so utterly alien to genuine love.

7. This sin strengthens itself, and, therefore, is one of the hardest to overcome. He who commits himself to evil speaking against a neighbor, will be strongly tempted to carry it out. He has said that neighbor is a bad man; now he must prove it. He must rake up more low and perhaps false scandal against him; -- else his own reputation will suffer. So he plunges deeper and yet deeper into this sin. Perhaps if called to account, he replies -- "You think that statement of mine is not true; I will look the matter all over and see." I tell you, he won't! He will do no such thing as revise that opinion candidly. Far more likely his committal will blind him the more and he will become only the more confirmed in his sin at every step.

8. Many are so hardened as not to realize the relation of what they say to God and to the moral universes. They do not seem at all to appreciate the great evil of injustice to character. What sinner ever realizes the nature of his unbelief towards God? God says -- "He that believeth not, makes Him a liar!" How terrible to destroy confidence in God! What an awful, mischievous, damning sin! Look at the wrong done to Christ by the Scribes and Pharisees, and the mischief it did in the world. But for their virulence and prejudice in rejecting Christ, the people would have embraced Him as their Messiah. To all human view, if they had received Christ candidly, and given Him their hearts, the nation would have been converted, and that nation, converted, would have sent the gospel at once all over the world. Such was their location, and such their relation to the nations

of the earth, they would have given the gospel to all nations in a single generation, and long ago, shouts of salvation would have rolled over every mountain, and echoed through every valley in all the globe! Alas, hell gloats over the misery and all nature groans under the evils, wrought by injustice to character! Who can measure the depth, and length and breadth thereof!

If this sin were not so common, it would be universally disgraceful. If, according to its real turpitude, it were in as low repute as other sins, who would dare commit it?

9. It is most painful to come near one who is in the habit of taking up evil reports and casting them about him as "firebrands and arrows, saying -- Am I not in sport?" You should avoid one who has this habit as you would a viper.

I have thought a mistake is working in community as to the manner in which we should treat persons who wrong society and manifest no repentance for this sin. It is easy and but too natural for us to put on a plaster where we should put in a probe. Certainly we ought to mark the man who goes about slandering society. In this thing, there are two extremes; one consists in treating such offenders without any compassion; the other, in overlooking their great wickedness. Plainly we should try to avoid both extremes.

How great is the cruelty of injuring the character of another, and especially, of using an influence to crush it! Their words eat as doth a canker, annihilating those on whom they fall! O how much does it become us to take care what we say of others' character!

It is most cruel towards God to injure the character of His children. God Himself feels outraged by such abuse offered to those He loves. We who are parents know very well how it affects us to have our children slandered, even though they may be wicked.

10. It is specially cruel to injure those who labor for our good. Ingratitude in this case heightens to wrong.

What an awful amount of sin the conductors of the press have to answer for! Especially for their course on the eve of an election. Then we cannot, often, believe a word they say. It would almost seem that many of them lie then on principle and by system! Perhaps the election is carried by such slander, and the men who rule us in the places of civil power are there because their friends had

superior skill in falsehood and slander! Before high heaven, what a nation of slanderers! I have often had occasion to say to editors who coin and pass on slanders just before election -- If you allow a lie to go out from your press for election purposes, you must answer for it to God! Are you prepared to meet God for this thing?

A man not just to character is not just to anything! He is a totally dishonest man, and just to nothing. If he appears to be just, it is an appearance only. What an appalling thought! There can be no stronger proof of radical dishonesty of character, and unmitigated selfishness.

11. Some seem to regard confidence in those around us as a ridiculous weakness, if not crime. This is most unfortunate, for how much is he to be pitied -- perhaps blamed too -- who confides in no one, and lives in everlasting distrust of all mankind! The Psalmist once said, "All men are liars;" but he said it "in his haste," and we hope only when in haste.

When one shows a general want of confidence, he deserves none in himself. This is obvious as an axiom.

12. Perhaps in no other thing is frequent self-examination more demanded than in this matter of doing injustice to character. The temptation and tendency to violate the law of love is so great, we need to overhaul our practice continually. Evermore let us search our hearts and our words, asking -- Do I deal justly with others even as I would have others do with me? Do I judge the motives of others only as I would have another judge mine?

No department of self-examination is more difficult than this. Hence, it needs to be pressed faithfully, with much self-distrust, and thoroughly, through all the circle of our formed and expressed opinions as to others. On no point is there more danger of delusion, and on none is this delusion more likely to prove fatal. Professed Christians are but too apt to forget that this is radically a dishonest state of mind, and hence, must be inevitably damning.

It is shocking to notice how evil reports are gotten up, spread abroad and received; how a lie passes round and round, and how rarely it meets with one kind, honest, loving heart, to impede its progress!

Men guilty of this sin, will die and be damned for it unless they are willing to repent, confess and make restitution. Who does not say -- if a man steals but a

horse or a sheep, and dies without confession and restitution, he cannot be saved. How much more must he die for such a sin as this, unrepented of and unforgiven!

This sin is so fearfully common, its great enormity is overlooked. Scarce anyone estimates it according to its real malignity. But suppose a sin of this kind should occur in heaven. Suppose one of the holy there should slander his brother unjustly! What a sensation! How would those pure and loving hearts be paralyzed with horror! And suppose society here were what it should be, how suddenly would men shut out from their fellowship one who could recklessly or maliciously traduce his brother! Is not this true? When we are really benevolent, what a shock comes over our feelings to hear one belch out an avalanche of venom! We are horrified! What! We say, is not this the spirit of hell?

In the great judgment God will show up this sin in its true light. Then He will place him that loves and him that receives, on a par with him that makes, a lie. The spirit of the act will give it its character then.

13. Where persons are really guilty, there is danger of doing them injustice. But God never falls into this danger. His judgment is eternally and perfectly just. And He would have us aim at entire justice. His word informs us that one of the loftiest angels did not bring a railing accusation against even the devil -- but said -- "The Lord rebuke thee." This example in high places stands for our admonition. We should no more abuse and wrong an enemy than a friend.

We would be specially on our guard in cases where we differ from others in opinion. Here pride of opinion comes in to heighten the danger of doing injustice to others.

14. Often, (as our text suggests) God visits retribution for this sin on men visibly in the present life. He shapes His providence's so that those who judge others censoriously, are themselves judged censoriously. But, if this retribution should not come down on men in this world, it surely will, (and only the more surely for the omission here,) in the world to come. God will judge those who thus judge their brother! And what a judgment must that be!

[Back to Top](#)

God's Goodness Toward Men Basely Required

Lecture X

September 12, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Psa. 109:5: "They have rewarded me evil for my good and hatred for my love."

David is here speaking apparently of himself, yet really says much that is appropriately applicable to the Messiah. This is common to those ancient prophets who were, in a sort, types of the Messiah, and is especially developed in the case of David, who, as God's chosen king of his covenant people, was so extraordinary a precursor and model of Zion's greater King.

In one aspect, this and several other kindred passages, have been a stumbling-block to some, and a trial to many. They are thought to breathe a vindictive spirit. But there is really in them no occasion for stumbling, for, justly interpreted, they contain nothing inconsistent with the revealed character of God - nothing repugnant to the genius and spirit of the New Testament. These objections grow out of ignorance of God.

God is benevolent. But benevolence has many attributes, and justice is one of them. When occasion calls for it, justice must be revealed. The occasions are less frequent now than they will be at some future day - because this is a period of probation, of long-suffering and of mercy. Under the Gospel, and during the progress of this great experiment of mercy on depraved hearts, we need not expect the ordinary manifestations of justice, that must obtain, in general, under God's government.

It should never be forgotten that God is not all mercy. If He were to become so, He could be no longer good. Indeed, it is impossible for us to conceive of a being all mercy and no justice, or all justice and no mercy.

In this psalm, the special manifestations are those of justice. We hear the writer pleading for justice. The Spirit of Christ within the Psalmist is praying God to execute justice on the wicked. Of course the Spirit which indited prayer in

David's mind, was well aware of the necessity of justice in the government of God. Why, then, should He not direct David's mind to offer prayer accordingly? In the case of truly spiritual Christians, led by the Spirit of God, we see the same thing developed now. The soul demands the administration of justice. Under a deep conviction of its necessity as a means of the greatest good, strong desire is awakened, and this, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, assumes the spirit of prayer.

On all hands, it is conceded that God is good - perfectly, infinitely good; - in other words, is truly love. All unselfish, He is only and infinitely benevolent.

The text assumes that God does good to men, and affirms that they requite Him evil therefor. Let us now inquire,

I. In what God's goodness and love to men are manifested;

II. How these manifestations ought to be received;

III. How they are received in fact.

I. In what God's goodness and love to men are manifested.

1. God manifested His love to man in creating him with a far nobler nature than He gave other animals. Man He made capable of knowing his Maker, and, in connection with this capability, made him capable, also, of loving and obeying Him, and of entering into His sympathies and views in regard to the welfare of His creatures. These glorious prerogatives, conferred on man by his Maker, are surely manifestations of His great love, and should be so regarded.

Again, this love appears, also, in His establishing over man a government, such as he greatly needed for his welfare. Beyond all doubt, such beings as we are, need to be trained. Even in Eden, holy man needed God's watchful care to keep him from sin. Much more does he need God's care and help, since his fall. If our children need parental training to make them good men and women, much more do we, under God, our Father, to make us holy and happy. If this training is an act of benevolence in parents, much more is it in God.

Again, God's goodness to men appears in the fact that He writes His law in

man's very nature, giving him a conscience whose voice responds to the voice of God. Surely, it was good in our Father to bring His law so very near as to write it in our inmost mind. For, if holiness is happiness, and hence, we must have God's law developed in all our moral being, then to give us a conscience on which this law should be written, is surely a development of real love.

2. Also, God reveals His love in giving man a written copy of this law. The case was that, by reason of sin, man did not like to retain God in his knowledge, and so, though he might have known, yet did not know God fully and rightly. Then that God should come down and spread out this law on the written page, was truly an act of love - love that would seek to vary the experiment in every way, and would use the best possible means for man's instruction and salvation.

3. And, yet further, after this law had been utterly broken, to open another door of hope through Jesus Christ - to throw it open so widely that none need fail of gaining admittance; - how significantly radiant with love is this!

But I have time only to glance at some of these things, passing unmentioned a great multitude of special developments.

(1.) I might speak of His love in giving us a Sabbath. Suppose we were immersed in worldly business incessantly. What a calamity! Now we may return to God one day in seven -, and, oh, what a rest and blessing is this! It is striking to observe how much of our time is Sabbath. The very child seven years old has had one whole year of Sabbaths, and the young man or woman twenty-eight years old, has had four full years of Sabbaths! - enough to go through college! O, if you had only used it to complete your education for the everlasting Sabbath!

(2.) Observe these Sabbaths are not a yoke, but a gift - made for man, to minister to his welfare - a holy day, to conduce the more to his holiness and happiness. How sad the mistake of those who never call the Sabbath a "delight," but only a "weariness!" Said a brother who had been sick - I had a new view of the Sabbath. I saw it to be a holiday, in which, like a weary laborer, I might go home and commune with my Father in heaven. I now thank God for Sabbaths!

(3.) God's goodness appears in all the means of grace He has appointed; in the blessings of His providence, also, in countless number and untold variety; in the restraints of His providence no less; in everything God does for us and in regard for us. All the needful discipline, all the chastisements, rebukes, corrections - all come from a loving heart, designed in real wisdom for our highest good.

(4.) We might extend even this view, and add - the restraints of physical government, for, what would this world be without these restraints? The restraints of family government too; the means of education and the government necessary for their efficiency and for the formation of good habits; all these things have in view the development of what is good in man, and must, therefore, be put on our list among the manifestations of our Heavenly Father's love. All things - whatever God does or suffers - are intended for our good. Indeed, the kindness of God's intentions is absolutely infinite. You cannot measure it; you can in no wise measure up or appreciate its wonderful manifestations. And, let us add, also, that all these things manifest not only love but wisdom. They are not only done with good intent, but they are done well. As the purpose is good, so is the plan for its attainment, wise. All is love, and all is perfect.

II. Let us now inquire - How ought these manifestations to be received by us?

1. As kindly as they were intended. Our gratitude should correspond to His loving-kindness. Our confidence should meet His goodness. For, how ought human government to be received in the family, the school, or the State? Plainly, if that government is framed in wisdom, to answer ends of love, it should be met with responsive love and gratitude; should be accepted in a grateful and obedient spirit. Why not?

2. So should we receive all God's administration in providence. Christian, did you never fall before God, saying - O, Lord, help me to receive this chastisement as kindly as Thou hast intended it. May I be as grateful for it as Thou hast been good in its administration."

3. Sometimes children do not take discipline kindly, although they know they ought to. The fact that "no chastisement for the present seemeth to be

joyous," but only grievous, creates a demand for some faith in the wisdom and loving-kindness of the Lord. This faith both honors and pleases God, and surely ought never to be lacking. Manifestly, all the details of God's government over us, should be received in the same docile, humble, and trustful spirit. How do you feel in regard to the way in which your own children receive your discipline toward them? You know you are liable to err in judgment; so do they know this? Yet you are wont to feel strongly that so long as you bear your heart and hand toward them in love, and with your best wisdom, they ought to receive it kindly. You claim this as a parent; you feel the reasonableness of this claim all the more from the consciousness of loving them as your own soul. How reasonably, then, may God feel all this, and even more as His love is greater, and the sacrifices He has made for us are exceedingly more manifest and heart-revealing. Besides, He never lacks wisdom - never makes any mistakes. There is no occasion to which that His judgment were as wise as His heart is kind; - it is so, and we have nothing more to wish.

4. Then why not accept God's discipline as kindly as He gives it? Why should we not? What are we thinking of when we murmur, or question His wisdom or His love? How ought we to receive the gospel? Who can doubt its wisdom and its love? Shall we then receive it as if it were some attack on our habits and interests? How utterly strange this would be! Yet scarcely more so than to view God's providential discipline towards us as hard. For myself, I have often thought I did not want anything else but to receive all God's discipline toward me just as He gives and intends it - as grateful as He is good - my heart responsive evermore in confidence to His darkest dealings.

Again, how ought we to receive God's gift of a Sabbath? Shall we take it as an assault on our liberty? Shall we deem it only a burden and cry out - O, what a weariness it is? How strangely would this be standing in our own light, and accepting with suspicion what God gives in the purest wisdom and love! Therefore, all reason demands that, under the most afflictive rebukes of His providence, we should bow most trustfully and most humbly, knowing that all these things are intended in the utmost kindness and love. These very things are, more than all the rest, trying to our Heavenly Father's heart; yet they are so useful and even necessary to us, that He may not withhold them.

III. But I must now proceed to inquire, not how God's administration toward us ought to be received by us, but how it is. On this point, what are the facts?

The text has it - "They rewarded me evil for my good, and hatred for my love." Is this in accordance with the facts? Let us look at the position which sin takes towards God and the interests of His great family. Sin consists in selfishness. In all selfishness, the mind holds on to its own particular interests, real or supposed, and disregards the general interests in comparison with its own. But God, the Father of all, loving all equally, cannot endure selfishness in any one of them, for the good reason that it is intrinsically unjust and ruinous to interests which He loves and defends. He cannot bear to see one of His family outraging the rights of another one out of mere selfishness. This is the reason why He hates and withstands sin. It is not selfish in Him to take care of all the interests of His great family, nor to regard their general interests as of supreme importance, for they are really so. Consequently, it cannot be selfish in Him to maintain His own honor as King and Lord of all; for, unless He did, how could He rule His subjects so as to ensure their highest good? Hence, to be truly wise and good, He must maintain His dignity and authority against all the insults and abuses of selfish beings, and against all their encroachments on the interests of His great family. It should never be forgotten, that sin and selfishness are intrinsically unjust; - unjust to God and unjust to His creatures. This injustice God must and ought to oppose. Consequently, every being, persisting in his own selfishness, will fret against God and be rasped by unceasing collision with His righteous administration. It cannot be otherwise. A God who cares justly for all, must forever come into collision with creatures who care excessively for self. He will move on righteously; they will chafe and fret, selfishly; He, seeking evermore to secure the highest good of all; they seeking supremely the small and particular good of self as against all. Hence, it is impossible for a sinner remaining selfish, to deny that he renders to God evil for good. He opposes God for His love to all His great family. On this principle he opposes God's gospel - opposes His Law - opposes His Sabbaths - opposes His means of grace - opposes the course of His providence. Mark any one of these forms of opposition to God. See, for example, how men complain of God's providence. For what? Has God done anything wrong? They do not even pretend that He has. They act like bad children in a family, who are forever restive under a government which they know to be right, yet practically regard as wrong. You know how such children

thwart all attempts for their good, rewarding their parents evil for all the good done and attempted to be done for themselves. What is all this rasping and fretting against God? Only selfishness working itself out in requiting God with evil for good - resisting measures which God adopts to bless His great family.

In conclusion, let me ask some personal questions.

REMARKS.

1. Would you, who remain in sin, be any better pleased if God should take a different course with you. What can He do to conciliate you? He would like to be at peace with you if He reasonably could, and never has sought a quarrel with you. Suppose He should abolish His law and not require you to obey Him in anything. Suppose He should not ask you to love your neighbor. Would this please you any better? To be released from all requisition from God to love your fellow-beings, would be quite a change; would you like it? You are not easy under His government now: would you have it reversed? Would you have God reverse the requisitions of His law and require you to hate instead of love your neighbor? Would you like this change? No. Your conscience would resist and condemn this new law not less than your selfish heart has resisted the old one. Yea, your whole moral nature would cry out against it. Especially when other selfish beings come down upon yourself, in obedience to this new law, you would exclaim against it as an infinite outrage. Nay, further, if God were merely to throw up the reins of government and leave every selfish being to prey upon your happiness as much as he pleased, you would cry out against even this as insufferable. You would say - Why does not God take care of His wicked creatures? Why does He not restrain their infamous selfishness? So, while you complain because God governs you to control your selfishness, you would complain infinitely more, and with some good reasons, too, if He were to do all what you demand for yourself! Let men alone, to be as selfish as they list.

2. Yet, again; would you have the penalty of His law altered? Would you have Him make it less? Would it better meet your demands then? But penalties, you know, are infinitely important. Law is good for nothing without them, and hence, their value is just as great as the value of the law itself. You would condemn the change which should annex a finite penalty to an infinitely valuable law. Of course you would, just as you would condemn a law which affixed a ten cent penalty to the crime of murder.

3. Can you suggest any change in His gospel? What change would improve it? Or can you say how His providence would be administered better? If so, explain how. You do not like its restraints, but suppose they were removed; would you be any the better? Does not your highest reason say there can be no change for the higher? Some of you, perhaps, do not like the restraints of his school, or of your own father's family; but does this prove that either is badly governed, or would be better if changed? Yet you cannot suggest any reasonable improvement. Your own reason affirms that all is as it should be, and that no change for the better can be made. No, in God's great kingdom, you cannot show that any change for the better can be made. Suppose I come to you as God's servant and say - What do you want? You are chafing and fretting against God; what would you have? What change would satisfy your demands? Can you name any change in His providence that would please you, and that you know would be on the whole an improvement? If so, what is it? What change do you demand in His gospel - or in His bible? Do you say, "It is so difficult for me to become a Christian!" What change shall God make to please you? Shall He forgive you without repentance? Would this please you? Shall He save you without faith on your part - without any confidence in Him? But this is a natural impossibility. Without confidence in God, you could not be happy anywhere in the universe.

4. What could be more unreasonable than your course toward God? He justly complains - "They have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love." You know this is true! You cannot deny it. And your misbehavior has not been caused by any fault in God, for God's law is unselfish. His whole course towards you is full of lovingkindness, while yours towards Him has been altogether selfish and mean.

5. What can be more trying to God than your course towards Him? Think of the sacrifices His love has made to bless you, and then consider how you have requited those sacrifices. Nothing can be so painful to a benevolent heart as this. If anyone among you has ever labored to do good to a friend, and that good so benevolently intended, has been requited only with abuse and evil, you know how this agonizes your heart! You can understand, in some measure, how God must feel when sinners requite Him evil for good. God says to them - "Thou has spoken and done evil things, as thou couldest." What worse could they do to Him than to abuse His love and repay His kindness with insult - His efforts to save with efforts to bring down on their own heads damnation?

So far as concerns God and the holy, it is infinitely better that you would make war on God for His goodness than for any wickedness. Therefore, it is not well that God should change to accommodate you. So of ourselves; if men will abuse us, let it be for our well-doing and not for our evil-doing. We must, by no means, do evil to accommodate them. It is an inexpressible consolation to God's people that sinners never can have any occasion to find fault with God for anything cruel, tyrannical or severe. There is not the least danger that anything will ever appear in any part of the universe to God's discredit;- nothing that can tarnish His name or reproach His administration, If there were the least reason to fear anything of the sort, it would clothe heaven in mourning, and thrill the hearts of the holy with horror.

Tell me, sinner, is not your course necessarily fatal, either to you or God? You oppose Him; He abhors you. If you are right, it will doubtless one day appear so, and then what can we say for God and His kingdom? But if God is right and you are wrong, you have within yourself the elements of the deepest ruin and destruction. You have such a moral nature - such powers of reason and conscience, that you will certainly condemn yourself, and load your own soul down eternally with self-reproaches and self-condemnation. Though all the universe beside you soul, were to caress you and shout your praises, yet your own conscience would come down on you with curses which no power in the universe can avert.

Then why not yield? Why not confess and repent? Come out now, in honesty and say - Lord, I have always been dreadfully wicked. I have obeyed neither Thy law nor Thy gospel. I have not received kindly the things that Thou hast so kindly given. So far from this, I have only been rasped and full of dissatisfaction. Have you ever gone before God to say - I have wronged Thee all my life by my suspicions? I have never realized that Thou has had kind intentions for me. To this day, my heart is hard as marble. I am only a wretch - a vile, ungrateful worm! Never have I received Thy blessings in a spirit corresponding to Thy love that gave them." Now why do you not cast yourself down before God in this way, saying - Lord, I know Thou hast been good, but I have been utterly and only evil; Thou hast sought to bless me, but I have only resisted and abused Thee! O break my spirit down in penitence! Can you say -Lord, I am afraid there is something wrong in Thy heart? Said a woman to me not long since - "God is not my Father. My heart will say - I am so poor, God will not own me. He is my adversary to resist me on every hand. He comes and stands in the way, as He

sent an angel to meet Baalam." Now, I am aware that God's dispensations towards individuals sometimes have this appearance, even as old Jacob said - "All these things are against me." When God deals with them in real mercy, and strives to lead them in His own right way, they only rebel the more. Oh, how sad that men are so slow of heart to trust God!

Consider how Jesus Christ is treated, for it is He who speaks in the text. For His love, what hatred does He experience! He who has loved sinners, how strangely do sinners hate Him even to the ruin of their own souls!

But perhaps some of you will say - I know it all; my conscience is wounded desperately; where is any remedy for me? Where can I find any balm for my soul? How can I ever have peace again? My soul is so hard, and my conscience so dead, it surely must be that I am past hope - given over to be lost forever! But have you ever gone to that long-abused Savior, saying - Lord, is there any help for me? Can you persuade yourself to go humbly to Him for help? Mark what He says - Wilt Thou not from this time cry unto Me, - "My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth?" Do you say - May I call Him Father? Do you ask, Where is He, that I may come even to His seat and pour out my confessions and my sorrows into His ear? Broken-hearted sinner, He is near thee - even where thou art - in thy room - at thy right hand; and it is only for thee to speak, and He heareth thee!

[Back to Top](#)

Losing First Love

Lecture XI

October 10, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rev. 2:4: "Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou has left thy first love."

In speaking from these words, I shall:

- I. Notice briefly what the first love of a Christian is;*
- II. How it manifests itself;*
- III. How it may be known that Christians have left their first love;*
- IV. Describe the state into which they fall;*
- V. The only remedy for this state of things.*

I. What the first love of a Christian is.

The Christian's first love is best known by experience. Those who are really brought from great darkness into marvellous light-- from sensible condemnation into conscious and assured peace and joy in God, cannot but know what this first love of the convert is. Ardent, earnest, self-sacrificing,-- it makes religious duties supremely delightful, and fills the heart with joy in God all the day long.

II. How it manifests itself.

1. The modes of its manifestation are obvious, and have, indeed, been necessarily indicated in what I have said of its nature. It should be remembered that it is as natural to the Christian life to do what pleases God for the sinner's life to do what pleases himself. For example, prayer is as natural to the true convert as living without prayer is to the unconverted. The latter are conscious of being pushed forward to perform these duties before they can be persuaded to do them. Other considerations besides the pleasantness of the thing itself must be brought to bear on the mind, or the man will not pray. But to the one who loves God, it is sweet to worship, and pray and praise. These things have a sweet attraction to his heart, and come with a rich relish to his soul.

2. The Christian, in his first love, is free from a sense of guilt and condemnation. He has great peace of mind, and, living in such faith as pleases God, he cannot have a sense of condemnation.

Again, nothing that God requires seems hard or grievous. No matter what it may be, "the yoke is easy and the burden light."

"'Tis love that makes his willing feet

In swift obedience move."

3. Even the burdens that pertain to the Christian life do not at all abate his interest in religious duties. He takes up these labors as part of his business in life. He feels no sense of burden in doing these laborious things; a divine peace fills his soul.

These states and experiences are, of course, unknown to the unconverted. Even some who think themselves converted, know them not, and are exceedingly jealous sometimes of those who do.

III. How it may be known that Christians have left their first love.

1. It may be known that persons have left their first love when they begin to talk of the burden of the Lord, and manifestly show that religion has become a weariness to them. If other considerations besides love to God are requisite to sustain the Christian life, and even to keep their outward observance of its forms, then you may be sure that their first love is gone. It may be that still "they cannot bear them that are evil;" Christ gives even the Ephesian church credit for so much; but this may be more a thing of conscience than of love.

Again, this loss of first love is indicated by a sense of bondage. When the Christian performs his religious duties, not from any sense of love, but of bondage to conscience, you may know that "first love" is gone. Obedience is not spontaneous. Under one's first love, it always is.

2. The annexed exhortation to "remember from whence they have fallen," shows that they had fallen from grace in the sense of having lost a gracious state of mind-- a state in which the gifts of the Spirit beget the Christian virtues, and the resulting state of the heart is acceptable in God's sight. Such cannot be in a justified state. Can it be possible that those are in a justified state whom God commands to repent, on pain of being blotted from the roll of his recognized churches?

IV. Describe the state into which they fall.

1. The state into which they fall is (1) one of hypocrisy . This must be the case unless they have become openly impenitent and irreligious. But the passage gives no hint of this. Of course we must conclude that they retain

the forms of godliness without its power. This is real hypocrisy.

2. It is a state utterly odious to God. He who makes no pretensions to religion is odious enough; but one who makes professions and yet dishonors God, is much more so. But many sinners profess to love God. Ask them if they love God. O, yes, say they. Ask them if they love to pray and praise; and they will tell you they do. They make profession enough, but are only hypocrites.

3. It is, moreover, a state of delusion, for they keep up the notion that they are still accepted of God. They are so hardened as not to see that they are the victims of the most fearful delusion. Scarce any thing is more adapted to blind the mind and scar the conscience than hypocritical forms of prayer. Let a man practice prayer without any heart in it, and who does not know that this course benumbs the conscience and kills the moral sensibility? Trace the history of such a man's praying. The first time he prayed, prayer filled his soul with awe. Usually those who have not been accustomed to prayer, experience this impression of awe and reverence. But a moderately long period of observance of the mere forms of prayer, kills this solemn impression, and he can pray as coldly unconcerned as if he had no heart. Prayer makes no impression on him. Nothing seems to touch him. This keeping up the forms of religion in a heartless way is playing a game with ourselves in which the interests of the the soul are fearfully the loser. You win nothing.

4. Notice, also, that the influence of this on unbelievers is most ruinous. Nothing leads them so naturally to condemn religion as the sight of so much heartless profession. On the other hand, when they see a living manifestation of religion, it will either drive them towards religion or make them uneasy without it, or drive them further off. The latter effect is produced only when the heart's depravity rebels utterly against God's claims, and therefore, it is more a testimony for than against the agencies that excite it. But false professions are naturally fatal to the unconverted; and it is no wonder they are so. On this subject I am often reminded of impressions made on my mind in my early and unconverted life. I then had on my mind the strong impression that the great mass of professed Christians seemed not to understand what they professed. There were one or two men and some women who, I knew, had religion. They exhibited

what I could not account for on any other supposition. Their life had more weight on my mind than the forms and professions of ten thousand of the other and more common sort. Being a lawyer, I could understand that the few gave a positive testimony, witnessing to what they knew, and revealing what their souls had certainly felt; while the testimony of the other class was only negative. It did not know anything in particular on the subject. I know one man who is not a Christian, but his wife is a Christian. He has been struggling for years to work himself into infidelity, but he cannot - never can so long as his wife lives to let the light of her example and spirit shine before him, or so long as he remembers her. I have already intimated the reason of this; he sees multitudes around him whose professed piety he contemns; but there is one - his own wife - whose life refutes infidelity most utterly.

5. Such religious declensions are most injurious to young converts. Said Dr. Hawes, of Connecticut, and Dr. Campbell of London - O, if these young converts could only be kept by themselves, and not be brought under the influence of dormant professors who have left their first love, they might be made a living and working church. But thrown back under this untoward influence, how surely will they fall under the same example of unbelief!

6. This state of mind must be painfully trying to Jesus Christ. What can be more so than to see his professed people lose their first love! When we see a wife who has lost all affection for her husband, it makes us naturally suspicious of him. Despite of all we can do to resist the feeling, it will arise. The wife is either lost to all the common impulses to humanity, or the husband is radically a bad man. Hence, when I see professed Christians lose their first love, I often say - Are you disappointed in Christ? Does he not bear acquaintance well? What has he done that you should lose your hearty interest in his character and in his cause? Is he in fault? If he is not, then surely you are - greatly so. This interest is entirely unavoidable.

7. The implication in backsliding, is most dishonorable to Christ. The Jews called God's service a great burden until he sent them a prophet to rebuke them. And who does not see that they deserved to be rebuked?

Ungodly men draw this inference: "If I must live such a life, let me put off its commencement as long as I can, for such a religion is not the thing to live by and enjoy." Who does not see that such an impression is most disastrous in

all its influences?

8. These men who lose their first love are uneasy and unhappy. None of them can be satisfied with it. For the most part, they must be in great doubt as to their acceptance with God. Often they query with themselves - "I wonder if Christians ever do fall from grace. Methodists think they do; Presbyterians and Congregationalists think they don't, for in this case I am safe. But if they ever do, then I am fallen." Thus they trust in an old hope, with nothing to rely on except their old experiences. They need some such reliance as men get by abusing the doctrine of saints' perseverance. It is not the true doctrine, but only in its perversion that they find any of this false peace; for the true doctrine holds that saints really persevere in love and faith; and that, falling from this, they have no ground of hope whatever. And it, instead of using God's promises of sustaining grace, they only pervert them to quiet their souls in sin, they are surely cheating themselves out of salvation!

9. Such persons are not prepared to die. If there is no truth in the Bible, they are sure to be lost, for the Bible pronounces their doom. If there were no truth on the Bible, they would be none the less lost, for they are not prepared to dwell in heaven - not in the heaven revealed in the Bible, nor in any other place of real happiness!

They are fallen into impenitence, as our passage itself implies; for how else could the Savior call on them to "repent?" Can one who is impenitent go to heaven?

10. They are not prepared to live to any good purpose. So far as their influence is concerned, it were better they should die than live. To live, as to them, is only to curse others by their example, and to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath for themselves.

V. The only remedy for this state.

The only remedy for this condition is given in the text: "Repent and do your first works." Repent more deeply than ever before, for now there are new and more aggravated sins to be repented of. When one has waded through such a life, all his former sins, prior to his professed conversion, are as nothing compared with these. After being so far enlightened, and after having tasted the good word of

God and his precious love - after having known God and Christ as revealed in the Gospel, and after having entered into covenant with God - then to violate this sacred covenant - to disown those solemn vows - to dishonor that ever-to-be-remembered name;- for all this, there can be no remedy short of coming down into the lowest dust before the Lord - lower than ever before - with confessions of greater guilt than ever before. Hence, it comes to pass that, where persons, once backslidden, do really return and repent, they are more thoroughly broken in spirit than they ever were before.

REMARKS.

1. Many persons keep just enough of what they call religion to fasten their delusions on their own souls. By dint of resolution and self-impulses, they keep up the forms of family prayer and of public worship, and by these means, they sustain the delusion that they are true Christians. If they had dropped these forms and gone into open apostasy, they would have known themselves, and would not have once thought of maintaining a hope of personal religion. The delusion could not have existed. But those who maintain the forms of religion, and the forms only, cannot have the witness of God's Spirit - can have no evidence from their own daily experience, but content themselves to live on the most meagre allowance of testimony to their own piety. They dare not speak very confidently, yet they are hopeful. They love to bring up the case of persons who had a great many doubts, and yet, on the whole are esteemed good Christian people. Some of them live on the doctrine of election, or perseverance of saints. Some live on the case of those who were reclaimed just before death. They sing the backslider's hymns and pray the backslider's prayer. From every quarter they are picking up shreds of matter of every sort wherewith to feed their own delusion. Sometimes, to help themselves out of their trouble, they set themselves to pick flaws in better Christians than themselves. This avails to relieve their conscience a little.

2. This is a most common delusion. A minister related to me certain facts respecting a doctor of divinity whom I had myself known, and in whom, I must say, I had never seen much evidence of personal piety. When this doctor of divinity came to die, he was greatly concerned about himself. My informant said - He asked me to pray that he might be restored to his first love! What! one who had lived forty or fifty years in the church, and one of her honored ministers too, yet, on his death-bed, asks his friends to that he may be restored to his first love,-

really, that he may be converted! If we have not even so much as first love - not so much as when we started, what are we? What state are we in, if we have not as much love as when first converted?

3. Many persons have occasionally strong exercises of mind - often a compound of anxiety about their final salvation, and conviction of sin - yet it falls short of true religion. They quite fail of coming into a state of true love to God or to Jesus Christ. There is feeling, action, energy; but love is wanting! That deep love which affectionately honors and recognizes God as supreme Lord and Father, and which then goes forth to embrace in its arms all his offspring; that love which "suffereth long and is kind"- which is never weary in well-doing - which finds its life in acts of kindness: - this is not there.

My beloved people, I have been your pastor now a long time. Going in and out before you as I have these many years, I have seen most of you pass through seasons that have been greatly interesting to me. In some of you I have seen grace developed and shining all the more clear and lovely for your trials; but of some of you I am constrained to ask - Have you not lost your first love? Is it not very difficult for you to live a Christian life? Some of you are in such a state that I have not seen you at a prayer-meeting for a year. You were not confined to your bed by sickness; you were not out of town; what was the matter? What is your spiritual state?

Of some of you who do come to the prayer meeting I must ask - What is your state? Is your experience daily becoming more rich, and more fresh, and more quickening? Do you live more closely on God? Are you daily walking more and more surely in newness of life?

[Back to Top](#)

Men, Ignorant of God's Righteousness, Would Fain Establish Their Own

Lecture XII

November 21, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 10:3: "For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."

Paul here states three facts in respect to the Jews, viz.: that they were ignorant of God's righteousness--that they sought to establish their own, and that they did not submit to God's. This is a condensed statement of their religious condition. The fundamental difficulty with them was, their ignorance of God's righteousness. On this rock the nation were wrecked. Not knowing Jesus, they were forever going about to establish their own righteousness--and forever unsuccessful.

What was true of the Jews is still true to an alarming extent of multitudes, both in and out of the church, among all classes in Christian lands. It may be said that all do this who are not really Christians and receive Christ.

In discussing this subject, I enquire,

I. When one may be said to be ignorant of God's righteousness.

II. When men may be said to go about to establish their own righteousness.

III. What this righteousness of God is--this of which sinners are so ignorant.

I. When one may be said to be ignorant of God's righteousness.

1. I answer, when he does not truly know God: particularly when he does not know Him as he reveals himself in the spirituality of his law. It was at this point the Jews failed. They did not see that the law called for the inmost heart and for perfect love there. Their carnal eye was attracted by the external and ceremonial, and the amount of visible doing in the Mosaic system gratified their ambition for distinction and display, so that they quite overlooked those very explicit statements, everywhere frequent throughout their scriptures, which were designed to call attention to the state of the heart as the only thing of real value in God's sight.

2. God's righteousness and perfect purity of character are revealed in his law, and are especially to be learned there.

Again, men are ignorant of God's righteousness when they do not understand

his method of making sinners righteous. The Jews did not feel any need of such a system as the gospel. They supposed they should be accepted if they merely obeyed their ceremonial law. In this they made a grand and fatal mistake. God never gave that law for this purpose, but for another entirely different from this. It was only introductory to the real gospel--intended to prepare the way for it. That ceremonial hinted plainly at the true system, and aimed to illustrate the great principles upon which it reposes.

3. It is remarkable that sinners generally have no idea of God's plan of securing in them what he commands. They look no further than the precept and the penalty, and seem utterly unaware that the high aim of God is to bring them back to obedience and love. Hence God must bring them first under a felt sentence of death; but this does not make them righteous; it only prepares the way for bringing them to Christ.

Again, men are ignorant of God's righteousness when they fail to understand the conditions on which He can treat them as righteous, that is, can justify and save them. This was the mistake of the Jews and is the mistake of all sinners. They do not understand how it is that God proposes to make them righteous, and turn them from all their sin.

II. I am next to enquire, When men may be said to go about to establish their own righteousness.

1. And first, what is meant by establishing one's own righteousness?

(1.) Suppose you see a man come into a court of justice. He is accused. He pleads not guilty. In some way he justifies his conduct. Perhaps he will even attempt to prove his own entire righteousness in the whole transaction, so that he can face the judge down and insist that in every particular he has done nothing wrong and only what is right. This would be going about to establish his own righteousness.

(2.) Sinners go about to establish their own righteousness when they bring in pleas of excuse for their sin. If a man can show his right under the circumstances to do as he does. this goes to establish his righteousness. So sinners go about to parry conviction--to bring in extenuating and justifying circumstances. Of this, God accuses them: "Wilt thou condemn Me, that thou mayest be righteous?"

(3.) Legitimately, the bearing of an excuse goes to arraign God. What do you mean, sinner? So you think God can accept your apology, and admit himself to be wrong? If not, why do you present it? Why bring it up before your Almighty Judge, to insult him to his very face, by impeaching his equity?

(4.) Every sinner who brings forward any form of excuse for his own sin, is really trying to establish his own righteousness.

Again, men are trying to establish their own righteousness when they depend on doing right for acceptance with God. How often do they tell you they mean to do about right, showing plainly by their manner, and by the use they make of this supposed intention, that they think hereby to secure favor with God. They turn off his claims with this plea, and so not at all believe they are in danger of being sent to hell. Now is this anything else but going about to establish their own righteousness?

2. The same must be said of those who depend on their own reformation.

(1.) I often meet with young persons, who, before they came here, had been much more loose, in many points of moral conduct, as for instance, the observance of the Sabbath; but coming here they attempt to reform, and this greatly relieves their consciences. Of course, now they are in a good way, and think themselves almost sure of heaven; whereas this reform may be wholly due to their love of a fair reputation. Mingling here with people who themselves observe the Sabbath, and who have established this general usage, they are forced to conform, and do so, without any more regard for God than they had before.

(2.) Such persons I have seen pass through other stages of self-righteous endeavor. They become convicted of sin, and begin to pray perhaps. Still they are uneasy, and, therefore, resort to some forms of external reformation. How very common is this among the masses of awakened sinners! Many of you who are before me, have had this sort of experience. How long it took you to understand that you were all wrong, and that nothing would avail for you short of a most radical change of heart.

(3.) In the same train of feeling, men depend on having done nothing worthy of condemnation. Indeed! What is this but going about to establish their own righteousness? They think they have done nothing that can justify God in sending them to hell. On this point they take issue with God, assuming that they have done nothing very wrong. They must know that, in God's sight, sin deserves hell, else He would not have built hell, nor have made it the penalty of sin. How, then, should they dare to dispute this point with God, and arraign him on the implied charge of injustice!

(4.) The same thing is seen, under a slightly different form when men depend on their general integrity of character. They have been honest and kind, and on the whole, so good that they think God cannot send them to hell, but will strike the balance in their favor. They have done a great many things that are about right. On the whole, they have done more good than hurt, and therefore, they are sure it cannot be right for God to send them to hell. Their life shows more obedience than disobedience--as they insist.

Indeed, sinner! What do you know of personal holiness? What experience have you of a pure heart--of real love to God--of sincere regard for his will? Surely, you are only going about to establish your own righteousness.

Again, sinners evince the same spirit when they hold on to the idea that they are about as good as professors of religion. Some such, they know of, who are not any better than they should be, and with whom they think their own case might compare favorably. Such, are going about to establish their own righteousness.

(5.) Also, when they depend on their religious observances. Many have learned better than to rely on their honesty or morality; so they resort to their religious observances. Like the Catholics, they, virtually, count their beads, and doup their senseless, unmeaning services;--yes, even Protestants do this, and just as really make a merit in these observances, as the poor man who expects to go to heaven, by kneeling before the holy altar, kissing the holy wafer, and saying his Ave Marias. This Protestant prays just like the Catholic--that is, with the same purpose, and the same state of heart; he reads his Bible on the

same principle, and in the same way goes through what he calls his "religious duties."

This was the mistake of the Jews. They fasted twice in the week--were greatly given to prayer and alms to the poor. In these services, their scribes, priests, and Pharisees, spent a great share of their time. Thrice a year they went up to Jerusalem to the solemn feasts. Religious duties absorbed a large share of their time and money. You would be appalled to learn how much their temple cost, and their religious worship, sacrifices and offerings. On all these they placed the utmost dependence. But evermore, when men rely on other methods of salvation than God's, they are really going about to establish their own.

III. I am next to enquire what this righteousness of God is--this of which sinners are so ignorant.

1. In general, God's righteousness is synonymous with his infinite moral purity; but, in such connections as this, it seems to mean more specifically his integrity as a moral Governor, bound to sustain the interests of his government in its relations both to the unfallen and to the fallen. Under the most solemn obligations to do his utmost to secure universal obedience as a necessary means to the highest happiness, he cannot suffer law to be broken, nor rebels to live--except on the ground of some satisfaction made, that shall amply sustain the sanctity and honor of law. Of course, this quality of his character, as a moral Governor, determines the great features of his plan of saving sinners. It stands revealed in his law and in his gospel. This righteousness of God renders it forever certain that no sinner can be accepted on the ground of any works of his own. God's claims are so high, and the sinner has fallen so low, that God can never accept any work of his hands. Even his prayers--out of Christ--and his best works are all odious to God. He is trying to put God off with something less than a perfect heart.

2. By the very terms and spirit of the law, it demands perfect obedience, and the exigencies of God's great kingdom require no less. The law, in both its precept and penalty, must be honored, or no sinner can be saved. I do not mean that God will insist that the utmost measure of penalty shall be visited on the sinner's own person;--but it must be this, or a substitute that will answer the one great end of fully sustaining the dignity, influence, and authority of his law. His throne must be infinitely removed from all

supposable connivance with sin.

3. Hence, it became necessary that our Surety should honor the law, as to its penalty, by offering his humanity on the altar of his divinity. In his own person, too, he obeyed the law fully.

4. Hence, sinners, to be saved, must return to real obedience. God's righteousness requires this.

5. We can now apprehend God's method of making sinners personally righteous. First he opens the way, by giving his Son to honor the law, so that God can come down from heaven and enter into covenant with the sinner and draw him back to life and love. This is God's method--that Christ be received as the sinner's righteousness, having borne for him the curse of the law, obeying it perfectly, and then suffering in place of the penalty, which the sinner else must have suffered. The sinner, by faith accepting Christ, becomes, in the governmental respect, united to Christ, so that, for Christ's sake, God accepts them both. Families sometimes come into such a relation to government, that the children stand in the stead of the parents, and are rewarded or forgiven for their parents' sake. Similar is the relation sustained by Christ and the believing sinner to the government of God. Christ is "set forth to be a propitiation for us through faith in his blood," in this sense, that the merits of his death are made over to us, on condition of our believing, and we have the full benefit of all that Christ has suffered and done to honor the law. We now abandon all hope of justification from personally obeying the law, and receive Christ as God's mode of making us right before the law. He is given to us as a Redeemer and Savior. He is treated in this transaction as if he had been a sinner,--we, as if we were righteous.

6. Thus we stand before God as if in Christ. Paul said--"If any other man thinketh he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more;" "touching the righteousness which is in the law blameless;"--"but what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ, that I may be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ--the righteousness which is of God by faith."

7. Thus by a governmental act, God merges in Christ the whole mass of believers--he having become our Surety, our Advocate, Mediator and King.

In this wonderful arrangement, God turns the whole race round from looking to the law for justification, to looking unto Christ.

8. Submission to God's righteousness is the condition of salvation. So the apostle implies. "For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." Here you cannot fail to observe that this method of salvation is something to be submitted to. The will must yield its full assent to this plan.

9. The constant effort of sinners is to do something of their own--some work of some sort, or get up some experience. This is the great idea which they aim to realize as soon as they are convicted. Hence they cannot have peace of mind, nor real pardon, because they do not meet God's plan. They struggle against God's Spirit, and resist his influence; they turn and shift in all possible ways to get up some righteousness of their own. The seventh chapter to the Romans, is only a picture of one who is struggling and floundering as in a spiritual quagmire--bringing himself by promises and resolves, and yet finding them all of no avail. What masses of even professed Christians, are in precisely this condition! They make not a prayer in which they do not feel condemned. Their state is one of conviction and despair, so deeply agonizing that they can have no peace. They are struggling to effect an impossibility,--to establish, in some way, their own righteousness; and failing in this, they sink down into despair. Hence it comes to pass that the last step a man takes before submission to God is usually a mighty effort to establish his own righteousness;--which effort ends in despair, after which, he consents to submit to God's plan of being made righteous. How often have I seen this in professors who thought they knew what religion is, but in the clear light of these truths have seen their mistake. If they come really to despair of help in themselves, and then cast their souls on God through Christ, all is well. Probably most ministers find cases of this sort. Great numbers of them have fallen under my observation. How many have I seen who struggle and struggle, long, and without relief, because they struggle in a wrong direction. They are ignorant of God's righteousness, and therefore go about to establish one of their own. A striking case now occurs to me, of a lady, now on mission-ground, a lady of many noble traits of character, but before her conversion, strong in her self-righteousness. Hearing of the great revivals in Oneida County, some

thirty years since, she came to see them. Her object was to learn what this new and strange movement might be. She heard sermon after sermon, but writhed under their pointed truths, often finding fault with the preaching as being too personal, and as being full of wrong things. Conviction, however, sank deeper and yet deeper. Soon a friend with whom she was boarding, said to me--We have a dreadful case at our house--you must come and see her. I went. I found she had set herself to defend the idea that she did not deserve to be damned, for if she was a sinner, it was only because she was made so, and born so. Being cornered up on these points, and shown her error, she became more agonized; the struggle was fearful! At last she screamed at the top of her voice, and yielded! Then a change came over her--a charming, glorious change, which no language can describe. Almost her first words, as she broke silence again, were "I'll be a missionary!" But few months passed ere this vow was fulfilled, and she has lived a missionary to this day. Her self-righteousness, like a mighty tower of strength, came down wonderfully;--and when Jesus became her righteousness, she was a lamb at His feet. Such a change in the whole being, manifest in every aspect, is truly wonderful.

Often it happens that you see professors of religion moving heaven and earth by their self-righteous efforts to get up some righteousness of their own. You will be struck in examining their religious system, to see how utterly Christ is left out of it, as a practical Savior. They think of their good and right things--not of Christ--as really the ground of their hope before God.

10. This method of God's righteousness is exactly opposed to human pride. Pride loves to do the work and have the honor of it; but God's system has done all the meritorious work itself--leaving nothing for man to do that he can be proud of.

It is for this reason that conversion costs such a conflict. Often it seems indispensable that God should startle sinners with awful fears before they will yield. On Mt. Sinai and all around, the trump of God waxed louder and louder--the mountain is all ablaze, and rocks quake under Jehovah's mighty voice long and loud, till every nerve of the sinner trembles, and he sees nothing but darkness--until the atonement reveals a living Christ to his agonized soul.

11. This gospel plan seems to sinners deep and dark as midnight, till the

Holy Ghost reveals to him his self-righteousness, cleaves down that self-righteous spirit, knocks out his props, and he falls and dies!--then the cross reveals life, and he rejoices with exceeding joy in a salvation wrought of God through redeeming blood.

12. This righteousness of God must be submitted to. The sinner must submit to the righteousness which has sentenced him to hell. He must admit it to be right and just. I often ask sinners--Are you prepared to subscribe to that righteousness which dooms you to hell? If I find him wavering on that point, I say to him--You do not understand God's righteousness. You cannot be saved till you subscribe to God's righteousness in this--till you fully admit its justness and propriety. You must yield also to his supreme authority and right to govern all his creatures, and consent to be saved wholly by grace--things which many fail to understand. In England, I found, to my surprise, that many ministers talked much of grace, yet did not believe that men deserve damnation for their sins. I said to them--What do you mean by this? You talk largely of grace, yet deny all need of it! For, grace is the antithesis of justice. How can there be grace shown the sinner, if it be not just to punish him!

13. The point of greatest struggle with the sinner is in laying aside as worthless, his own righteousness. You recollect the case of the poor Indian and his rich white neighbor, both awakened and convicted at the same time, but the Indian came at once to Jesus, while the white man remained a long time in extremest darkness and distress. At last, he asked the Indian how it happened that he found Christ so soon, while himself had sought so long in vain. The Indian stammered his reply--"Indian poor; white man rich; poor Indian no clothes; white man good clothes, fine clothes; Indian throw his old rags right away, take Christ's robe at once; white man can't throw away his fine clothes."

You recollect, also, the case of the poor woman in the gospel. Christ had been invited to a rich man's table; they sat reclined at their meal, with their feet somewhat extended behind them, when this woman came up gently, clasped his sacred feet, bathed them with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Blessed woman! She knew her position as a lost sinner, and she had tasted the grace that forgives freely. What an act was that! Her humility of spirit charms us, and we read in her case the feeling of those who

discard all righteousness of their own, and come to understand the righteousness of God.

REMARKS.

1. The ignorance of the Jews came of their great pride, and is not at all to be ascribed to the obscurity of the subject itself. The ignorance of sinners now, even under the gospel, is amazing. I have recently seen one who had been well instructed in the letter of these things, yet when he became deeply hungry for gospel life, seemed scarcely to know how to use one of the plainest truths it embraces. It was affecting to see him drink in a few of the simplest gospel truths, saying--"I am sure I never heard of that before--never thought of that." How common it is for sinners, under the Spirit's light, to say--"All this is new to me; I wonder I was never told of this before!"

2. Many feel the need of becoming truly religious; they mean to be, and they set themselves to work for it in some way. Perhaps they set themselves to serve God, but have no right idea of what it is to be truly religious. Hence, we find so few who seem, in their own experience, to know the deep power of the gospel. Ah, the deep foundations of their selfishness are not broken up. They have never been made conformable to Christ's death. Hence, the difference between this class and those who are utterly cut down and slain by the law--then raised from the dead to a new life in Christ.

3. When the sinner is truly convicted of sin, the way opens before him, and the first conditions are fulfilled for his free pardon. Now, he has new apprehensions of God's law--of its great spirituality. But it is not enough to know this; another lesson yet remains. I am glad to see you cut down under thorough conviction, but you must also learn not to fly in the face of that fiery law for salvation! Sinner, professed Christian, do you know how you are to be saved? You need not make any atonement; you need not suffer and toil to work up an atonement; no need of this at all. In my own first convictions, I said, under my great sorrow--I shall have to bear a great deal of this, I have been a sinner so long; I shall have to be nearly killed before I can be saved. Ah, how mistaken! God wants no such atonement--no such suffering of you. The atonement is all made, ready to your hands! Do you understand that no works, or prayers, or tears of your own can do anything for you towards an atonement, and towards constituting a ground of your acceptance before God? God himself has provided the lamb for the offering. Now come, as the ancient Jew came, and lay your hand on that dear

sacrifice, and there confess your sins. The vail of the great temple is rent away, and you may enter the inner sanctuary; may come quite to the mercy-seat and lay your own hand on the head of the victim that takes away the sin of the world. Will you come?

[Back to Top](#)

Adorning the Doctrine of God Our Savior

Lecture XIII

December 5, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Titus 2:10: "But showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things."

In our last Friday prayer meeting, one of the brethren quoted this passage in prayer. It struck me with great force; indeed, I never had seen its beauty and power so fully before. It turned my mind upon this passage with so much interest, that I have concluded to present my views upon it in this morning's discourse.

I. What is this doctrine of God our Savior?

II. What is it to adorn this doctrine?

III. What are the particular reasons for our thus adorning the gospel?

IV. What are the conditions of so adorning this gospel?

I. First, let us inquire, what is this doctrine of God our Savior?

The chapter in which the passage occurs, affords us all the answer we need. Paul is instructing Timothy how to teach and preach the gospel to his converts. He specially applies the gospel to "aged men," "aged women," "young women," "young men," to himself, as a "pattern of good words," and to "servants;" and in

this latter connection, comes in our text. This exhortation is then enforced as well as explained in these remarkable words: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

Let this suffice to show what the doctrine is that Christians of every class in life should strive to adorn. The essential idea of the doctrine is that God's infinite grace towards our lost world had for its aim to redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us unto Himself -- in short, to make us holy.

II. We must next inquire -- what is it to adorn this doctrine?

To adorn it is to honor it, and make it honorable before all. It implies that we commend it by being ourselves an illustration of its meaning, and by evincing to all its spirit and efficacy. We are to prove the excellence of the doctrine by showing, in our own case, what it can do in the hands of the Holy Spirit to reform the world. The doctrine is good or otherwise, according to its practical results. If it accomplishes what it aims to, it is beyond expression valuable and glorious. That it can and does, is just the thing which God leaves for His people to prove by their lives. Hence, they must live so as to hold forth the excellence, beauty and power, of the gospel.

III. What are the particular reasons for our thus adorning the gospel?

1. Unless we adorn and honor the gospel, it will dishonor us. Paul said -- "I magnify my office." He honored the office of an apostle and it honored him. But if he had neglected and disparaged the office, it would have visited disgrace on him. So if we do not magnify our office, all will despise us -- the devil and all the universe will count us too mean to be cared for. To have such responsibilities and then to heed them not; to be pressed with such motives, and yet have no sensibility to their pressure and force - this would show that our character has no worthy elements in it, and ought to subject us to dishonor. If you do not adorn the gospel, there must be a reason; and what is it? This -- that you are playing the hypocrite!

Again, if we do not adorn the gospel, it will more deeply ruin us. The gospel, instead of blessing us, will only work for us a deeper damnation. There is no avoiding such a result from such a life.

2. It will greatly grieve the Savior. If we profess the gospel and yet do not adorn it, we do the worst thing we can do to injure His cause and wound His feelings. Accordingly, we find that He expresses the utmost displeasure and disgust towards those who profess to love and honor Him, yet do not. To one of the seven churches of Asia, He said - "I know thy works that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then, because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth!" No such language can be found elsewhere in the Bible; from which we may infer that the Savior hates no other form of sin more intensely and with more utter loathing.

Again, if we do not adorn the gospel, we shall greatly hinder and retard its success. We shall stumble others who would enter the narrow way. Our life scandalizes the gospel which it should, but does not, adorn. He who, professing the gospel, does not adorn it, gives his highest influence against it. He throws against it the whole weight of his example.

3. If you reply to this that it is better to profess religion and be a somewhat decent backslider, than to come out in open opposition, this is not true. No argument which an opposer can use against the gospel will have the weight that a protesting life will have. He who professes love but lives hatred; whose lips honor Christ, but whose life protests against Him, is Christ's worst enemy. The gospel does not suffer from any other foes as from him.

4. On the other hand, if we do adorn the gospel, it will surely adorn us. Let any one really adorn the gospel, it shall be to him a mantle of glory. If men witness in him the spirit of Christ, they will admire that spirit and honor him who exhibits it. Besides this, it will win others to love the Savior. If we illustrate it in our lives, it will carry conviction and persuasion too. It is true that in many things, the motives of Christians are liable to be misjudged. Sometimes, when they do right, false motives are imputed to them. Yet, though this be true, there will be many things which the world will be obliged to confess, and this reluctant testimony will be the more to their real honor. Wicked men cannot gainsay their living testimony to the power of the gospel on their own hearts, as manifest in their lives. A holy life will

command the attention of the world, and they will inquire what this doctrine may be. They are forced to exclaim -- How beautiful their lives are! And how sweet their temper! Who is this Savior whom they profess to follow, and to whose influence they attribute their peculiar spirit and life? If this doctrine begets such a spirit and such a life, we ought to know it and ought to have it!

So it will always be. If this doctrine is really adorned, it will be sure to create inquiry. It must arrest attention. There are probably few men of the least observation who have not known certain persons whose lives have arrested their attention. A man can hardly live anywhere without coming in contact with someone of whom he is constrained to ask -- What is it that enables him to live so? What spirit is this? When they see its striking and beautiful manifestations, they are constrained to inquire thus for its causes, and are anxious to learn what they may be.

Mere philanthropists commonly ascribe everything to phrenological development, and make nothing of it but mere humanity. But let them come into contact with a living and earnest Christianity, and they will see the difference. They will see that while the Christian lays all due stress on the rights of man and of woman too, they lay yet more stress upon the rights of God, and ought to. They will see that God has a rightful claim to the homage of His creatures, and that no man deserves much praise for justice who does not give God His rights as well as man his. Thus, the presence of a living Christianity corrects the common mistake of the mere philanthropist. In fact, this class are wont to make this mistake only where they see no living Christianity, but only a doctrinal one -- only one which has its embodiment in creeds and pulpit teachings -- not in the spirit and life of its professors. Let them see the doctrine really adorned, and they will then know the difference.

It is remarkable that modern philanthropy goes out only to the animal part of our nature, being, in this respect, on a level with the sympathy of brutes towards their own species. It troubles not itself to save the soul -- all this is dropped out. You may see these philanthropists exceedingly zealous in defence of mere earthly interests, solicitous about visible and bodily joys and sorrows, boiling over with excitement about the body; but call them to labor for the soul, they have no heart in it -- no interest, no sympathy; those things lie beyond their sphere of care or concern.

5. Now let the doctrine of God our Savior be really adorned by those who believe it, and let no rights of man or woman be overlooked, and yet let all the rights of God be seen to be uppermost in their regards; then philanthropists will see their mistake.

Again, let this doctrine be steadfastly honored, and men will surely see the beauty and truth of the doctrine of sanctification. Let Christians persevere, and they will certainly overcome. Overcoming sin and Satan, they will certainly prove to all that there is a power in the gospel to save from sin. Here what they will say: "I have seen this man or woman now these years, and I know there must be something in them that I do not understand." Said one man of my acquaintance concerning a young lady who had been several weeks in his family, and whose life eminently adorned the gospel -- "Now, wife, I want you to tell me in what one thing that young woman sinned while she was in our family! Did you see her do or hear her say any single thing that was not in harmony with the gospel? I must confess, I say and heard nothing out of the right way." Yet he watched her with an eagle eye. He was not a Christian himself, and was by no means prejudiced in her favor as a Christian; but he could not help observing so peculiar a life, and he soon found that it commended itself most entirely to his moral feelings and judgements, so that he could say nothing against it.

6. Now, to produce such results, professors of religion need not be disputatious; they need only live out the spirit of the gospel in word and deed; so will it steadily confound gainsayers. The ungodly will see their need of the gospel, and the religion of the cross will work its way into the profound esteem of mankind.

7. One of the great reasons many give for not becoming religious is this -- "If I should be converted, I could not stand; I should backslide and disgrace myself." This objection is not so common here as elsewhere. Abroad I meet with it almost everywhere; men saying, "I am afraid to profess religion, lest I should disgrace it and myself too. I had rather not profess than profess, and not adorn it." But, let me say, if the gospel be adorned by its professors, men will see that it can be honored in the profession -- that men can live a holy, blameless life. When abroad among strangers, I often ask individuals, "Do you not know of some one or more within your personal acquaintance, who really honor the gospel?" Some, perhaps, will answer, no; but if you

converse with them much, you are likely to conclude that they are either dishonest or untruthful. For , with most remarkable forethought, God, in His providence, has scattered some salt all abroad over Christian lands, so that every man shall have the moral trial of deciding whether he will or will not receive the lessons which it teaches.

8. Adorning the doctrine of Christ will encourage the impenitent to believe that there is something stable in religion. Beholding it in the real life, they will say, "There is something that I want. I know that must be true religion." I now recollect the case of a lawyer not a professed Christian, one of the leading men in the State in his profession, who, though an entire stranger introduced himself to me while I was preaching from time to time in the city, saying -- I have a friend whom I should like to have you see, and should be happy to have you go with me to her residence. Certainly, said I, and with pleasure. I found her an elderly lady, but her heart running over with love to God and to all her fellow-creatures. As our conversation drew out her deep knowledge and experience of the gospel, I saw him dash the tear from his cheek, greatly moved at such a demonstration of the power of the gospel. After we had left the house, he said to me -- "What do you think of that? Is not that the true religion of the Bible? I know it is, and am determined never to rest till I have it.

If we adorn this doctrine people who know our life and yet do not embrace religion will feel severely self-condemned. Whether they are ungodly men out of the church or backsliders in it, they will see that their own course is wrong and without excuse. It will beget a sense of guilt and shame that they do not themselves live so as to adorn the gospel. They will see that they must adorn this gospel in heart and life, or they cannot be saved. For this world also they will see that they must be either a blessing in society or an odious nuisance.

IV. What are the conditions of so adorning this gospel?

1. We must earnestly intend it. We must really set our hearts on being living epistles for God, and upon developing in our lives all that the gospel requires.
2. We must not be satisfied with merely having evidence of our acceptance with God. A hope that we are Christ's should not suffice, and certainly not,

a hope which is weakened by much doubt. We ought to know that we have no right to hope unless we are truly in love with this gospel, and unless our heart is set upon adorning it in our temper and life. It will not do for us to rest with being about as good as most professors of religion. We are by no means to make any man our standard.

3. We should beware of legal motives lest we become unamiable in temper and come under the sway of a legal spirit instead of the spirit of peace, love and joy in the Holy Ghost. Such a temper as would represent the gospel as being unamiable in spirit is especially to be guarded against and deplored.

4. Beware of mistaking license for liberty; for this doctrine is designed to make us holy, and holiness surely can give no license to sin.

5. Guard against being in thought diverted from Christ. Let people do what they will, resolve ever so much, they never will live holy if Christ be left out. With Christ left out of one's thoughts, the gospel is left out, and there is no power left. You must give yourselves much to communion with Him. Rely upon this, that unless you look to Christ as the center and fountain of your life, you will not live, and all your promises and covenants and resolutions, will not give you life. When you have let Christ pass from your thoughts, He no longer influences you, and He will not save you. Hence, He must be your theme -- the great center of your thoughts and of your heart's power.

6. You will be wise to keep in mind one passage standing in our context -- "Who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Remember that this was His object in dying for us -- to make us a holy people in His own praise. For this end He endured all that mortal flesh could bear. Let us then strive to appreciate the value of this great end, even as He did. Let it be with us an omnipresent consideration, that Christ suffered for us to redeem us from all personal sin. Let no one fail to realize the worth of this great object, for none can bring their souls under the full pressure of gospel motives and gospel power unless they keep this great truth in the right place in their mind. You must realize that this is His object and should be yours also. Christ would have you take hold of Him for this result that He may take hold of you. David Brainard made a remark which, in my early Christian life, was a great stumbling block to me -- to the effect that "he did

not expect to make much progress in holiness in this life, sin was so strong." Can this be according to the Bible? If so, then the provisions of grace for sanctification must be radically defective, and that fitness and fulness which so strikingly characterizes everything else in the gospel are strangely wanting here -- here, just where we might expect them to be most abundant. This cannot possibly be true.

7. Do you believe that Christ wants you to be saved from sin as much as you desire to be? Some of you have come to me to inquire how you may and can be delivered from sin; and I now ask you if you suppose that you are more anxious to be rid of sin than Christ is to have you? Will you not believe that Christ is at the bottom of all those desires which you feel; that His own mind energizes within your soul; that He is always intensely anxious to press this work along -- always more interested by far in it than you ever are? What! Will you assume that Christ is so attracted and engrossed by the thundering hallelujahs of heaven that He loses sight of your struggles of a holy heart? Will you think that, when on a lovely Sabbath morning you lift up your heart before Him for holiness, he does not hear you? Has He backslidden? Has His love for His people below grown cold? Ah never, NEVER! On this subject His interest never wanes. It has been burning many thousand years, and never can be quenched. Every desire you feel for victory over sin is only reciprocated action, coming from its fountain in His bosom.

8. Fully expect Him to do all He has promised. Do not adopt that blasphemous assumption -- that if you expect Him to fulfill His promises to you, you will be deceived. Away with that infidel absurdity! Do not insult God by such an assumption; an assumption that God is a liar!

9. Be sure to make use of all appropriate instrumentalities for light and life. The reason for this is that God uses them to accomplish His results in the soul of man; therefore, you should use them, that you may co-operate with Him. Yet do not rest in these means as having, in themselves, the power to save you. The power resides only and wholly in God. "According as His divine power hath given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness."

10. It is affecting to think what an interest Christ must have in our character. Could He die for us to redeem us from all iniquity? Then His interest in our holiness is measured by nothing less than His own blood! An interest so

deep that He did not even think His life too great a sacrifice for such an end! What a flood of light does this fact throw on His heart-interest for our sanctification!

REMARKS.

1. What an interest every member of the true church must have that we should adorn the doctrine of God our Savior! Paul said -- "Who is offended and I burn not?" If any were stumbled in their Christian course, it seemed to set his soul on fire!

2. What an interest the wicked world must have in the living piety of the church. That ungodly man who has a pious wife might say -- I would not have her lose that piety of hers for a thousand worlds! I need it always before me, a living example and rebuke. So may all wicked men say of their Christian neighbors. If there is to be any hope of their salvation, they must have these instrumentalities which God Himself has ordained.

3. What an interest it gives us in defending the character of Christians. Those who love Christ and His cause will not circulate slander against Christ's children. They feel too keenly alive to the interests that cluster around the Savior's name! Sometimes you find persons deeply distressed because they see Christ dishonored through His friends. Sometimes even the fear that He will be, greatly agonizes them, so deeply are their hearts set on His honor and praise. I could name to you facts that show the greatest distress felt by Christians in the supposed dishonor done to Christ through His children

4. To be careless about adorning this doctrine evinces hypocrisy. There can scarcely be a stronger proof of it than this.

5. When we really love this doctrine of God our Savior, how watchful we become of each other. Then how it strikes one to see Christ dishonored. But those who are not in sympathy with Christ can see His name continually dishonored, yet manifest no grief. They feel none.

6. But living Christians will be jealous and tender of each other's reputation. It will offend and grieve them to see the character of Christian brethren assailed. How can it be otherwise, so long as they see Christ thus wounded in the dishonor cast on His doctrine through His professed people?

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE VII). Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians* (LECTURE XII).

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians* (LECTURE I).

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE LXXVI).

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to

salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

End of the 1855 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1856
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Lecture I. [Thanks for The Gospel Victory](#)
Lecture II. [Gospel Ministers Ambassadors for Christ](#)
Lecture III. [The Destruction of the Wicked](#)
Lecture IV. [The Wicked Stumbling in Their Darkness](#)
Lecture V. [On The Atonement](#)
Lecture VI. [The Sinner's Natural Power and Moral Weakness](#)
Lecture VII. [Moral Insanity](#)
Lecture VIII. [On Believing with The Heart](#)
Lecture IX. [On Offering Praise to God](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Thanks for The Gospel Victory

Lecture I

January 30, 1856

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 7:25: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Text.--1 Cor. 15:57: "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord."

In both these passages Paul gives thanks for deliverance from a sinning and sinful state.

To bring this subject fully before us, I remark,

I. That unconverted men are morally and spiritually dead.

II. Moral death of sinners is a fact of experience.

III. There must be efficacious remedy for sin.

IV. This remedy is never in ourselves.

V. What the Bible thus declares, is true also in philosophy and in fact.

VI. Thanksgiving for victory over sin.

VII. Until the church is sanctified, the world cannot be converted.

I. The Bible everywhere teaches and facts prove that unconverted men are morally and spiritually dead.

1. They live as if there were no God. They appreciate neither His rights nor His feelings. To all intents and purposes, they are, towards God, as dead men. Considerations concerning God have no influence on them. This is one of the most obvious facts in human life. So true is it, that in fact we often find men pleading as their excuse that they have no inclinations towards God. Thus they reveal their moral death, not in their lives only, but

in their very excuses; showing that they are conscious of their moral apostasy and death, and but too well aware that they have no tendencies in themselves towards God.

2. Christians, on the other hand, are represented as being alive but not in good and perfect health, and not mature in their growth. At first they are new-born babes, needing the pure milk of the word; then youth, needing counsel; then fathers and mothers in Israel, of "full age," and "having their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Often the scriptures represent Christians as being very weak, so that they have great liability to stumble and fall. This stumbling and falling becomes a sad stumbling-block in the way of wicked men -- those men who are prone to look for and seek stumbling-blocks for their excuse. They do not realize the condition of Christians, only in part reclaimed from their death in sin. They do not consider that though born, they are yet babes, or at best, but children. But they are not disposed to make allowance for these circumstances -- a fact which only serves to show how unreasonable sin is.

Returning to the fact that Christians are usually weak, I remark, this weakness is moral, not natural. Natural weakness pertains to one's created faculties; moral, to one's voluntary purposes. Weakness of nature is a misfortune; weakness of moral purpose is a fault. Death in sin is simply a fault -- always and altogether, a fault. This weakness in Christians is also a fault, because it results from a want of faith in Christ, and love to His name.

II. This weakness and moral death of sinners is a fact of experience.

1. I have myself had but too much reason to know what it is. I found a total discrepancy between my convictions and my actions. I could say, "So I ought to do, but so I do not." When I questioned myself, asking -- Why is this so? I could only say, It is wholly unaccountable. Wide awake on all other subjects, and to all other interests, yet perfectly dead to this, I found myself in a strange state, and if not a "wonder to many," I was at least to myself. In a wretched state, I knew I had no disposition to get out of it. And every sinner who reflects knows that this is just his state.

2. The spiritual weakness of Christians manifests itself in a conscious want of promptness to act upon, and fully up to, their convictions of duty and sense of obligation. They are more deeply conscious of these defects than

sinner's are, or can be, of theirs. Sinners have little anxiety or trouble about their own moral death; but not so with Christians. They recognize their obligations, and are unusually conscious of being ready, prompt, and anxious to meet them, yet painfully aware that while "the spirit is willing the flesh is weak." Sometimes they are strong in the Lord, and their sense of weakness has passed away; anon, perhaps, they trust to their own strength, and find out their weakness to their cost; they fall sadly short, and come into darkness and trouble.

3. This state in both saints and sinners is among the most patent and obvious facts in the world. Who can doubt that there is moral life in real Christians, and moral death in sinners? This the Bible everywhere teaches or implies. It is a fact that no man can doubt who has eyes to see, and a mind candid enough to apprehend and admit a plain fact.

I often think it strange that unconverted men allow themselves to be so stumbled by the weakness of professed Christians. I have met some impenitent men who had thought candidly on this subject, and who seemed to appreciate fully the state and difficulties of Christians, and consequently were not stumbled at all by any mistakes or errors into which they might fall. They did not at all wonder that Christians are no better. If I had not considered this matter, and had not ceased to stumble myself on the imperfections of professed Christians, I never could have become a Christian. If I had not seen that all this is according to the Bible and reason, I could not have come into a state of mind towards God and Christianity in which my conversion from sin would be possible. Usually, in a place where there are many Christians, there will be some who stumble constantly upon them, as if utterly unable or unwilling to apologize for their failures on the score of infant piety, superinduced upon long-standing habits of sin.

III. If there be not some efficacious remedy for sin, in the soul, sinners must be either annihilated, at death, or damned.

So of Christians, if there be not some efficacious remedy, giving them victory over sin, they too must be lost. In my early life I was much more ready to doubt whether any could be saved, than to believe that all would be. There seemed to me more reason to suppose all would be damned, than all saved. The great inquiry was, How can any be saved? It was never this, How can God damn any? Let any sensible man get a clear and full idea of what salvation is, and he will

see it can be no easy thing. He will assume that the law must go into full execution against all, and that so, none can be saved. My mind before my conversion ran on this text -- "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" I could see that even Christians must have mighty help from some quarter, being only babes in Christ, and their salvation a work of many difficulties.

It has always been passing strange to me that any man could be a Universalist. Even before my conversion it was a profound mystery. Why, said I then, does not everybody see that men must become holy or be lost? If the Holy Ghost does not go down into hell to convert sinners, surely they cannot be saved there. Unless there be some efficacious remedy for sin, taking effect to the full extent of actually giving the victory over it, salvation in heaven is impossible.

In Romans 7, Paul describes a state in which there is the greatest effort to get rid of this state of sinfulness. There he cries out, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death?" Then, the gospel opening on his anxious eye, he thanks God for deliverance through Jesus Christ. He saw the remedy.

IV. This remedy is never in ourselves.

Nowhere in the wide range of the material system all round us, can it be found; nowhere outside of God. It might be demonstrated that in our own nature there is no efficacious remedy. Yet by this I do not mean to say that if any man would use his powers right, he could gain no relief; but I do mean to say that, apart from God, he never will use his own powers right for this end. His own will is committed in an opposite direction. He has fallen into the slough of his corrupt propensities. These propensities are fearful adversaries to his being holy, and must be, until they are subdued. Hence we are constantly pressed with the question -- Where is the power that can subdue them and give us the victory?

1. Paul answers, thanking God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him we have it. Yet until men come to know the gospel by an inward apprehension, it is to them dark, and almost without meaning. They feel but little if any interest in it. But when the divine Spirit reveals Jesus to the mind, these dark things become precious realities. Light breaks in, and illumines the chambers, so recently in thick darkness. Under this influence gospel truth becomes intensely interesting, and even exciting.

Men who have been swept away by the influence of worldly objects, who would not look at spiritual things, and were almost mad in their pursuit of objects which appeal only to the senses, are now wonderfully changed. Christ reveals Himself so clearly that He overbalances and overcomes these earthly excitements. Especially is this the case when the Spirit reveals God as being truly love. This at once, takes prodigious hold on us. Said one who had long professed Christ, and had known something of the gospel in her own experience, "All at once, after so long walking in comparative darkness, the Lord showed me that I had hitherto known Him but very imperfectly. I did not know God was love, before. I did not see this in its own true sun-light. I had opinions; I had notions; but it could not be said I had knowledge. I had heard of Him by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye has seen Him, and my heart has been ravished with His love."

From this time onward her whole soul seemed all glowing with love to God, and radiant with the love of God, revealed to her. So it will always be when the Spirit reveals Jesus to the soul, and we see why He died for us, and why He has in so many ways done so much for us. When these things come up from the realms of theory, into the position of fact, and of experience, apathy ceases; the sensibilities are no longer stagnant; all is wakeful; slavish fear is gone; the soul approaches God freely, and in the spirit of a child; he is no longer religious, because he must be, nor reads the Bible because he must, nor does he pray, or give in benevolence, for such reasons. All these forms of dead experience have passed away, and the mind looks back on it as a loathsome abomination. While these views of Christ are before his mind, he will make no more legal efforts -- will no more strive to gain the favor of God by mere works of law. Christ, thus revealed, breaks the power of sin.

2. Turning now to my impenitent hearers, I ask you if you do not know and admit that I have given a fair account of your case. You know that you have no proper regard, practically, for God, no more than if your heart and intellect were separated, and all mutual influence of one over the other were broken off. Your convictions of truth are often clear and strong; but the response of your heart to this truth is utterly withheld. The state of your affections and will seems to have no correspondence to your own convictions of what they should be. Yet this strange discrepancy is altogether within your power, and you ought to put an end to it at once. You have no right to live on so; God asserting His claims, but your soul utterly

disowning them. This is precisely the state of the sinner; his conscience dissevered from his heart. When his attention is turned to this, he is conscious of this utter disagreement and discordance. In my days of sin, I was just as sensible of this as of my own existence.

Do you ask, What is the reason for this? Am I ever to become self-consistent? Said one of the first lawyers in New York -- "There is no use in trying to vindicate myself. I can make no defense; can offer no explanation. It avails nothing for me to argue my case, for I have nothing to plead." So you know you have no reason to offer for your course of sin. If I were to put it to you all, to say by a public expression if this be not your case, you would at once, if honest, rise to give assent. You are in a lost state. You feel, sometimes, a deep sense of this lostness. Is there a remedy for you?

3. Some of you who profess religion are in great doubt whether you have any spiritual life. Let me ask you if you have not been greatly tried with the fact of your own spiritual impotence, and of your having so little rallying power in yourself? Are you not surprised and troubled at your want of energy, your inefficiency in duty? Have these things pressed you, and have you been led to inquire, anxiously, whether there is a remedy? Do you want to get hold of one, if it be yet possible?

Our text gives us the true and only remedy. God in Christ is the only efficient and all-sufficient power to reach and remedy this direst of all things, sin. Everywhere else in the Bible, the condition of this victory over sin is declared to be faith in Jesus Christ. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith." Without faith the gospel never takes effect in us.

V. What the Bible thus declares, is true also in philosophy and in fact.

Goodness revealed has attractions over even sinners. It is its very nature to attract all human hearts.

1. Some of you felt this attraction even when you were in your sins. Perhaps you feel it somewhat even now. In my own case I recollect the circumstance of weeping profusely at an instance of goodness. I thought then it came near to winning me over to sympathy with goodness. I could not help crying out, This is not in me; I know my heart is not in sympathy with God; -- so strangely did this manifestation of goodness affect me.

You who have read Uncle Tom's Cabin will remember the story of Topsy and little Eva. Topsy seems never to have seen any manifestations of kindness and goodness towards herself. Always beaten about, every influence only driving her the farther from goodness, no wonder she became surly and morose. Little Eva approached her on one occasion as she sat, and looking her mildly and sweetly in the eye, asked her if she could not be good. Now, for the first time, she saw an interest manifested in her happiness, and saw also, in contrast with Eva's spirit, what her own was. This is represented as the first step before the great moral change.

2. No doubt this is true in philosophy. There is something in goodness which strongly tends to draw a moral being into sympathy with itself.

3. Christians are made strong by the revelations which Christ makes of Himself to their minds. "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, (Jesus) they are changed from glory to glory." The view of His own glory, which the Lord gave to Moses when he prayed, "I beseech Thee show me Thy glory," and the Lord answered, "I will make all My goodness pass before thee," this strengthened Moses greatly. It seemed to cast the mantle of Jehovah upon him, and make him a new and wonderful man.

4. When the Lord gains the confidence of a sinner so that He can reveal Himself, the first step is to reveal His goodness. So we should expect, and so it is.

But this goodness must be believed. Confidence must be reposed in Christ, else He cannot reveal His goodness in any saving manner.

5. A conscious victory over ourselves and sin is the only evidence of a saving change. An apparent victory is the only evidence to others of our being savingly changed. This victory consists in being saved from sin, and in becoming like God. Nothing less than this is real salvation.

Love revealed to faith is the power of God unto salvation. Suppose one of you comes into a state in which you have not a particle of confidence in any one who tries to do you good; all that any friend should attempt to do for you, you ascribe to some sinister motive. So long as you withhold confidence his love is not revealed to your faith, for you have no faith to which it can be revealed. In this case, by a natural law of mind, all the goodness he reveals to

you only makes you more wicked and only works out a deeper ruin.

The love of God revealed to faith, is the power of God to bring the soul out of its bondage. But love manifested, yet through unbelief rejected, works ruin to the soul by a natural law; and by the same law, the clearer the revelations of that love, the more rapid and fearful the ruin wrought. The case of the Jews, taught by Christ in person, is in point, a most striking and affecting example. The way they rejected their Messiah served fearfully to deprave their hearts and to hasten the ruin of the nation. Christ Himself said, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin, (that is, comparatively none) but now they have no cloak for their sin." When Christ went through all Judea and Galilee, manifesting everywhere the evidences of His being the Messiah, and bearing Himself with so much kindness, dignity, and humility, it seems wonderful that the people in mass and their priests and scribes especially, did not open their hearts to bid Him welcome. But when instead of this, they withheld their confidence, and rejected Him in stern and wicked unbelief, they became fearfully hardened. Every step in the process of this rejection, worked only mischief and ruin. Suppose you have in your family a son whom you are trying to save; but the more you labor for this result, so much the more does he withhold his confidence, traduce your motives, and pervert to evil all your intended good. Such a course as this on his part throws him fearfully into the power of Satan, and he is led captive, by that arch-deceiver, at his will.

6. None can appreciate our texts, and other passages of this class, except those who have had experience. "Thanks be to God," cries Paul, "who giveth us the victory;" -- a song in which none can truly join but those who have gained this victory, and know its power and blessedness. What can an impenitent man know of such emotions? What can he say? Can he thank God for victory of which he knows and experiences nothing? No; he has been only vanquished, and Satan sings the peans of victory over the ruin of his soul.

To the Christian, really victorious, there is the utmost occasion for gratitude and thanksgiving. He esteems this far above all his other mercies, that he finds himself lifted above the power of temptation, his old chains broken, his religious exercises and purposes become spontaneous, and religion the life and joy of his soul. How earnestly does he bless the Lord who hath given

him the victory!

VI. Thanksgiving for victory over sin.

1. It is sad to see how little there is, in our day, of this thanksgiving for victory over sin. How rarely do you hear such thanks for grace received and victory obtained! We have been in the habit here of having a thanksgiving meeting, for the purpose of expressing our individual grounds of thanksgiving. When the next thanksgiving day occurs shall we hear any offerings of praise to God for giving the victory over sin? We used to hear thanks for grace received; shall we have such thanks again? It was once, more common with us than thanks for temporal mercies; shall it be so again?

2. If the numbers who return to give thanks for this blessing are small, what shall we infer? Is it not fearfully sad and perilous that the gospel should lose its power, in any community?

Many seem not to be aware of their real state. It is hard to convince them that they are not altogether right, yet they have no thanks for this victory. Yet if they had gained this victory they surely would acknowledge it, and express their gratitude to God for it. No other victors are more grateful than Christian victors. If they find themselves victors, they will not conceal the blessed truth, but will naturally wish to shout the praises of victorious grace!

3. Many professed Christians spend their time and breath in brooding over their great weakness, talking it over, praying about it, and discouraging themselves and others as if the Lord were a hard master, who imposed heavy tasks and allowed only the least possible amount of grace to help His children perform them. Yet they do not usually quite despair of help in themselves; do not cease from legal efforts; are not dead to this class of efforts, as those who have utterly renounced them, and who trust in Christ alone. They still think they shall gain the victory by some work which they shall do in themselves. By efforts made without faith, they hope to get faith, and so work out their own righteousness. But it is only when self is really despaired of, that deliverance comes. When you see a sinner on the verge of despair in himself, then you may know he is near the kingdom of grace and mercy. When he has done everything he can do in himself, to save himself, and is compelled to despair of doing anything more, then he is ready to trust

in Jesus. Who of us has not seen this experience in others, and felt it in ourselves? At first we thought we could get religion with little effort; we started off self-righteously, made some ineffectual struggles to pray, and soon learned that our case was far worse than we had supposed. Before my conversion I had never prayed much. For a short time previous, I used to lock my office door, stop the keyhole, and whisper out a short prayer in the greatest perturbation lest somebody should hear my voice, or in some way learn that I was praying. But this answered no purpose; I must pray better than this. I seemed to be bound up and hemmed in on every side, and could not pray. But it occurred to me that if I could get entirely away from everybody, and could meet God alone, that then I could pray. So I went off into the woods, far beyond any danger of being overheard, or seen. But even then I could not pray. My heart refused to pray; there seemed to be no prayer in it. I felt fearfully faint -- said, All is over with me; I never can pray. Despair came down on my heart for a moment; the last prop was knocked out from under me, and there was nothing more I could do but to fall helpless at Jesus' feet, and find mercy there!

4. Often persons talk and complain much of their weakness, but do not despair of yet further efforts in their own strength. They are not so shut up to God that they know they cannot take another step to purpose, in any other direction. They seem little aware of the fact that Jesus Christ is knocking at the door of their heart every moment, as He said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" -- yet they do not bid Him enter with welcome. In fact, they even bolt the door against Him.

A lady of my acquaintance, hopefully a Christian, felt her need of sanctifying grace, and really exhausted her strength in efforts, after her own ideas of the matter, to get the command of her temper. At length she fell into despair; said she was not a Christian and could do no more, and would profess piety no longer. At this crisis Jesus revealed Himself to her, and in a moment she found deliverance. She was completely saved from the power of her giant temptation. Years after this, she said to me -- "I have no more expectation of committing those sins of temper than I have of committing murder."

5. Real despair of help in one's self does not make men careless and lead them to drop all efforts; on the contrary, the more they despair, the more their soul reaches out on every side for help and hope.

VII. Until the church is sanctified, the world cannot be converted.

Until Christians can testify with their lips and lives, it cannot be expected that the truth will take effect.

A man of much prominence in New York had a pious wife. When the subject of sanctification came to be agitated here, some eighteen years since, she was enough of a Christian to understand it, and to feel her need. She studied it and embraced it. When her unconverted husband saw the astonishing change it wrought in her, he said, "the church must have this. When they do, the world will understand the gospel. They will have something intelligible to aim at." How true! Until the church gets the victory, and, rejoicing in this victory, can show it to the world, she need not think she is greatly recommending religion, or is likely to secure many converts.

1. Converts are likely to be converted only to the current standard of piety in the church where they are. Often you see this illustrated in a very striking manner. Although they have the Bible in their hand, and although they have excellent preaching, yet their practical ideas of religion are usually drawn from the observed life and spirit of their Christian friends. The living patterns have the practical power. Hence, if young converts have before them high example, it puts them upon high aims and efforts. They aspire to the standard of those whom they most esteem. O how precious to them, to have high and holy examples for their imitation!

2. Church members are in their own light when they reproach converts, for they only reproach themselves. They often do not consider that these converts are only themselves reproduced; a mirror in which they can see the reflection of their own faces. So, also, for the church to complain of each other is only to complain of themselves. We are every one of us responsible in our measure, for the state of the church, and to blame for its state being no better than it is. It is therefore of no use for us to recriminate.

Some professors of religion say, "All this does not apply to me, for I don't profess sanctification." A great mistake; for you have professed sanctification. Scarcely could you make a more solemn profession than you made when you joined the church. Then you publicly avouched the Lord Jehovah to be your God, Jesus to be your Savior, and the Holy Ghost to be your sanctifier. You solemnly promised to abstain from all ungodliness and

every worldly lust, and if this is not a profession of entire sanctification, what is? Certainly, your promise and profession went the whole length of pledging yourself to full and whole-hearted obedience -- an obedience not so complete as you may perhaps, render in after years, with more and better knowledge; for holy obedience may progress with knowledge, onward through all time and all eternity. But after such a covenant, it avails nothing to say that you have not committed yourself to a life and a state of entire consecration to God.

Is it not the fact that some of you, instead of coming up to the gospel standard, keep shy of it, more than willing to waive the question about entire consecration, and really anxious to build up a new highway to heaven, which shall not be the "highway of holiness"? Brethren, such building of other highways for the Christian life, must be a fearful failure. There is perdition at the end of such a pathway, and there ought to be. If God's redeemed people rebel against being constrained by redeeming love, and insist that some little sin must be indulged and admitted into the standard Christian life, ought not God to give them up to their own lusts? Nay more, will He not do this as sure as He is holy, and as surely as He hates sin with utter hatred?

[Back to Top](#)

Gospel Ministers Ambassadors for Christ

Lecture II

March 12, 1856

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--2 Cor. 5:20: "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

An ambassador is an agent or representative of a government. In ancient times, they were employed only in regard to matters of war and peace. In those times, commercial relations were of small account, compared with what they are now. Now it is common to sustain ambassadors at all the foreign courts, to look after those numerous relations that obtain between nations at peace with each other.

No such thing was thought of in New Testament times. Our Savior speaks of ambassadors being sent, but it was only to "offer conditions of peace." In this sense, God sends His ambassadors to guilty men.

The Church, and especially her gospel ministers represent Christ on earth, and are engaged to do His work. The world being in revolt against its own Maker, Ruler and Father, He sends His ministers as ambassadors to plead with men to be reconciled to God. Ministers are divinely appointed and commissioned for this express purpose. Holding their credentials from the Lord Jesus Christ, they are authorized to offer men free pardon on condition of unqualified submission to God's will and acceptance of pardon in the name of Jesus only. I need only say, on this point, that a duly appointed ambassador holds such relations to both parties, that, while acting within his commission, his acts bind the government he represents, as truly as their own acts can do. His business is to keep within his commission and instructions, and report what he has done. Then his action is conclusive upon his employers.

I. Sinners are not reconciled to God.

II. But what is implied in being reconciled?

I. The text assumes that sinners are not reconciled to God.

This is, of course, true of every sinner. It is indeed only an identical proposition - a mere truism -- only another way of saying the same thing. Sin is transgression of God's law, and, of course, is opposition and not friendship towards God. This is the very idea of being a sinner. To say that a sinner is unreconciled to God is only to say that he is a sinner. The being a sinner, implies an unreconciled state.

It is plain that God looks on sinners as being unreconciled; else how should He call on them to be reconciled? I am aware that sinners often say, "I have nothing against God," but this only shows that they know not what spirit they are of. They really act towards God as if they had the utmost reason for disliking Him; and if they were carefully to search their own hearts, they would find real enmity against God -- a spirit that loves to find fault, even where there is not the least occasion.

It is a simple and notorious fact that sinners are at variance with God. There is not another fact on all the face of this world's history more patent than this.

II. But what is implied in being reconciled?

That we cordially approve His character, and not His character only, but His government, so that we practically consent to obey Him. This implies supreme love to God, for He requires just no less than this. It implies submission to His providence also -- that is, to His actual administration of the affairs of this world. It includes a cordial embracing of His whole will -- in every department of His government and providence. A cordial and constant co-operation with Him in all His ways, must be embraced; for as He holds the position of Supreme Ruler, nothing less than this can be commensurate with our obligations.

1. There are many reasons why you, who are in sin, should be reconciled to God.

(1.) Because everything He has done is perfectly right. There is no fault to be found in His law -- all there, is holy, just and good. There is no fault to be found with the Gospel; that is ineffably condescending and compassionate -- gloriously good and wise. What reason, then, have you to be otherwise than reconciled?

(2.) It is utterly useless for you to persist in this controversy with God. You know He is right, and yourself wrong; and you also know that no amount of debate and controversy will ever make your case any better. Why, then, should you prolong such a controversy, so unjust to God -- so unreasonable; and to yourself as ruinous as it is unreasonable?

(3.) You ought to yield because you cannot afford to live so. You can find no happiness, no good of any sort in prosecuting this controversy.

(4.) God can never yield to you. You must yield, or there must be an everlasting antagonism. And can you look upon such a result with any other feelings than dread and horror?

(5.) That you should yield is intrinsically right -- a reason which ought to be sufficient alone, if there were no other.

(6.) Of course, it is safe to yield -- perfectly safe. You lose nothing -- run no risk of losing anything.

2. Suppose you were at variance with any other person, and there were only

this one reason urged for your becoming reconciled, that it would be on your part simply right -- would you not be a knave if you were to resist? And ought you not to be so esteemed by all the world unless you would yield? In all controversies, the first thing enquired after is -- Who is in the right and who in the wrong? In the case between you and your Maker, this is perfectly plain. Not one unprejudiced judge in all the universe will ever decide in your favor.

Again, it is expedient. It will cost you nothing. It will deprive you of no good. In every point of view, expediency demands that you submit to God. I know sinners are often ashamed to admit that themselves are wrong; but which is most honorable; to maintain a position which everybody decides to be wrong; or to recede from that position -- nobly come out, and confess and avow what you know to be right, though it condemn your own past course? What do men say of those who doggedly maintain a wrong position because they are too proud to confess their known wrong? Do they honor such a spirit? Nay, verily, but , on the contrary, men always say if you have done wrong, it is noble and generous to admit it. What a wonderful thing to have a controversy with God, and maintain it, because you cannot brook the humiliation of confession and repentance! What! To contend with God, knowing that you are utterly wrong, and God altogether right; yet you maintain the controversy and go into it deeper and deeper every hour! What would you think of a child that should have such a controversy with its father, the child totally wrong in every point, the father perfectly right, and yet the child persists in maintaining the controversy?

Again, consider, God seeks a reconciliation -- seeks it although He is the offended and injured party, and although your course has been utterly and unreasonably wrong, and only wrong continually. Yes, the offended party comes and seeks reconciliation. He would live in peace with you. Not that He wants your help; for, is He dependent on you? No; but He seeks your peace and welfare -- seeks it simply and only because He is kindhearted and really benevolent.

3. You can have no peace, either within or without, until you yield to God. If you have a controversy with a neighbor, it is perpetually rasping and chafing your feelings; how fearful, then, to have such a controversy with God? How fearful to have an enemy who is present everywhere; so that, if

you ascend into heaven, He is there; if you make your bed in hell, He is there; or if you take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the earth, even there you find your adversary -- a fearful Presence to blight your peace! The chariot-wheels of His government will roll on and on; and if you throw yourself in their path, they tarry not and turn not, but must "grind you to powder!" Where can you find a place to live, unreconciled to God? Why then, will you prolong this controversy?

God seeks to be at peace with you, not because He fears you; not lest you should destroy or even mar His happiness; no; you are to Him so small and so contemptible an enemy, He has only to withdraw His sustaining hand from underneath you, and you sink at once to hell by your own gravity. It is only because He loves you that He should ever care to bring you from your wretched rebellion to be at peace with Him.

4. He cannot be at peace with you unless you change. There is no possible way to restore a good understanding between yourself and God, unless you consent to become reconciled to Him. He cannot change and come over to you; you must consent to change your position and return to Him. And you must do this voluntarily. For God to force you, implies a contradiction. Omnipotence cannot force a sinner to be reconciled. Anything that should make this change irresistible, is simply absurd -- overlooking the intrinsic nature of the change itself.

5. God is your nearest neighbor, and always will be. You cannot move away from Him; He will be your nearest neighbor wherever you go or wherever you stay. Why would you keep up a controversy with your nearest neighbor -- with one who held the same room with you? Would you like a perpetual quarrel with your roommate? How much less should you, then, with one so all-present, so all-wise and powerful as God!

6. You cannot deny the fact of the controversy, nor the fact that you are wrong in it. How bad, then, to persist in your rebellion, and refuse to yield yourself implicitly to His will!

While God might command and might threaten, He yet for the most part, appears in a very different attitude. Laying this aside, He comes down to beseech you to be reconciled. Just as if your neighbor, who had all law and right on his side; who might prosecute you at law, and might prove you in the

wrong, and make you suffer the consequences -- should, instead of this, come to you in a modest and quiet way, entreating you and saying -- "Now let us be at peace." So God comes in tones of most tender entreaty, and beseeches you to be reconciled.

7. If you do not come, you sin against your own soul. You impose on Him the hard necessity of destroying you. The feelings with which He views this hard necessity, you may see in His language when He cries out -- "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within Me; My repentings are kindled together." O sinner, hear that! "How shall I give thee up!" He bursts out in the language of grief, as if His very heart would break! Long time, and with every means in His power, He has followed the sinner, beseeching him to turn and live; how sad, then, to a heart of infinite love, to see that, probably -- yes, certainly, all these compassionate labors must fail! O, to follow a sinner so, in the fulness of an aching heart, for years and scores of years -- and then have it come utterly to naught!

And is this God's bearing towards thee, O sinner? Precisely so; these are God's own words. And He feels thus and speaks thus only because He so dislikes to take vengeance. Therefore, it is that He waits so long and so patiently, and still comes forth in mercy to entreat and beseech wayward sinners to be reconciled to God.

8. Consider yet, that God has taken the greatest pains to put things in the best position for entreating you. Think of this -- that God should take the attitude of a suppliant -- and before whom? Not an equal -- not a lofty angel even; but before a poor, weak and mean sinner! To even such, He sends His ambassadors praying and beseeching! And is this really so? Suppose you should meet Him on earth, and, instead of reproaching you, He should look you in the face most tenderly, and ask you why you had been abusing Him so long and so grievously. Suppose He presses you to say why you have ever had it in your heart to abuse Him at all. What could you answer? That He should come and really beseech you -- would not this break your heart as a potter's vessel?

9. God loves to do this when He can do it safely. It is only when He knows that He can spare no longer, with safety to His kingdom, that He changes

His attitude, rises in His majesty to maintain the honor of His throne, and hurls the sinner down to eternal ruin!

REMARKS.

1. Sinners often pretend to think the difficulty is on God's part. They say -- "I have nothing against God; I am reconciled to God."

What does that mean? Do you really mean that you yield obedience to God, and in every way, take your own proper position towards Him? How can you say that while you are in conflict with Him at every point?

What base hypocrisy it is for sinners to set aside the whole question by saying -- I have nothing against God. But you have something against God. Your heart is full of prejudice against Him. You utterly fail to love, honor, or obey Him! Not one thing, appropriate to your relations to God, have you ever done! How basely hypocritical, then, for you to claim that you have nothing against God, and that all is right on your part!

2. Sinners seem to think that they must move God. They will have it they must persuade God to make up with them, and almost, if not quite, confess, that He has been in the wrong. Instead of praying that they may themselves come back to God and feeling that they ought to, they insist that God ought to come back to them. You may have heard of the little girl who became convicted of her sins, and who prayed for a long time with great agony; but, at length, got hold of the true idea of her relations to God and of God's to her, and running in, she cried out to her mother, "Ma, ma, I have made up with God!"

3. The world has gone off into rebellion against God, and is utterly removed from all sympathy with Him. Upon this state of things, God has ordained an economy of proceedings, all arranged for the one purpose of restoring man to love and obedience. It aims to illustrate God's government and yet to demonstrate His love. In the development of this great plan, Christ came in person to His own chosen people; when they reviled, He reviled not again; when they cursed, He only blessed; when they blasphemed, He prayed for them; and when they plotted and perpetrated His murder by most wicked hands, He prayed, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do, and proceeded at once to offer them pardon through the very blood they had shed, "beginning at Jerusalem." In how many ways did He strive to teach men, even sinners, that

God is their friend, displeased, indeed, with their sins, yet earnestly seeking their welfare and ready at once to blot out all their transgressions, if they will repent and accept of mercy. See how beautifully all this stands revealed before us in the last scenes of the Savior's earthly life. You know how He finally died under their hands; how He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, meekly and unresisting; how they mocked Him, put on Him a crown, not of pearls, but of thorns -- a reed in one hand for a scepter; how, when the Roman Governor would release Him, they preferred the scandalous Barabbas, as if glad of an opportunity to show their appreciation of the Son of God! You know how this mobocrat and murder was released instead of Jesus, and how they heaped on Him every form of abuse and of insult they could devise. And did He lose all patience? Does He call for twelve legions of angels to sink that guilty city a thousand fathoms deep in the gulf of destruction? No; far from this as can be! After He has comforted His disciples, the first thing He does is to say -- "Go, preach My gospel among all nations, but begin at Jerusalem." Go, first of all, to My murderers!

4. And now, after this demonstration by "God manifest in the flesh," can you suppose that the difficulty is on God's part, and that He cannot consent on reasonable grounds to be reconciled to you?

5. How can this difficulty be settled? God on His side says -- "What can I do more that I have not done" to you? As one of Christ's ambassadors, I ask -- What more shall God do for you? Can you suppose anything short of your yielding up the whole controversy can save you? Indeed, if God were to change ever so much, and recede from His claims ever so fully, your conscience would wage everlasting war against you and you could get no peace! I said to a young lady -- Are you a Christian? She replied, "I believe God deserves better treatment than He has ever received from me." What sinner does not know this? And who would not be compelled to say it if he were shut up to the truth? You know you have no occasion to treat Him with any, even the least, contempt.

6. If He deserves better treatment at your hands, shall He have it? What do you say to that? Shall He have it from this time and onward forever? God being your helper, and by His grace, will you yield entirely to His claims? This is implied in being reconciled to God; have you any reason why you should not do it?

7. Suppose God should abandon all efforts to make peace with you! This is more than supposable; it will certainly take place ere long. He has plainly told you that He will not always strive with you. And, besides, it is every way reasonable that

He should at some time desist from all further effort. You could not think it strange if He were to desist now. It should even be expected. Suppose, then, that His compassion should fail -- His forbearance go no further -- the Spirit be withdrawn, God give you over to hopeless impenitence and endless woe -- to let your enmity rage on forever; what then? Suppose this result which surely must be reached in time, were reached today? There remains no more hope for you. You can look back on a hopeful past -- a period when you sat near the very gate of heaven, and almost without effort, you might have pressed your way within the strait gate; but that time has forever past. O, how you wish you could have one more gospel Sabbath, and have another gospel sermon, and have once more a waiting Savior and a striving Spirit! O might it only be! But with you it is all too late!

Are you not afraid of this result? You know God will not wait long. You know you have abused His patience already, past all human endurance, and how long can you presume that even divine forbearance and compassion will hold out?

Having made you proposals from my Master, and in His name, I come now to demand from you an answer. What shall I say from you to my Master? Suppose I come to you individually -- for this business is all to be done with you as individuals -- I come to you, then, as individuals, and would fain know what you reply to my Master. I am going to report the matter; what shall I report? Do you say that you have no report to make -- that you take no action in the case? But this is impossible. To try to do nothing, is to neglect this offered salvation, and insult your Redeemer, and say back to God -- "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways!" It is scarcely possible that any action can be so fatal as this.

Suppose Christ should appear -- in this very place and hour -- and with a voice that should shake this house, should say, "I come to demand a decision! Tell Me now, once for all, whether you will or will not repent -- whether you will or will not have salvation through My blood! Now, therefore, let every sinner choose the ground he proposes to stand on forever. As you say now, so it shall be at the judgment, and so shall stand through eternity!"

So Jesus does beseech you to choose this day whom you will serve, and so He may accept your virtual decision as final, and set His seal upon it forever!

[Back to Top](#)

The Destruction of the Wicked

Lecture III

May 7, 1856

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Prov. 29:1: "He that, being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

In speaking from these words, I shall,

I. Notice some of the ways in which God reproveth the wicked;

II. Show what is meant by hardening the neck;

III. Point out some of the ways in which men do harden the neck;

IV. What is meant by being suddenly destroyed;

V. What, by being destroyed without remedy;

VI. Why this destruction is remediless.

I. The ways in which God reproveth the wicked are various.

1. All His providences are disciplinary. Every one of them has a voice of admonition, speaking to the sinner in tones of love, and appealing to his fears, or to his conscience, or to his heart.

2. His revealed word is another means of reproof. There God speaks in burning words to the sinner. What language could be more plain and persuasive! And every word teems with reproof against sinners and admonitions to cease from sinning.

3. God's Spirit reproveth the sinner, making use for this end of both God's word and providence. Often these reproofs are felt by the sinner to be

deeply solemn and searching.

4. Besides all these agents, God makes use of the human conscience. He has constituted the human soul with a faculty which takes cognizance of its moral acts and states. Through this, He rebukes the sinner. He also employs our friends and our enemies, availing Himself of the social law of our nature to reach us through fellow-beings, and do us good.

II. What is meant by "hardening the neck?"

The figure is that of a bullock who presses against the yoke until his neck becomes callous -- a figure both plain and common to denote the stubborn resistance of the sinner's will against God.

III. The ways in which sinners harden their neck are many and various.

1. They do it by refusing to attend to God's reproof. Nothing is more common for sinners than to divert their attention voluntarily from the reproof which God administers. For example, they go to meeting, not because they wish to hear of God and duty, but because they cannot well avoid going. Once there, if truth annoys their conscience, and they cannot divert their attention otherwise, they will leave the house, or open a book and read. Why do they refuse to attend to Gods' messages? What is this but strengthening one's self in rebellion against God.

Some of you have done this very thing today. Many of you know full well that you have set yourself against God's claims, and do not mean to give them even so much as your serious regard.

2. Sometimes, when friends seek an opportunity to converse with you, you are careful to give them no opportunity. As those who are invited to the gospel feast are represented by Christ as begging to be excused, so sinners in our times, will even try to escape hearing even the invitation to the feast.

Again, sinners harden their necks by refusing to interpret God's providences rightly. They resist the admission that God has a controversy with them. In every way they try to get rid of the idea that God has any meaning in His providences, and especially, any meaning for them. They ascribe all these events to be fixed laws, or to fate, or to change -- any form of atheism, rather than admit a present and ever-acting God!

3. When the finger of God's providence becomes so plain that they cannot deny it, then they refuse to justify God. Instead of yielding the point at once, saying -- "I have sinned, and I have nothing to say in my own behalf, they murmur, and rebel, and think it very hard in God to single them out for such a stroke. They wonder why it is that God deals thus and thus with them -- a common way of intimating that they have done nothing so very wrong as to call for such rebuke from God.

4. An almost universal method of hardening one's neck against God is to refuse to make self-application of the truth to one's own life and heart. Sinners can very readily apply truths to others, both bad men and good, but they feel strongly averse to making this sort of application to their own heart and conscience. Why? Because they don't love the truth, and do not mean to yield their hearts to its claims.

5. When the rebukes of truth apply unmistakably to their own case, they refuse to justify God, but insist on justifying themselves. Just at this point, they reveal their real state of mind. You remember how Nathan came to David, and how he managed his application of truth so well that he drew out from David a most decisive verdict against a special case of wrongdoing before he let him see how entirely the case was his own. David's indignation was aroused and he declared that the man who had done so should die. Yet when Nathan solemnly replied to him -- "Thou art the man" -- what did David do? There he revealed his real character. He did not rebel -- did not resist the application, but humbled himself at once, and confessed his great sin. Often, however, it happens that, when persons cannot mistake the application of rebuke to themselves, they refuse to justify God, and insist on justifying themselves.

6. Sometimes, when persons have done that which publicly disgraces religion and are publicly reproved for it, instead of humbling themselves, they complain and think themselves hardly treated. Indeed, they often talk as if God's ministers had no right and no authority from their Master to reprove men for their sins. So they defend their position in sin, and, of course, harden their necks.

7. Often men plead some excuse to palliate their wrong, and thus harden their necks. They insist that others are to blame, and seem determined to assume that this ought to excuse them. Suppose you were laboring to

enforce the truth upon one of your children, but he should dodge every point and try to cover up, and cast the blame on others; would you not feel greatly grieved that you could not reach his conscience to do him good?

8. Yet further, sinners harden their necks by objecting to the manner in which the reproof is administered. Instead of looking at the matter of the reproof, and asking themselves if it be not true, and if it does not involve very great guilt, they engross their minds with the manner, and complain of that as being perhaps very strange. But God is not wont to consult the taste of wicked men as to the manner in which He shall rebuke their sin. Probably He is not so fastidious as they are. It often happens that men do object to His manner when He handles them roughly, and get only the result of being thereby more fearfully hardened.

9. Sometimes they object against the persons who reprove them, saying -- "Physician, heal thyself." Or you may hear talk loudly of impudence and impertinence. David, rebuked by Nathan, did not do so, although he had all the power a man could ask, The reason of his different course was, that he had a conscience and humbled himself before a holy God.

But let reproof come from whom it may, and in whatever manner it may, those who reject it are surely hardening their own necks. There is nothing, perhaps, which more clearly reveals a man's real character than his course and spirit under reproof. You may, perhaps, recollect the case of a minister who was so much abused in his own house, that his wife lost all patience, and said to him -- "Why not show the man the door?" but who mildly answered his wife's suggestion, saying, "Let us hear all he has to say against me; we may learn some good. If the Lord suffers him to curse, who knows but he has some wise ends to answer." It is most true that God sometimes lets our enemies try us and provoke us sadly. Happy is that man who has humility enough to receive such rebukes and make the best of them. The justice of the reproof, not the manner of it, is the thing we should look at. This is the matter that most concerns us in our relations to God. If the reproof be administered manifestly in a bad spirit, then you need pre-eminently to be on your guard. Then you are in the greater danger of repelling it, and becoming thereby the more hardened. Human nature is exceedingly prone to feel deeply, and to object strongly to the manner, or the person who reproves; but God will not hold us guiltless if we repel reproof for such reasons.

10. Persons often harden their own hearts by complaining of the language used in the rebukes they receive. They think us too severe, or perhaps, extravagant, while really no language can adequately describe their own great wickedness.

11. All sorts of excuses made for wickedness, harden the heart and stiffen the neck against God. Sometimes, when reproofed, men will resort to recrimination, abuse and retort. Instead of receiving rebuke in humility, they hurl it back with resentment. Woe to him who does this. Nothing that he can do will more fearfully harden the heart.

12. Some seek relief under the sting of reproof, by indulging hard feelings against those who reprove them. These feelings tend strongly to confirm the will in its rebellious attitude against God, for as long as one indulges these feelings, he is, of course, hardening his neck against reproof.

13. Some, to excuse themselves, will plead their inability, or that they have other duties to perform, yet are compelled in honesty to say, "I might have done it if I had been in the spirit of religion, and had realized the value of souls."

14. Some persons excuse themselves from attending meetings, but would not, if they knew and felt the value of souls. It is entertained only as an apology for neglect. Or by allowing some prejudice to prevail, men will repel the truth and harden their neck. Or they will utterly deny the justice of the charge made against them. This spirit of self-justification is sometimes so strong that they will not confess. Press them as you may, they are still so full of the spirit of self-justification, they will not utter a word of confession -- will not come down in true humility.

These are some of the ways in which sinners harden their necks.

IV. I am next to show what is meant by being "suddenly destroyed."

1. This class of words -- destroyed, kill, etc., does not mean annihilation. We know nothing about annihilation. Who can know anything about it? We have had no observation and of course no experience of it. We certainly do not know that it is possible, save to the omnipotent power of Jehovah. This, however, we do know -- namely, that the words kill, destroy, etc., never mean annihilation; but only the death of the body, leaving the soul as full of

life as ever. Therefore, in using these or similar words, God does not threaten annihilation.

2. Nor again, can it denote a merely temporary punishment. No man would use such language in such a sense. Nor can it denote any light degree of punishment. It must mean the loss of the soul -- the utter ruin of all the sinner's well-being.

3. It shall be sudden -- that is, it will come unexpectedly. This is the usual sense of the word, sudden. In such an hour as they think not, the fearful blow will fall.

V. What is meant by its being "without remedy?"

1. It must mean that the threatened destruction cannot be prevented. You are sick and send for a physician; but he decides that your case is beyond a remedy. The meaning is, that he cannot avert impending death. The threatened calamity will come, despite of every means of resistance. So the sinner, of hardened neck, must be destroyed, and nothing can prevent it. He may resist instruction, but cannot resist destruction. He may withstand the rebuke that seeks to reclaim, but the rebuke that comes to avenge God's insulted majesty, no power can withstand. When God's own right hand is lifted to destroy, there is no mightier arm than His that can deliver. Alas, the sinner may look imploringly in every direction, but no help can come!

2. As it cannot be prevented that it shall not come, so neither can there be any redemption from it when it has once fallen. No relief, interposing, can prevent it from being final and complete.

VI. But why is this destruction so sudden and remediless?

1. For the reason that it is just and righteous altogether.

2. Also, because it is of no use for God to spare such sinners any longer. Having reached the point where reproof only serves to harden their necks the more, it is plain that for them to live longer, would only serve to enhance their guilt, and there heighten their doom.

3. Why, then, should not God destroy them suddenly? And yet further, it is benevolent towards all other beings to make of them a public example. The

public good would be in jeopardy if God's forbearance were prolonged indefinitely. And should not God take care of the interests of the holy and pure not less than of the hopelessly vile?

REMARKS.

1. This text is applicable to nations. When they are often reprov'd, and yet still harden their neck, they may expect destruction speedily and without remedy. Of this the Jews were examples in more than one generation.

2. So of the visible church.

3. And so, also, of sinners. After great provocations of His long-suffering patience, they are left of God. In revivals, especially, we often see how God cuts them down. I could stand here and give you the names of many whom God has cut down as in a moment. They had abused His Spirit until they had become fatally hardened, and God saw there was no more hope of their turning to Himself. What could He do, then, better than to cut them down where they were, ere they had swollen yet more the measure of their guilt, and the fearfulness of their retribution?

We can often predict the doom of sinners when we see them hardening themselves against God. How awful to look on and see them hardening themselves against God, and yet know assuredly that ere long they must be suddenly destroyed, unless they at once repent! Some of us have had our faces turn pale as we have seen our children hardening their necks. O, what sorrow can be like this sorrow!

It is, of all things else, most alarming, to see persons becoming so blind to their own guilt and danger, that they can rush on, reckless of God and of His righteous retribution. Hear them crying, Peace and safety! All seems well to them; they enjoy perfect health, perhaps, and think their mountain stands strong; but ere they are aware, sudden destruction cometh on them, and they shall not escape forever!

Sinner, do you wish to know when God will arise in His wrath and cut you down in your sins? It will be just when you are crying "peace and safety," and are hardening your neck against all sense of either guilt or danger. Then, in a moment, it will burst on you like a clap of thunder out of a clear sky! Just this our Savior affirmed when He said, "In such an hour as ye think not, the Son of

Man cometh."

Think of the case of sinners here. In every breeze they may hear the gentle whispers of Divine love; in each day's prolonged life, another appeal to their souls to render unto God the honor and gratitude which are His due; at every table, a fresh demonstration of His loving-kindness; through every Sabbath and every week, the voice of God re-echoes in their ear -- but alas! they are weary of hearing so much from God! They are tired of these constant appeals to do what they hate and to honor Him for whom they care not. So they harden their necks and make their course of sin as smooth and as undisturbed as possible!

Ah, we shall see how it will be with them! We shall see whether they withstand the Most High when once He shall arise in His wrath to take vengeance on His foes! Who hath ever hardened himself against God and prospered? Just when they thought themselves on the eve of triumph over their great enemy, then sudden destruction fell on them, and there was no escape!

4. The infidelity of many in regard to God in providence, is to them a stumbling block. They will have it that there is no God in these events that occur. They are most averse to any recognition of His agency. "God speaketh once, yea, twice; but man regardeth it not." Nothing is so unwelcome to the sinner as to meet with manifestations of a present God. He does not love the truth taught by Christ, that "even the very hairs on your head are all numbered." O, if they could only be forever beyond the reach of this great and awful God! But they cannot!

5. Their pride and self-will are their ruin. Long time has God been laboring to subdue your self-will; but you resist and will not yield. You are determined this proud will of yours shall not be subdued. Has not God been making appeals to your heart and conscience to induce you to yield to His sway? Has He not in many ways sought to move you by affliction, until, perhaps, He is saying of you -- "Why should you be smitten any more? Ye will revolt more and more." Reproof comes to you from the four winds of heaven; every living thing has a voice for God to use in solemn warning and affectionate entreaty; and shall it all be in vain? Will you yet make your heart hard as an adamant stone? If so, we shall see whether God will be true to His word. We shall see whether sudden destruction will or will not come, and that "without remedy!"

How fearful must such a destruction be, and especially so to those who have been so long and so well instructed as most of you have been! Some of you are

from families where you have been continually reprov'd of sin from early infancy. O, how fearfully hardened must your necks have become! Will it not be most awful for you to fall into the hands of a just God!

[Back to Top](#)

The Wicked Stumbling in Their Darkness

Lecture IV

July 2, 1856

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Prov. 4:19: "The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble."

The older I grow, the more I admire and love the book of Proverbs. Its wisdom is most profound. Manifestly these proverbs are the result, not of inspiration only, but of much observation and reflection in the writer. They are useful, being easily remembered, and so various, that you can always find something to apply, be your circumstances what they may. It is plain the author had moved among men with his eyes wide open. Hence, he had noticed that the wicked are forever stumbling, and seem not to know at what they stumble. It is to this great truth that I now call your attention.

I. It is well, in the first place, to notice several facts of human consciousness.

II. To state in detail some of the things over which sinners stumble.

III. A few words should be said here as to the course that true wisdom dictates.

I. It is well, in the first place, to notice several facts of human consciousness.

Whoever shall carefully study these facts, shown by human consciousness, must see that the pretended skepticism of men is mere hypocrisy. Men know better.

What are these facts?

1. In any moral agent, the spirit of living to one's self, as distinguished from living for others, is sin. Every moral agent knows this because his irresistible convictions affirm it.
2. Consciousness affirms that the way of the wicked is one of self-will. For, to make the promotion of one's own interests the chief end of life is self-will. Self-will and nothing else prompts and pushes men to this. And, in respect to this point, it matters not whether the interests sought to be promoted are temporal or eternal -- those pertaining to time, or those which reach forward into eternity.
3. Sinners are alienated from God. God is cast out of their regard. They scarcely think of Him, and never, with the reverence, love, and trust, which are His due. Every sinner knows this, because his own consciousness affirms it.
4. Yet, even in this fearfully wicked course, they seek to justify themselves. Consequently, they are tempted to be very uncandid; nay, ore -- not only tempted, but if they will persist in their sin, compelled. They cannot justify themselves, and still be fair-minded. The truth is all against them; so that it must make them ceaseless trouble if they consent to see things as they are.
5. Of course, this leads to great blindness. The Bible represents sinners as being blinded by sin; you can now see how this must certainly result. When men take a false position towards God, the truth annoys them terribly; it becomes entirely essential to their quiet in such a position, that they should see things, not as they are, but as they are not; so that they are led on to pervert the truth, and blind their own eyes. Such a result from such causes, is by no means peculiar to religion. It takes place just as certainly and palpably in politics, and there, we may see it any day. When men resign their opinion to the control of self-will, they, of course, become uncandid, and thus blinded. This is a simple matter of fact, coming within the pale of consciousness.
6. Such men become filled with prejudice. They try to seek some refuge of lies. They get up excuses -- which yet are no excuses, and they inwardly know it. Yet, suppressing all notice of this inward knowledge, they manage

to make themselves almost believe in the validity of these excuses -- this being the only way in which they can live any way comfortably in their sins. It is remarkable that a sinner will bring himself with great ease to accept some delusion; a single suggestion suffices often, and he does not trouble himself about the evidence. "The wish is farther to the thought."

7. The Bible says of the wicked, that "their way is as darkness." It is as if one was groping along, in the dead of a night, starless and rayless; he feels his way; he stumbles and knows not at what. He cannot see things as they really are. Such is the way of the wicked.

His self-will prevents him from coming to the light. "Every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, because his deeds are evil."

8. The control of self-will and self-interest ensures profound misapprehension. Those of you who observe the errors and prejudices of politicians, are often amazed. It shocks you to see what absurd positions they can take, and with what facility they can utterly distort the truth, and yet make it seem to their eyes to be truth yet. Of late, I do not pretend to believe the party papers. Let them say what they please, I know there is no confidence to be reposed in either their facts or their opinions. So, on any subject, let a man become committed to a party, and that moment he becomes the victim of prejudice. If you had fallen in with the members returning from the National Democratic Convention, you would have been surprised to see how differently from yourselves they view the great questions of the day. Are they right? No; they are committed, and, by consequence, prejudiced. So, on any side of any question, men committed under some selfish influence, are sure to be misled.

9. When the Bible says of the wicked -- "They know not at what they stumble," it assumes that they do stumble and fall. Of course, this refers, not to the body, but to the soul. Misled as to their relations and attitude towards God, they stumble and fall into eternal perdition.

They stumble -- they know not at what. They are in no state to see. They have enveloped their own minds in deep darkness. How can they discriminate? All the effort they put forth for this purpose, while in this state of self-will, is vain. They will not adjust and weigh the evidence fairly. All their trying is likely to avail nothing, unless they shall really cut loose from

their committal -- sunder the bonds that hold their minds under the sway of prejudice, and let in the light of truth upon their own souls. In fact, until they do this they do not try to see the truth, in any proper sense. They might see the truth easily if their minds were in an upright and honest state.

II. I am now about to state in detail some of the things over which sinners stumble.

Let me beg of you, as I name these points, to note their bearings on your own experience.

1. Sinners stumble at their own ignorance. Often they are amazingly ignorant -- of God, of His attributes; of their own relations to God, and indeed, of themselves. It is amazing to hear the things they say, and the conclusions to which they come. Yet they seem not at all aware that they are stumbling at their own ignorance. A young man of skeptical views, who came here some years since, said to me, in answer to some question of mine in regard to his spiritual state -- "I do not take the same views of Christianity that you do." What, said I, what does this imply? It must imply either that you have given more attention to the subject than I have, or more able thinking, or that you are more honest. Yet, when he came to bring out his own view, anybody could see that he was stumbling over his own ignorance. He had, as he thought, got bravely over the prejudices of his godly father; had broken off all the trammels that hold the professors here; in fact, so profound was his ignorance, he seemed not to have comprehended the first thing pertaining to the subject. Just as you sometimes see persons talking very large and wise on other subjects, when every word they say, show their ignorance to be most profound; so it is here.

In like manner, sinners stumble over the ignorance of others. They follow leaders who mislead them, and cause them to stumble over themselves into destruction.

2. They stumble over their own foolish and wicked prejudices. It is impossible to be wicked without being prejudiced. Usually, men are not well aware of the depth and power of these prejudices. Hence, under this influence they are the more surely led on to ruin.

This principle is true on political as well as on religious subjects; and, indeed, on any and all subjects.

3. Sinners stumble over their own enmity against God. Through neglect to notice their own consciousness, and through neglect of God, they do not admit the fact of their being at enmity with God, and consequently fail to account for many things in their own history as they might. Indeed, they often assume themselves to be friendly to God and to religion, while really there is the deepest enmity in their hearts. Hence, no wonder that, under such a delusion, they become fearfully blinded, and stumble into perdition.

Often sinners misunderstand and pervert sermons and the truths they teach, because of their own bad state of mind. The enmity of their hearts boils up, and its fumes becloud their mental vision.

4. They stumble over their own dishonest state of mind. They are uncandid and dishonest towards God, and this constantly perverts their views. They say that when they read the Bible, they cannot understand it. Reason; lack of an honest mind. They stumble at God's character, providence and dealings with men -- all because they are not in a state of mind to see and judge fairly. When they read the Bible, they are forever looking after its discrepancies and its difficulties, and they find almost nothing else there. Now, the Bible is so written that a dishonest mind can make for itself any amount of difficulty with it. The explanation of this fact is, that the sacred writers were so eminently honest and simple-hearted, they wrote right on as men who take no pains to avoid being misunderstood. Honest themselves, it does not seem to occur to them that any of their readers will be otherwise. The Bible is, in style, utterly unlike the documents of diplomacy. A man who remembers that his words are to be quizzed and sifted, will take care for the one construction which shall answer for one emergency, and, perhaps, also, for other constructions, to meet other emergencies. A crafty writer looks out in all directions. Honest men, like apostles and prophets, never trouble themselves about cavilers.

Hence, cavilers against the Bible abuse that model of beautiful simplicity -- to their own damnation. They can do this if they choose, and they choose to do so because they love darkness and not light. The Bible is particularly open to perversion, so that, if men are dishonest, they will almost certainly misunderstand it. If you talk with Universalists, you will be amazed to see

how they can swallow down the greatest absurdities, and the most monstrous lies and delusions, taught them by their ministers. No matter how hard and tough it may be, they seem to have a capacity equal to it -- their hearts going before and creating an appetite for this doctrine.

5. They stumble over their own unbelief. Their want of confidence in God leads them to misinterpret His providence; to question its universal goodness, and to misunderstand His works and ways. Now, it is in the nature of the case impossible for God to explain all His conduct to His creatures as He goes along, so that they can understand all He does. Hence, the natural necessity for faith, and hence, if you have not faith in His goodness, you are stumbled. Take, for instance, the existence of American slavery. It certainly exists under God's government. Not that He has ordained, in the sense of commanding or approving it; but He has suffered it to exist. Now, suppose you infer from this that God is tyrannical and cruel. This inference would only show your want of confidence in God's providence. It would not, by any means, show that God is doing wrong. So sinners stumble at what God does or omits to do. Suppose your children have no confidence in you. Unless you explain everything, they are stumbled, and think hard of your course. They must see through all your plans and approve them all, or they cry out against you. Would not you think this horrible?

Sinners are often stumbled through their sheer aversion to God. They cannot bear to admit that He is as holy, just, and good, as He truly is. If they were willing to believe this, it would be easy enough. Just as when you are greatly prejudiced against a neighbor, and hear much good said of him, you will be like to reply, "I can't believe that." Yet the reason why you cannot lies not in the man, or in the evidence, but in your own prejudice. You might perhaps say -- There is so much counter evidence, I cannot believe it; -- but really the force of this counter evidence lies only in your own prejudice. So with the sinner; the root of the difficulty is that he is so alienated from God, that he cannot bear to think well of Him.

6. They stumble also over their own uncharitableness. You meet thousands who are stumbling over what they are pleased to call the faults of professors. Now the fact is, that ordinarily by far the greatest part of all that is said against Christians is untrue. If you search out these charges, you find

but a lean foundation, often, for the gravest part of them. I have found it so in cases almost without number. Sinners will tell you gravely that they are greatly stumbled against the things they hear of Christians; when the fact is, they would give no credit to such stories on equal evidence, yet bearing against friends. That is, they believe them only because they are prejudiced against Christians. They hate God's people, and are eager to catch up any scandal against them. One instance in point occurred not long since where I was laboring. A brother whom I had long known, I found was generally spoken of with disrespect. It was said he was dishonest in his business. I determined to enquire into the case; did so, and found this report false, and that report false, and indeed could not track down any of the reports to a valid foundation. I then went to those brethren in the church who had been circulating these reports, and said to them, Do you know those evil reports to be true? "No." Have you carried these reports to that injured brother, for his explanation? "No." Then, said I, you ought to be turned out of the church, every man of you, for slandering your brother.

In the same way the uncharitableness of others becomes an occasion of stumbling to sinners. They hear others speak uncharitably, and they believe it because it falls in so entirely with their own tendencies of mind.

This uncharitableness is one of the most fruitful sources of stumbling to the souls of men. Just think how much sinners influence each other to uncharitableness, and turn each other away from God.

7. Some stumble over a false hope. Suppose it to be a minister of the gospel. If he holds fast to his false hope, it will almost inevitably shape his views of Christian experience. Taking himself to be a Christian, and judging what piety is by his own experience, all his notions are modified accordingly. Hence, he will not only stumble himself, but others also. He tells his Christian friends that they cannot expect to make this or that attainment in this life. Inevitably he will lower down the standard of the Christian life. I have now in mind the case of a pastor who invited a brother to preach in his pulpit. The latter preached to Christians that they ought not to stop short of being fully conscious of loving God; that religion was a matter of consciousness, and hence, if they were not conscious of its presence and power in their souls, they ought to conclude they know nothing of it.

After he had gone, this pastor set himself earnestly to fritter all these ideas away. He told his people men might be Christians and not know it; that many were so, doubtless, who did not regard themselves as Christians; that it was a bad sign to be too sure and confident, etc., etc. It fills my heart with grief to see a minister take so much pains to let the people down to the level of his own experience. This defective experience may be a legal, as distinct from a gospel, experience or it may have other elements of a false religion. No matter, if it be false, it becomes a grievous occasion of stumbling.

8. Men stumble over a false profession. Even though they may see clear as light that they have professed without possession, yet their pride may keep them from admitting it. Then, to keep up appearance, they are subjected to a life of hypocrisy -- a fearful curse to the soul!

It often happens that these false professors are a stumbling block to others. Sinners will place before themselves some false professor, choosing the worst and not the best, as their model of religion, and say, "Well, any how, I am as good as some professed Christians." So they think to hide behind such an example, and stumble over it to the depths of hell.

The real faults of professed Christians often become the occasion of stumbling to sinners. They however do not usually go to the bottom of the difficulty. They ascribe their stumbling to the faults, say, of a certain minister; but the real cause lies in their own state of mind. If they were right themselves, not even the real faults of Christians would stumble them. These faults might grieve them; but could not harm them. "Great peace have they that love Thy law, and nothing shall offend (stumble) them;" -- not even the manifest faults of gospel ministers.

It is much more common for men to stumble over apparent or supposed, than over real faults. The common feeling towards Christians being what it is, there are vastly more apparent or supposed faults than real ones, floating about on the surface of the common talk of the world. All these answer the purpose of those who really seek some relief from the pressure of a troubled conscience, and who want some excuse for a life of sin.

9. Men are wont to stumble over their own dishonest moral judgments. For example, they judge themselves by a false standard. One, it may be, of mere external morality instead of heart piety; while at the same time they know

better, as is manifest from the fact that they judge others by a very different rule. They will insist that others must truly love God, and not merely be of decent morality. Why do they not judge themselves by this same standard? They are not honest. Besides, in practice, they will allow themselves to do the very same things which they condemn and stumble over in others.

10. Their habit of procrastination is the ruin of thousands. They hear enough, but not for the sake of learning their duty that they may do it. They learn not to regard what they hear. Persons who have lived here a long time seem not to be aware of their fearful danger in this respect.

11. It is fearful to see how many stumble over God's forbearance. Because vengeance is not executed speedily, their hearts are fully set in them to do evil. The longer God waits on them, the more presumptuous they become. Indeed nothing is more commonly a stumbling-block to men than God's goodness. They will have it that God is too good to send men to hell. Instead of combining His goodness with justice and holiness, as they should, they fritter it down to a mere good-nature. They think Him good with such a sort of goodness that He cannot restrain His creatures from ruining themselves, and the whole universe besides -- so very good-natured that He must forsooth let all the wicked be as wicked and selfish as they please, and must be sure not to hurt them, however much they desolate His great family and spread ruin over His kingdom. How often and naturally Universalists do this! In fact, it seems to lie at the foundation of their system. David said, "Why boasteth thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? The goodness of God endureth continually;" -- the very goodness of God being a reason why men should be afraid to do mischief.

12. Multitudes are stumbled by their selfish views of the whole matter of personal religion. Their whole conception of the plan of salvation makes it only an expedient to accommodate their sin, so that they can enjoy sin almost to the end of life, and then get religion enough to save their souls from hell. Have not some of you made this very mistake? Has not this been the great practical question with you; How long will it be prudent to neglect this great salvation? How long can I afford to run the personal risk of living in sin? So asking, your whole concern turns on self. You care not a farthing for God's feelings, or His rights. You have not the remotest idea of laying your soul and body on His altar, and making yourself truly a living sacrifice

to the interests of His kingdom. All the love He has shown you seems to have no influence to draw you towards this earnest consecration to His service. A sinful heart makes men credulous as to falsehood, but incredulous as to truth. "How is it," said one, "that incredulity takes on such a type? Men are strangely incredulous as to what is good. They doubt the sincerity of this good man; but their doubts all look in only one direction, for they are most ridiculously credulous in admitting lies."

III. A few words should be said here as to the course that true wisdom dictates.

1. The facts of human consciousness in regard to man's selfishness and alienation from God should be thoroughly admitted and deeply studied.
2. You should most fully assume the fact of God's infinite love, purity, wisdom and power. I say assume these, because you certainly know them to be true. You know that God is universally and perfectly good. This you know and should never allow yourself to call in question.
3. Let it also be taken for granted that no objection can be valid against God's law or His gospel.
4. If men would assume these two things, it would save them from countless mistakes and delusions; namely,

(1.) That God is infinite and perfect; consequently nothing can be said against Him;

(2.) That there never can be any valid excuse for sin. The goodness of God makes it certain that His law is right, and His administration too;

-- that He never requires anything unreasonable. Wisdom dictates therefore, that these points should be forever settled.

5. Again, you should always assume man's natural alienation from God. Say, I am, if unconverted, an enemy of God. Let me remember that. Let it be settled also and admitted, that being an enemy, you are almost sure to be prejudiced. This must be true of you and of all who are enemies in heart to God. Now if you know you are prejudiced, or are likely to be, you ought to be closely on your guard in that direction. For example, those of you who

have a hope that does not purify your heart, take warning. Remember your proneness to self-deception. And those of you who never had a hope should say -- the causes of self-deception are in my very heart; I am in the utmost peril of deceiving myself; let me be on my guard against self-justification and against a thousand other sources of danger. My dear friend, you must cast yourself on God for help. Say to Him -- "O Lord my God, Thou knowest all my wicked heart, and Thou knowest how many dangers beset me on every side. Now unless Thou save me, I shall surely ruin myself."

6. Another thing; beware what you hear and how you hear it, lest you listen earnestly to the wrong and love it; or lest, hearing truth, your heart should be turned aside by prejudice, and you permit it to your destruction. Say to yourself -- I shall certainly do something to ruin my soul if I am not on my guard. Consider always that while in sin, your state of mind is such as exceedingly to endanger your ultimate salvation. You ought to know the great facts of your own consciousness; and these should solemnly admonish you of your ever present danger.

REMARKS.

1. Because sinners are dishonest, their delusions are entirely inexcusable. If they were really honest, and their delusions excusable, their case would be far other than it is.

2. All the prejudice and errors of sinful men will come out by and by. They cannot last forever. Their utter fallacy and guilt will stand revealed by and by. But it may then be too late to repair their mischief.

There, said a man, now I am sorry; I had a wicked prejudice against a good minister; I held it a long time and it poisoned my mind terribly. At length, I said to him -- Don't you hold this sentiment? No, said he, by no means, Then I found all my prejudices were causeless, and I had brought leanness and guilt on my soul, for no good reason whatever. So sinner, you may be sorry. Your mistake will come out by and by; but very likely too late to be corrected in this world. Then the Lord shall come with ten thousand of His saints to execute judgment upon all, He will surely convince all the ungodly of their ungodly deeds and speeches. But for your real repentance, this will come all too late. Alas, you allowed yourself to disbelieve; you went on stumbling in the darkness which your own wicked heart caused, and now it only remains that you be driven away

into everlasting darkness, where is weeping and wailing. The darkness of the sinner's final doom may well remind him of the mental darkness which his own soul loved and caused while on earth.

3. It is often sorely painful to see men stumble in matters which respect only the body. Sometimes they take to the use of quack nostrums, and poison their bodies; sometimes they imbibe the most ridiculous superstitions, and violate the laws of life till they fall an easy prey to pestilence. In cholera times, men would soak their bodies with alcoholic liquors, and surely die by the hand of their own remedy.

But what are all these delusions, compared with that which takes away the soul! Suppose you could see the moral course of sinners painted to the life -- their poor self-deluded souls stumbling into pit-falls which their own hands had dug -- sliding down precipices at the foot of which open the jaws of the bottomless pit; there, there he goes! Alas, you have seen him but your eyes shall see him no more! Gone, gone, where darkness reigns forever! But you see others all around about you, pursuing the same path, and nearing the same death-verge, just ready, some of them, to slide over; and what will you do? Can you save them?

4. Christians are said by Christ to be the lights of the world. So let them take care to be. Let them stand as lamp-posts in the city in dead of night, pouring light on the dangers that would else engulf the unwary. Some of you have heard of the fogs of London -- where the coal-smoke of many thousand fires is wont in a misty atmosphere to settle down like Egyptian darkness upon all the city. When the thick fogs join their influence, London in mid-day is darker than midnight. Men cannot move save by the light of flambeaux held close to the ground as they pass along. How vivid the picture there given, of the deep and thick darkness that rests down on the city of Destruction, where sinners live! Darkness so profound as this seems not to comprehend the light when it comes. There in London, shall be lamps on their posts, burning with what power they have; but in the dense darkness they are visible only a few feet. The light shineth as in the Savior's day, but "the darkness comprehendeth it not." So often to the minds of sinners now. The light of Christian example and instruction shines around them, but their dense impenetrable darkness does not "comprehend" it. Alas for them.

[Back to Top](#)

On The Atonement

Lecture V

July 30, 1856

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 Cor. 15:3: "How that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."

Text.--2 Cor. 5:21: "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

Text.--Rom. 5:8: "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Text.--Isa. 42:21: "The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He will magnify the law and make it honorable."

Text.--Rom. 3:25, 26: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness; that He might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

In this last passage, the apostle states, with unusual fulness, the theological, and I might even say, the philosophical design of Christ's mission to our world -- that is, to set forth before created beings, God's righteousness in forgiving sins. It is here said that Christ is set forth as a propitiation that God may be just in forgiving sin, assuming that God could not have been just to the universe, unless Christ had been first set forth as a sacrifice.

When we seriously consider the irresistible convictions of our own minds in regard to our relations of God and His government, we cannot but see that we are sinners, and are lost beyond hope on the score of law and justice. The fact that we are grievous sinners against God, is an ultimate fact of human

consciousness, testified to by our irresistible convictions, and no more to be denied than the fact that there is such a thing as wrong.

Now, if God be holy and good, it must be that He disapproves wrong-doing, and will punish it. The penalty of His law is pronounced against it. Under this penalty, we stand condemned, and have no relief save through some adequate atonement, satisfactory to God, because safe to the interests of His kingdom.

Thus far we may advance safely and on solid ground, by the simple light of nature. If there were no Bible, we might know so much with absolute certainty. So far, even infidels are compelled to go.

Here, then, we are, under absolute and most righteous condemnation. Is there any way of escape? If so, it must be revealed to us in the Bible; for from any other source it cannot come. The Bible does profess to reveal a method of escape. This is the great burden of its message. It opens with,

I. A very brief allusion to the circumstances under which sin came into the world.

II. The philosophical explanation of the reasons and governmental bearings of the atonement, must not be confounded with the fact of an atonement.

III. A distinction must here be made between public and retributive justice.

IV. In this atonement God has expressed His high regard for His law and for obedience to it.

V. What can be done to teach these lessons, and to impress them with great and everlasting emphasis on the universe?

I. A very brief allusion to the circumstances under which sin came into the world.

Without being very minute as the manner in which sin entered, it is exceedingly full, clear and definite in its showing as to the fact of sin in the race. That God regards the race as in sin and rebellion is made as plain as language can make it. It is worthy of notice that this fact and the connected fact of possible pardon, are affirmed on the same authority -- with the same sort of explicitness and clearness. These facts stand or fall together. Manifestly God intended to impress

on all minds these two great truths -- first, that man is ruined by his own sin; secondly, that he may be saved through Jesus Christ. To deny the former is to gainsay both our own irresistible convictions and God's most explicit revealed testimony; to deny the latter, is to shut the door of our own free act and accord, against all hope of our own salvation.

II. The philosophical explanation of the reasons and governmental bearings of the atonement, must not be confounded with the fact of an atonement.

1. Men may be saved by the fact if they simply believe it, while they may know nothing about the philosophical explanation. The apostles did not make much account of the explanation, but they asserted the fact most earnestly, gave miracles as testimony to prove their authority from God, and so besought men to believe the fact and be saved. The fact, then, may be savingly believed, and yet the explanation be unknown. This has been the case, no doubt, with scores of thousands.

2. Yet it is very useful to understand the reasons and governmental grounds of the atonement. It often serves to remove skepticism. It is very common for lawyers to reject the fact, until they come to see the reasons and governmental bearings of the atonement; this seen, they usually admit the fact. There is a large class of minds who need to see the governmental bearings, or they will reject the fact. The reason why the fact is so often doubted is, that the explanations given have been unsatisfactory. They have misrepresented God. No wonder men should reject them, and with them, the fact of any atonement at all.

3. The atonement is a governmental expedient to sustain law without the execution of its penalty on the sinner. Of course, it must always be a difficult thing in any government to sustain the authority of law, and the respect due to it, without the execution of penalty. Yet God has accomplished it most perfectly.

III. A distinction must here be made between public and retributive justice.

The latter visits on the head of the individual sinner a punishment corresponding to the nature of his offence. The former, public justice, looks only toward the general good, and must do that which will secure the authority and influence of law, as well as the infliction of the penalty would to it. It may accept a substitute,

provided it be equally effective to the support of law and the ensuring of obedience.

Public justice, then, may be satisfied in one of two ways, to wit -- either by the full execution of the penalty, or by some substitute, which shall answer the ends of government at least equally well. When, therefore, we ask -- What is necessary for the ends of public justice? -- the answer is,

1. Not the literal execution of the penalty; for if so, it must necessarily fall on the sinner; and on no one else. Besides, it could be no gain to the universe for Christ to suffer the full and exact penalty due to every lost sinner who should be saved by Him. The amount of suffering being the same in the one case as in the other, where is the gain? And yet, further, if the administration of justice is to be retributive, then it cannot fall on Christ, and must fall on the sinner himself. If not retributive, it certainly may be, as compared with that due the sinner, far different in kind and less in degree.

It has sometimes been said that Christ suffered all in degree and the same in kind as all the saved must else have suffered; but human reason revolts at this assumption, and certainly the scriptures do not affirm it.

2. Some represent that God needs to be appeased, and to have His feelings conciliated. This is an egregious mistake. It utterly misrepresents God and misconceived the atonement.

3. It is no part of public justice that an innocent being should suffer penalty or punishment, in the proper sense of these terms. Punishment implies crime -- of which Christ had none. Christ, then was not punished.

4. Let it be distinctly understood that the Divine law originates in God's benevolence, and has no other than benevolent ends in view. It was revealed only and solely to promote the greatest possible good, by means of obedience. Now, such a law can allow of pardon, provided an expression can be given which will equally secure obedience -- making an equal revelation of the lawgiver's firmness, integrity and love. The law being perfect, and being most essential to the good of His creatures, God must not set aside its penalty without some equivalent influence to induce obedience.

5. The penalty was designed as a testimony to God's regard for the precept of His law, and to His purpose to sustain it. An atonement, therefore, which

should answer as a substitute for the infliction of this penalty, must be of such sort as to show God's regard for both the precept and penalty of His law. It must be adapted to enforce obedience. Its moral power must be in this respect equal to that of the infliction of the penalty on the sinner.

IV. Consequently, we find that, in this atonement God has expressed His high regard for His law and for obedience to it.

1. The design of executing the penalty of the law was to make a strong impression of the majesty, excellence and utility of the law. Anything may answer as a substitute, which will as thoroughly demonstrate the mischief and odiousness of sin, God's hatred of it, and His determination to carry out His law in all its demands. Especially may the proposed substitute avail if it shall also make a signal manifestation of God's love to sinners. This the atonement, by the death of Christ, has most emphatically done.

2. Every act of rebellion denounces the law. Hence, before God can pardon rebellion, He must make such a demonstration of His attitude towards sin as shall thrill the heart of the created universe, and make every ear tingle. Especially, for the ends of the highest obedience, it was needful to make such a demonstration as shall effectually secure the confidence and love of subjects towards their Lawgiver -- such as shall show that He is no tyrant, and that He seeks only the highest obedience and consequent happiness of His creatures. This done, God will be satisfied.

V. Now, what can be done to teach these lessons, and to impress them with great and everlasting emphasis on the universe?

1. God's testimony must be so given as to be well understood. Obviously, the testimony to be given must come from God, for it is His view of law, penalty and substitute, that needs to be revealed. Every one must see that if He were to execute law on the sinner, this would show at once His view of the value of the law. But, plainly, His view of the same thing must be shown with equal force by any proposed substitute, before He could accept it as such.

2. Again, in this transaction, the precept of the law must be accepted and honored both by God and by Jesus as Mediator. The latter, as the representative of the race must honor the law by obeying it, and by publicly

endorsing it -- otherwise, the requisite homage cannot be shown to the Divine law in the proposed atonement. This has been done.

3. Again, to make adequate provision for the exercise of mercy to the race, it is plainly essential that, in the person of their Mediator, both the Divine and the human should be united. God and man are both to be represented in the atonement; the Divine Word represented the Godhead; the man Jesus represented the race to be redeemed. What the Bible thus asserts, is verified in the history of Jesus, for He said and did things which could not have been said and done unless He had been man, and equally could not have been unless He were also God. On the one hand, too weak to carry His cross, through exhaustion of the human; and on the other, mighty to hush the tempest and to raise the dead, through the plenitude of Divine power. Thus God and man are both represented in Jesus Christ.

4. The thing to be done, then, required that Jesus Christ should honor the law and fully obey it; this He did. Standing for the sinner, He must, in an important sense, bear the curse of the law -- not the literal penalty, but a vast amount of suffering, sufficient, in view of His relations to God and the universe, to make the needed demonstration of God's displeasure against sin, and yet of His love for both the sinner and all His moral subjects. On the one hand, Jesus represented the race; on the other, He represented God. This is a most Divine philosophy.

5. The sacrifice made on Calvary is to be understood as God's offering to public justice -- God Himself giving up His Son to death, and this Son pouring forth His life's blood in expiation for sin -- thus throwing open the folding gates of mercy to a sinning, lost race. This must be regarded as manifesting His love to sinners. This is God's ransom provided for them. Look at the state of the case. The supreme Law-Giver, and indeed the government of the universe, had been scouted by rebellion; of course there can be no pardon till this dishonor done to God and His law is thoroughly washed away. This is done by God's free-will offering of His own Son for these great sins.

This being all done for you, sinners, what do you think of it? What do you think of that appeal which Paul writes and God makes through Him -- "I beseech you, therefore, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."

Think of those mercies. Think how Christ poured out His life for you. Suppose He were to appear in the midst of you today, and holding up His hands dripping with blood, should say -- "I beseech you by the mercies shown you by God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God!" Would you not feel the force of His appeal that this is a "reasonable service?" Would not this love of Christ constrain you? What do you think of it? Did He die for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto Him that loved them and gave Himself for them? What do you say? Just as the uplifted ax would otherwise have fallen on your neck, He caught the blow on His own. You could have had no life if He had not died to save it; then what will you do? Will you have this offered mercy, or reject it? Yield to Him the life He has in such mercy spared, or refuse to yield it?

REMARKS.

1. The governmental bearings of this scheme are perfectly apparent. The whole transaction tends powerfully to sustain God's law, and to reveal His love and even mercy to sinners. It shows that He is personally ready to forgive, and needs only to have such an arrangement made that He can do it safely as to His government. What could show His readiness to forgive so strikingly as this? See how carefully He guards against the abuse of pardon! Always ready to pardon, yet ever watchful over the great interests of obedience and happiness, lest they be imperiled by its freeness and fullness!
2. Why should it ever be thought incredible that God should devise such a scheme of atonement? Is there anything in it that is unlike God, or inconsistent with His revealed character? I doubt whether any moral agent can understand this system, and yet think it incredible. Those who reject it as incredible, must have failed to understand it.
3. The question might be asked -- Why did Christ die at all, if not for us? He had never sinned; did not die on His own account as a sinner; nor did He die as the infants of our race do, with a moral nature yet undeveloped, and who yet belong to a sinning race. The only account to be given of His death is, that He died not for Himself, but for us.

It might also be asked -- Why did He die so? See Him expiring between two thieves, and crushed down beneath a mountain weight of sorrow. Why was this?

Other martyrs have died shouting; He died in anguish and grief, cast down and agonized beneath the biddings of His Father's face.

All nature seemed to sympathize with His griefs. Mark -- the sun clothed in darkness; the rocks are rent; the earth quakes beneath your feet; all nature is convulsed. Even a heathen philosopher exclaimed -- Surely the universe is coming to an end, or the Maker of the Universe is dying! Hark, that piercing cry -- "My God, My God; why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

On the supposition of His dying as a Savior for sinners, all is plain. He dies for the government of God, and must needs suffer these things to make a just expression of God's abhorrence of sin. While He stands in the place of guilty sinners, God must frown on Him and hide His face. This reveals both the spirit of God's government and His own infinite wisdom.

4. Some have impeached the atonement as likely to encourage sin. But such persons neglect the very important distinction between the proper use of a thing and its abuse. No doubt the best things in the universe may be abused, and by abuse be perverted to evil, and all the more by how much the better they are in their legitimate use.

Of the natural tendency of the atonement to good, it would seem that no man can rationally doubt. The tendency of manifesting such love, meekness and self-sacrifice for us, is to make the sinner trust and love, and to make him bow before the cross with a broken and contrite heart. But many do abuse it, and the best things, abused, become the worst. The abuse of the atonement is the very reason why God sends sinners to hell. He says, "He that despised Moses' law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the Spirit of grace?"

Hence, if any sinner will abuse atoning blood, and trample down the holy law, and the very idea of returning to God in penitence and love, God will say of him, "Of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy" than he who despised Moses' law and fell beneath its vengeance?

5. It is a matter of fact, that this manifestation of God in Christ does break the heart of sinners. It has subdued many hearts, and will, thousands more. If they

believe it and hold it as a reality, must it not subdue their heart to love and grief? Do not you think so? Certainly if you saw it as it is, and felt the force of it in your heart, you would sob out on your very seat, break down and cry out -- Did Jesus love me so? And shall I love sin any more? Ah, your heart would melt as thousands have been broken and melted in every age, when they have seen the love of Jesus as revealed on the cross. That beautiful hymn puts the case truthfully --

"I saw One hanging on a tree,
In agony and blood;
Who fixed His languid eyes on me,
As near the cross I stood."

But it was not the first look that fully broke his heart. It was only when,

"A second look He gave which said
I freely all forgive;
This blood is for thy ransom paid,
I died that thou mayest live."

that his whole heart broke, tears fell like rain, and he withheld no power of his being in the full consecration of his soul to this Savior.

This is the genuine effect of the sinner's understanding the gospel and giving Jesus Christ credit for His lovingkindness in dying for the lost. Faith thus breaks the stony heart. If this demonstration of God's love in Christ does not break your heart, nothing else will. If this death and love of Christ do not constrain you, nothing else can.

But if you do not look at it, and will not set your mind upon it, it will only work your ruin. To know this gospel only enough to reject and disown it, can serve no other purpose save to make your guilt the greater, and your doom the more fearful.

6. Jesus was made a sin-offering for us. How beautiful this was illustrated under the Mosaic system! The victim was brought out to be slain; the blood was

carried in and sprinkled on the mercy-seat. This mercy-seat was no other than the sacred cover or lid of the ark which contained the tables of the law, and other sacred memorials of God's ancient mercies. There they were, in that deep recess -- within which none might enter on pain of death, save the High Priest, and he only once a year, on the great day of atonement. On this eventful day, the sacred rites culminated to their highest solemnity. Two goats were brought forward, upon which the High Priest laid his hands, and confessed publicly his own sins and the sins of all the people. Then one was driven far away into the wilderness, to signify how God removes our sins far as the east is from the west; the other was slain and its blood borne by the high priest into the most holy place, and sprinkled there upon the mercy-seat beneath the cherubim. Meanwhile, the vast congregation stood without, confessing their sins, and expecting remission only through the shedding of blood. It was as if the whole world had been standing around the base of Calvary, confessing their sins, while Jesus bore His cross to the summit, to hang thereon, and bleed and die for the sins of men. How fitting that, while Christ is dying, we should be confessing!

Some of you may think it a great thing to go on a foreign mission. But Jesus has led the way. He left Heaven on a foreign mission; came down to this more than heathen world, and no one ever faced such self-denial. Yet He fearlessly marched up without the least hesitation, to meet the consequences. Never did He shrink from disgrace, from humiliation, or torture. And can you shrink from following the footsteps of such a leader? Is anything too much for you to suffer, while you follow in the lead of such a Captain of your salvation?

[Back to Top](#)

The Sinner's Natural Power and Moral Weakness

Lecture VI

August 13, 1856

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--2 Pet. 2:19: "Of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in

bondage."

I propose in my present discourse to discuss the moral state of the sinner.

I. All men are naturally free, and none the less so for being sinners.

II. Men have this attribute of moral liberty, it is equally true that they are morally enslaved.

I. The first important fact to be noted is that all men are naturally free, and none the less so for being sinners.

1. They naturally have freedom of will. By natural freedom I do not mean that they have a right to do as they please; for this can by no means be true. Nor do I mean that they are free agents merely in the sense of being able to do as they will to do. In fact men sometimes can and sometimes cannot execute their purposes of will; but be this as it may, moral liberty does not consist in the power to accomplish one's purposes. You are aware that some old philosophers defined liberty of will to be the power to do what you will to do. This for many reasons cannot be the true idea of freedom of the will. For look at the department of doing which is embraced in muscular action. The simple fact is that some of our muscles are not under the control of the will at all, while others are under its control by a law of the sternest necessity. In regard to this latter class, all the freedom there is pertains to the will -- none of it to the action of the muscles controlled by the will. It is then a sheer mistake to deny the location of freedom where it is, and to locate it where it is not. If there be any such thing as necessity in the universe, it is found in the absolute control held by the will over those physical muscles which are placed under its control. The obedience of the muscles is absolute -- not free or voluntary in any sense whatever. Hence the absurdity of locating human freedom there.

2. This freedom is in the will itself, and consists in its power of free choice. To do, or not to do -- this is its option. It has by its own nature and function of determining its own volitions. The soul wills to do or not to do, and thus is a moral sovereign over its own activities. In this fact lies the foundation for moral agency. A being so constituted that he can will to do or not to do, and has moreover knowledge and appreciation of his moral obligations, is a moral agent. None other can be.

It deserves special notice here that every man knows that he has a conscience which tells him how he ought to act, as well as a moral power in the exercise of which he can either heed or repel its monitions.

3. That a man is free in the sense of determining his own activities is proved by each man's own consciousness. This proof requires no chain of reasoning. A man is just as much aware and as well aware of originating his own acts as he is of acting at all. Does he really act himself? Yes. And does he know that he acts himself? Yes. How does he know these things? By consciousness. But he has the same evidence of being free -- for this is equally proved by his own consciousness.

4. Still further -- man can distinguish between those acts in which he is free, and those in which he is acted upon by influences independent of his own choice. He knows that in some things he is a recipient of influences and of actions exerted upon himself, while in other things he is not a recipient in the same sense, but a voluntary actor. The fact of this discrimination proves the possession of free agency.

The difference to which I now refer is one of every day consciousness. Sometimes a man can not tell whence his thoughts come. Impressions are made upon his mind the origin of which he cannot trace. They may be from above -- they may be from beneath: he knows but little of their source, and little about them, save that they are not his own free volitions. Of his own acts of will there can be no such uncertainty. He knows their origin. He knows that they are the product of an original power in himself, for the exercise of which he is compelled to hold himself primarily responsible.

Not only has he this direct consciousness, but he has, as already suggested, the testimony of his own conscience. This faculty, by its very nature, takes cognizance of his moral acts, requiring certain acts of will and forbidding others. This faculty is an essential condition of free moral agency. Possessing it, and also man's other mental powers, he must be free and under moral obligation.

5. It is inconceivable that man should be under moral law and government, without the power of free moral action. The logical condition of the existence of a conscience in man is that he should be free.

6. That man is free is evident from the fact that he is conscious of praise or blameworthiness. He could not reasonably blame himself unless it were a first truth that he is free. By a first truth, I mean one that is known to all by a necessity of their own nature. There are such truths -- those which none can help knowing, however much they may desire to ignore them. Now unless it were a first truth, necessarily known to all, that man is free, he could not praise or blame himself.

As conscience implies moral agency, so, where there is a conscience, it is impossible for men really to deny moral responsibility. Men cannot but blame themselves for wrong doing. Conscious of the forewarning of conscience against the wrong act, how can they evade the conviction that the act was wrong?

Again, the Bible always treats men as free agents, commanding them to do or not to do as if of course they had all the power requisite to obey such commands. A young minister once said to me, "I preach that men ought to repent, but never that they can." "Why not preach also that they can?" said I. He replies, "The Bible does not affirm that they can." To this I replied that it would be most consummate trifling for a human legislature, having required certain acts, to proceed to affirm that its subjects have the power to obey. The very requirement is the strongest possible affirmation, that in the belief of the enacting power, the subjects are able to do the things required. If the lawmakers did not believe this, how in reason could they require it? The very first assumption to be made concerning good rulers is, that they have common sense and common honesty. To deny, virtually, that God has these qualities, is blasphemous.

7. Freedom of will lies among the earliest and most resistless convictions. Probably no one living can remember his first idea of oughtness -- his first convictions of right and wrong. It is also among our most irresistible convictions. We assume the freedom of our own will from the very first. The little child affirms it in its first infantile efforts to accomplish its purposes. See him reach forth to get his food or his playthings. The little machinery of a freely acting agent begins to play long ere he can understand it. He begins to act on his own responsibility, long before he can estimate what or how great this responsibility is. The fact of personal responsibility is fastened on us so that we might as well escape from

ourselves as from this conviction.

II. While it is true, past a rational denial, that men have this attribute of moral liberty, it is equally true that they are morally enslaved -- in moral bondage.

1. The liberty they have by created constitution; the bondage comes by voluntary perversion and abuse of their powers.

2. The Bible represents men as a being in bondage -- as having the power to resist temptation to sin, but yet as voluntarily yielding to those temptations. Just as our dough-faced politicians might, but do not and will not, resist the demands of the slave power. Just such is the bondage of sinners under temptation. The Bible represents Satan as ruling the hearts of men at his will, just as the men who wield the slave power of the South rule the dough faces of the North at their will, dictating the choice of our Presidents and the entire legislation of the Federal Government. So Satan ruled Eve in the garden; so he now "works in the children of disobedience."

3. What the Bible thus represents, experience proves to be true. Wicked men know that they are in bondage to Satan. What do you think puts it into the heart of young men to plot iniquity and drink it in like water? Is it not the devil? How many young men do we meet with, who, when tempted, seem to have no moral stamina to resist, but are swept away by the first gust of temptation.

4. Men are in bondage to their appetites. Appetite excited leads them away as it led Eve and Adam. What can be the reason that some young men find it so hard to give up the use of tobacco? They know the habit is filthy and disgusting; they know it must injure their health; but appetite craves, and the devil helps on its demands; the poor victim makes a feeble effort to deliver himself, but the devil turns the screw again and holds him the tighter, and then drags him back to a harder bondage.

So when a man is in bondage to alcohol, and so with every form of sensual indulgence. Satan helps on the influence of sensuality, and does not care much what the particular form of it may be, provided its power be strong enough to ruin the soul. It all plays into his hand and promotes his main purpose.

So men are in bondage to the love of money; to the fashions of the world; to the opinions of mankind. By these they are enslaved and led on in the face of the demands of duty. Every man is really enslaved who is in fact led counter to his convictions of duty. He is free only when he acts in accordance with those convictions. This is the true idea of liberty. Only when reason and conscience control the will is a man free -- for God made man, intelligent and moral beings to act normally, under the influence of their own enlightened conscience and reason. This is such freedom as God exercises and enjoys; none can be higher or nobler. But when a moral agent is in bondage to his low appetites and passions, and is led by them to disregard the dictates of his conscience and of his reason, he is simply a galley slave, and to a very hard and cruel master.

God made men to be free, giving them just such mental powers as they need in order to control their own activities as a rational being should wish to. Their bondage, then, is altogether voluntary. They choose to resist the control of reason, and submit to the control of appetite and passion.

5. Every impenitent man is conscious of being really in bondage to temptation. What man, not saved from sin through grace, does not know that he is an enigma to himself? I should have little respect for any man who should say he was never ashamed of himself, and never found himself doing things he could not well account for. Especially I should be ashamed and afraid too, if I were to hear a student say he had never been impressed with a sense of his moral weakness. Such ignorance would only show his utter lack of reflection, and his consequent failure to notice the most obvious moral phenomena of his inner life. What! does he not know that his weakest desires carry his will, the strongest convictions of his reason and conscience to the contrary notwithstanding?

This is a most guilty state, because so altogether voluntary -- so needless, and so opposed to the convictions of his reason and of his understanding and withal so opposed to his convictions of God's righteous demands. To go counter to such convictions, he must be supremely guilty.

Of course such conduct must be most suicidal. The sinner acts in most decided opposition to his own best interests, so that if he has the power to ruin himself this course must certainly do it. The course he pursues is of all others best adapted to destroy both body and soul; how then can it be

anything but suicidal? He practically denies all moral obligation. And yet he knows the fact of his moral obligation, and denies it in the face of his clearest convictions. How can this be otherwise than suicidal? I have many times asked sinners how they could account for their own conduct. The honest ones answer, "I cannot at all -- I am an enigma to myself." The real explanation is, that while by created constitution they are free moral agents; yet, by the infatuation of sin, they have sold themselves into moral bondage, and are really slaves to Satan and their own lusts.

This is a state of deep moral degradation. Intrinsically it is most disgraceful. Everybody feels this in regard to certain forms of sin and classes of sinners. We all feel that drunkenness is beastly. A drunkard we regard as a long way towards beast hood. See him reeling about, mentally besotted, and reeking in his own filth! Is not he almost a beast? Nay, rather must we not ask pardon of all beasts for this comparison, for not one is so mean and so vile -- not one excites in our bosom such a sense of voluntary degradation. Compared with the self-besotted drunkard, any one of them is a noble creature.

So we all say, looking only from our human standpoint. But there is another and a better standpoint. How do angels look upon this self-made drunkard? They see in him one made only a little lower than themselves, and one who might have aspired to companionship with them; yet he chose rather to sink himself down to a level with swine! O how their souls must recoil from the sight of such self-made degradation! To see the noble quality of intellect discarded; and yet nobler moral qualities disowned, and trodden under foot as if they were only an encumbrance -- this is too much for angels to bear. How they must feel!

Nor is the drunkard alone in the contempt which his sensual degradation entails. See the tobacco-smoker. The correct taste of community demands that by conventional laws he be excluded from parlors, steamboat-cabins, first class rail-cars, churches, and indeed all really decent places. Yet, for the sake of this low indulgence, the smoker is willing to descend into places not decent. See him steal out of his place among respectable people in the rail-car, and herd with rowdies in the smoking car, for the sake of his filthy indulgence. If he were only obliged to ride all day in the society to which he sinks himself by this indulgence, it might admonish him of the cost of his sensuality! It might help to open his eyes!

6. I have taken these forms of sensual indulgence as illustrations of the real degradation of sin. In these cases the good sense of mankind has been evinced by the grade of debasement to which they consign these votaries of low self-indulgence. If we only saw things in their right light we should take the same view of the moralist. I recollect that in talking with a great moralist he said, "How can I act from regard to God or to the right? How can I go to meeting from the high motive of pleasing God? I can go from a desire to promote my own selfish ends, but how can I go for the sake of pleasing God?"

Yes, that is precisely his difficulty and his guilt. He does not care how little he pleases God! That is the least of his concern. The very lowest class of motives sways his will and his life. He stands entirely afar from the reach of the highest and noblest. In this consists his self-made degradation and his exceeding great guilt.

So of the miser when he gets beyond all motives but the love of hoarding; when his practical question is; not, how shall I honor my race, or bless my generation, or glorify my Maker; but how can I make a few coppers? Even when urged to pray, he would ask, "What profit shall I have if I do pray unto Him?" When you find a man thus incapable of being moved by noble motives, what a wretch he is! How ineffably mean!

So I might bring before you the ambitious scholar, who is too low in his aims to be influenced by the exalted motive of doing good, and who feels only that which touches his reputation. Is not this exceedingly low and mean? What would you think of the preacher who should lose all regard for the welfare of souls, and think only of fishing for his reputation? What would you say of him? You would declare that he was too mean and too wicked to live, and fit only for hell! What would you think of one who might shine like Lucifer among the morning stars of intellect and genius, but who should debase himself to the low and miserable vocation of snuffing round after applause, and fishing for compliments to his talents? Would you not say that such self-seeking is unutterably contemptible? With all heaven from above beckoning them on to lofty purpose and efforts, there they are, working their "muck-rake," and nosing after some little advantage to their small selves!

See that ambitious man who so longs to please everybody that he conforms his own to everybody's opinions, and never has one that is really his own?

Must not he be low enough to satisfy any of those whose ambition seems strangely reversed, so that they only aspire to dive and sink -- never to soar; whose impulses all tend downwards and never up? One would suppose they would have degradation enough to satisfy any ordinary ambition.

All this comes of bondage to base selfishness. Alas, that there should be so much of this in our world that public sentiment rarely estimates it anywise according to its real nature!

REMARKS.

1. Our subject reveals the case of those who are convicted of the right, but cannot be persuaded to do it.

For example, on the subject of temperance, he is convicted as to duty -- knows he ought to reform absolutely, but yet he will not change. Every temperance lecture carries conviction, but the next temptation sweeps it by the board, and he returns like the dog to his vomit. But mark this, -- every successive process of temperance-conviction and temptation's triumph, leaves him weaker than before, and very soon will find him utterly prostrate. Miserable man! How certainly he will die in his sins!

2. No matter what the form of the temptation may be, he who, when convinced of his duty, yet takes no corresponding action, is on the high road to perdition. Inevitably this bondage grows stronger and stronger with every fresh trial of its strength. Every time you are convinced of duty and yet resist that conviction, and refuse to act in accordance with it, you become more and more helpless; you commit yourself more and more to the control of your iron-hearted master. Every fresh care renders you only the more fully a helpless slave.

3. There may be some young men here who have already made themselves a moral wreck. There may be lads not yet sixteen who have already put their conscience effectually beneath their feet. Already you have learned perhaps, to go against all your convictions of duty. How horrible! Every day your bands are growing stronger. With each day's resistance, your soul is more deeply and hopelessly lost. Poor, miserable, dying sinner! "He that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy!" Suddenly, you dash upon the breakers and are gone! Your friends move solemnly along the shore, and look out upon those rocks of damnation on which your soul

is wrecked, and weeping as they go, they mournfully say, "There is the wreck of one who knew his duty but did it not. Thousands of times the appeals of conviction came home to his heart -- but he learned to resist them -- he made it his business to resist, and alas, he was only too successful!"

4. How insane the delusion, that the sinner's case, while yet in his sins, is growing better. As well might the drunkard fancy he is growing better because every temperance lecture convicts him of his sin and shame, while yet every next day's temptation leaves him drunk as ever! Growing better! There can be no delusion so false and so fatal as this!

You see the force of this delusion in clearer light when you notice how slight are the considerations that sway the soul against all the vast motives of God's character and kingdom. Must not that be a strong and fearful delusion which can make considerations so slight outweigh motives so vast and momentous?

5. The guilt of this state is to be estimated by the insignificance of the motives which control the mind. What would you think of the youth who could murder his father for a sixpence? What! you would exclaim, for so mean a pittance be bribed to murder his father! You would account his guilt the greater by how much less the temptation.

6. Our subject shows the need of the Holy Spirit to impress the truth on the hearts of sinners.

7. You may also see how certainly sinners will be lost if they grieve the Spirit of God away. Your earthly friends might be discouraged, and yet you might be saved; but if the Spirit of God becomes discouraged and leaves you, your doom is sealed forever. "Woe unto them when I depart from them!" This departure of God from the sinner gives the signal for tolling the knell of his lost soul. Then the mighty angel begins to toll, toll, TOLL! the great bell of eternity; -- one more soul going to its eternal doom!

[Back to Top](#)

Moral Insanity
Lecture VII

September 10, 1856

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Eccl. 9:3: "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live."

The Bible often ascribes to unconverted men one common heart or disposition. It always makes two classes, and only two, of our race--saints and sinners; the one class converted from their sin and become God's real friends;--the other remaining his unconverted enemies. According to the Bible, therefore, the heart, in all unrenowned men, is the same in its general character. In the days of Noah, God testified "that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thought of his heart was only evil continually." Observe, he speaks of the thought of their heart, as if they had one common heart--all alike in moral character. So by Paul, God testifies that "the carnal mind is enmity against God," testifying thus, not of one man, or of a few men, but of all men of carnal mind. So in our text, the phraseology is expressive:--"the heart of the sons of men is full of evil"--as if the sons of men had but one heart--all in common--and this one heart were "full of evil." You will notice this affirmation is not made of one or two men, nor of some men, merely; but "of the sons of men," as if of them all.

I. But what is intended by affirming that "madness is in their heart while they live?"

II. It is important to point out some of the manifestations of this state of mind.

III. This moral insanity is a state of unmingled wickedness.

I. What is intended by affirming that "madness is in their heart while they live?"

1. This is not the madness of anger, but of insanity. True, sometimes people are mad with anger; but this is not the sense of our text. The Bible, as well as customary speech, employs this term--"madness," to express insanity. This, we understand to be its sense here.

2. Insanity is of two kinds--one, of the head; the other, of the heart. In the former, the intellect is disordered; in the latter, the will and voluntary powers. Intellectual insanity destroys moral agency. The man, intellectually insane, is not, for the time, a moral agent; moral responsibility is suspended because he cannot know his duty, and cannot choose responsibly as to doing, or not doing it. True, when a man makes himself temporarily insane, as by drunkenness, the courts are obliged to hold him responsible for his acts committed in that state; but the guilt really attaches to the voluntary act which creates the insanity. A man who gets intoxicated by intelligently drinking what he knows is intoxicating, must be held responsible for his acts during the ensuing intoxication. The reason of this is, that he can foresee the danger, and can easily avoid it.

3. The general law is that, while the intellect retains its usual power, so long moral obligation remains unimpaired.

Moral insanity, on the other hand, is will-madness. The man retains his intellectual powers unimpaired, but he sets his heart fully to evil. He refuses to yield to the demands of his conscience. He practically discards the obligations of moral responsibility. He has the powers of free moral agency, but persistently abuses them. He has a reason which affirms obligation, but he refuses obedience to its affirmations.

In this form of insanity, the reason remains unimpaired; but the heart deliberately disobeys.

4. The insanity spoken of in the text is moral, that of the heart. By the heart here, is meant the will--the voluntary power. While the man is intellectually sane, he yet acts as if he were intellectually insane.

II. It is important to point out some of the manifestations of this state of mind.

Since the Bible affirms it to be a fact that sinners are mad in heart, we may naturally expect to see some manifestations of it. It is often striking to see how perfectly the Bible daguerreotypes human character; has it done so in reference to this point? Let us see.

Who are the morally insane?

1. Those who, not being intellectually insane, yet ACT as if they were.

For example, those who are intellectually insane, treat fiction as if it were reality, and reality as if it were fiction. They act as if truth were not truth, and as if falsehood were truth. Every man knows that insane people actually follow the wild dreams of their own fancy, as if they were the most stern reality, and can scarcely be made to feel the force of anything truly real.

So men, in their sins, treat the realities of the spiritual world as if they were not real, but follow the most empty phantoms of this world, as if they were stern realities.

2. They also act as if self were of supreme importance, and everything else of relatively no importance. Suppose you were to see a man acting this out in common life. He goes round, day after day, assuming that he is the Supreme God, and practically insisting that everybody ought to have a supreme regard to his rights, and comparatively little or no regard for other people's rights. Now if you were to see a man saying this and acting it out, would you not account him either a blasphemer or insane?

Observe, now the wonderful fact, that while wicked men talk so sensibly as to show that they know better, yet they act as if all this were true--as if they supposed their own self-interest to be more important than every thing else in the universe, and that God's interests and rights even, are nothing in comparison. Practically, every sinner does this. It is an essential element in all sin. Selfish men never regard the rights of any body else, unless they are in some way linked with their own.

3. If wicked men really believed their own rights and interests to be supreme in the universe, it would prove them intellectually insane, and we should hasten to shut them up in the nearest mad-house; but when they show that they know better, yet act on this groundless assumption, in the face of their better knowledge, we say, with the Bible, that "madness is in their hearts while they live."

Again, see this madness manifested in his relative estimate of time and of eternity. His whole life declares that, in his view, it is by far more important to secure the good of time than the good of eternity. Yet, if a man should reason thus--should argue to prove it, and should soberly assert it--you would

know him to be insane, and would help him to the mad-house. But, suppose he does not say this--dares not say it--knows it is not true;--yet constantly acts it out, and lives on the assumption of its truth, what then? Simply this--he is morally mad. Madness is in his heart.

4. Now precisely this is the practice of every one of you who is living in sin. You give the preference to time over eternity, You practically say--O give me the joys of time: why should I trouble myself yet about the trivial matters of eternity?

5. In the same spirit you assume that the body is more than the soul. But if a man were to affirm this and go round trying to prove it, you would know him to be insane. O, if he were a friend of yours, how your heart would break for his sad misfortune--reason lost! But if he knows better, yet practically lives as if it were even so, you only say, he is morally insane--that is all!

Suppose you see a man destroying his own property, not by accident or mistake, but deliberately; injuring his own health, also, as if he had no care for his own interests;--you might bring his case before a judge and sue out a commission of lunacy against him; under which the man's goods should be taken out of his own control, and he be no longer suffered to squander them. Yet, in spiritual things, wicked men will deliberately act against their own dearest interests; having a price put into their hands to get wisdom, they will not use it; having the treasures of heaven placed within their reach, they do not try to secure them; with an infinite wealth of blessedness proffered for the mere acceptance, they will not take it as a gift. Indeed! How plain it is that, if men were to act in temporal things as they do in spiritual, they would be pronounced by everybody insane. Any man would take his oath of it. They would say--Only see; the man acts against his own interests in everything! Who can deny that he is insane? Certainly, sane men never do this!

But, in moral questions, wicked men seem to take the utmost pains to subvert their own interests, and make themselves insolvent forever! O, how they beggar their souls, when they might have the riches of heaven.

6. Again, they endeavor to realize manifest impossibilities. For example, they try to make themselves happy in their sins and their selfishness. Yet

they know they cannot do it. Ask them, and they will admit the thing is utterly impossible; and yet, despite of this conviction, they keep up the effort perpetually to try--as if they expected by and by to realize a manifest impossibility. Now, in moral things, it may not strike you as specially strange, for it is exceedingly common; but suppose, in matters of the world, you were to see a man doing the same sort of thing, what would you think of him? For example, you see him working hard to build a very long ladder, and you ask him what for? He says--"I am going to scale the moon." You see him expending his labor and his money, with the toil of a life to get up a mammoth ladder with which to scale the moon! Would you not say--he is certainly insane? For, unless he were really insane, he would know it to be an utter impossibility. But, in spiritual things, men are all the time trying to realize a result at least equally impossible--that of being happy in sin--happy with a mutiny among their own constitutional powers, the heart at war against reason and conscience. The pursuit of happiness in sin, is as if a man were seeking to bless himself by mangling his own flesh, digging out his own eyes, knocking in his teeth. Yet men as really know that they cannot obtain happiness in sin and selfishness, as they know they can not ensure health and comfort by mutilating their own flesh, and tearing their own nerves in sunder. Doing thus madly what they know will always defeat and never ensure real happiness, they show themselves to be morally insane.

7. Another manifestation of intellectual insanity, is loss of confidence in one's best friends. Often this is one of the first and most painful evidences of insanity--the poor man will have it that his dearest friends are set to ruin him. By no amount of evidence can he be persuaded to think they are his real friends.

Just so sinners in their madness treat God. While they inwardly know he is their real friend, yet they practically treat him as their worst enemy. By no motives can they be persuaded to confide in him as their friend. In fact, they treat him as if he were the greatest liar in the universe. Wonderful to tell, they practically reverse the regard due respectively to God and to Satan--treating Satan as if he were God, and God as if he were Satan. Satan they believe and obey; God they disown, dishonor, and disobey. How strangely would they reverse the order of things! They would fain enthrone Satan over the universe, giving him the highest seat in heaven; the Almighty and holy God

they would send to hell. They do not hesitate to surrender to Satan the place of power over their own hearts which is due to God only.

I have already noticed the fact that insane people treat their best friends as if they were their worst enemies, and that this is often the first proof of insanity. If a husband, he will have it that his dear wife is trying to poison him. I have a case in my recollection--the first case of real insanity I ever saw, and, for that reason, perhaps, it made a strong impression on my mind. I was riding on horseback, and coming near a house, I noticed a chamber window up, and heard a most unearthly cry. As soon as I came near enough to catch the words, I heard a most wild, imploring voice, "Stranger, stranger, come here;--here is the great whore of Babylon; they are trying to kill me, they will kill me." I dismounted; came up to the house, and there I found a man shut up in a cage, and complaining most bitterly of his wife. As I turned towards her I saw she looked sad, as if a load of grief lay heavy on her heart. A tear trembled in her eye. Alas, her dear husband was a maniac! Then I first learned how the insane are wont to regard their best friends.

Now, sinners know better of God and of their other real friends;--and yet they very commonly treat them in precisely this way. Just as if they were to go into the places of public resort and lift up their voices to all bystanders--Hallo, there, all ye--be it known to you--"the Great God is an almighty tyrant!" "He is not fit to be trusted or loved!"

Now, every body knows they treat God thus practically. They regard the service of God--religion--as if it were inconsistent with their real and highest happiness. I have often met with sinners who seemed to think that every attempt to make them Christians is a scheme to take them in and sell them into slavery. They by no means estimate religion as if it came forth from a God of love. Practically, they treat religion as if--embraced--it would be their ruin. Yet, in all this, they act utterly against their own convictions. They know better. If they did not, their guilt would be exceedingly small compared with what it is.

8. Another remarkable manifestation of insanity is, to be greatly excited about trifles, and apathetic about the most important matters in the universe. Suppose you see a man excited about straws and pebbles--taking unwearied pains to gather them into heaps, and store them away as treasures; yet, when a fire breaks out around his dwelling and the village is in flames, he

takes no notice of it, and feels no interest; or people may die on every side with the plague, but he heeds it not;--would you not say, he must be insane? But this is precisely true of sinners. They are almost infinitely excited about worldly good--straws and pebbles, compared with God's proffered treasures; but O how apathetic about the most momentous events in the universe! The vast concerns of their souls, scarcely stir up one earnest thought! If they did not know better, you would say--Certainly, their reason is dethroned; but since they do know better, you can not say less than that they are morally insane--"madness is in their heart while they live."

9. The conduct of impenitent men is the perfection of irrationality. When you see it as it is, you will get a more just and vivid idea of irrationality than you can get from any other source. You see this in the ends to which they devote themselves, and in the means which they employ to secure them. All is utterly unreasonable. An end madly chosen--sought by means madly devised;--this is the life-history of the masses who reject God. If this were the result of wrong intellectual judgments, we should say at once that the race have gone mad.

Bedlam itself affords no higher evidence of intellectual insanity than every sinner does of moral. You may go to Columbus, and visit every room occupied by the inmates of the Lunatic Asylum; you cannot find one insane person who gives higher evidence of intellectual insanity than every sinner does of moral. If Bedlam itself furnishes evidence that its Bedlamites are crazy, intellectually; so does every sinner that he is mad, morally.

Sinners act as if they were afraid they should be saved. Often they seem to be trying to make their salvation as difficult as possible. For example, They all know what Christ has said about the danger of riches and the difficulty of saving rich men. They have read from His lips--"How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God." "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." This they know, and yet how many of them are in mad haste to be rich! For this end, some are ready to sacrifice their conscience--some their health--all seem ready, deliberately, to sacrifice their souls! How could they more certainly ensure their own damnation!

Thus they regard damnation as if it were salvation, and salvation as if it were damnation. They rush upon damnation as if it were heaven, and flee

salvation as if it were hell.

Is this exaggeration? No; this is only the simple truth. Sinners press down the way to hell as if it were the chief good of their existence, and shun the way to heaven as if it were the consummation of evil. Sinner, this is your own moral state. The picture gives only the naked facts of the case, without exaggeration.

III. This moral insanity is a state of unmingled wickedness.

1. The special feature of it which makes it a guilty state, is that it is altogether voluntary. It results not from the loss of reason, but from the abuse of reason. The will persists in acting against reason and conscience. Despite of the affirmations of reason, and reckless of the admonitions of conscience, the sinner presses on in his career of rebellion against God and goodness. In such voluntary wickedness, must there not be intrinsic guilt?

2. Besides, this action is oftentimes deliberate. The man sins in his cool, deliberate moments, as well as in his excited moments. If he sins most overtly and boldly in his excited moments he does not repent and change his position towards God in his deliberate moments, but virtually endorses then the hasty purposes of his more excited hours. This heightens his guilt.

Again, his purposes of sin are obstinate and unyielding. In ten thousand ways, God is bringing influences to bear on his mind to change his purposes--but usually in vain. This career of sin is in violation of all his obligations. Who does not know this? The sinner never acts from right motives--never yields to the sway of a sense of obligation--never practically recognizes his obligation to love his neighbor as himself, or to honor the Lord his God.

3. It is a total rejection of both God's law and gospel. The law he will not obey; the gospel of pardon he will not accept. He seems determined to brave the Omnipotence of Jehovah, and dare his vengeance. Is he not mad upon his idols? Is it saying too much when the Bible affirms--"Madness is in their heart while they live?"

REMARKS.

1. Sinners strangely accuse saints of being mad and crazy. Just as soon as Christian people begin to act as if the truth they believe is a reality, then wicked

men cry out--"See, they are getting crazy." Yet those very sinners admit the Bible to be true, and admit those things which Christians believe as true to be really so; and, further still, they admit that those Christians are doing only what they ought to do, and only as themselves ought to act;--still, they charge them with insanity. It is curious that even those sinners themselves know these Christians to be the only rational men on the earth. I can well recollect that I saw this plainly before my conversion. I knew then that Christians were the only people in all the world who had any valid claim to be deemed sane.

2. If intellectual insanity be a shocking fact, how much more so is moral. I have referred to my first impressions at the sight of one who was intellectually insane, but a case of moral insanity ought to be deemed far more afflictive and astounding. Suppose the case of a Webster. His brain becomes softened; he is an idiot! There is not a man in all the land but would feel solemn. What! Daniel Webster--that great man, an idiot! How have the mighty fallen! What a horrible sight!

But how much more horrible to see him become a moral idiot--to see a selfish heart run riot with the clear decisions of his gigantic intellect;--to see his moral principles fading away before the demands of selfish ambition--to see such a man become a drunkard, a debauchee, a loafer;--if this were to occur in a Daniel Webster, how inexpressively shocking! Intellectual idiocy is not to be named in the comparison!

3. Although some sinners may be externally fair, and may seem to be amiable in temper and character, yet every real sinner is actually insane. In view of all these solemnities of eternity, he insists on being controlled only by the things of time. With the powers of an angel, he aims not above the low pursuits of a selfish heart. How must angels look on such a case! Eternity so vast, and its issues so dreadful, yet this sinner drives furiously to hell as if he were on the high-road to heaven! And all this only because he is infatuated with the pleasures of sin for a season. At first view, he seems to have really made the mistake of hell for heaven, but, on a closer examination, you see it is no real mistake of the intellect; he knows very well the difference between hell and heaven;--but he is practically deluding himself under the impulses of his mad heart! The mournful fact is, he loves sin, and, after that he will go! Alas, alas! so insane, he rushes greedily on his own damnation, just as if he were in pursuit of heaven!

We shudder at the thought that any of our friends are becoming idiotic or lunatic;

but this is not half so bad as to have one of them become wicked. Better have a whole family become idiotic than one of them become a hardened sinner. Indeed, the former, compared with the latter, is as nothing. For the idiot shall not always be so. When this mortal is laid away in the grave, the soul may look out again in the free air of liberty, as if it had never been immured in a dark prison; and the body, raised again, may bloom in eternal vigor and beauty; but, alas, moral insanity only waxes worse and worse forever! The root of this being not in a diseased brain, but in a diseased heart and soul, death cannot cure it; the resurrection will only raise him to shame and everlasting contempt; and the eternal world will only give scope to his madness to rage on with augmented vigor and wider sweep forever.

4. Some persons are more afraid of being called insane than of being called wicked. Surely they show the fatal delusion that is on their hearts.

5. Intellectual insanity is only pitiable, not disgraceful; but moral insanity is unspeakably disgraceful. None need wonder that God should say--"Some shall arise to shame and everlasting contempt."

6. Conversion to God is becoming morally sane. It consists in restoring the will and the affections to the just control of the intelligence, the reason and the conscience, so as to put the man once more in harmony with himself--all his faculties adjusted to their true positions and proper functions.

Sometimes persons who have become converted, but not well established, backslide into moral insanity. Just as persons sometimes relapse into intellectual insanity, after being apparently quite restored. This is a sad case, and brings sorrow upon the hearts of friends. Yet, in no case can it be so sad as a case of backsliding into moral insanity.

7. An intellectual bedlam is a mournful place. How can the heart of any human sensibility contemplate such a scene without intense grief? Mark, as you pass through those halls, the traces of intellectual ruin,--there is a noble-looking woman, perfectly insane; there is a man of splendid mien and bearing--all in ruins! How awful! Then, if this be so, what a place is hell! These intellectual bedlams are awful;--how much more the moral bedlam!

Suppose we go to Columbus, and visit its Lunatic Asylum; go round to all its wards and study the case of each inmate; then we will go to Indiana; then to New

York, and so through all the Asylums of each several State. Then we will visit London and its Asylum, where we may find as many insane as in all our Union. Would not this be a mournful scene? Would not you cry out long before we had finished--Enough! Enough! How can I bear these sights of mad men! How can I endure to behold such desolation!

Suppose, then, we go next to the great moral bedlam of the universe--the hell of lost souls; for if men will make themselves mad, God must shut them up in one vast bedlam cell. Why should not he? The weal of his empire demands that all the moral insanity of his kingdom should be withdrawn from the society of the holy, and shut up alone and apart. There are those whose intellects are right, but whose hearts are all wrong. Ah, what a place must that be in which to spend one's eternity! The great mad-house of the universe!

8. Sometimes sinners here, aware of their own insanity, get glimpses of this fearful state. I recollect that, at one time, I got this idea that Christians are the only persons who can claim to be rational, and then I asked myself--Why should I act so? Would it hurt me to obey God? Would it ruin my peace, or damage my prospects for either this life or the next? Why do I go on so?

I said to myself--I can give no account of it, only that I am mad. All that I can say is that my heart is set on iniquity, and will not turn.

Alas, poor maniac! Not unfortunate, but wicked! How many of you know that this is your real case? O, young man, did your father think you were sane when he sent you here? Ah, you were so intellectually, perhaps, but not morally. As to your moral nature and functions, all was utterly deranged. My dear young friend, does your own moral course commend itself to your conscience and your reason? If not, what are you but a moral maniac? Young man, young woman, must you in truth write yourselves down moral maniacs?

9. Finally, the subject shows the importance of not quenching the Spirit. This is God's agency for the cure of moral maniacs. O, if you put out his light from your souls, there remains to you only the blackness of darkness forever! Said a young man in Lane Seminary--just dying in his sins--Why did you not tell me there is such a thing as eternal damnation? Weld, why did not you tell me? "I did." Oh, I am going there--how can I die so? It's growing dark; bring in a light! And so he passed away from this world of light and hope!

O sinner, take care that you put not out the light which God has cast into your dark heart, lest, when you pass away it shall grow dark to your soul at midday--the opening into the blackness of darkness forever.

[Back to Top](#)

On Believing with The Heart

Lecture VIII

December 3, 1856

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 10:10: "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness."

The subject brought to view in this passage requires of us, that we should, distinguish carefully between intellectual and heart faith.

There are several different states of mind which are currently called faith, this term being obviously used in various senses. So, also, is the term heart used in various senses, and indeed, there are but few terms which are not used with some variety of signification. Hence, it becomes very important to discriminate.

Thus, in regard to faith, the Scriptures affirm that the "devils also believe and tremble," but it surely cannot be meant that they have heart faith. They do not "believe unto righteousness."

Faith in the intellect is a judgment -- an opinion. The mind so judges, and is convinced that the facts are so. Whatever the nature of the things believed, this is an involuntary state of mind. Those things believed may be truth; they may relate to God and may embrace the great fundamental facts and doctrines of religion; yet this faith may not result in righteousness. It is often true that persons have their judgments convinced, yet this conviction reaches not beyond their intelligence. Or perhaps it may go so much further as to move their feelings and play on their sensibility, and yet may do nothing more. It may produce no change in the will. It may result in no new moral purpose; may utterly fail to reach the voluntary attitude of the mind, and hence, will make no change in the

life.

But, heart faith, on the other hand, is true confidence, and involves an earnest committal of one's self and interests, to the demands of the truth believed. It is precisely such a trust as we have in those to whom we cling in confidence -- such as children feel in their friends and true fathers and mothers. We know they are naturally ready to believe what is said to them, and to commit themselves to the care of those they love.

The heart is in this. It is a voluntary state of mind -- always substantially and essentially an act of the will. This kind of faith will, of course, always affect the feelings, and will influence the life. Naturally, it tends towards righteousness, and may truly be said to be "unto righteousness." It implies love, and seems in its very nature to unify itself with the affections. The inspired writers plainly did not hold faith to be so purely an act of will, as to exclude the affections. Obviously, they made it include the affections. I must now proceed,

I. To notice some of the conditions of intellectual faith.

II. What are not, and what are, conditions of heart faith.

I. Some of the conditions of intellectual faith.

1. Sometimes, but not always, faith of the heart is essential to faith of the intellect. Thus, it may be necessary that we have heart faith in a man before we are duly prepared to investigate the facts that relate to his character. So, in relation to God, if we lack heart faith in Him, we are in no state to deal fairly with the evidence of His works and ways. Here it is well to notice the vast difference between the irresistible assumptions of the mind respecting God, and those things which we arrive at by study and reasoning. Heart faith seems essential to any candid investigation.

2. It is also essential to our conviction as to the truth. I am not prepared to judge candidly concerning a friend, unless I have some of this heart faith in him. Suppose I hear a rumor about my best friend, affirming something which is deeply scandalous. My regard for him forbids my believing this scandalous report unless it comes most fully sustained by testimony. On the other hand, if I had no heart confidence in him, my intelligence might be thrown entirely off, and I might do both him and myself the greatest

injustice.

Many of you have had this experience in regard to faith. Often, in the common walks of life, you have found that, if it had not been for your heart confidence, you would have been greatly deceived. Your heart held on; at length, the evidence shone out; you were in a condition to judge charitably, and thus you arrived at the truth.

3. Heart faith is specially essential where there is mystery. Of course there are points in religious doctrine which are profoundly mysterious. This fact is not peculiar to religious truth, but is common to every part of God's works -- which is equivalent to saying -- it is common to all real science. Any child can ask me questions which I cannot answer. Without heart confidence, it would be impossible for society to exist. Happily for us, we can often wisely confide, when we cannot, by any means, understand.

4. In the nature of the case, there must be mysteries about God, for the simple reason that He is infinite and we are finite. Yet, He reveals enough of Himself to authorize us to cherish the most unbounded confidence in Him. Therefore, let no one stumble at this as though it were some strange thing, for, in fact, the same thing obtains to some extent in all our social relations. In these, we are often compelled to confide in our friends where the case seems altogether suspicious. Yet, we confide, and by and by, the truth comes to light, and we are thankful that our heart faith held us from doing them injustice.

Again, heart faith is specially in place where there is contradictory evidence.

5. Often it may seem to you that God must be partial. Then, the mind needs the support of confidence in God. You go on safely if there is underlying all, the deep conviction that God is and must be right. See that woman, stripped of everything -- husband, children, all; how can she give any account of this? You may remember the case of a woman who traveled West with her husband and family; there buried her husband and all but two little ones, and then made her weary way back with these on foot. Pinching want and weariness drove her into a stranger's dwelling at nightfall; there a churlish man would have turned her into the street, but his wife had a human heart, and insisted on letting them stay, even if she herself sat up all night. Think of the trying case of that lone widow. She does not sleep; her

mingled grief and faith find utterance in the words -- "My heart is breaking, but God is good!"

How could she make it out that God is good? Just as you would in the case of your husband, if one should tell you he had gone forever, and proved faithless to his vows. You can set this insinuation aside, and let your heart rise above it. You do this on the strength of your heart faith.

So the Christian does in regard to many mysterious points in God's character and ways. You cannot see how God can exist without ever beginning to exist; or how He can exist in three Persons, since no other beings known to you exist in more than one. You cannot see how He can be eternally good, and yet suffer sin and misery to befall His creatures. But, with heart faith we do not need to have everything explained. The heart says to its Heavenly Father, "I do not need to catechize Thee, not ask impertinent questions, for I know it is all right. I know God can never do anything wrong." And so the soul finds a precious joy in trusting, without knowing how the mystery is solved. Just as a wife, long parted from her husband, and, under circumstances that need explanation, yet when he returns, she rushes to meet him with her loving welcome, without waiting for one word of explanation. Suppose she had waited for the explanation before she could speak a kind word. This might savor of the intellect, but certainly it would not do honor to her heart. For her heart confidence, her husband loves her better than ever, and well he may!

You can understand this; and can you not also apply it to your relation to God? God may appear to your view to be capricious; but you know He is not; may appear unjust, but you know He cannot be. Ah, Christian, when you comprehend the fact of God's wider reach of vision, and of His greater love, then you will cry out with Job -- "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." When you have trusted so, think you not that your heart will be as dear to Christ as ever?

II. Let us next consider, what are not, and what are, conditions of heart faith.

1. It is not conditioned upon comprehending the facts to be believed. We may know a thing to be a fact, while yet we are entirely unable to explain it. The reasons and the explanations are quite a different thing from the evidence which sustains the fact, and commends it to our belief.

2. Let it also be borne in mind that it is not half as necessary to know all the reasons in the case of God's ways as in man's. The ground of the difference is, that we know, in general, that God is always right -- a knowledge which we cannot have in regard to man. Of God, our deepest and most resistless convictions assure us that all is right. Our corresponding convictions in the case of man are far from being irresistible. Yet, even in regard to men, we often find that a conviction of their rectitude, which is far less than irresistible, lends us to trust. How much more should our stronger convictions as to God, lead us evermore to trust in Him!

Again, this heart faith in God does not rest on our ability to prove even that God exists. Many an earnest Christian has never thought of this, any more than of proving his own existence. An irresistible conviction gives him both, without other proof.

But, positively, God must be revealed to your inner being so that you are conscious of His existence and presence. There is not, perhaps, in the universe, a thing of which we can be more certain than of God's existence. The mind may be more deeply acquainted with God than with any other being or thing. Hence, this heart confidence may be based on God's revelations to the inner soul of man. Such revelations may reach the very highest measure of certainty. I do not mean to imply here that we are not certain of the facts of observation. But this is a stronger assurance and certainty. The mind becomes personally acquainted with God, and is conscious of this direct and positive knowledge.

3. A further condition is, that the soul be inwardly drawn to God. In our relations to each other, we are sometimes conscious of a peculiar sympathy, which draws us towards a friend. This fact is a thing of consciousness, of which we may be quite unable to give any explanation. A similar attraction draws us to God, and seems to be a natural condition of the strongest forms of heart faith.

4. It is quite essential to heart faith that we have genuine love to God. In the absence of good-will towards God, there never can be this faith of the heart. The wife has no heart faith in her husband, save as she loves him. Her heart must be drawn to him in real love -- else this heart faith will draw back and demand more evidence.

In view of this principle, God takes measure to win our love and draw our hearts to Himself. As human beings do towards each other, so He manifests His deep interests in us -- pours out His blessings on us in lavish profusion, and, in every way, strives to assure us that He is truly our friend. These are His methods to win the confidence of our hearts. When it becomes real to us that we owe everything to God -- our health, gifts, all our comforts -- then we can bear many dark and trying things. Then, we know that God loves us even though He scourge us, just as children know that parents love them, and mean their good, even though they chastise them. Under these broad and general manifestations of love, they confide, even though there be no present manifestations of love. You may remember how Cecil taught his little daughter the meaning of gospel faith. She came to him, one day, with her hands full of little beads, greatly delighted to show them. He said to her calmly -- "You had better throw them all into the fire." She was almost confounded; but, when she saw he was in earnest, she trustfully obeyed and cast them in. After a few days, he brought home for her a casket of jewels. "There, said he, my daughter, you had faith in me the other day, and threw your beads into the fire; that was faith; now I can give you things much more precious. Are these not far better?" So you should always believe in God. He has jewels for those who will believe, and cast away their sins.

Again, I observe, heart faith is unto righteousness -- real obedience. This trustful and affectionate state of heart naturally leads us to obey God. I have often admired the faith manifested by the old Theologian Philosophers who held fast to their confidence in God, despite of the greatest of absurdities. Their faith could laugh at the most absurd principles involved in their philosophy of religious truth. It is a remarkable fact that the greater part of the church have been in their philosophy necessitarians, holding not the freedom, but the bondage of the will; their doctrine being that the will is determined necessarily by the strongest motive. Pres. Edwards held these philosophical views, but despite of them, he believed that God is supremely good. The absurdities of this philosophy did not shake his faith in God. So all the really Old School Theologians hold the absurdities of hyper-Calvinism, as for example, that God absolutely and supremely controls all the moral actions of all His creatures.

Dr. Beecher, in controversy with Dr. Wilson, some years since, held that obligation implied ability to obey. This Dr. Wilson flatly denied. Whereupon

Dr. B. remarked that few men could march up and face such a proposition with winking. It is often the case that men have such heart confidence in God that they will trust Him despite the most flagrant absurdities. There is less superstition in this than I used to suppose, and more faith. Men forget their dogmas and philosophy, and despite of both, love and confide.

Some men have held monstrous doctrines -- even that God is the author of sin and puts forth His divine efficiency to make men sin, as truly as, by His Spirit, to make them holy. This view was held by Dr. Emmons; yet he was eminently a pious man, of childlike, trustful spirit. It is indeed strange how such men could hold these absurdities at all, and scarcely less so, how they could hold them and yet confide sweetly in God. Their heart must have been fixed in this faith by some other influence than that of these monstrous notions in philosophy and theology. For, these views of God, we absolutely know, were contrary to their reason, though not to their reasonings -- a very wide and essential distinction -- which is sometimes overlooked. The intuitive affirmations of their reason were one thing; the points which they reached by their philosophical reasonings, were quite another thing. The former could not lie about God, the latter could. The former laid that sure foundation for heart faith; the latter went to make up their intellectual notions, the absurdities of which, (we notice with admiration,) never seemed to shake their Christian faith. While these reasonings pushed them on into the greatest absurdities, their reason held their faith and piety straight.

5. The faith of the heart is proof against all forms of infidelity. Without this nothing is proof. For if men without piety drop the affirmations of their intuitive reason, and then attempt, philosophically, to reason out all the difficulties they meet with, they almost inevitably stumble.

6. Heart faith carries one over the manifold mysteries and difficulties of God's providence. In this field there must be difficulties, for no human vision can penetrate to the bottom of God's providential plans and purposes.

7. So, also, does this faith of the heart carry one over the mysteries of the atonement. It is indeed curious to notice how the heart gets over all these. It is generally the case that the atonement is accepted by the heart unto salvation, before its philosophy is understood. It was manifestly so with the apostles; so with their hearers; and so, even with those who heard the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The Bible says but very little indeed on the point of

the philosophy of the atonement.

8. It is in no sense unreasonable that God should require us to have such faith in Him. Properly considered, He does not require us to believe what we do not know to be true. He does not ask us to renounce our common sense and exercise a groundless credulity. When we trust His general character and accept certain dark dispensations of providence as doubtless right, what is it that we believe? Not the special reason for this mysterious dispensation, but we believe that, despite of its dark aspect to us, God's hand in it is both wise and good, and we believe this because we have abundant ground to confide in His general character. It is as if you were to tell me that a known and tried friend of mine had told a lie. I should say, I cannot believe it. I know him too well. But you say -- "Here is the evidence. It looks very dark against him." "Very likely," I reply, "but yet I cannot believe it. There will be some explanation of this. I cannot believe it."

Now I consider myself fully authorized to reject at once all surmises and rumors against my known friend. I am bound to do so, until the evidence against him becomes absolutely conclusive. This is altogether reasonable. How much more so in the case of dark things in God's doings!

For it should be considered that man may deceive us; God never can. We do not know man's heart always, to the very core; and if we did, it may change; what once was true, becomes false. But not so with God; our intuitive convictions affirm that God is always good, and always wise; and, moreover, that there can never be any declension in His love, or any revolution in His character.

9. Consequently Christians are often called on to believe God, not only without, but against, present evidence.

Abraham, called out of his home and country, to go into a strange land, obeyed, not knowing whither he went. He might have asked many questions about the reasons; he does not appear to have asked any.

Commanded to offer up Isaac, he might, with apparent propriety, have expostulated earnestly. He might have said, "Lord, that would be murder! It would outrage the natural affection which Thou hast planted in my bosom. It would encourage the heathen around us in their horrid abominations of

making their children pass through the fire of Moloch." All this, and more he might have said; but, so far as appears, he said nothing -- save this; "The Lord commands, and I obey. If He pleases He can raise up my Isaac from the dead." So he went on and virtually offered up his son Isaac, and "in a figure, received him again from the dead." And God fixed the seal of his approbation on this act of faith, and held it out before all ages as a model of faith and obedience, despite of darkness and objections.

So Christians are often called to believe without present evidence, other than what comes from their knowledge of God's general character. For a season, God lets everything go against them, yet they believe. Said a woman, passing through great trials, with great confidence in God -- "O Lord, I know Thou art good, for Thou hast shown me this; but, Lord, others do not understand this; they are stumbled at it. Canst Thou not show them so that they shall understand this?"

REMARKS.

1. The demand for reasons often embarrasses our faith. This is one of the tricks of the devil. He would embarrass our faith by telling us we must understand all God's ways before we believe. Yet we ought to see that this is impossible and unreasonable. Abraham could not see the reasons for God's command to offer Isaac a bloody sacrifice; he might have expostulated; but he did not. The simplicity and beauty of his faith appears all along in this very thing -- that he raised no questions. He had a deeper insight into God's character. He knew too much of God to question His wisdom, or His love. For, a man might understand all the reasons of God's ways, yet this knowledge might do him no good; his heart might rebel even then.

In this light you may see why so much is said about Abraham's faith. It was gloriously trustful and unquestioning! What a model! No wonder God commends it to the admiring imitation of the world!

2. It is indeed true that faith must often go forward in the midst of darkness. Who can read the histories of believing saints, as recorded in Scripture, without seeing that faith often leads the way through trials. It would be but a sorry development of faith, if at every step God's people must know everything before they could trust Him, and must understand all His reasons. Most ample grounds for faith lie in His general character, so that we do not need to understand the special reasons

for His particular acts.

3. We are mere infants -- miserably poor students of God's ways. His dealings on every side of us appear to us mysterious. Hence it should be expected that we shall fail to comprehend His reasons, and consequently we must confide in Him without this knowledge. Indeed, just here lies the virtue of faith, that it trusts God on the ground of His general character, while the mind can by no means comprehend His reasons for particular acts. Knowing enough of God to assure us that He must be good, our faith trusts Him, although the special evidence of goodness in particular cases may be wanting.

This is a kind of faith which many do not seem to possess or to understand. Plainly they do not confide in God's dealings.

4. It is manifestly needful that God should train Christians to exercise faith here and now; since in heaven we shall be equally unable to comprehend all His dealings. The holy in heaven will no doubt believe in God; but they must do it by simple faith -- not on the ground of a perfect knowledge of God's plans. What a trial of faith it must have been to the holy in heaven to see sin enter our world! They could see few, perhaps none of the reasons, before the final judgment, and must have fallen back upon the intuitive affirmations of their own minds. The utmost they could say was -- We know God is good and wise; therefore we must wait to see the results, and humbly trust.

5. It is not best for parents to explain everything to their children, and especially, they should not take the ground of requiring nothing of which they cannot explain all the reasons. Some profess to take this ground. It is for many reasons unwise. God does not train His children so.

Faith is really natural to children. Yet some will not believe their children converted until they can be real Theologians. This assumes that they must have all the great facts of the gospel system explained so that they can comprehend their philosophy before they can believe them. Nothing can be further from the truth.

It sometimes happens that those who are converted in childhood become students of theology in more advanced years, and then, getting proud of their philosophy and wisdom, lose their simple faith and relapse into infidelity. No, I do not object to their studying the philosophy of every doctrine up to the limits

of human knowledge; but I do object to their casting away their faith in God. For there is no lack of substantial testimony to the great doctrines of the gospel. Their philosophy may stagger the wisest man; but the evidence of their truth ought to satisfy all, and alike the child and the philosopher. Last winter I was struck with this fact -- which I mention because it seems to present one department of the evidences of Christianity in a clear light. One judge of the court said to another -- I come to you with my assertion that I inwardly know Jesus Christ, and as truly and as well as I know you. Can you reject such testimony? What would the people of this State say to you if you rejected such testimony on any other subject? Do you not every day, let men testify to their own experience?" The judge replied, "I cannot answer you."

"Why, then," replied the other, "do you not believe this testimony? I can bring before you thousands who will testify to the same thing."

Again I remark, it is of great use to study the truths of the gospel system theologically and philosophically, for thus you may reach a satisfactory explanation of many things which your heart knew and clave to and would have held fast till the hour of your death. It is a satisfaction to you, however, to see the beautiful harmony of these truths with each other, and with the known laws of mind, and of all just government.

6. Yet Theological students sometimes decline in their piety, and for a reason which it were well for them to understand. One enters upon this study simple hearted and confiding; but, by and by study expands his views; he begins to be charmed with the explanations he is able to give of many things not understood before; becomes opinionated and proud; becomes ashamed of his former simple heart faith, and thus stumbles fearfully if not fatally. If you will hold on with all your simple heart confidence to the immutable love and wisdom of God, all will be well. But it never can be well to put your intellectual philosophy in the place of the simplicity of gospel faith.

Herein is seen one reason why some students do not become pious. They determine that they will understand everything before they become Christians. Of course they are never converted. Quite in point, here, is a case I saw a few years since. Dr. B., an intelligent but not pious man, had a pious wife who was leading her little daughter to Christ. The Dr. seeing this, said to her -- Why do you try to lead that child to Christ? I cannot understand these things myself, although I have been trying to understand them these many years; how then can

she? But some days after, as he was riding out alone, he began to reflect on the matter; the truth flashed upon his mind, and he saw that neither of them could understand God unto perfection -- not he anymore than his child; while yet either of them could know enough to believe unto salvation.

Again, gospel faith is voluntary -- a will trust. I recollect a case in my own circle of friends. I could not satisfy my mind about one of them. At length, after long struggling, I said, I will repel these things from my mind, and rule out these difficulties. My friend is honest and right; I will believe it, and will trust him none the less for these slanders. In this I was right.

Towards God this course is always right. It is always right to cast away from your mind all those dark suspicions about Him who can never make mistakes, and who is too good to purpose wrong. I once said to a sister in affliction -- Can you not believe all this is for your good, though you cannot see how it is? She brightened up, saying -- I must believe in God, and I will.

Who of you have this heart faith? Which of you will not commit yourself to Christ? If the thing required were intellectual faith, I could explain to you how it is reached. It must be through searching the evidence in the case. But heart faith must be reached by simple effort -- by a voluntary purpose to trust. Ye who say - - I cannot do this -- Bow your knees before God and commit yourself to His will; say, "O, my Savior! I take Thee at Thy word." This is a simple act of will.

[Back to Top](#)

On Offering Praise to God

Lecture IX

December 17, 1856

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Psa. 50:23: "Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth Me."

Praise is commendation. To praise one, is to commend him.

The text affirms that he who offers praise glorifies God. Let us enquire --

I. What is implied in offering acceptable praise to God?

II. What is it, we next enquire, to glorify God?

I. What is implied in offering acceptable praise to God?

1. Of course it implies confidence in Him. We cannot honestly praise Him, unless we have this confidence. And this implies not merely a conviction that He is a good being, but also a state of heart in harmony with this conviction. Suppose Satan were convinced that God is good, and should say so; this saying so could not be acceptable praise, for he does not feel it. He has no corresponding state of heart. No doubt Satan now knows that God is good, and he might confess it with his lips; yet nothing is plainer than that this cannot be acceptable praise. Praise, therefore, implies the confidence of the heart.

2. Acceptable praise implies the spirit of worship and adoration. This involves an appreciation of His goodness and merits. By this, I do not mean that we must appreciate Him perfectly, and with an appreciation equal to His worth, for this would be infinite, and of course utterly beyond our capacity. But I do mean that we should appreciate Him according to our means of knowledge and our capacity. With such an appreciation, we shall feel deeply, and shall honestly mean what we say. It is of no use to tell God coldly what we think of Him. It does no good to talk over His attributes in a prosy way, with no heart in what we say. In acceptable praise, the mind must be deeply in earnest.

3. It implies, also, supreme affection for Him. Suppose a man really hated God, and yet would acknowledge His goodness. Would this be offering praise? Certainly not. No amount of mere saying that God is good, can be acceptable praise, unless it breathe sincere regard and affection. It is obvious, moreover, that true praise implies complacency in God's character -- that is -- it implies that you are truly pleased with Him, and cordially approve His character.

4. Acceptable praise also implies a sense of dependence on Him as the Benefactor, both of ourselves and of the Universe. For, if we have no sense

of our dependence on Him, our hearts will not burst forth with sincere commendation and praise.

5. It implies some degree of light in the intellect, coupled also with corresponding love of the heart. We must both know and love. There is such a thing as light without love. But those who have light enough to produce the conviction that God is good, and yet withhold their heart's love, are of all men farthest from real praise. These convictions may be ever so deep, even amounting to agony, yet there can be no praise without love.

6. Real praise implies a union of our will with God's will. So long as there is collision and chafing between our will and God's, there can be no praise. If you are fretting against His providence, or against any truth taught in His word, you cannot praise Him. Any want of cordiality precludes acceptable praise. Everything depends on this state of sincere cordiality. You know what it is as between yourself and your friends. You understand it there, and can readily discern its manifestations. The same must exist between your own soul and God before you can offer acceptable praise to Him. You must heartily approve the ways of His providence and the plan of His gospel. Without this cordial approbation of God, there can be no praise; with it, your heart spontaneously praises God.

7. Offering acceptable praise implies an abundance of this feeling. It must fill the heart; then, out of the abundance, the mouth will speak, and its full utterances are real praise.

II. What is it, we next enquire, to glorify God?

1. You cannot fail to understand that it means to honor and exalt Him.

2. Theologians are accustomed to distinguish between God's essential and His declarative glory -- the former denoting His essential character and attributes; the latter, His character as manifested before His creatures. Now, it is very plain that, in the former sense, we cannot exalt God higher than He is already; but, in the latter sense, we can exalt Him. We cannot change His intrinsic character; we can make it more widely and perfectly known. In the latter sense only, can we be said to glorify God.

3. Offering praise to God is a universal duty, binding always, every where and on all. This is true because God always and every where deserves it of

all His intelligent creatures.

For proof of this, we readily appeal to the irresistible convictions of every such being. When you have received a favor, do you not feel that you do wrong if you refuse to acknowledge it? Could you think yourself commendable if you refused to honor your parents, supposing them to be good? When you have abused your loving and kind father or mother, can you escape self-reproach? Do you not both know and feel that you have neglected a plain duty, and done them a great wrong? The fact is, that praise in such a case is intrinsically demanded. As regards God, you know that He deserves to be praised. If you neglect it, you do Him great injustice. You know He is worthy of it, and you cannot refuse without the conviction that you withhold it from Him most wickedly.

4. It is most injurious to His feelings to withhold the praise that is due to Him. We can judge of this by our own feelings under circumstances somewhat similar. When we have done a friend a real favor, and he refuses to acknowledge it, we feel wounded and grieved. So, also, if others have done us a great favor, and we refuse to acknowledge it, we are conscious of doing them great wrong. Suppose you were persistently to withhold all commendation from your wife. Would you expect her life to be a happy one? Or could you think well of yourself? Or suppose you were never to thank those who watch over you and nurse you when you are sick, would this commend itself to your better judgment and feelings? Indeed, if one simply manifests his good will towards you, do you not feel that you do him wrong if you refuse to acknowledge your reciprocal regard? And must not God be greatly tried when His feelings are so abused -- when those who are infinitely obliged to Him, persistently withhold from Him the praise that is His due? We feel thus when such things are done to us. If we lay ourselves out to do good to others, and they seem not to recognize it at all, we feel it most keenly. Scarce anything wounds the human heart more deeply. These expressions of gratitude are appropriate and every way in accordance with the nature of things.

5. Yet, further, the withholding of due praise from God tends to injure His government. For, it should be considered, His government is a moral one, and must be sustained by moral influence. To withhold our praise, is to withhold testimony to His goodness, and this is often equivalent to leaving

His character under suspicion. For His established order is to employ His people in revealing Himself to the wicked. He says to them, "Ye are My witnesses." First revealing Himself to them, He depends on them to communicate what they learn of Him to their ungodly neighbors. Suppose they refuse to do so. It amounts, practically, to bearing witness against God. This very neglect virtually proclaims -- I have known God, but I have nothing good to say of Him. You must make your own inference; this is all I have to say. You do not hear me commend God. You must judge for yourself whether I should do so, if I thought He deserved it!

Now, who does not see that, if this took place between a son and his father, this very silence would be a terrible stab? Who could bear it? When Christians take this course towards God, must it not tend naturally to injure His interests among men? If you, young men, were never to speak well of your father, would you not greatly detract from his influence? If you wished to sustain and establish his influence, could you hope to do it withholding all due commendation? Suppose you should never speak well of him; could you hope, in this way, to honor him?

6. In fact, to commend God, is the way to extend His influence greatly. This is its natural influence. Consequently, to withhold praise, must be an awful sin against God and against His kingdom. Persisting in this sin, do you not deserve to be denied all further gifts? If you will not praise God, why should He continue to load you with His benefits?

The offering of praise to God is important for its bearing,

(1.) Upon God;

(2.) Upon ourselves;

(3.) Upon others.

(1.) As towards God.

We have seen that it is and ought to be most grateful to His feelings. We judge so, in part from our own feelings under similar circumstances. Scarcely anything is more grateful to our feelings than to be commended where we deserve it. If a student has done well, it does him good to commend him for it. I have seen the tears gather in

the eye of those who come before the congregation to receive their diploma when allusion is made to their good behavior, and to their faithful discharge of their duties as students. On the other hand, the utter withholding of all commendation would be sad. You would feel the lack of justice in it.

In the application of this point to God, men are prone to overlook the fact that God's susceptibilities are infinite, and that, consequently, He must feel far more acutely than any other being can. All is right in His character. If He were insensible to praise, it would be a great defect in Him. We could not approve His character if He were regardless of the esteem in which His creatures hold Him. For, this would be equivalent to being regardless of their happiness.

Hence, the praises of heaven are not only useful to those who offer them, but are grateful to Him to whom they are offered. They aid Him in carrying out His purposes of love, because they lead His creatures to a better appreciation of His character and works. If it be useful to an earthly monarch to have his subjects speak well of him, how much more so to God!

Make the case our own. How would you increase my usefulness? Suppose you were to do as a friend of mine did many years ago, when I was young in the ministry. I had begun to preach in a place; the Spirit of the Lord came among us with power; but the adversary, true to his usual instincts, began to circulate all sorts of false and foul stories about me and my former labors. This friend came in just at that moment, and denounced those false stories, told them what he knew of me, and showed them that these rumors were malicious slanders, gotten up to injure especially the work of God. These efforts of my friend were greatly blessed.

God's influence in the universe depends greatly on the praise offered to Him by His people, and by all who know Him. This praise is the more effective for good because where sin goes, there goes unbelief, and a want of confidence in God. The praises of His people bear a direct testimony against this wicked withdrawal of confidence from God. Then, let us never overlook the fact that God's influence is augmented by our testimony to His goodness.

(2.) On the importance of praise to ourselves let us consider,

1. It is impossible to be in a spiritual state without praising God. Praise cultivates spirituality. It is indispensable as a means of changing us into the same image as our Savior bears. While we praise, we are insensibly transformed into the same image. This effect is in harmony with a known law of mind. The things we admire, we unconsciously imitate. Hence, the study of God's excellencies of character and conduct, serve to assimilate us to those excellencies. Consequently, nothing tends more powerfully to promote and establish our sanctification than praise.

2. Praise increases our usefulness, and is altogether essential to it. Not having the spirit of praise, a man can do little good, whatever else he may have. Some Christians you know walk mournfully all their days. They live on the shady, not the sunny, side of life; but they need never expect to convert sinners so. David said -- "Restore unto me the joys of Thy salvation; then will I teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee." So long as he was "writing bitter things against himself" -- "his bones waxing old through his roaring all the day," he could not convert sinners. Let it be understood, then, that this spirit and these acts of praise are essential to our success in winning souls to God.

3. Praise is essential to our own happiness, and almost constitutes its chief element. Praise is the great employment of the holy in heaven, and no doubt constitutes the chief means of their blessedness. They have such a sense of His goodness and lovingkindness and also of His purity -- indeed, this is all but one generic idea, holiness; they have such views of His holiness, they cannot but praise and adore. Wherever in scripture you catch a glimpse of heaven, you hear them crying -- "holy, holy, HOLY, Lord God Almighty!" Why should not they shout His praises! What else should you expect?

The spirit of praise in us is essential to our fitness for heaven. Without it, there could be no sympathy between our spirit and theirs.

I have sometimes thought that old professors would object to heaven -- there is so much enthusiasm there!

4. Praise greatly opens the way for God to manifest Himself to His people. You may see this idea beautifully brought out in Psalm 67. "Let the people praise Thee, O God; let all the people praise Thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase, and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him."

Another striking illustration of the same truth we read in the closing verses of 2 Chron. 5 -- a passage which details the services performed at the solemn dedication of the temple. Of this the historian says -- "It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying, For He is good; for His mercy endureth forever; that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God."

No doubt your own observation, and I hope also, your experience has given you instances in which praise has seemed to bring down great blessings upon the people. When the spirit of praise bursts forth, then the Lord Himself breaks forth in His glorious mercy.

(3.) Our praises of God is also important to others.

I could not but remark in the revival at Rochester, last winter, that the spirit of praise seemed to be exceedingly sincere and earnest. It was so prominent that it arrested the attention of the wicked, and they said -- "How strange this is! How little have we ever thought of God's goodness before!" It convicted them of the sin of ingratitude, and of their own sins in this respect. When they heard Christians bursting forth in heart-felt utterances of praise, adoring God for all His mercy to themselves, it contrasted so widely with their own state of mind, they could not help seeing their own dreadful guilt against God. They saw themselves unfit for heaven. They knew then that the spirit of

heaven was not in them, and that they must be converted to God ere they could hope to see heaven. The very countenance of Christians beaming with the joy of praise, struck home to many this conviction. Such a glow of heavenly praise, said they, on their very faces, gave us a new idea of heaven. That, said they, must be the spirit of heaven; we have it not; but we must have it! I recollect the case of one lady in R. converted in a striking manner, after her friends had been long time praying for her. Her countenance was so resplendent that none could see her without an impression that this is the halo of heaven, beaming on her face. It was truly wonderful! This brought a new conviction on the minds of sinners. Never before had they such an impression of the value of praise and of Christian joy, as related to the conviction and conversion of sinners. When they saw the contrast between one under conviction, and the same person when converted, it made them feel that they, too, must find Christ.

But when they see only a legal religion, full of mourning and sadness, they are repelled. When they see the spirit of praise bursting all its banks like Jordan in harvest, and overflowing all the soul, they instinctively say -- "That is good! That is worth having!" This gives them the sunny side of religion. Not that religion itself has any other than sunny sides; but the way thither through conviction, and the return to it after backslidings, may be very unlike a sunny side. These sometimes become a great stumbling block to wicked men.

Hence, praise is one of the highest means of influence over the wicked. Sometimes we fail to do good by prayer, and accomplish nothing till we turn our souls to praise.

REMARKS.

1. Sinners, remaining such, cannot praise God. Neither can legalists, nor backsliders, nor those who are in spiritual bondage.
2. Many ministers present only the shady side of religion. Indeed, they have not been on the sunny side themselves, and therefore know too little about it to preach of it to any purpose. The same is true of many professors of religion. Their whole experience is that of conviction and complaint. They never seem to break forth in the spirit of praise and thanksgiving. Consequently they never

draw sinners to Christ.

3. Some entire churches are in this very state. O, how grievously do they misrepresent God and religion! Of course they do but very little good. They have not the true spirit of God's children. Without the spirit of praise, how can they hope to glorify God?

4. No one glorifies God in his life who does not praise God. Indeed, our lives dishonor God unless we praise Him.

5. We see why there is so much more prayer in the church than praise. We dwell more on what we lack than on what we have. This is a great evil among us, that we should forget what we have received, and thus dishonor and displease God. Another reason for so little praise in our times, is that people fear it will look like boasting to stand up and testify for God and His goodness. The case of a man, whom I saw recently in a revival, is in point here. He had been away from the place on business, and failed to appreciate the spirit that pervaded the people there. When he came back he would often whisper to me -- "There seems to be a spirit of boasting here." But, curiously, after he had been there awhile, he too, caught the spirit of praise, and would pour forth his praises with loud voice and gushing tears. But after being absent awhile and returning, his first impressions were as before; and only when the spirit of praise filled his own soul did he appreciate the feelings of the brethren in their praise of Almighty God.

6. Another reason is, we overlook the importance and use of praise. Prayer we understand better. Less is thought and felt of the duty of praise.

Praise is one of the great instruments by which God answers our prayers. When we have prayed for souls, and then the spirit of praise comes upon us, and our souls break forth in thanksgiving, lo, then our God comes! I think now of the case of a father who had long prayed for his children. At last, the spirit of praise came upon him with great power, and then God answered his prayers in the conversion of his children.

Why should not we have more meetings for praise? I have often thought that our meetings on Thanksgiving day should suggest the wisdom of having more meetings of the same sort, in which each one should have opportunity to express his own personal grounds for thanksgiving and praise, and call on his brethren to join him in thanksgiving. On such occasions, how often have we said -- Did not

our hearts burn within us while we heard one and another recount the mercies of the Lord toward himself, and saw him pour out the testimony of a full heart in grateful tears? Why do we not continue these meetings, and have stated seasons for praise as well as prayer -- praise-meetings, no less than prayer meetings. If we were to have a meeting for praise and recount the acts of Divine goodness towards us and ours, surely it would bless us more than anything else. Let those who can praise bear witness to the goodness of their God!

O, let it be understood by all and never forgotten, that we are most ungrateful to God when we restrain praise. Shall we go on begging and begging, and never thank God for what we have? Can it be a less sin to restrain praise than to restrain prayer?

7. The absence of praise denotes a lack of faith. The filial, trustful spirit bears a deep sympathy with praise. And where the filial spirit is not, praise is uncongenial. I have often been struck with this, that those who have only a spirit of agony and no praise, are not wont to prevail greatly in prayer.

Those who cannot sympathize with praise are not saved; they have not the spirit of heaven. You who are in sin -- what could you do in heaven? You who have no heart for praise, what would you do in heaven? You could have no sympathy with its employments, or its joy, and you would have no heart to stay in such society and amid such sympathies! None can be there but such as love to glorify God, and God is to be glorified pre-eminently by praise.

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE VII). Also, "approbation of the character of its object.

Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

End of the 1856 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1857
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Lectures I. & II. [Owing God- No.'s 1 & 2](#)
Lectures III. & IV. [On Sinning & On Being Holy- No.'s 1 & 2](#)
Lecture V. [The Lord's People His Portion](#)
Lecture VI. [The Wrath of God Against Those Who Withstand His Truth](#)
Lecture VII. [On Confessing and Being Cleansed From Sin](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Owing God- No.'s 1 & 2

Lectures I & II

June 24, 1857

by Charles Grandison Finney

President of Oberlin College

Text.--Luke 16:5: "How much owest thou unto my Lord?"

LECTURE I.

These words are part of the parable of the unjust steward. In this parable Christ teaches the importance of using wealth so as to fulfill the conditions of being received into heaven.

It is not my purpose to comment on the parable itself. I select this verse as my text, not for its doctrine, but for its suggestions. In this way texts are sometimes selected, not as teaching any special doctrine, but because they forcibly suggest truths elsewhere taught.

This question -- "How much owest thou unto my Lord?" leads us to consider,

I. The rights of God.

II. How much hast thou already paid?

III. What has been the foundation-motive for this act?

IV. What does God propose to do in the case? And what does He propose to have done?

I. The rights of God.

These should be considered in several different relations.

Our age is remarkable for a great deal of talk about rights; inalienable rights; rights of the North and of the South; State rights; Federal rights and Woman's rights; -- every other sort of rights but God's rights. On the latter, little is said, little seems to be thought. I propose to speak to you this morning in behalf of God's rights; and,

1. His rights as Creator of the universe. That He is the sole Creator of the universe is a fact assumed on all hands, and therefore there is no occasion to prove it.

This fact must invest Him with an absolute right of property in everything

made, and pre-eminently in the intelligent beings on whom He has conferred His richest blessings.

Let it be noted that the rights of property resting in all other beings but God are relative; God's only are absolute. A right that a man has to his coat or his wages may be good as against the claim of his fellow-man, but is no right as against the claims of God. God's rights, on the contrary, are absolute, in the sense of being everywhere and always good -- good against all other claims possible or conceivable.

2. Let us also consider His rights as conditioned on His susceptibilities. Being a moral agent, with infinite sensibilities to happiness, He must have an infinite claim on all the moral subjects of His government to promote His happiness. Deeply susceptible to the happiness of having affectionate children to love and trust Him, this very susceptibility creates an obligation on their part to render Him the love and homage which will conduce to His happiness. This consideration seems to be strangely overlooked by most of His creatures in this world.

3. Next, let us study His rights as conditioned on His natural and moral attributes. The natural attributes of God; omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, etc., are all in their nature infinite. Whatever claim on us and right on His part can result from such attributes, must therefore be unlimited, because there can be no limit to His knowledge, power or presence.

(1.) His moral attributes; benevolence, justice, mercy, etc., are all perfect in kind and in degree, and hence God's right on the score of possessing these attributes must be unlimited.

(2.) The mutual relations existing between these two classes of attributes serve to perfect their claim on us. For if God were perfectly good, yet without omniscience and wisdom, He might make mistakes. If He were ever so well disposed, yet lacked the requisite power to carry out His purposes, such a failure must make an important deduction from the respect due Him and from the trust we might repose in His government. But now, being not only good but all-wise and all-powerful, He never can mistake and never can fail in any of

His endeavors. Hence no subject of His can ever doubt that His claims are infinite; none, that He deserves our implicit and perfect confidence. This will not be denied, yet it may not have been well considered.

(3.) I have said that on the mere ground of His susceptibility to happiness, He has a claim on our benevolence. I now add, that on the mere ground of His goodness, He has an infinite claim on our complacency.

(4.) On grounds already presented He has a claim on our cordial affection. Perfect goodness constitutes an eternal foundation for this claim.

(5.) Being both wise and good, He has the highest possible claims on our sympathy. Himself engaged in the noblest object possible -- that of blessing His great family to the utmost extent of His resources, He rightly claims the cordial co-operation of all intelligent beings. Every one of them is bound to promote this same object with all his powers. The same reasons that move God to labor for this end should also move His creatures. Of course this implies that God has a right to our universal and perfect obedience. Being wise and good, He is bound to rule; the interest of His moral universe bind Him; and consequently, they equally bind us to obey.

This obligation includes the universal submission of all His creatures to everything He does or omits to do. It is their business to acquiesce in all His ways and with unqualified confidence and resignation. And we should not make a virtue of a forced submission, yielding to His will because we cannot help it; but should submit to His doings because we know He is worthy to be trusted. Even when we cannot fathom the reasons of His course, we yet know He must have good reasons, and are bound to honor Him by the most implicit confidence.

(6.) God has a claim also on our universal adoration and praise. He rightfully claims that we should acknowledge His attributes and duly appreciate His character, and that we should also commend His character and His infinite worthiness to others. No one can honestly deny this.

(7.) Let us also consider those rights of God which are conditioned on our dependence and on His fatherly care. We live and move and have our being in Him. He feeds and clothes us; sustains us in life and crowns this life with His love. Our dependence on Him is absolute and perfect, since we have no power to make our own blood to flow, or lungs to heave or our digestive organs to work. Not one of these life-processes is under our own control, so that we can dispense with God's upholding hand.

He sent these young people here to school; supported them before they came here; gives them life and health and all things. How much do you think it has cost Him already? Sometimes persons seem quite thoughtless of what God does for them and how much it costs Him to supply their wants. One winter during my absence from home, my eldest son thought he would keep account with his mother of work done and of benefits received. He kept it faithfully one week. When he came to settlement, he was greatly surprised to find himself so deeply in debt. Notwithstanding he had done some little things, he found he had by no means paid for his board, room, tuition and clothing. He looked very thoughtful. It was a new idea that he was always to be in debt, and, so deeply in debt too. What could he do?

So it would be in your account with God. Perhaps you have never thought of it; but if you ever were to think of it, you would see that it costs far more to supply your wants than you have been wont to think. How much owest thou unto my Lord for all His care in supplying your wants?

I once met an old man who used tobacco, and asked him how much it had cost, and how much he supposed God had charged against him for his waste of God's money on this filthy indulgence. I said to him -- Estimate also how much time it has wasted and how much of your strength; how much mental power; and how much you have lost of the spirit of prayer. He paused a few moments, and said "I never thought of it in this light before. I do not know what I can say for myself."

God has been every way your benefactor. Now, what has He a right to expect from you? Certainly, that you should abstain from everything injurious to yourself or to others. If parents may demand so much as this

from their children, how much more may God, of His! You cannot hear the conduct of ungrateful children spoken of without tears. What, you exclaim, can that son so abuse his own father, and the mother that bare him! Can he forget how they watched around his bed in his sickness, and bore with him in his waywardness and folly?

(8.) These obligations you say are not mere abstractions by any means, but are the most solemn realities. Yet they are as nothing, compared with the rights of God and the claims He has on His creatures, and the wrongs done Him when He is treated with ingratitude of heart or life.

4. Let us next consider His rights as conditioned upon redemption. O might we only see what an amount of obligation He has rolled upon us by redeeming us from the curse of the law and at such a cost!

(1.) Think how He took us out of the hands of public justice -- a thing He had no right to do and could not honorably do until He had first honored public justice and satisfied its claims. Do not start at this and say -- Has not God the right to do anything He pleases? Let it be considered that although God has rights, so also have the universe of beings whom He had made. For their sakes, God could not pardon one sinner, until He had duly regarded the claims of public justice. This He might accomplish in either of two ways. He might execute the penalty on every sinner, or He might devise some equivalent which should answer governmentally the same purpose, inasmuch as it would equally manifest the heart of the King towards His law and the welfare of His subjects. The latter course was chosen, and a substitute was found in His own beloved Son on whom He "laid the iniquities of us all."

(2.) How much did He pay? Suppose there is a similar exigency upon you. You are a public officer. It devolves on you to sustain law by administering the penalty, or its equivalent. The law is broken; will you smite, or will you spare?

You have an only son, dear to your heart. Can you give him up to shame and to an agonizing death for the sake of safely pardoning those transgressors? Can you estimate how much a sacrifice of this sort would cost you?

(3.) God has bought you with a price. Bought? Did He not own you altogether before? Yes, but you had brought yourself into such relations to public justice that He must needs buy you again, or you are lost. Now, what are His rights as conditioned on His having paid the price of your soul -- paid it too by the blood of His own and only Son! Does not this purchase intensify His claims and augment them exceedingly?

Suppose you had violated the laws of this State, and the Governor had sacrificed his own son to deliver you. Would you not feel that he had fresh claims on you, immensely greater than ever before? You had no claims on him but those of your own wretchedness, and yet he gave heed to those claims. And yet all this, if true, would give us but a faint illustration of what God has done for you through the sacrifice of His Son. Have you ever considered how vast, how deep, how infinite your obligations to Him must be? Surely He has a right to your deep, unselfish, and infinite devotion. Christ died for all, that they who live by His death should not henceforth live to themselves, but to Him who hath loved them and given Himself for them. Ought you not to devote to Him a life thus saved -- a soul thus redeemed? What! Has He redeemed you from death that you might oppose Him and live to yourself? Do you not see that He has a claim on you for all your possible love and service? Surely there is no service possible on your part which is not most emphatically due to Him who hath loved and redeemed us.

(4.) God's rights are peculiar and infinitely great. They are peculiar, because none are altogether like them in kind; none can ever approach them in degree. In the broad field of human relations, there are some rights which are analogous, so much so that they aid us in understanding the nature of God's claims on us; yet none can be found in all respect like His. Thus for example no rights of property can be absolute save those of God. All other property-rights are only relative. My rights to my property are good against the claims of fellow-beings; but they are nothing against the claims of God. He owns me and mine. But my fellow-beings do not own either.

(5.) God's rights are peculiar in degree. The rights of no other being are infinite; His are. No being has infinite susceptibilities but God;

consequently none but God has a claim on His creatures for infinite benevolence.

There is no other being whose rightful authority is universal and infinite. The rights of every other being to authority are so far below His that we must regard them as infinitely less. All the rights of parents to authority over their children -- of kings to rule over their subjects, -- all vanish to nothing compared with His. Yet parents and kings have rights of authority. But they are only the shadow, of which God's infinite authority is the substance.

What would any of you who are students think of yourself if you had trampled on the reasonable authority of one of your teachers? If you had a just sense of your own meanness, you would be ashamed to be seen in the streets -- ashamed to hold up your head. How much more if you had contemned the whole Faculty! You would feel within you the deep mutterings of self-reproach, just indignation and shame, because you had set at nought an authority which you are bound to respect.

Alas how little men think of their obligation to love and honor God!

(6.) There is no other being whose rights and claims are sustained by every possible consideration. Let any one of you look at the considerations that bear of whom it is true that obligation comes from every possible source -- grows out of every relation, presses you from every side, springs up from every spot beneath your feet and looks down with authority from every point above you? Truly there is no limit and no measure to this obligation.

(7.) God has a right to claim that every man should treat himself and everybody else as belonging of right to Him. He has a right therefore to keep an account with you and to charge you with every meal He puts on your table and gives you health to partake; with every breath you draw; with all the strength you have to use; with all that property which should be used for Him. Why not? Is not this true? You know and must admit it. And you also know that if these gifts of God are not so used for Him, He is really wronged; and more wronged than we can ever be by any robbery of what we call ours. The wrong is higher in kind, by so much as His rights and claims are greater and higher in

their nature than ours can be.

Moreover, it is not only true that a wrong inflicted on God is higher and more aggravated than any wrong against man can be, but it is also true that He will realize and feel it more keenly than we ever can. The more holy a man is the more keenly will he feel any injustice. No matter whether the injustice be done against himself, or against someone else. He may have a forgiving spirit and yet may feel the wrong only the more keenly. He will feel it the more by how much the greater his holiness may be.

So God must have a keener sense of the injustice done to Him than any creature can have of the injustice done against a creature. Yet farther; God's sense of this wrong and injustice is greater than the aggregate of all the wrong and of all the sense of wrong and injustice ever felt in the universe. You talk about the sense of wrong felt by the slave. No doubt it is often keen. You speak of the wrong done to parents by their ungrateful children; but what is all this compared with that which God experiences and which He suffers?

What will you think of the forbearance of God -- say, ye who have suffered injustice so long and have felt the pang so keenly? You have been a slave perhaps and you have felt the iron of oppression enter into your very soul. You have felt a sense of wrong enkindled in your bosom, which is seemed to you could never be extinguished -- and you cried out -- How long, O Lord; O Lord, how long wilt Thou not avenge our blood! If you were to be reproved for this intense feeling, you would reply -- you need to be a slave yourself and to feel these wrongs in your own bosom; then you could better judge! It is only a mockery of others' unknown woes, for you to talk about meekness and patience, when you know nothing about this sense of wrong!

How much more keenly God must feel! Who can measure the depth of the keenness of His sense of the wrongs done to Him?

We sometimes see women feel deeply indignant underneath the wrongs they suffer. This may be not without some reason. But let us look into the reason God has for feeling this sense of injustice. Come, count up all the wrongs heaped on Him; measure all the accumulated sense of wrong ever

felt in the universe; what is all this, compared to the sense of wrong felt by God, coming upon Him from the abuse He receives from His creatures?

Yet God's forbearance holds out still. His infinite heart waits yet. His patience and forbearance are not yet exhausted. O how would you feel! You think it an insult if anyone whispers in your ear a hint about longer forbearance. You cannot bear it. Then what will you think of God's unutterable forbearance and long-suffering?

LECTURE II.

July 8, 1857

OWING GOD--No. 2

Text.--Luke 16:5: "How much owest thou unto my Lord?"

The rights of God in regard to His creatures imply corresponding obligations on their part. It remains for us to consider what these obligations are.

The question -- How much owest thou unto my Lord, requires us to ask and consider -- How much hast thou already paid? In the light of this question you may find how much remains yet due.

These, be it remembered, are not merely abstract questions, however much they may be so regarded. It is astonishing to see how much infidelity attaches itself to these questions in the minds of men, and how little, consequently, they care for any claims God may be shown to have on their hearts. It is because these things take hold so feebly on human hearts that the Divine Spirit is needed and is sent to open our eyes to see these things truly, and to quicken our sensibility to their bearing on ourselves. It is because of this intense moral insensibility that, in regard to our moral relations, fiction seems to us to be reality, and reality fiction.

Resuming our main question, I ask once more -- How much you have already paid? Have you kept your account carefully? Can you tell from that how the case stands?

II. How much hast thou already paid?

It is a curious fact, developed often in business between man and man, that men who keep no formal account, will have yet a sort of general idea of the way the matter stands. The men who run to the store and get little things on credit, are apt to suppose they know about how their account stands; but often they find, on comparing their ideal of the matter with the merchant's books, that they were widely mistaken. Some of you may be under an equal and far more dangerous mistake in the matter of your accounts with your Maker.

1. Probably many of you have tacitly assumed that, at least in some things, you have done all your duty. Thus you put it down that you have been to meeting today; that you get good lessons in your class; that you do about what should be expected of you in your circumstances of life. But you will need to go more deeply into the matter than this. It is of the utmost consequence to know precisely when you have a right to credit yourself with the performance of a duty to God; else you may commit the very great mistake of giving yourself a credit where God charges you as in debt. When you come to the great reckoning and lay down your books, perhaps God will not accept them. Perhaps He will cast them out as viciously kept and as being all wrong in principle and in fact.

2. Hence it is important for you to consider that nothing is done to purpose unless it be done with a right state of mind towards God; for without this, there can be no real obedience. The state of heart is just the thing God has always required and always must require.

3. Now in the light of this great law will you renew your examination and ask -- What have I done today? Did you come to church with a heart really full of love to God? Unless you did, you have no right to put the external act to your own credit as a duty done for God. God requires, just as you see He ought to, that this and every other duty be done from a spirit of real, honest devotion -- in true love, and with an eye that looks only at His glory. Which of your duties have been performed in this spirit? Nothing less than this can be doing duty. It is God's right to claim that you should always devote yourself to His service with a single and pure intent to do all His will, and to promote His glory.

4. Now what have you in fact done with yourself -- with your time, your talents, your education? How many pages of your account will really meet His demands when weighed in His balances? Wherein and when have you

done all your duty? Do you think God ought to be satisfied with your spirit in coming to meeting this morning, and ought to have given you credit for it? Have you spent the intermission in a way to please God? Can you write it down, saying -- Lord, Thou knowest I came with a desire to honor Thee and to do all the good I can? Thou knowest that my eye has been single to Thy glory?

5. Go back as far as you can remember and put your finger on the points when and the things wherein you have done your duty. Consider that you have never even approximated towards your duty save as you have earnestly sought to glorify God. Now wherein have you respected His authority? Wherein have you regarded His feelings, so that you can reasonably suppose He will say -- That satisfies Me? I speak to those of you who have not gone into bankruptcy -- pleading guilty before Him, and have thus obtained a full pardon, having your accounts canceled. To all others I speak, and I ask -- Have you met God's will in anything? Have you, in any hour of all your life, been in the state of mind that God requires? Take your pen, and sit down; make up the account. With what can you credit yourself? Did you obey your parents? You think you did. Well; with what spirit? With what purpose towards God? If we could sit down together -- you with your pen in hand, and search out these things to the bottom, and consider the state of mind requisite in real duty, it might make some revelations to your mind of points unnoticed before. We would ask -- What duties have you really done towards your fellow-men? You may be saying -- "Although I cannot set down any credits on my side towards God, yet I certainly can as towards men. I know I have been honest with man."

6. Have you indeed? God has a right to demand of you towards men, even, unselfish benevolence. Have you had it? Have you been as unwilling to believe evil of your brother as to have him believe it of you? Have you treated his good name as you would have him treat yours? Have you been as jealous for his honor as for your own? Has the same been your habit and your life towards all men? Or has your justice towards your fellow-men been mere selfishness? You have not cheated your neighbor, you say; but if you lack the principle of honesty -- just that principle which will make you honest and upright towards God, it is absurd to suppose you have real honesty towards men. You have not done your duty towards your neighbor if you have neglected duty towards your God. "He that is unjust in the least

is unjust also in much," and on a similar principle, he that is unjust in the great things (towards God) will not fail to be unjust in the least things -- those that look towards fellow-men.

7. What have you done that is all right? Say, what? Got my lessons, you say. But with what motive and for what end? Was it done for the honor of it to yourself or for the honor of God? Did you come here to college, for God, or for yourself? Did you consult God's interests in that thing, or only your own? Did you ask Him if you should come; or did you come without any such enquiry? What education you get, do you faithfully use for Him? You have done thousands of things in the course of your life; but which one of them all for God? What have you done for Him in the family where you live?

III. The question to which we must continually return is this -- What has been the foundation-motive for this act?

1. I have asked you repeatedly -- Have you done for God any service which you think He ought to accept? Let me hold the Bible before you and you may lay your hand on it and swear. Do you honestly believe that you can lay your hand on this Bible, and swear that you think you have done your life-duty, so that God ought to accept it? Sometimes men are called on to swear to their accounts. I call on you in the same manner; I put you under oath. Is your account correct? Do you honestly believe it to be true and honest? So you feel sure that God ought to accept it? Have you done anything which you can really accept yourself? And if you cannot accept it, sincerely approving both the act itself and it's motive, then you could not accept it in God if He should approve it. How could He approve what you cannot, and yet be respected by the angels, and respected too by Himself?

2. God is infinitely fair-minded. If you were the veriest child and had an honest intention, God would approve it. He is not exacting, is not captious, is never fault-finding. He can never try to bear down on you with His great power. But have you really been simple-hearted and child-like? That is the real question. God forbid that I should represent Him as over-bearing and exacting. No; He is fair-minded and even generous, as far as He honestly can be.

3. But let me ask you, if in truth you are not in a state of hopeless

bankruptcy -- just in the case of one who has paid nothing and never can pay anything. Sometimes men in business get into debt, and cannot get out with any amount of struggling. It is even so with you. Deeply in debt; never able to do anything more than keep up with current duty; when will you ever perform any one single work of supererogation? When can you do the first thing to set off against a life-long course of sin? O my dear child; have you run in debt so deeply and have you nothing to pay? Why did you not think of this before? Can you find absolutely nothing in your past life that God can accept? Is there no prospect that you can ever pay the first farthing? Then what can you do?

IV. This brings us to our next great point: What does God propose to do in the case? And what does He propose to have done?

1. Not that you should pay the debt; He knows this to be impossible. He might require you to pay the debt; but in fact He does not, but simply proposes to you to take advantage of the bankrupt law. He has made such a law and under it, He offers to forgive freely all that debt on condition that you confess judgment, accept the boon and commit yourself absolutely to His disposal. If you will restore all that remains and truly consecrate it to His use as you should and as you ought to have done from the very first moral act, then He will cross out the whole account. It shall stand as if balanced and settled, and you shall be at peace with Him.

2. Now what more can you ask than this? Ought not this proposition to meet all your demands? Can it be possible that you on your part can object, if God can make up His mind to offer such favors on such conditions? How does it strike you? What do you think about it? Can you persist in forgetting and disregarding God's rights, and carry out this disregard in the gospel as well as under the law? Somehow it has strangely come to pass that many men pervert the gospel scheme entirely to their own selfish purposes, assuming that it was gotten up solely for their special benefit, and is nothing more or less than a vast system of indulgences!! All they want to get from it is permission to sin at will, and exemption from its penal consequences. Hence, not content to forget all God's rights under law, they carry the same spirit into the gospel and here too would fain rob God of all the homage, love, and obedience which are due Him for His redeeming mercy.

Again, will you continue to contend for your own rights, while you refuse to

respect God's? Is not such conduct outrageous? What would you think of a man here among us who should trample on everybody else's rights, but should none the less clamor violently for his own? Would you like the man as a neighbor who should crowd and prosecute other men to pay him and steadfastly refuse to pay his own debts? Will you do precisely this sort of thing towards God? Will you stringently insist on your own demands both upon God and your fellow-beings, while yet you are reckless of His rights? Will you deny your guilt, or make light of it? Will you call in question your desert of eternal damnation? Will you consent to receive neither mercy nor justice? Are you prepared to reject mercy and yet with the same breath complain of God's administration of justice? Indeed! And do you expect to carry out your scheme and withdraw from the government of Jehovah? He offers mercy and you scorn it. He falls back of necessity upon justice, and you complain of that. Thinkest thou, O man, that thou shalt evade the sweep of Jehovah's justice? Can you escape from His power, or convict His administration of wrong?

Again, when you think seriously of your case, is not this seriousness produced by a sense of danger and not by a sense of guilt? Is it not much more the fear lest you shall be cast off and lose your soul, than the conviction of great sin and guilt and wrong, of which you ought to repent? You think little of restoring what you have withheld. You are even enquiring how you are to be forgiven before you have taken the first step towards forsaking your sins and breaking them off by righteousness! And does this look like fair dealing towards God?

Again, will you treat God's claims as last and least of all? You talk as if you were doing all your duty, and yet you utterly neglect God and set aside His claims on you as if they were altogether false and fictitious.

3. You show this often by the way you plan for the future. Has it not often been in your heart that you would come to God and get mercy when you have become too old to enjoy sin any longer? Virtually you assume that it will be soon enough to do right by God when you cannot otherwise keep out of hell another day. And does not this show how little you care for God's rights?

4. You put it in a little more plausible shape perhaps, but the thing itself is the very same and not a whit the better for its fairer seeming. You say it

thus; I must attend to other matters; my lessons -- my business, the cares of life or the pleasure I love; and when I have done with them all, then I can afford for the sake of heaven to give to God the dregs of my existence! You can, indeed! But can God afford to accept you then? You propose to meet all other claims first; your own, your neighbor's, everybody's; and let God's come at the very last end of your life! Does this seem to you like fair dealing towards God? If anybody must be neglected, you say let it be God! If any claims must be shuffled off contemptuously, let it be His!

Do you flatter yourself that this treatment of God will conciliate His good will, and put your relations in a shape favorable for your final blessedness?

Once more; can you for one moment doubt that you must utterly fail to meet your obligations? Are you not certain of bankruptcy? Are you not shut up to it, past all escape? Then why will you not now acknowledge your sins; restore all that remains; and cast yourself at once on His clemency? He wants you to do this now! O come; give up the last thing you have, and throw yourself on His great mercy!

5. This offer is only for a season. There is a limit to it; none can tell how near! Do you say -- Then I will go on and yet increase my debt? Can you do that deliberately and with your eyes open? Then you can regard your salvation as miserably cheap and of little worth. Perhaps you incline to think so. The word of God has long since said -- "He that scorneth, he alone must bear it."

[Back to Top](#)

On Sinning & On Being Holy- No.'s 1 & 2

Lectures III & IV

August 5, 1857

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--James 4:17: "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

LECTURE III.

ON SINNING--No. 1

This is only a part of what the apostle James said to those who supposed they might have true faith and yet neglect the duties required in the moral law. This was the great error of the Antinomians of that day who regarded the gospel as a grand system of indulgences and practically held that faith gave them a license to sin. Their doctrine was that faith in Christ is accepted of God instead of that affectionate obedience which the law requires. Faith, in their view, was a substitute for this in such a sense as to discharge their obligation to have and exemplify this love. It became thus a compromise; faith instead of love and obedience.

Now Paul did indeed preach that men are not justified by their obedience to law and that they cannot hope to be accepted on the ground of their own righteousness. On the contrary, he taught that the ground of their acceptance is in Christ alone -- solely in what He has done and suffered for us. Yet he at the same time taught that this faith in Christ always leads to a holy life -- always works by love, and therefore always bears the fruits of real holiness.

There were some in the church of those times, as there are in our day, who misapprehended Paul and failed to understand his idea of faith. They made faith a mere opinion, a simple belief in which there is no heart, and this heartless faith they held to be itself saving.

To withstand this grievous error, James taught that works of love and obedience are essential to salvation. Yet Paul and James are not at variance, but teach the same gospel. Paul speaks of works as the ground -- James as the condition of salvation. Hence rightly Paul denies and James affirms; Paul denies that they are the ground of salvation, as he should deny, and as James too would deny. James affirms that they are the condition of salvation and so would Paul and so should we. In maintaining his position James declares that neglect of known duty is sin. This is the doctrine of our text.

I. The knowledge of duty implies obligation.

II. Here note also that neglect to comply with obligation always implies a refusal.

I. The knowledge of duty implies obligation.

1. Only that can be duty to me which I am bound to perform. Hence the ideas of duty and of obligation are closely related.
2. Knowledge of personal duty necessitates some moral action of the mind. It is impossible to remain indifferent and not take some form of moral action when duty is really seen. Not to act at all under these circumstances is out of the question -- is simply impossible. The stimulus of known duty being applied to the mind, it must act.

The proof of this lies in human consciousness, and to this I appeal. Everybody knows that when the conviction of duty fastens on the mind, he acts one way or the other. He obeys, or he refuses to obey.

II. Here note also that neglect to comply with obligation always implies a refusal.

1. For the time being at least, you refuse to meet your obligation by obeying the demand of duty. The demand called on you to do something; you answered, no! In the nature of the case you must either consent to comply or you must refuse.
2. In such a case, there is always a positive going forth of the will to refuse, or to comply.

Again, if inaction were possible, it would be sin. For, action is the thing required. Inaction is therefore the thing forbidden. Neglect to act, therefore is positive disobedience.

3. The action which this subject contemplates is that of the will, the free action of the mind. And here it is quite essential to note that the will is not something separate from the mind, as for example, the hand; but is the mind itself, willing.

Neglect to obey obligation implies as opposite willing -- a committal to an opposite course of action. When you refuse to meet obligation, you do so because you purpose and choose not to meet it.

I do not stop here to agitate the question whether there can be any other duty

than known duty. This would lead us into a field of enquiry foreign from our present object.

4. To neglect to comply with known duty is to reject the claims of moral obligation. Suppose a man sees that God requires of him a given duty; but he decides not to do it. What is this but to decide that he will not obey God and that the idea of duty shall not govern him? Surely this is a decision of the mind not to be influenced by the conviction of known duty.

This is sin, and the whole of sin. Sin is a deliberate decision of the mind, not to obey God. What can be sin if this is not?

5. While one known duty is neglected, none can be acceptably performed. For example, suppose a man neglects some known duty, and yet professes to do something else and call it duty; is this obedience to God? Nay, it is only a delusion of his own mind, or an act of downright hypocrisy. James says -- "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." For if a man refuses to do one known duty, he shows himself in no state of mind to do God's will. If he can refuse to comply with any one known obligation, how can he possibly perform any other duty in a way that God can accept?

6. To refuse to perform any one known duty is a virtual denial of moral obligation and a plain refusal to obey God at all. It is virtually telling God that you care not what He requires, that you shall take your own course and do what you please. If you were to take your oath not to obey God, it would not be a more emphatic refusal than you make when you refuse to perform one well known duty. Yea if a man were to go about the streets, proclaiming, "I don't care what God requires; I shall do as I please about obeying Him, and shall take the liberty of omitting to do anything whatever which He requires, whenever it pleases me to do so; let no man suppose that I intend to obey God simply because He commands me" -- even this shocking declaration would not be so emphatic as his action in refusing to do known duty. It always will be true that "actions speak louder than words."

Again, for a man to know his duty and yet not do it, is moral dishonesty -- is a total repudiation of all moral principle, and, an open rejection of all moral duty. I know a young man who said he had made up his mind to obey God.

Subsequently, however, he fell under adverse influences and then changed his mind and said -- How can I afford to serve God? On hearing this remark, I said to him -- "You are a dishonest man; nobody can trust you a moment." He seemed surprised at this, and would fain appear to feel hurt, as if I had slandered him, for he had piqued himself very much on his moral honesty. But let us examine this principle. Suppose a man who owes you for goods comes into your store, and you very gently suggest to him if it would be convenient to settle that old account, he says, no. Why not? Have not you the money? Yes, he says, I have the money, but I want to use it. I will pay you at my convenience, just when I think best. When will that be, you say? But he only answers, "When I please."

If you should speak out what your heart feels, you would say -- You villain! Are you lost to all moral honesty? Can you refuse to meet a known obligation?

Just so the sinner who will not do one known duty, virtually says -- I repel the idea of moral obligation. I hope you don't suppose that obligation to God has any binding force on me! Do you think I care for any supposed obligation to God -- or that I care for duty to Him?

That, sinner, is what your practical life proclaims when you know your duty and do it not. That is just what you do. And is not that as bad as the devil? The only reason why you are not fully as bad as the devil is that you don't know as much.

Is this too strong language? No, verily, I should only blink this momentous question and deceive you, if I did not tell you that you are as bad as the devil.

Again, neglect to perform duty is the true idea of impenitence. This is the very thing. Impenitence is not a mere negation -- is not a nothing; but is precisely a refusal to perform known duty.

A persistent neglect of any known duty is sin, and must be fatal to the soul.

REMARKS.

1. They who neglect their duty to God never really fulfill any duty to man. Men who disown obligation towards God do not care anything about duty; it is not the consideration of duty that moves you. Unless you have a supreme respect for

God and His will, there is no doing of duty. Thus the man who neglects prayer to God can never be accepted in anything he does for man. Suppose he were a very pertinacious Anti-Slavery man, or Temperance man; but he never honors God, and pays Him no respect even; then it is plain that his principles of reform are all rotten.

2. No one who does perform duty to God will neglect duty towards man. His sense of obligation to God and his practical submission to that sense of duty will certainly ensure his obedience in the lesser duties due towards his fellow-beings. If the doctrine of this text be true, he cannot be pious without being philanthropic also. If he performs his duty towards God, he will also towards man. If he neglects his duty towards God, he will also neglect his duty towards man.

3. You may as well blink the duty of prayer and praise as neglect anything else.

4. No man can neglect his duty towards a suffering fellow-man while his wants are crying out for relief, and yet be a Christian towards God. He cannot be truly pious unless his mind is made up to serve God fully in all classes of duty.

5. He who neglects a public profession of religion -- how can he hope to be saved? Not that a public profession is in its nature saving, but it is plainly required and therefore becomes every Christian's duty. No requisition, plain as this, can be set aside, and yet the man who does it be accepted of God. Suppose the man lives where there is a visible church and there is no reason why he should not do this duty; yet he does not come out and place himself on the Lord's side, but he thinks notwithstanding, that he shall be accepted of God. How many make this very mistake! Because a man is not saved by a public profession, therefore they neglect it. This is the same mistake as that made by the Antinomian. Because he does not expect to be saved by his works, therefore he feels no interest in performing good works. Shall he not be saved without? Why then should he trouble himself about doing laborious duties? The truth is -- whosoever will neglect known duty ought to know that he cannot be accepted in anything.

6. The same is true of those who allow themselves to live below their convictions, and their expressed obligations. I admit that a man may be suddenly thrown off the track of his purposed life; the purpose was to do God's will -- that is, if he were a true Christian. The very moral attitude that makes one a Christian

is that of a determined resolution and purpose of heart to do all God's will, always and everywhere. With this purpose living in one's heart in its power, he is a true Christian. If he is thrown off the track, his first concern is to get back with the least delay possible. But if persons allow themselves to live in this guilty sinning state, they cannot be saved.

7. So also if they allow themselves to live below their privileges. Some persons attempt here to set up a very curious distinction between living in known sin and living below their privileges. They would be alarmed if they knew they were living in known sin; but it seems to them a small matter that they are living below their known privileges. Just as if it were not their duty to live up fully to all their privileges. Just as if the grace provided in Christ and in the Spirit for the Christian's growth and strength and power for good, might be neglected without sin!

8. The great error of this day is the practical assumption that Christians may be accepted on the whole, although they allow themselves to do many things against known duty. Visit the churches all through the land, and you will find this assumption underlying their piety. They admit that they are living in known sin, yet they have family prayers, they pay for preaching, they give to various benevolent objects, and they are, as they think, Christians. Sometimes the pulpit connives at this soul-destroying sentiment. But is it for the Christian pulpit to teach that a man can do his duty in some things while yet he neglects known duty in other things?

This assumption seems to underlie the hopes of the masses of modern Christians. Do you not see this to be the fact?

The true doctrine is -- You have no right to hope save as you find yourself committed to do the whole will of God; none at all, save as you cry out -- if you fall into sin -- "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; though I fall I shall rise again." You spring back to regain the ground you have lost. There is a sudden and powerful reaction; for you cannot live in sin. Peter differed from Judas; Peter was impulsive, generous, ardent, made for a leader. You see his characteristic features in the case of our Lord's washing the disciples' feet. At first it seemed to him too bad that the Lord should perform for him so menial an office; and he declared outright -- "Thou shalt never wash my feet." But when our Lord signified to him that, otherwise, he could have no part in Him, then, changing his attitude entirely, he wanted to be washed all over! No doubt he was

sincere when he said -- "Though all men forsake Thee, yet will not I." Yet when temptation's power came heavily and suddenly on him, he fell. It was a sad fall; but soon Christ turned and looked on him, with one look of love and rebuke. Then Peter thought; and thinking, wept; wept as if his tears would never cease to flow. One fearful wave of temptation had torn him from his moorings; but see how soon he springs back again. Christ cast one look on him and he weeps bitterly. He did not wait for the cause to become popular before he should espouse it again; but, just then and there, while the peril was as great as ever and the scandal was unabated -- there, in the presence of all those external temptations under which he had fallen, he returns to his Lord. O, if you had seen him weep there, you would have said -- Certainly that man is a real Christian! How he springs back after his guilty lapse! As a wife or husband who have been betrayed into some offence against each other will suddenly return to their kindly and endearing relations to each other, so does the real Christian, for he cannot live away from Christ.

You see the great mistake of those who think one may be really honest and yet neglect some known duty. You call such a man honest; but in what sense can you? In the sense of having due regard to his moral obligations? Certainly not; for of this regard, he has not a particle. If he had he could not neglect one known duty.

The common standard of piety is utterly fallacious. It holds practically that we may neglect this and that moral duty and still have a good hope in Christ. Nothing can be more fallacious than this idea.

Those who believe in the entire attainability of sanctification and yet neglect the known and appropriate means and efforts to reach this attainment, are fatally deceived. They know their duty, but they do it not. They know their privilege and know that this privilege brings with it the obligations of duty, yet they fail to accept this offered mercy. They come short deliberately and with their own real consent. Alas, they are fatally deceived. They "hold the truth in unrighteousness."

9. The same is true of all who admit this attainment to be their duty, and yet come short of it. There are many of this class who admit entire sanctification to be their duty, while they do not admit that it is attainable. Now it is all in vain for this class to deny their responsibility. It is duty and nothing but duty that brings on us responsibility. They admit entire sanctification to be their duty; how then

can they escape the responsibility for attaining it? Knowing it to be their duty, if they do not strive and struggle to realize it, they are in great guilt and are surely deceived as to their own religious state.

In the discussions of this subject that took place several years ago, the Presbytery of Troy maintained that men were under obligation to be indefinitely better than they are. They did not tell us how much better -- did not define the precise limits of possible and binding attainment, and show us how much there is beyond that line that we cannot reach; but they said we all can become indefinitely better than we are. They said we might all hope to rise a good deal higher. Now persons who believe precisely this, and yet rest short of reaching it, must be lost. They know to do good, but do it not; and to them it must be sin.

It matters nothing whether they admit that men may reach entire sanctification, or hold only they may rise indefinitely higher and be a great deal better, so as to be almost sanctified; no matter how much or how little beyond their present state they know that they can attain, it is all the same as to the principle now being considered; the guilt of failing to do known duty is the same. Each alike is a case of knowing duty and not doing it. If a man does not commit himself to do his best and utmost; if he does not attempt to rise to the highest point possible in his view of his duty, then he is deceiving himself if he thinks himself a Christian, accepted of God. For what is true religion? An obedient spirit; a state in which one lives in the performance of all known duty. No one can allow himself to stop short of universal and entire obedience to God and yet be a Christian. Is not this certain? The very fact of his living in allowed and habitual sin convicts him of being a sinner. What stronger evidence can there be than this? Even Pres. Edwards held that living in known sin is conclusive evidence of an impenitent state. It is not easy to see how any man can deny this.

Those who believe entire sanctification possible should no longer act on the defensive. They should affirm men's obligation to do all known duty and to accept all their revealed privileges. I have been often asked of late -- Do you believe that a man can live without sin? I answer -- Do you believe a man ought to live without sin? They go on -- Do you believe that anybody does? That is another question entirely. Our question now turns on known duty, and accruing obligations. The great question is -- What is the state and coming doom, of those who know their duty, yet will not do it? What is to become of us if we are bound to reach perfection, and will not do it?

Is it not time, then, that we who believe in the duty of men to be holy should act on the offensive and maintain the universal duty of all men to deny all ungodliness and to walk holy and unblameably in this present world? What is living a Christian life but committing one's self fully to do all the will of God?

10. People need not think to escape responsibility by giving up great truths.

It has been sometimes said that the Oberlin people have given up some of their doctrines because they have found them too broad. But of what use can it be to give up doctrines known to be true; for if the conviction remains that you ought to obey God wholly and universally, then you must make up your mind to do all this or have no salvation. If you blink this, you fall from grace.

You who profess to be Christians, yet live in neglect of known duty, are fatally deceived. If you live on and on, below your standard of known duty, not earnestly agonizing and energizing; living on and neglecting all due effort to perform your known duty, you are fatally deceived. You are not obeying God and are not in a state of acceptance before Him.

11. You see where this subject places all the unconverted. You who are in this state are guilty of the whole of sin. Your very life is a perpetual scene of knowing yet not doing duty. Each day is full of precisely this experience. And what shall the end be of such a life?

LECTURE IV.

September 2, 1857

ON BEING HOLY--No. 2

Text.--1 Pet. 1:16: "Be ye holy, for I am holy."

This precept enjoins holiness, and our first business should therefore be to enquire what holiness is. It is plain that the Bible uses the term as synonymous with moral purity; but the question will still return -- What is moral purity?

I answer -- Moral fitness; that which we see to be morally appropriate; it is in substance, moral propriety; in other words -- perfect love; such as God requires. It is sympathy with God and likeness to Him; the state of mind that God has. Holiness in God is not a part of His nature in such a sense that it is not voluntary

in Him; but it is a voluntary exercise and state of His mind.

The same is true of all beings. Holiness is not a thing of nature as opposed to free action, but must always be a free and a moral thing. It is not possible to any beings but such as are made in the image of God in the sense of being moral agents. They must have free will, and then must voluntarily conform themselves to rectitude. Nothing less or other than a voluntary conformity of themselves to the moral law can be holiness. In them all, holiness is that state of mind which is precisely appropriate to their nature and relations. This state is expressed in one word -- love, meaning by this, benevolence -- good will to all. When this term is used in its widest sense, it includes all moral duty. Hence this command to be holy requires that we bring ourselves into a moral adjustment to God and our entire moral duty.

Why should we be holy?

God, as in our text, requires it. "It is written -- 'Be ye holy, for I am holy.'"

The contest also combines with the text to enforce the duty by God's example. "As He who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" -- according to the ancient precept -- "Be ye holy, for I am holy." Because I am holy, therefore be ye holy likewise.

Our Lord enforced the same duty by the same reason; (Matt. 5:48) "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect."

What are the reasons of this requirement?

1. We cannot but require it of ourselves. Our own nature irresistibly demands it of us -- his own individual conscience of every moral agent. There is no moral agent whose nature does not require holiness of himself. Each one is so constituted that it is impossible he should not require this of himself. Hence there must always be a war in his own bosom unless he yields to this demand. He knows he ought to, and therefore, by a necessity as strong as his own nature, he must become holy, or fail of peace and conscious self-approval.

No moral agent can respect himself unless he is holy. He may be careless and thoughtless; and may thus slide over and past some of the self-reproach he must otherwise feel for unholiness; but he can never have any honest self-

respect unless he behaves himself in a comely and decent way which he believes to be in his circumstances right.

Need I urge that self-respect is a thing of very great importance? Few are fully aware how very important self-respect is to themselves and to others. Let a young man lose his self-respect, and what is he? What hope can you have of his stability and manliness? A young woman void of self-respect, is no longer herself. Who does not know how complete she falls from her position as a virtuous woman!

This form of self-respect pertains to our relations to this world and to society; but suppose a moral agent in like manner, to lose his self-respect towards God. How fearful must be the influence of this loss on his heart! How reckless or moral rectitude he becomes in all that pertains to his Maker!

Or suppose God to lose His self-respect. Suppose He should cease to do what is honorable to Himself, and should no longer care to act in a manner worthy of His own esteem. How fearful must be the consequences first to Himself, and next to His whole universe! Suppose Him to be morally impure, no longer adjusting His conduct to His own standard of right. It shocks us unutterably to conceive of God as acting in a way unworthy of Himself. We know how keenly every sensitive and right-minded being feels the disgrace of having consciously acted in a way unworthy of himself. Those who have been conscious of this pain have often thought how God must feel, if, with His infinite sensibilities, He should act unworthy of Himself. You sometimes experience this feeling and therefore know how you loathe yourself and have no peace or rest in your soul.

It is true that these considerations may have but little weight with those who know nothing of holiness, and who have never cultivated their own right feelings and sentiments; but those of you who have been near to God and have had your "heart sprinkled from an evil conscience," must appreciate it.

2. Another reason why we should be holy is, that God requires it of us. He has made us in His own image -- like Himself in the attributes of intellect, sensibility and free-will; and therefore for the same reasons that make Him require holiness of Himself, He must require it of us. He must require it of us because it is His duty to do so.

He requires us to be holy because He cannot make us happy unless we will become holy. Our nature being what it is, it is forever impossible that we should be happy without being holy. God is happy, because He is holy; He knows that we exist under the same law of nature and necessity; hence His benevolence prompts, nay compels Him to use this necessary means of securing our happiness.

REMARKS.

1. Sinners know they are not holy. All know this, yet many often say -- What have I done so very bad? No matter whether very bad, (judged by the popular standard,) or not; you know you are not holy. Now do not suppose yourself to be holy as God is holy. You know there is none of this character in you. How much so ever confused men's sentiments on this subject may be, it is universally true that they conceive of God as being holy in a sense in which they are not themselves. Whatever they may say of it, they know this.

2. The hope that unconverted people often have that they shall be saved, is utterly without foundation. Many try to think they have not done anything so bad that they deserve to be sent to hell!

How strange that such men should think themselves fit for heaven! Christ said -- "Marvel not that I said unto you, ye must be born again." No marvel that men should need a radical change! Hearts so foreign from love, so full of selfishness - - how can such hearts dwell in heaven! The unholy man's hope of heaven -- how utterly absurd! What nonsense that men should cherish such hopes without any holiness to fit them for it! Just as if heaven were a certain place, of no peculiar character, and to go there would be to ensure one's bliss! You know better! You know something about the business and the delights of the Christian -- you know they are such as you delight not in. The Sabbath is no privilege to you. Rather you exclaim, "behold, what a weariness it is!" Social worship has no spiritual attractions for you. How then can you suppose that heaven would be a world of joy to you?

3. Many who know they must become holy, are yet very ignorant of the way in which they are to become so. Having begun in the Spirit, they try to become perfect in the flesh. Their reliance is more on resolutions, than on Christ embraced by faith. A leading minister of the Presbyterian church, not long since, heard a sermon showing that men are sanctified by receiving Christ into the

heart by faith. He remarked -- "We are just beginning to receive this doctrine. We have a long time been trying to become holy by resolution."

Of many it is true that all their efforts are by works of law. They seem not to know that all the efforts they make without Christ avail nothing save only sin.

4. Pardon without holiness is impossible, in this sense: that the heart must turn from its sins to God before it can be forgiven. Repentance is really nothing more or less than turning from sin to holiness; and who does not know that the Scriptures teach that repentance must precede pardon? Reversing this order would ruin the sinner. The idea that God can reverse it, works only ruin to those who accept it.

5. The command to be holy implies the practicability of becoming so. I meet with some professed Christians who on this subject have really no hope. They feel that need of being holy, but they are in despair of attaining it before they die. Now these Christians claim to be believers, but they are not. The grand difficulty in their case is, that they do not believe God's word of promise. They have no faith that men can become holy in this life, yet they say they believe in Christ. Yet what is Christ if not a Savior? A Savior from what if not from sin? Is it not expressly said -- "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins"? Does it not seem strange that so many profess to be believers in Christ, but yet avow that they do not believe the plainest things said in the Bible of Christ? They claim to be believers! What! are they believers, gospel-believers, and yet do not believe what Christ says! Nay more, they tell you it is dangerous to believe that you can be holy in this world! Said a Unitarian minister -- "How strange that the Orthodox should object to sanctification in this life"! He had been reading the views presented here, and said, "Why can they object? If they profess to believe that Jesus is a divine Savior, and that in Him all fullness dwells, why should they object? They should either give up their doctrine of a divine Savior, and deny that He is able to save to the uttermost, and abandon their ideas of a divine Redeemer, or admit your views to be true" -- and certainly there seems to be force in his reasoning.

I have never been more struck with this great idea -- salvation from sinning, by Jesus Christ -- than I have during the past winter. I found it everywhere as I read the New Testament, and indeed in the Old Testament also. O how strange that the church should be fighting the idea of becoming holy through Jesus Christ! How strange that they should insist that He will not do such thing! Is it not

wonderful?

6. Christ's promise and relations to His people imply a pledge of all the help we need. The entire gospel scheme is adapted to men -- not in the sense of conniving at their weakness, but of really helping them out of it. It does not say - "Go on in your sins;" does not smooth this path by saying -- "No man can live sinless in this world;" but it says -- "Take hold of Christ's strength and He will help you." It does not encourage you to hold on in sinning, but it urges you to take hold of Christ for all the help you need to overcome the practical difficulties in your way. Its language is -- "My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

While you affirm your moral obligation, you are more and more impressed with your moral weakness. But this weakness is what Christ counterbalances with His strength. In the extremest weakness, His strength finds largest scope and fullest development. "As thy day, so shalt thy strength be" -- when thou shalt thoroughly cast thyself on the arm of the Mighty One.

Hence, the command to be holy is no apology for despondency, but should really encourage us to take hold of the strength promised to meet human weakness.

7. God sympathizes with every honest effort we make to become holy. Wherever He sees a moral struggle in any soul, it interests Him exceedingly. He sympathizes infinitely more deeply than we do. And yet some of us know how deeply we sympathize where we see a convert getting hold of the idea of sanctification by Christ. In some such cases I have known the joy of older Christians to be really inexpressible. When I have seen gospel ministers getting hold of the idea of sanctification and struggling to reach the experience of that idea, I have said to myself -- If we can feel so deeply in view of such a struggle, how much more must God feel! Do you not think God feels? Ah, indeed in every pulse of His infinite and boundless sensibility!

8. If we become partakes of His holiness, we are made sure of the river of His pleasures. This comes both of the nature of the case and of the revealed laws of His kingdom. Holiness becomes God's house forever. And while it is fearfully true that without holiness, no man shall see the Lord, it is delightfully sure that the holy shall see and enjoy spiritual blessedness in His presence.

9. All men will sometimes feel the necessity of this holiness. In some cases, it is

felt most deeply. Last winter I became acquainted with a woman, hopefully a Christian, but who had heard very little on this subject. She had been converted under circumstances where the great desolation and moral darkness became the immediate occasion of her awakening. From such surroundings, she had struggled up into the light. Yet when she came to hear the real gospel, and the way of holiness was opened to her mind, it was wonderful to see how she did grasp and devour this blessed bread of life! It met a great void in her spiritual nature, and her soul exulted in it with exceeding joy.

You often feel these struggles. You know you need something more and higher; you cannot be satisfied with your present state; you are conscious something is wrong between your soul and God, and you have a deep conviction that you need more holiness. Why then do you not lay hold of this hope set before you in the gospel?

10. There is no rest, short of being holy. Many try to find rest in something less, but they are sure to fail. They suspend further efforts and would fain believe they shall have rest where they are; but all such hope is vain. There can be no rest short of coming into sympathy with God and into spiritual union with Jesus Christ.

11. Many insanely suppose that when they come to die, they shall be sanctified and prepared for heaven. Let us sit down by the bedside of such a man -- one who expects to be sanctified in death. What is he doing? What progress is he making? Would you speak kindly to him and enquire after his spiritual progress? But you must not allude to religion -- the doctor would not like to have you. He says it might retard the man's recovery. He wants his mind to be perfectly quiet and unthinking. It will not do therefore even to whisper the name of Jesus! And is it supposable that this dying man is taking hold vigorously of that blessed Name which you may not even whisper in his ear? Is he gaining the victory over the world by faith in the Lamb of God? Do you judge from what you see and hear that his soul is in a mighty struggle with the powers of selfishness and sin, a struggle in which faith in Jesus ensures the victory? Ah! he sinks -- he goes down, lower and lower; sometimes all consciousness seems to be lost; and can you think that in these dying hours, his soul is entering into sympathy with Christ -- is bursting away from the bands of temptation and taking hold with a mighty grasp of those exceeding great and precious promises? I do not ask you what you admit as to the possibility of miracles on a death-bed; but I ask if you

think the circumstances are favorable for the mental effort which the nature of the case demands in renouncing sin and in receiving Jesus Christ by faith for sanctification?

12. No man has any right to hope unless he is really committed to holiness and in all honesty and earnestness intends to live so. If he does not intend to live a holy life, let him know that he is not in the way to heaven. If he is in his sins and indulges himself in sinning, by what right or reason can he suppose himself traveling towards the abodes of infinite glory? If he hopes for heaven at the end of such a life, he is egregiously self-deceived.

Is not every person in this house most fully convinced that he must become holy if he would be saved? Notwithstanding all the looseness of your views on this subject, do you not know that you must be holy if you would find a home in heaven?

Do you believe that in any practical sense you really can become holy? Doubtless you do; for where would you be if you knew you must be holy and yet know equally well that you cannot be? You are not in this dilemma. You cannot bring yourself to think that the ever blessed God has ever shut up His children in a dilemma so hopeless.

The case with you probably is, that you know you ought to become holy, but you are not ready to be just now. If I should call on the younger classes, they would say -- I have so much to do, how can I? Certainly I am not ready now. The middle-aged also are equally unprepared yet. The great evil is that men will not act on their own convictions. They have convictions; they know what they ought to do and that it is infinitely wicked for them not to do, yet they do it not. There they stop. They stop, not in the point of gospel rest, but in the point where impenitent sinners often stop -- convicted of sin, but not acting up to their convictions of duty. Suppose one should come to you and try to hire you to make no further effort to become more holy; could you be hired to any such committal? It would affect you very much as it would have done when you were first convicted of sin, if some one had tried to hire you to defer all effort to come to Christ for a score of years longer. You would have cried out -- "Get thee behind me, Satan," -- "don't tempt me to sell my soul!" Satan took a more cunning course. He only said -- Waive it just now; let it lie over till you find a convenient season. So offered, the bait took, and you swallowed it; and so thousands are putting off their effort to become holy. You would be horror-

stricken with the proposal to put off all effort to become holy for ten years longer; but the thought of putting it over for an indefinite time -- supposed to be not very long, does not startle you at all.

O my hearers, what shall the end be of such procrastination? May it not be that in your real heart you have no love of holiness, and have never sought it as the pearl of great price? Can it be well for you to go on still in a course that leads you farther every day from God? Will you forget that He is holy, and that if you would behold His face in peace, you too must become holy?

[Back to Top](#)

The Lord's People His Portion

Lecture V

October 28, 1857

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Deut. 32:9: "For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance."

Text.--Mal. 3:17: "And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

In speaking on the subject presented in these passages, I propose,

- I. To notice briefly some of the Bible representations respecting God's regard for His people;*
- II. Some of the reasons for His regarding them thus;*
- III. Show that they are truly His portion.*

I. The great love of God to His people is one of the leading themes of the Bible.

1. Through Jeremiah (31:3) God declared of His collective people -- "Yes, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." To the same purport are the two passages read to you as my text. "The Lord's portion is His people;" but one's portion is that which he most highly values. It is his peculiar treasure.

2. "They shall be Mine when I make up My jewels;" and jewels are of all things most precious and most prized. On no other earthly thing do men set so high a value. This term, therefore, chosen of God to indicate His regard for His people, must be intensely expressive.

3. Elsewhere His love for His people is spoken of as being exceedingly great and unchangeable. How rich is the view given of its intensity by those words found in Isa. 49:14-16. But Zion had said -- "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me."

4. Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will not I forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls are continually before Me."

Can any illustration be found more expressive than this? What love is more tender and more enduring than a mother's?

5. The Bible abounds with representations to show that God rejoices over His people with great joy and rests in this love with intense satisfaction. It also represents His love for His people as very peculiar -- altogether unlike the love He has for any other creatures. Indeed this class of statements are so abundant in the Bible that no careful reader can fail to have noticed them. I need not dwell on these passages, nor expand this point of my subject.

II. God has good reasons for this high regard.

1. Of course we must assume that if the fact be as the Bible represents, God must have good reasons, for He is never unreasonable in anything -- never cherished a regard for any person or object, save as there were the best of reasons for such regard. Least of all would He be unreasonable in His estimate of things valuable and worthy of His love. We are safe in saying that He is never partial -- never capricious in His love for His people. It cannot be supposed that He loves them for any other than good reasons. So

far forth as His love is peculiar, there must be peculiar reasons for it. It must forever be true that He loved them for good reasons and not for no reasons at all.

Before I became a Christian I was perplexed very much by what I heard said on this subject; for it seemed to me to represent God's love for His people as altogether capricious. It seemed to me that special pains were taken to represent God as loving them for no known reasons, or at least, for reasons, if any, which were not at all apparent and could not be known by us. To my mind, this seemed to be precisely what we call partiality and caprice -- to love without any good reason, existing either in the object of this love, or in anything else that ought to influence such a being. I cannot enter at length into this subject; it would occupy too much time.

2. It is made plain in the Bible that God loves all men, irrespective of their character with a great love, vastly surpassing all our conceptions. He loves to do them good and this love is so exceedingly great and far reaching that He is always seeking opportunities for its exercise and manifestation. We see it on every side in His providence; it shines out in every feature of His glorious gospel.

3. But His love to His people is peculiar -- a love unlike any other -- a complacent regard -- a delight of entirely another sort from any that He feels in ungodly men. One reason for His peculiar love for them is that He has been able to gain their confidence. In the case of others, He has failed, although He has always done all He wisely could to gain it. It is strikingly true that God is always doing all He reasonably can to gain the confidence of all His intelligent creatures. Great is the joy of His heart when He succeeds. We know how parents enjoy it to have the entire confidence of their children. So, and more, does God enjoy the confidence of His people. The fact that they repose confidence in Him cheerfully, must greatly endear them to His heart. It is this primarily which makes them His people -- their faith in His name.

Again, He loves them because He has been able to gain their hearts, and hence their consent to become His people and be adopted by Him as His children. He has in the same manner offered His hand to others, but they would not accept it. Hence there is good reason for His very peculiar regard for them. Why should not He love His own adopted children -- those who are

willing to be adopted and to regard themselves as truly the Lord's? He is their Father in a peculiar sense. In the general sense of being their Creator, He is the Father of all His creatures; but He is a Father to His people in a far higher sense. He has begotten them to Himself by regeneration of the Spirit. He has won them to His love and service from a state of great enmity. Why should not He feel a most tender regard for them?

Again, He loves them for their steadfastness to Him amid great trials and temptations. He knows that this is a world of great trial and He also very well knows our frailty and intrinsic weakness. When therefore He finds that by His constant grace He can hold them in the main steadfast in His love and service, He must look upon them with intense interest. True they sometimes falter; but on the whole they endure and are steadfast, and in this He greatly rejoices. The very watchfulness He exercises over them may serve to endear them to Him the more. Just as parents love those children most whom they watch over, down almost to the gates of the grave; and for the same reason those also who greatly tax their solicitude for their morals and their souls. If, after many a care and struggle and many tears, they have the joy of seeing them stronger in virtue, their joy in them is exceedingly great. The parent who sees a child passing through great trials -- somewhat as God sees His children tried, yet only the more purified thereby -- cannot fail to feel for such one a most deep and thrilling regard. All a parent's heart is drawn out towards him.

4. We may put this general analogy in a somewhat different form. Suppose an earthly sovereign is called to pass through great trials and difficulties, of such sort as must test his people's love and allegiance very severely, yet they are firm and never fail; will not this greatly endear them to his heart?

So the cause of God on earth sometimes passes under a cloud. Adverse circumstances throw their shade over it; foes are strong and bold, and friends are few and weak; -- then if God's people stand firm, and are only the more decided and bold for God, must not this endear them to His heart exceedingly?

Again, the nature of their dependence on Him must greatly endear them to His heart. He sees how absolute this dependence is -- how utterly powerless in a moral sense they are against temptation and sin, save as they look to Him to be upheld and made strong. Earthly parents can understand how and

why the weakness of children makes them dear to a parent's heart. They will tell you they always love their most dependent children most tenderly. I never felt this fully in my experience till the birth of my youngest who, as most of you know, was extremely dependent. Poor weak creature, and as dear to our hearts as she was weak -- how she used to hang upon us for all her comforts, and how warmly did her parents' hearts respond to this so earnestly expressed dependence! I never shall forget how her last look went to my heart as I was leaving her to visit England. That look was so imploring, so full of dependence, it seemed to say so expressively -- Will my last friend leave me? -- It seemed almost too much for a parent's heart to bear. The nature of that dear little one's dependence on her parents taught me many lessons in regard to the feelings of God towards us in view of our extreme dependence on Him. I have said -- If God is indeed a father to His people and sees and feels all their weakness and their utter dependence on Him, and if He feels as earthly parents do when weakness makes its touching and melting appeal to their hearts, then certainly we may trust Him forever!

5. Consider, again, as another reason for His great and tender regard for His people -- the great sacrifices He has made for them. We know that things become dear to us much in proportion to the sacrifices they cost us. Sacrifices are the price we pay, and that which costs us dear will be held as correspondingly dear to our hearts.

Now as to God, it cost Him little to create the universe. It was done in a very short time -- and cost but little of either trouble, effort or sacrifice, compared with what it has cost Him to redeem His people from their sins, and make them what they should be. The creating of the universe did not cost Him the blood of His own Son!

Again, God loves His people for their sincerity. However great their weakness, they are sincere. They may sometimes falter before the shock of some strong temptation; but deep in their hearts they are sincere, and God cannot but know it. If they lack this fundamental quality, they are not His children. It may please Him sometimes to put this sincerity to the test. He may ask them as He did Peter -- Lovest thou Me? But yet He knows they can answer with Peter -- "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." He loves them for their sincerity, and does not despise them for their weakness. It is written -- "For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth

that we are dust." We may perhaps despise our sincere friends for their weakness; but God does not. He regards their affection towards Him with tenderness, although they are really and exceedingly weak as to moral strength.

6. Another reason for His peculiar love to them is that He views them as in Christ, perfect. Not as perfect in themselves; but as perfect, seen in Christ. So viewed, He sees no iniquity in Jacob. He has made Christ unto them, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, and whatever part Christ sustains is borne perfectly -- is so sustained as leaves nothing more or better to be desired. Whoever is in Christ is "complete in Him." Hence there is a sense in which God does not regard His people as so very imperfect -- as we do when we see them only as in themselves. God sees them in Christ, and therefore sees abundant ground for their free pardon and full acceptance before Him. It is also true that prospectively, He sees them in the beauty of perfect holiness -- the germ of which is already developing and it is His great joy to nourish and cultivate it to that destined perfection.

III. God's people are His portion.

1. This implies that they are set apart to Him -- made over and sure to His use and possession. It also implies that they are of some real value to Him and to interests which He holds dear. A portion, held as such by one so capable of judging of values as God is, must be of very great value.

2. That they are His is manifest from the nature of their relations to Him. In the nature of the case, children are the wealth of their parents. What other wealth can be so real to parents, as this? Well may they regard all other sorts of wealth as only relative -- that is, as valuable only as it may be useful to their children. Especially is it true of good children that they are eminently the wealth of their parents.

So God's people are valuable to Him because they are sincerely good -- sincerely devoted to His interests. Pre-eminently is it true that those children are a treasure for whom great sacrifices have been made and who labor to requite those sacrifices by a grateful and a devoted life. Precisely this is the peculiar characteristic of all honest and earnest Christians. This state of mind proves that they are His children, and it is this state, especially, which makes them a real treasure to God.

Compared with this, the physical universe is of small value to Him -- of almost no value, save as a home for intelligent minds, and a means of their existence and culture. Planets are cheap, but souls are precious.

3. The mutual relations between God and His people, when well considered, show that God's people must be of great value. For, His government is moral; it acts on intelligent minds and aims to secure their highest obedience and happiness. Consequently, to make this government eminently efficient for these ends, God needs such subjects as converted men, who may become witnesses for Him and children under such a Father. He needs and knows how to use this example. Beyond all question He can use them for great and widely useful ends in His mural kingdom. To all eternity we shall be learning more and more of this great value of His people to His kingdom.

4. Again, they are an ever-increasing portion. By this I mean, not merely that they are perpetually increasing in number, although this may be true and some passages of scripture seem to support it; but I mean, in yet another sense, that they are a fountain of great interest to Him because they are constituted for perpetual and indefinite progression. Look at this. Once we were in a state of deep, entire ignorance and our mental capacities were low, in accordance with that stage of acquisition. But the law of progress obtains throughout the entire family of God's intelligent creatures. Carrying out this law, we shall see that a period will arrive when the one who entered heaven last and least will know more and will have more capacity of knowing than all the intelligent universe have now. This aggregate, taken now must be less than the knowledge and capacity of him who shall enter heaven last and least, taken at some remote period in the onward march of his mind. This result is of necessity just as certain as the law of progress itself, gives, an eternity to be used in making this progress, and it inevitably follows that he who is least in heaven will one day know more than the whole created universe knows now. And how can any one doubt for a moment that this is the law of all human intelligences?

5. We see this law pervading the present world. It is this law which so greatly heightens our interest in our children. We see them begin with nothing, but almost immediately, the law of progress develops its operation.

We see that they are growing -- their mind is expanding and their knowledge

is increasing. As they pass one point after another, our heart burns within us at the grateful sight. With a sacred pride, we watch this growth and acquisition. I have sat here on commencement day and looked with admiration at parents sitting in this house to see their children graduate. Some of you have observed it, you have seen the tears in their eyes as they listened to the performance of their son or their daughter in their graduating exercises. If you speak to them of that son or daughter, you will see that they think there is wealth there and a wealth in which they feel a most intense interest. So we may suppose God to feel when He sees His people graduating from one stage of their mental and moral progress, to another. Some of us may have lost children. If we were now to meet them in heaven and were to see how much they have advanced since they left us and how fast their powers have been developed, perhaps we should not even know them. We might be in danger of supposing one some angel of light, rather than that little and immature thing we once called our own child.

6. In regard to this law of progress it matters not as to our argument whether the progress be slow or fast, with eternal ages for growth and expansion, the amount of progress must at some remote point be so great as to defy all computation.

So will virtue and love increase. Saints in heaven will grow in love to God. Even the least of them will advance beyond the point where the greatest are now. That little imbecile of mine may be so advanced already that if I were to meet her now, I might almost suppose her to be some angel. Those of us who have lost children, going before us to the better country, may find when we come to meet them that all our highest views of progress are low and our most exalted conceptions of progress in heaven are mean compared with the reality. Doubtless there will be more in each of God's children to be loved than we can now conceive. In the lapse of ages there will come an hour when their beauty and loveliness will far surpass all we had ever dreamed. Even here we have seen their loveliness -- their humility, their deep peace -- their earnest consecration to their Master's work; and seeing all these, we have exclaimed -- What beauty. What divine loveliness overspreads this character! But how much greater must these developments be in heaven!

How do you regard those children of yours who are increasing in loveliness when you see one pleasing trial of character after another putting forth, like

the opening rose bursting its prison doors and coming forth in ever fresh beauties and glories!

We must conceive of this future increase as big as a compound ration, since it depends on both knowledge and virtue, each of these acting unutterably on the other, and moral growth being conditioned on each. With the growth of knowledge, the soul is able to comprehend more and more of the deep things of God, and to pass on continually to newer lessons, using them all evermore to subserve the greater ends of real holiness. On the other hand, religious purpose pushes the soul forward in attainment of divine knowledge, and in many ways fosters intellectual growth. Then when all the powers of both intellect and heart are brought to act harmoniously and are put to their fullest development, the soul's progress must be exceedingly rapid. How wonderfully will the mind grasp new thoughts, and how naturally will all this acquired knowledge be carried out to the legitimate ends of a holy life!

7. God has enjoyed all this from eternity. His happiness has always been found largely in His obedient creatures. Their value is therefore by no means fictitious. Things are valuable in God's sight and in truth, according as they are conducive to happiness. God's intelligent and obedient creatures conduce exceedingly to His happiness, and to the happiness of the universe, and they are therefore really His portion. Some have supposed that God is above all wants -- that even if He existed alone in a vacant universe, sustaining no relations whatever to other existences because there are no other, He would still be no less happy than He now is. I suppose no such thing. I take this view of the case. God is benevolent. He finds His blessedness in this benevolence: in other words, He finds it in promoting the happiness of His creatures. In harmony with this view, the scriptures represent God as happy in His creation prospectively, before it came into being. Even from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. Wisdom was with Him rejoicing always before Him; rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth and her delights were with the sons of men (Prov. 8:22-31). God's infinity does not absolve Him from the conditions of moral agency. To be happy, He must be virtuous -- a law of moral agency which is no less applicable to God, the Infinite One, than to any of His finite creatures. The laws of His being must come from His own intelligent and moral nature, and must be in essence the same as obtain in the case of all intelligent and moral beings. Hence His benevolent happiness demands

as its condition the existence of creatures whom He can bless and in whose blessedness He may find the heightening and perfecting of His own. His people, therefore, have to Him a value not fictitious by any means, but real. Through all a past eternity, it has been His purpose to do all He is doing in time. Evermore His virtue has been His blessedness.

REMARKS.

1. This subject is not enough considered. In its practical applications, it is exceedingly useful to encourage faith in God. I know personally that one phase of faith, more difficult than any other, is to realize that I can be of any consequence in God's universe. It is hard to see how I can be regarded as anything but a filthy, contemptible wretch. Hence I have found it important to study the Bible on this point and to receive it and believe it and take the comfort of its teachings, despite of the devil. He is a liar and tries to drive me off and shut me up in despondency; but I need the comfort of God's truth and I will have it.

2. This truth -- that God's people are His portion -- and are objects of His intense love and regard -- is of great value to us in resisting temptations to despondency. The tendency of conscious guilt and unworthiness is always to make one say, "What am I and what is my father's house?" It is not in vain therefore that God has expressed this love for His people. However great therefore our guilt may be, and however great our conviction of sin and our reasons for regarding ourselves as the offscouring of all things, yet if we will look into what God has said about rejoicing over His people; if we will notice how He mourns over their misdeeds and rejoices over them when they repent; if we listen and hear Him say -- "How can I give thee up Ephraim, how can I deliver thee, Israel; My heart is turned within Me; My repentings are kindled together"; -- if we think of these manifestations of our Father's heart, we shall surely see that we should be encouraged to trust Him as our Father. We should know that He loves us and cares most deeply for our welfare.

I fear that we who are parents are not sufficiently aware of the importance of encouraging obedience in our children by manifestations of our regard for them. Perhaps we think it bad to commend; but God does not take this course; the apostles did not; but they commended warmly, although they also rebuked sharply. It is well always to commend and encourage obedience and to show that we love to see it and are happy in them when they are obedient.

It is even right that we should both feel and manifest a sacred pride in their obedience and virtue. How greatly this encourages children, we ought to know from our own experience. Daughter, will you make your mother's heart leap for joy! Is not this a good motive for obedience and for love? Did you even think it wrong to say -- I will try to make my father's heart glad? Think of it; he can scarcely read your letters, his heart so yearns with joy over a virtuous, lovely daughter; and is it not best for you to cherish this feeling of joy in making his heart glad? And now shall we not believe that God feels the same yearning and the same intense love of His children -- the same joy in seeing them do well? If so, shall we not find our highest joy in making Him happy?

Whenever you have had anything come home to your heart, saying -- Well done, good and faithful servant, -- what effect did it have upon you? Did it make you proud? No; you longed to keep low at His feet, and never did you feel this more deeply -- I never shall -- I never can, offend Him again.

3. This subject is adapted to the case of impenitent sinners. I can remember how I used to feel in regard to God's people. I looked on them as the excellent of the earth, although I saw some of them living wrong. But the question would often arise -- What are they in the estimation of God? This would always take hold of my heart and make me say -- Is it possible for me ever to be loved of God as His people are?

Again, this subject encourages supplication. When we duly appreciate the wealth God has in His people, then we shall see that we may come and ask anything that is in harmony with His heart, anything that seems essential to the interests of His kingdom, assured that He will hear and do. If we regard our children as our wealth, our children will know it. When they see how much we enjoy their developments in the right direction, they are encouraged to ask anything of us that manifestly conduces to the ends they know we seek and love. They learn what influence they can rightly have over us and how they may properly use it. So, as we come to learn more and more of God's heart we shall have greater confidence in praying for those things which we see to be in harmony with His heart.

4. This subject, well considered, tends strongly to win home to God the backslider. Let him listen and hear his divine Father say, "Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly

remember him still; therefore My bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." Does not this naturally draw him back to such a Father? Who can withstand such an appeal to his heart? When God calls back His wanderers thus and shows the great depth of His heart's love for them; when He says to an apostate and unfaithful wife -- "Return unto Me, and I will return unto you" -- he sees that however guilty and lost, he may come back to God and find a Father's heart open.

He will see that it is not in God's heart to despise one of His least children. Before I had an imbecile child myself, I used to think a parent would be ashamed of such a child, and could find no heart to love them, and nothing in them to love. But now I know very well that no children can be loved so deeply and tenderly as an imbecile. Never could the thought come into my heart to despise such a child -- never any other feeling but that of unqualified pity. With all my heart, I would make common cause with such a child and stand by it forever. Now I can understand how God cannot despise one of His least and weakest children.

5. Hence the subject is useful to the poor of this world and to the uneducated. There always are many who have no other prospect but to be poor and uneducated. Be it so; if you are God's child, you have a sincere heart and God cannot despise you because of your poverty or lack of education. I see some here today who can never enjoy the same opportunities for education which they are struggling hard to give to their children. Often have I been affected, more than I can express, with the interest manifested here by parents to give their children a far better education than they ever had or could have. It is noble; it is often a truly Christian self-sacrifice for others' good. Perhaps God rewards you for it even now by giving you children who do not despise you because you are illiterate. So and much more, God does not despise His poor and unlearned children.

6. The subject is appropriate to humble the worldly great and rich. In a meeting of the church in Boston last winter, a brother rose and spoke of the importance of interesting themselves in the case of the Lord's poor. Another rose and said, if we wished to look for God's choice and loved ones, we should not find them among those who are rich in gold, but among those who are rich in faith. These are prevalent in prayer, and happy in God. Such are most often among the poor of this world. Then let the rich man come down, and not think himself because of

his riches above his poorer brother. God knows no man after the flesh. In His sight mere worldly distinctions go for nothing. Why should not we try to estimate values as God does?

[Back to Top](#)

The Wrath of God Against Those Who Withstand His Truth

Lecture VI

December 9, 1857

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 1:18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness."

The following context shows that in these words the apostle has his eye especially on those who, not having a written revelation from God, might yet know Him in His works of nature. Paul's view is that God's invisible attributes become apparent to the human mind, ever since the creation of our world -- being revealed by the things He has made. In and by means of these works, we may learn His eternal power and His real Divinity. Hence all men have some means of knowing the great truths that pertain to God, our infinite Creator. And hence God may, with the utmost propriety, hold men responsible for accepting this truth reverently, and rendering to their Creator the homage due. For withholding this, they are utterly without excuse. In discussing the subject presented in our text let us enquire,

I. First, what is the true idea of unrighteousness?

II. What is implied in "holding the truth in unrighteousness?"

III. What is intended by "the wrath of God revealed from heaven" and why is it thus revealed against all such "unrighteousness"?

IV. Wherein and how is this wrath revealed?

I. What is the true idea of unrighteousness?

Beyond question, it cannot be less than the negation of righteousness, and may imply more or less of positive wickedness. Here the question will arise -- What is righteousness? To which I answer, rightness -- moral rightness, the original term being used in regard to material things to denote what is straight, as for example, a straight line. Unrighteousness, the opposite of this, must mean what is morally crooked, distorted -- not in harmony with the rightness of God's law. To denote sin, the scriptures employ some terms which properly signify a negation, or utter absence of what should be. Some theologians have maintained that the true idea of sin is simply negative, supposing sin to consist in not doing and not being what one ought to do and to be. This idea is strongly implied in our text. Sin is, indeed, a neglect to do known duty and a refusal to comply with known obligation. Inasmuch as love is required always and of all men, this must be a state of real disobedience. Suffice it then to say that unrighteousness is an omission -- a known omission -- a refusal to be what we should, and to do what we should. Of course it is only and wholly voluntary. The mind's refusal to obey God is a matter of its own free choice.

II. What is implied in "holding the truth in unrighteousness?"

The meaning of the original term -- "hold" -- is to hold back, to restrain. The idea here is that the man restrains the legitimate influence of the truth and will not let it have its proper sway over his will.

The human mind is so constituted that truth is its natural stimulus. This stimulus of truth would, if not restrained and held back, lead the mind naturally to obey God. The man holds back the truth through his own unrighteousness when, for selfish reasons, he overrules and restrains its natural influence, and will not suffer it to take possession and hold sway over his mind.

III. What is intended by "the wrath of God revealed from heaven" and why is it thus revealed against all such "unrighteousness"?

The obvious sense is that God, manifesting Himself from heaven, has revealed His high and just displeasure against all restraining of the truth and withstanding of its influence.

Before I proceed to show why this is, I must be permitted to come very near to some of you whom I see before me this day and talk to you in great frankness

and faithfulness. I do not charge on you that you have been outwardly immoral, but you have restrained the truth, you have withstood its influence. You are therefore the very persons against whom the wrath of God is said to be revealed. This is true of every one of you who has not given himself up to the influence of truth; you have restrained that natural influence; therefore against you God has revealed His wrath.

This is a terrible thing. The wrath of a king is terrible; how much more so is the wrath of God! Ah, who can stand before Him when once He shall arise in His wrath to avenge His truth and His own glorious name!

1. Why does God's wrath wax hot against this sin? Comprehensively the reason is this -- withstanding the truth is resisting God's revealed claims of love and obedience and is therefore the whole of sin. All is comprised in it. This is the very essence -- the true idea of sin; it is deliberate, intelligent, and intentional rebellion against God. There could be no obligation until your conscience affirms it to yourself. The conscience cannot thus affirm obligation until there is some knowledge of God revealed to the mind; but when this knowledge is revealed, then conscience must and will affirm obligation. Subsequently to this point, the more conscience is developed, the more it unfolds, and the more strongly it affirms your obligation to obey God. Suppose a person were created asleep. Until he awakes, there could be in his mind no knowledge of God -- not one idea of God, and consequently no sense of obligation to obey Him. But as soon as the moral functions of the reason and the conscience create a sense of obligation, then the mind is brought to a decision. It must then either choose to obey or to disobey God. It must elect either to take God's law as its rule of duty or to reject it.

The alternative of rejecting God makes it necessary to hold back the truth and withstand its claims. We might almost say that these processes are substantially identical -- resisting the natural influence of God's truth on the mind, and withstanding the known claims of God. When you know the truth concerning God, the great question being whether or not you will obey it, if your heart says no! you do of course resist the claims of truth; you hold it back through your own unrighteousness.

2. The very apprehending of moral truth concerning God renders it impossible to be indifferent. Once seeing God's claims, you cannot avoid acting upon them one way or the other. Hence to stop there, after your duty

is made known, and hold your mind aloof from obedience, is being just as wicked as you can be. You disown your whole obligation towards God, and practically say unto Him -- "Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of Thy ways." Is not this as wicked as you can be, with the light you may have at the time? What more wicked thing could you do?

Let us look at this matter a little farther. Holding back the truth through unrighteousness, implies the total rejection of the moral law as a rule of duty. This must be the case, because when light concerning the meaning of this law comes before the man, he repels it and resists its claims, thus virtually saying -- That law is no rule of duty to me. Thus resisting the influence of truth, he practically denies all obligations to God. Truth coming before his mind, he perceives his obligation, but he withholds his mind from its sway.

You may probably have observed that some persons seem to have no sense of any other obligation save that created by human law. Legal obligation can reach them, but not moral. They will not pay an honest debt unless it is in such a shape that the strong hand of the law can take hold of them. Others have no sensibility to any claims save those that minister to their business reputation. Take away their fear of losing this; remove all the inducements to do right save those that pertain to moral obligation, and see if they will ever do any thing.

Now such men practically reject and deny God's rights altogether, and equally so, their own obligations to God. Their conduct, put into words, would read -- I have some respect for human law and some fear of human penalty; but, for God's law or penalty, I care nothing!

3. It is easy to see that to hold back the truth thus is the perfection of wickedness. For suppose a man refrains from sinning, only because of his obligations to human laws. Then he shows that he fears human penalties only, and has no fear of God before his eyes.

Again, this holding the truth in unrighteousness settles all question as to the moral character. You may know the man with unerring certainty. His position is taken; his course is fixed; as to moral obligation, he cares nothing. The fact is perceived moral obligation does not decide his cause at all. He becomes totally dishonest. This of course, settles the question of his character. Until he reveres God's authority, there is not a particle of moral goodness in him.

He does not act with even common honesty. Of course his moral character towards God is formed and is easily known. If he had any moral honesty, the perceived fact of his own moral obligation would influence his mind; but we see it does not at all; he shuts down the gate on all the claims of truth and will not allow them to sway his will; hence it must be that his heart is fully committed to wickedness.

4. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all who thus hold back the truth, because this attitude of the will shows that you are reckless of your obligations towards God. It shows that, with you, a moral claim on your heart and conscience goes for nothing. If you restrain the truth from influencing your mind, this very fact proves that you do not mean to serve God. Some of you know that you are not doing what you know to be your duty. You are conscious that the presence of known duty does not move you. You have not done one act of obedience to God's claims because they are God's.

Again, not only does this settle the question of moral character -- which is of itself a good reason for God's wrath; but it also settles the question of moral relations. Because it shows that your moral character is altogether corrupt and wrong, it also shows that in regard to moral relations, you are really God's enemy. From that moment when you resist the claims of moral truth, God must regard you as His enemy, and not by any means as His obedient subject. Not in any figurative sense, but in its most literal sense, you are His enemy, and therefore He must be highly displeased with you. If He were not, His own conscience would condemn Him. You must know that it must be His duty to reveal to you this displeasure. Since He must feel it, He ought to be open and honest with you. You could not, in reason, wish Him to be otherwise. All of you who know moral truth, yet obey it not -- who admit obligation which yet you refuse to obey; you are the men who hold the truth in unrighteousness. Let this be settled in every one of your minds; that if you restrain the influence of any truth known concerning God and your duty, then against you is His wrath revealed from heaven.

IV. We must next enquire -- Wherein and how is this wrath revealed?

Perhaps some of you are already making this enquiry. Moralists are wont to make it and to say -- "We do not see any wrath coming. If we are as good as professors of religion, why shall we not be saved as well as they?"

Wherein then is God's wrath revealed against this great wickedness?

1. Your conscience affirms that God must be displeased with you. It certifies to you beforehand that you are guilty, and that God cannot accept you.
2. The remorse which will sometimes visit such sinners yet more confirms God's displeasure. True, the feeling of remorse belongs to the sensibility; but not the less does it give admonitory warning. Its voice must be accounted as the voice of God in the human soul. He who made that sensibility so that it will sometimes recoil under a sense of guilt, and turn back to consume the life and joy of the soul, did not make it a lie. It is strange that any should suppose this remorse to be itself the punishment threatened of God against sin and the whole of it. Far from it. This is not that punishment which God has threatened; it is only a premonition of it.
3. The very fears men feel are often to be taken as an indication that the thing they dread is a reality. Why is it that men in their sins are so often greatly afraid to die? It is no other than a trumpet-tone of the voice of God, sounding up from the depths of their very nature. How can they overlook the fact that these grim forebodings of coming doom are indeed a revelation of wrath, made in the very nature God has given them!
4. Another revelation of God's wrath He makes is in His judicial abandonment of sinners. God manifests His despair of doing any thing more for their salvation when He manifestly withdraws His Spirit and gives them over to hopeless abandonment. Withdrawing His Spirit, He leaves them in great moral blindness. They may have been able to see and to discriminate spiritual things somewhat before, but after God forsakes them, they seem almost utterly void of this power. Everything is dark; all is confused. The light of the Holy Spirit being withdrawn, it were practically vain for the sinner himself or for his sympathizing friends to expect his salvation. This mental darkness over all spiritual things is God's curse on his rejection of truth, and significantly forebodes his speedy doom.
5. Analogous to this is the indication given in a moral paralysis of the conscience. Strangely it seems to have lost its sensibility, its ready tact in moral discrimination is gone; its perceptions seem unaccountably obtuse,

and the tone of its voice waxes feeble and almost inaudible. Practically, one might almost as well have no conscience at all.

6. What does this paralysis of conscience indicate? Plainly, that God has abandoned that soul. The conscience so long over-borne by a perverse will, gives way, and God ceases longer to sustain its vitality.

It is painful to see how persons in this condition strain their endeavors, but such debility comes down upon them -- they become so indifferent; diverting influences are so potent -- they drop their endeavors, powerless. Once their conscience had some activity; truth fell on their mind with appreciable force, and they were aware of resisting it; but, by and by, there ensued a state of moral feeling in which the mind is no longer conscious of refusing; indeed it seems scarcely conscious of any thing whatever. He has restrained the influence of truth until conscience has mainly suspended its function. Like the drunkard who has lost all perception of the moral wrong of intemperance, and who has brought this insensibility on himself by incessant violations of his better judgment, so the sinner has refused to hear the truth, until the truth now refuses to move him. What is the meaning of this strange phenomenon? It is one of the ways in which God reveals His indignation at man's great wickedness.

An ungodly student, put on the intellectual race-course alongside of his classmates, soon becomes ambitious and jealous. At first, he will probably have some sense of this sin; but he soon loses this sense, and passes on as if unconscious of any sin. What is this but a revelation of God's displeasure?

Again, this wrath against those who hold back the truth in unrighteousness, is abundantly revealed in God's word. Think of what Christ said to the hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees -- "Fill ye up, then, the measure of your fathers." What did He mean by that? Their fathers had filled their cup of sin till God could bear with them no longer, and then He filled up His cup of wrath and poured it forth on the nation, and "there was no remedy." So Christ intimates it shall be with the Scribes and Pharisees. And what is this but to reveal His wrath against them for holding back the truth through unrighteousness?

Again, He lets such sinners die in their sins. Observe how, step by step, God gave them one revelation after another of His wrath against their sin;

remorse, moral blindness, decay of moral sensibility, and the plain assertions of His word. All these failing, He gives them up to some strong delusion that they may believe a lie. God Himself says -- "For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." It is painfully instructive to study the workings of modern delusions, especially spiritualism; to notice how it has come in following the track of those great revivals that blessed our country a few years since. Do not I know scores of persons who passed through those revivals unblessed, and now they are mad with this delusion? They saw the glory of God in those scenes of revival power; but they turned away, and now they are mad on their idols, and crazy under their delusions. God has given them up to die in their sins, and it will be an awful death! Draw near them gently, and ask a few kind questions; you will soon see that they make no just moral discriminations. All is dark which needs to be light, ere they can find the gate of life.

REMARKS.

1. You may notice the exact difference between saints and sinners, including among sinners all professors of religion who are not in an obedient state of mind. The exact difference is this; saints have adopted Gods' will as their law of activity, the rule that shall govern all their life and all their heart. You reveal to them God's will; this settles all further controversy. The very opposite of this is true of the sinner. With him, the fact of God's supposed will has no such influence at all; usually no influence of any sort, unless it be to excite his opposition. Again, the Christian, instead of restraining the influence of truth, acts up to His convictions. If the question of oughtness is settled, all is settled. Suppose I go to Dea. A. or Dea. B., and I say, "I want you to do a certain thing; I think you must give so much of your money to this object." He replies, "I don't know about that, my money costs me great labor and pains." But I resume and say -- "Let us look calmly at this question;" and then I proceed to show him that the thing I ask of him is beyond a doubt his duty to God and to man. He interposes at once, "You need not say another word; that is enough. If it is my duty to Christ and to His people, I ask no more." But the sinner is not moved so. He knows his duty beforehand, but he has long been regardless of its claims on him. You must appeal to his selfish interests if you would reach his heart. With the Christian, you need not appeal to his hopes or his fears. You only need show him his duty to God. The sinner you can hope to move only by appeals to his

interests. The reason of this is that his adopted course of life is to serve his own interests, nothing higher.

2. With sinners, the question of religion is one of loss and gain. But with Christians, it is only a question of right and duty towards God. This makes truth to him all important, and duty imperative. But the sinner only asks, "What shall I gain?" or "What shall I lose?" It is wholly a question of danger. Indeed so true is this that ministers often assume that the only availing motive with a sinner must be an appeal to his hopes and fears. They have mostly dropped out the consideration of right as between the sinner and God. They seem to have forgotten that so far forth as they stop short of the idea of right and appeal only to the sinner's selfishness, their influence tends to make spurious converts. For if men enter upon the Christian life only for gain in the line of their hopes and fears, you must keep up the influence of these considerations, and must expect to work upon these only. That is, you must expect to have selfish Christians and a selfish church. If you say to them, "This is your duty," they will reply -- "What have we ever cared for duty? We were never converted to the doctrine of doing our duty. We became Christians at all, only for the sake of promoting our own interests, and we have nothing to do in the Christian life on any other motive."

Now observe, they may modify this language a little if it seems too repugnant to the general convictions of decent people; but none the less is this their real meaning. They modify its language only on the same general principle of making everything subservient to self.

Again, we see how great a mistake is made by those selfish Christians who say -- "Am I not honest towards my fellow-men? And is not this a proof of piety?"

What do you mean by "honest?" Are you really honest towards God? Do you regard God's rights as much as you wish Him to regard yours? But perhaps you ask, as many do; What is my crime? I answer -- Is it not enough for you to do nothing -- really nothing towards obedience to God? Is it not something serious that you refuse to do God's will and hold back the claims of His truth? What's the use of talking about your morality while you disregard the greatest of all moral claims and obligations -- those that bind you to love and obey God? What can it avail you to say perpetually -- Am I not moral and decent towards men?

Why is God not satisfied with this?

3. Ye who think ye are almost as good as Christians; in fact it is much nearer the truth to say that you are almost as bad as devils! Indeed you are fully as bad, save that you do not know as much, and therefore cannot be so wicked. You say -- "We are kind to each other." So are devils. Their common purpose to war against God compels them to act in concert. They went in concert into the man possessed with a legion of devils as we learn in the gospel history. Very likely they are as kind towards each other in their league against God and goodness, as you are towards your neighbors. So that selfish men have small ground to compliment themselves on being kind and good to each other, while they withstand God, since in both these respects, they are only like devils in hell.

And now, my impenitent hearers -- what do you say? Putting your conduct towards God into plain language, it would run thus; "Thou, Lord, callest on me to repent; I shall refuse. Thou dost strive to enforce my obligation to repent by various truths; I hold back those truths from their legitimate influence on my mind. Thou doest insist on my submission to Thy authority; I shall do no such thing."

This, you will see, is only translating your current life and bearing towards God, into plain words. If you were really to lift your face toward heaven and utter these words, it would be blasphemy. What do you think of it now? Do you not admit and often assert that actions speak louder than words? Do they not also speak more truthfully?

To those of you who are business men, let me make this appeal. What would you think of men who should treat you as you treat God? You take your account to your customer and you say to him; this account, sir, has been lying a long time past due; will you be so good as to settle it? You cannot deny that it is a fair account of value received, and I understand you have abundant means to pay it. He very coldly refuses. You suggest the propriety of his giving some reasons for this refusal; and he tells you it is a fine time to get large interest on his money, and he therefore finds it more profitable to loan it out than to pay his debts. That is all. He is only selfish; all there is of it is simply this, that he cares for his own interests supremely, and cares little or nothing for yours when the two classes of interests -- his and yours, come into competition.

When you shall treat God as well as you want your creditors to treat you, then you may hold up your head as, so far, an honest man. But so long as you do the very thing towards God which you condemn as infinitely mean from your

fellow-men towards yourself, you have little ground for self-complacent pride.

All this would be true and forcible even if God were no greater, no better, and had no higher and no more sacred rights than your own; how much more then are they weighty beyond expression, by how much God is greater, better, and holier than mortals!

[Back to Top](#)

On Confessing and Being Cleansed From Sin

Lecture VII

December 23, 1857

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The connection in which this passage stands, is this -- "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

The first inquiry under our text is,

I. What is implied in "confessing our sins?"

II. Let us next consider what the text affirms upon the condition of true confession.

I. What is implied in "confessing our sins?"

1. Of course, it must mean something more than merely verbal confession. For,

"God abhors the sacrifice,
where not the heart is found."

A merely lip confession can be no other than an abomination to God.

2. It is plain that some do not confess to purpose, for they are not thereby cleansed from their sin. Their own life shows that they have not secured the fulfillment of this promise, and, therefore, we know they have not performed its condition.

3. Confession implies that we understand what our sin consists in. It is one of the most remarkable things in the history of human nature, that men can sit under the sound of the gospel, and yet never seem to understand what their sin consists in -- that it consists in refusing to do our duty to God.

Suppose one of these merchants here holds a claim against a man. He has often asked him to pay it. The man confesses the duty in words, but always denies it in practice. What will this merchant think of his customer? Is it not strange that this customer of his can pretend not to see wherein his own sin consists? This is sin. As Pollok says of the man wailing in eternal despair -- he hears ever and anon a voice as if it came down from the Light above --

"Ye knew your duty, but ye did it not."

4. So sin consists in a known and voluntary neglect to know and obey God, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Again, true confession implies that we cease from all known sin, of either omission, or commission. Also, that we cease from all excuses or apologies for sin. He who makes an honest confession does it under the heart-conviction that all sin is utterly wrong. Feeling this, he cannot say one word in excuse or apology for sinning.

5. It also recognizes our guilt, and not only for all want of outward conformity to God's law, but for all inward sin -- for all sins of the heart. The confession contemplates sin as against God, and, therefore, it makes no discrimination in favor of those that escape the human eye.

Again, to confess our sin rightly, recognizes this fact -- that, so far as we are not perfect before God, the fault is our own. Of course, this imports that God

requires of us perfection, and has proffered us such aid, that this command is in no sense unreasonable.

6. It implies, also, that we recognize our moral weakness as really our sin. Many people do not go so deep as this. Really, they assume that some how or other, this moral weakness is their misfortune, and not their great sin. They ascribe it to Adam, and not to themselves. Few men will march straight up to the idea that they are to blame for their spiritual weakness. They try to get around it. But all real and right confession implies that we admit this sin to be our own, and not Adam's. It leaves to Adam to bear his own sin, but does not try to shirk its own blameworthiness, by passing it over upon the father of the race.

Notice how the Bible speaks of this moral weakness. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" This is, indeed, a very strong representation of the moral weakness of our race; but what does it say? Does Jeremiah here drop a hint that this weakness comes from Adam, and that, considered as a sin, it is to be accounted as only Adam's? Hear what he says - "Then shall they who are accustomed to do evil, learn to do well." The difficulty is, he began wrong and has kept on wrong. By his own acts, this course of wrong-doing has become confirmed. And is not this his own fault? To be sure it is. He has not only tied his own hands himself, but he has kept them tied of his own free will.

7. A proper confession of sin implies, therefore, that we recognize the great extent of our moral debility, and feel that it is our own fault. The question is not precisely whether, at the point of final struggle, we can withstand the influence of motives, temptations; but whether we cannot -- at a point further back -- control the state of mind which gives motives to sin their great power. What does the wife complain of in her drunken husband? Not merely that, in the final conflict, he yields to temptation and is overcome; but she complains of that state of mind in which he refuses to become temperate, and in which -- in the cool hour when no temptation is upon him, he gives himself up to strong drink, and will not try to deliver himself from his powerful foe.

So of all sinners. God says of them -- "They will not frame their doings to return to the Lord their God, because the spirit of whoredom is in the midst of them, and they have not known the Lord."

The great difficulty with sinners lies in their self-justifying spirit. They will not confess their sins. They have never in heart given up their sins, and thrown themselves in desperation on that strong Arm that is able to save them to the uttermost.

Nothing is plainer than this -- that, if sinners would be saved, they must renounce all their sins -- must go to the bottom, and make a clean break before the Lord, and before men too, so far forth as their sin affects their fellow-men.

8. Many are so taken up with the sins of others, they have no time to think of confessing their own. But, confessing to purpose implies that you really renounce your own sin, wholly, and confess it to all who have a personal interest or concern in it.

II. Let us next consider what the text affirms upon the condition of true confession.

This is it: "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This may be regarded as a promise; but it really is an explicit assertion. Let us see what it affirms.

1. "He is faithful" to forgive us our sins -- implies that He has promised, and will surely perform, His word is pledged, and He cannot fail to perform it. And is also "just to forgive" -- implying that performance is now a matter of justice in the sense of veracity -- fidelity in the performance of what He has promised. He adds -- and "to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This is just what we want.

2. Our great unrighteousness is our ruin. The absence of righteousness is essentially the same as the moral weakness of the soul. This moral weakness is so great, that, without God's gracious aid, no one will ever repent. You know how men sometimes fall under the dominion of some strong appetite, like that for alcohol, or opium, or tobacco, and become so fearfully enslaved and subjected to this appetite, that their utmost efforts to free themselves seem only like the struggles of an infant against some gigantic power. Many such cases you have seen -- illustrative of the very nature of all sin. Now the glorious grace of God which cleanseth from all unrighteousness and from all want of conformity to God's will, is the very

thing we need.

How many of you have felt this difficulty. You have practically so little power to stand before temptation that you find yourselves almost perpetually overcome. If tempted to anger, you give way before the temptation. Or if tempted to peevishness, or to lust, you are easily overcome. This experience of moral weakness is but too painfully familiar to your whole history. You, then, ought to understand and appreciate the blessedness of a gospel which cleanseth from all unrighteousness.

Perhaps most of you cannot remember when you first repelled the monitions of conscience. Somewhere far back, in the memory of your moral existence, when your mother admonished you of duty, or your Sabbath school teacher gave you some instruction as to your duty to God, or to man, you felt some impressions of duty, and some monitions of conscience, but you did not yield to their demands. Ah, that was a momentous hour! How fearful the mischief which you did to your own moral nature by that first distinct resistance to the conviction of duty! Then you entered on a career of sin and hardness of heart, which has naturally led you on from bad to worse ever since. It may be that some of you are so hardened that you can go on shamelessly in sin, and care no more for the monitions of conscience than you do for the idle wind. Is not this a fearful state?

Those of you who have never submitted your will to God's will must say, if you were to speak the whole truth -- "When I see my duty, I do not perform it; I cannot tell why not; I can give no account, but I know I always fail; and however it is to be accounted for, such is the fact." True, this is the real fact, whether you frankly confess it, or whether you conceal and evade it.

Those of you who attempt to begin to turn to the Lord find yourselves amazingly weak. The iron habits of years are not broken up without a fearful struggle.

Do you not say, when you speak out what you feel -- "I have no tendencies towards God; all my tendencies are towards sinning." You have observed this. Most of you have felt it. You have often dwelt on your case in precisely this strain of thought; saying, "I am dead in sin; whatever may be the reason of it, I am not prepared for heaven, and I dare not go to heaven, for the spirit of obedience to God is not in me." Such is your deplorable case.

3. Ye who have submitted to God feel the need of salvation deep and thorough. Sometimes, your experience compels you to exclaim, "I need a salvation omnipotent in its moral force; else I cannot stand." All this decay of moral vigor -- this collapse in the moral system -- this is what you need to overcome, and grace for this result is precisely the thing your case requires. You try to pray, but heart and language fail you! Ah, this sinking away from God -- this perpetual gravitation earthward and sinward -- how terrible! You must be delivered from this; and nothing else can deliver you short of this moral cleansing which is provided in the blessed gospel.

4. The thing you need is that the Holy Spirit should become a moral power in your soul, antagonistic to the moral forces there that urge you towards sinning. This is the antidote of God's own providing.

This death in sin is complete. Unless there be some supernatural power to counteract it, all your efforts will be vain -- vain essentially for the reason that you are not disposed to make efforts to any practical purpose. When you receive this divine power to help, you will understand what this means -- "I am the resurrection and the life." To have this resurrection power and life of Christ in you, working in you to do all His will -- this is the cleansing which the gospel promises, and which you so greatly need. When you experience it, you will find it a most effectual influence. Then you will know how blessed it is to have a supernatural and ever-present power at hand on which you may perpetually lean. Unless this power takes possession of the soul, nothing effectual will be done. How often does it happen that "the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not." Do you understand this?

REMARKS.

1. We have before us now precisely the true mission of Christ. The text speaks particularly of Jesus Christ, inasmuch as it is said that "His blood cleanseth us from all sin." The entire work He does for us is composed of two parts; forgiveness and moral cleansing. Through His blood shed for us, He can forgive; through His Spirit, sent down to dwell in our souls, He can cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The atonement is one part of this great work, naturally first in order. This is finished. This work is wrought out and complete, and needs not to be done again. And Jesus has risen from the grave and ascended on high to great power and glory that He may accomplish the remaining part of this work -- sending His Spirit down to convince of sin and to cleanse the soul from its

pollutions.

2. If Christ be really divine, then He is doubtless able to do this work in both of its great departments. Being truly divine, His death, we readily see, must make an ample atonement; and it is equally clear, that if He be truly divine, there can be no limit to His power to save the soul from sin. But if He is nothing but a man, then this claim to be able to save to the uttermost, it is all nonsense! Nothing can be so absurd! What a blasphemer He is! But if He be truly divine, then this is just what may be expected of Him. A leading Unitarian of New England, on learning our views of sanctification, and being informed of the objections raised against these views in many quarters, said -- "What is the ground of these objections, raised by those who are called Orthodox, against your views of sanctification? If the orthodox views of Christ are correct, and He is truly divine, then this result, as held by Oberlin men, is just what ought to be expected. A Savior really divine ought to be able not only to pardon but to cleanse from sin. If He were human only, then it might ever remain true that "no mere man, either of himself, or by any grace received in this life, can wholly keep the commandments of God, but must daily break them in thought, word, and deed. Every thing seems to turn on the question of His true divinity. And I marvel how men who hold to this divinity, can yet object against His having such power to save."

3. The gross inconsistency of holding Christ's divinity and rejecting His ability or His willingness to save, is the great stumblingblock of the world. It is the more glaring because the scriptures announce His mission in precisely this language -- "Thou shalt call His name Jesus (Savior) for He shall save His people from their sins." Matthew 1:22

4. The self-excusing spirit is the ruin of the race. It begins by throwing back the guilt of all human transgressions upon Adam. What monstrous wickedness! It can be shown that this moral weakness can be only voluntary, and can lie nowhere save in man's moral nature -- in that nature where everything is free and voluntary.

Take the case of a drunkard, and admit, if you please, that he commenced moral agency with a strong bias in his constitution towards strong drink. But this bias is not his sin -- is not in itself sin at all. It may become an occasion of sinning, but it is not itself sin. If he resists firmly, he is the more virtuous for that constitutional tendency, and can by no means be deemed the more sinful. Thus

there are some young men who resist all the temptations incident to city life, and who may be trusted even in a bank, or anywhere else. The more temptation they withstand, the greater their virtue. It may be true of some of you that you have inherited tendencies to temptation: but this is not sin. It may occasion temptation; but it does not necessitate sin. Take the case of Paul's thorn in the flesh. This was manifestly in some form a temptation and an occasion to sin. No matter what it was; we know not and cannot know what it was; but it did not result in moral weakness -- did not paralyze his moral strength; but rather made him strong, because it emptied him of himself and cast him wholly on Christ for strength.

5. Many overlook the real nature of their sin, do not see wherein it lies, and hence have never confessed it. Often like a man enslaved to opium or tobacco, they will not see that this very enslavement is their sin, and therefore they do not confess and find mercy.

You may see also why the church is not sanctified. Many in the church have never yielded the great controversy with God -- have never taken sides with God against themselves and against all their own sin. Many years ago in preaching to an Old School church and congregation on "making to themselves a new heart," I showed them that the sinner first made his own heart wicked, then kept it wicked, and therefore was under perpetual and growing obligation to make to himself a new heart. This threw them into great agitation. They had heard ever so much about inability, dependence, the work of the Spirit, &c., &c., but had never heard this truth. Consequently, they came into great excitement. While I was yet preaching, many rose to their feet, startled by such things as God helped me to say. The minister who sat in the desk behind me, kept moving from one end of the seat to the other in the greatest excitement; you might hear him breathe hard under so much intense emotion. It was not that he dissented from the doctrine preached, but he felt so intensely anxious for the effect it might have on the people. As we came down and walked along through the aisles, one woman cried out to the minister -- What do you think of that? "Worth five hundred dollars," said he. "Then you have never preached the gospel to us," said she, to which he replied, "Very true, I have not."

To another woman there who found fault with this doctrine, I said -- "You would make it out that God ought to provide an atonement as a thing of simple justice, and ought to give to men the Holy Ghost, and that no man has done wrong by

sinning against God." True, said she, I have always thought that God ought to help sinners since they cannot help themselves.

Thus it is that men who lay their sin on Adam and not on themselves, and on God but not on themselves, never confess to any purpose. Their pretended confession is no confession at all. They deny the very foundation of the gospel.

6. You, sinners here, perhaps do not think you are so wicked, as you are told you are here. You try to think that this great sin of yours is not your fault. Hence you do not confess and you get no peace.

Many of you have held the truth in theory, but you reject it in practice. Have you not seen your own sin so clearly that it seemed to you utterly loathsome, and you could spew it out of your mouth -- even as a drunkard abhors himself and knows that this horrible weakness which lets him sink down into sottishness, is the very thing he ought to confess as his sin and shame, and ought to abhor?

7. True Christians do find a power not their own, really cleansing, sustaining, and making them clean. This is indeed a rich and blessed experience.

Ye who are conscious of not being cleansed, do ye not feel your need of a power not your own? You find yourself exceedingly weak and easily overcome. Do you not need a far different experience? There is a far higher life than this you are living. To illustrate this truth, let me refer to a lady in Rochester who has for many years known much of the indwelling power of Christ. Two years since she suffered a great physical affliction which subjected her to severe bodily suffering, so great and so fearful that one could not bear to look at her in her extreme paroxysms of pain. Yet under this extremest suffering, she was so blessed and so happy, she often said she would not have one feature in her case otherwise than God should order it in one single point. Afterward however, she thought she fell into sin. Consequently she became fearfully dejected, and often said -- "Can I ever be forgiven?"

I saw her while in this state of mind and said to her -- "Are you aware that your very question implies the greatest unkindness towards your Savior? Suppose it lay between you and your husband. Suppose you have in one case spoken unkindly of him; and now you feel this very questioning as to him. You cannot see how he can ever forgive you. How would this affect his feelings? What would he say? How would he grieve over this unbelief of his wife!" She had not

seen how this doubting had wronged Christ. It had not occurred to her that this was really "the unkindest cut of all." She did not see it till it was mentioned; then she saw that the greatest sin she had to confess was this very sin of doubting Christ's love and His readiness to forgive.

Is not here a fountain opened? Are not its waters just such as you perpetually need? Suppose there were somewhere an artesian well, out of which gushed up a constant and mighty stream; and suppose further that it is found to have a power to cleanse from all sin. Absolutely, whoever comes and drinks of this water is cleansed from his iniquities. How far would you go to reach this well and to drink from these waters? You, brother, and you, sister, how far would you go for these waters? Do you not say -- If I knew they actually had this healing virtue, and would make everyone strong as with Christ's own power, how readily would I go to Asia, or to the ends of the earth! "Ah, said a young man, I was straining to reach this water; I had been struggling and pressing to get to it -- and lo, in a moment, I opened my eyes and it is here -- at my feet; I am standing in it and it flows like a river all around about me." So, many see the gospel when their spiritual eye is opened.

The thing you need is to confess and renounce your sin, and then come to Christ and cast yourself on Him for life.

Sinner, is there not hope for you in Jesus? Will you really come to Him? See here is your help. Not in Asia, nor in Africa; not in some unknown land; but here, in Christ who is here to save. "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart -- the word of faith which we preach."

Some of you have feared that if you became Christians, you could not stand. Never fear, but come, and cast yourself on Jesus and trust Him to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

O this glorious idea -- being cleansed from all unrighteousness -- putting from us all this moral weakness which has crippled us so long!

Brethren, what is the reason we should not right here do this very thing? Why not come out at once and freely say -- I do confess; I abhor myself for my sins; I have been long time in bondage; but here the rock is smitten, and while the waters of salvation flow, let me at least step in and be healed!

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE VII). Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians* (LECTURE XII).

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians* (LECTURE I).

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE LXXVI).

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their

sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of

truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

End of the 1857 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1858
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Lecture I. [The Doom Of Those Who Neglect The Great Salvation](#)

Lecture II. [The Treasure And The Pearl](#)

Lecture III. [The Self-Righteous Sinner Doomed To Sorrow](#)

Lecture IV. [Sufficient Grace](#)

Lecture V. [On Following Christ](#)

Lecture VI. [Christian Consciousness, a Witness For God](#)

Lecture VII. [God's Love To Us](#)

Lectures VIII. - X. [The Blessedness Of The Merciful- No. 1](#)
[Blessedness Of The Pure In Heart- No. 2](#)
[Blessed Are The Persecuted- No. 3](#)

Lecture XI. [On Refuges Of Lies](#)

Lecture XII. [God's Wrath Against Those Who Withstand His Truth](#)

Lecture XIII. [Abiding In Christ And Not Sinning](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

The Doom Of Those Who Neglect The Great Salvation

Lecture I

January 20, 1858

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Hebrews 2:3: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

Escape what? What can Universalists say to such a question as this? They whose first doctrine proclaims that there can be no danger -- what will they say to this solemn question and its startling assumption of peril from which there shall be no escape? How shall we escape? -- says the inspired author -- as if he would imply most strongly that there can be no escape to those who neglect this great salvation.

Salvation; -- the very term imports safety or deliverance from great impending evil. If there be no such evil, there is then no meaning to this term -- no real salvation.

I. The salvation published in the gospel; and the greatness of its Author and Revealer.

II. The greatness of this salvation in many other points of view.

III. The language used in the Bible to describe the sinner's future woe is very terrible.

IV. What is to be regarded as fatal neglect?

V. What is effectual attention?

I. The writer is speaking of the salvation published in the gospel; and the

idea that immediately suggested its greatness is the greatness of its Author and Revealer.

1. It is because Jesus Christ by whom this gospel came is so great, compared with angels, that the writer conceives of this salvation as pre-eminently great and glorious.

2. This second chapter is closely connected with the first. The train of thought reverts to the fact that God had anciently spoken to their fathers by the prophets; but in these last days, by His Son -- the very brightness of His own glory -- the Upholder of all things, shown all through the Bible to be higher than angels, through whose ministrations also, the Divine word had sometimes come to mortals. Now then, since the word so revealed by angels, carried with it the sternest authority, and every sort of transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall men escape who neglect a salvation so great that even God's glorious Son is sent from heaven to earth to reveal it! He, the Exalted Son, came down to create and reveal this salvation; He wrought it out in death, confirming His divine mission while He lived, by miracles; must it not, then be a matter of supreme importance?

II. Yet the Bible has not left us to infer its greatness from the glory of its Author alone; it presents to us the greatness of this salvation in many other points of view.

1. It is great in its very nature. It is salvation from death in sin.

Let men talk and gainsay as they will, this one great fact is given us by human consciousness -- that men are dead in sin. Every man knows this. We all know that apart from God's quickening Spirit, we have no heart to love God. Each sinner knows that, whatever may be his power as a mortal agent, yet, left to himself, there is in him a moral weakness that effectually shuts him off from salvation, save as God interposes with efficient help. Hence the salvation that meets him in this weakness and turns him effectually to love and to please God, must be intrinsically great.

2. Again, it is great because it delivers from endless sinning and suffering.

Just think of that: endless suffering. How long could you bear even the slightest degree of pain -- supposing it to continue without intermission?

How long ere you would find it unendurable? Experiments in this matter often surprise us -- such for example as the incessant fall of single drops of water upon the head -- a kind of torture sometimes inflicted on slaves. The first drops are scarcely noticed; but ere long the pain becomes excruciating, and ultimately unendurable.

Just think of any kind of suffering which goes on ever increasing! Suppose it to increase constantly for one year; would you not think this to be awful? Suppose it to increase without remission for one hundred years -- can you estimate the fearful amount? What then must it be if it goes on increasing forever!

3. It matters not how rapid or how slow this increase -- the amount, if its duration be eternal, must be ineffably appalling! Nor does it matter much how great or how little the degree at the outset; suppose it ever so small, yet eternal growth must make it beyond measure appalling! You may suppose the amount of woe endured to be represented by one drop for the first thousand years; yet let it increase for the next thousand, and yet more for the next, and ere eternity shall have rolled away, the amount will be an ocean! It would take a great while to fill up such an ocean as the Atlantic by giving it one drop in each thousand years -- yet time would fill it; it would take yet longer to fill the Pacific at the same rate -- but time would suffice to fill it; more time would fill up the Indian ocean; more yet would cover this globe; more would fill all the vast space between us and the fixed stars; but even this lapse of time would not exhaust eternity. It would not even begin to measure eternal duration! How fearful then must be that woe which knows no limit save eternity!

4. Some deny the sufferings of the wicked to be penal inflictions, and insist that they are only the natural consequence of sinning. I shall not stop now to enter upon any argument on this point; but I ask, what difference does that make as to the amount or endurableness of eternal woe? Penal or not penal, the Bible represents it as eternal, and its very nature shows that it must be forever increasing; how then can it be essentially lessened by the question whether it be or be not penal infliction? Whether God has so constituted all moral agents that their sin -- allowed to work out its legitimate results -- will entail misery enough to answer all those fearful descriptions given us in the Bible, or whether in addition to all that misery,

God inflicts yet more, penally, and this enlarged amount makes up the eternal doom denounced on the finally wicked, it surely can be of small consequence to decide, so far forth as amount of suffering is concerned.

5. Some deny that the cause of this suffering is material fire. They may even scoff at this and think that by so doing, they have extinguished the flames of hell, and have thus annihilated all future punishment. How vain! Can a sinner's scoff frustrate the Almighty? Did the Almighty God ever lack means to execute His word? What matters is whether the immediate agent in the sinner's sufferings be fire or something else of which fire is the fittest emblem? Can your scoffs make it any the less fearful?

This fearful woe is the fruit of sinning; and is therefore inevitable, save as you desist from sinning while yet mercy may be found. Once in hell, you will know that, while you continue to sin, you must continue to suffer.

III. The language used in the Bible to describe the sinner's future woe is very terrible.

1. We may call it figurative. I suppose those germs to be figures of speech, but I cannot tell. I have never been there. If anyone here has been, let him speak.

2. It certainly may be literal fire. No one of us can certainly know that it is not. It must be something equal to fire; for we cannot suppose that God would deceive us. Whoever else may speak extravagantly, God never does! He never puts forth great swelling words of vanity -- sounding much, but meaning little. Take it then which way you please, it is an awful revelation - - to die in your sins; to go away into a furnace of fire -- to be among those, the smoke of whose torment ascendeth up forever and ever! How strikingly is this doom symbolized in the smoke of those doomed cities of the plain, "set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire!" Their "smoke ascended as the smoke of a great furnace." Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw it! What sort of a night did he spend after that appalling scene? He had risen early -- had made his way through the morning dew to the hill-top overlooking Sodom, and then he saw the smoke of those doomed cities ascending to heaven. So may the Christian parent perhaps wend his way to the hill-tops of the heavenly city and look over into the great pit, where the ungodly weep and wail forevermore! Shall it be that

any of your unsaved children will be deep in that pit of woe?

3. Observe again, this salvation is not merely negative -- a salvation from sin and from suffering: it has also a positive side. On this positive side, it includes perfect holiness and endless blessedness. It is not only deliverance from never-ending and ever-accumulating woe; it is also endless bliss -- exceeding in both kind and degree, all we can conceive in this life. This is not the world to realize the full bliss of unalloyed purity. There will be sin around us; there will yet be some sad traces of it within us. Yet who of us does not sometimes catch a distinct view of that purity and blessedness which we know reigns in heaven? Most blessed views there are, yet no doubt dim and weak, compared with the great reality. When that bliss shall be perfect -- when nothing more is left us to desire, but every desire of our soul is filled to its utmost capacity, and we shall have the full assurance that this blessedness must increase with the expansion of our powers and with our advance in knowledge as we gaze with ever growing interest into the works of the great God; this will be heaven! All this is only one side -- the positive side of that blessedness which comes with this great salvation.

Now set yourselves to balance these two things one against the other; an ever-growing misery and an ever-growing blessedness. Find some measuring line by which you can compare them.

You may recall the figure I have more than once mentioned here. An old writer says -- Suppose a little bird is set to remove this globe by taking from it one grain of sand at a time, and to come only once in a thousand years. She takes her first grain and away she flies on her long and weary course, and long, long, are the days ere she returns again. It will doubtless seem to many as if she never would return; but when a thousand years have rolled away, she comes panting back for one more grain of sand -- and this globe is again lessened by just one grain of its almost countless sands. So the work goes on. So eternity wears away -- only it does not exhaust itself a particle. That little bird will one day have finished her task and the last sand will have been taken away, but even then eternity will have only begun. Its sands are never to be exhausted. One would suppose that the angels would become so old, so hoary with the weight of centuries, and every being so old, they would be weary of life, but this supposing only shows that we are judging of the effects of time in that eternal state by its observed effect in this transient

world. But we fail to consider that God made this world for a transient life -- that for one that shall never pass away.

Taking up again our figure of the little bird removing the sands of our globe, we may extend it, and suppose that after she had finished this world, she takes up successfully the other planets in our system -- Mercury, and Nevis, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and Herschel, each and all on the same law -- one grain each thousand years, and when these are all exhausted, then the sun, and then each of the fixed stars; until the hundreds of thousands of those stupendous orbs are all removed and gone. But even then eternity is not exhausted. We have not yet even an approximation towards its end. End? There is no end! That poor old bird makes progress. Though exceedingly slow, she will one day have done her appointed task. But she will not even then have come any nearer to the end of eternity! Eternity! Who can compute it? No finite mind; and yet this idea is not fiction, but sober fact. There is no possible room for mistake -- no ground for doubt.

Moreover, no truth can be more entirely and intensely practical than this. Everyone of us here -- every one of all our families, every child -- all these students -- are included. It concerns us all. Before us, each and all, lies this eternal state of our being. We are all to live in this eternal state. There awaits us there either woe or bliss, without measure and beyond all our powers of computation. If woe, it will be greater than all finite minds can conceive. Suppose all the minds ever created were to devote their powers to compute this suffering -- to find some adequate measure that shall duly represent it; alas, they could not even begin! Neither could they any better find measures to contain the bliss on the other hand, of those who are truly the children of God. All the most expressive language of our race would say -- It is not in me to measure infinite bliss or infinite woe; all the figures within the grasp of all created imaginations would fade away before the stupendous undertaking! Yet this infinite bliss and endless woe are the plain teaching of the Bible, and are in harmony with the decisive affirmations of the human reason. We know, that if we continue in sin, the misery must come upon us; - - if we live and die in holiness, the bliss will come.

And is this the theme, and are these the great facts which these young men may be abroad to the ends of the world and proclaim to every creature, and which these young women also may speak of everywhere in the society

where they move? Truly they have a glorious and sublime message to bear!

Again, suppose the joy resulting from this salvation to be a mild form of peace and quiet of soul. We may suppose this, although we cannot forget that the Bible represents it as being a "joy unspeakable and full of glory;" but suppose it were only a mild quiet joy. Even then an eternal accumulation of it -- a prolongation of it during eternal ages, considering also that naturally it must forever increase -- will amount to an infinite joy. Indeed it matters little how small the unit with which you start, yet let there be given an eternal duration, coupled with ceaseless growth and increase, and how vast the amount!

4. According to the Bible, this blessedness of the holy is the full fruition of God's love. Hence the bliss which it involves can be nothing short of infinite. It can have no limit. A really comprehensive view of what it will be would be overpowering. Who of you could bear the view of your future selves? Could you who are saints? Suppose you could see yourselves as you will exist ten thousand years hence. Suppose you were for a moment endowed with the power to penetrate the future and see yourself as you will be before the throne of God. If you were not apprised that it is yourself, you might fall down and worship!

5. Or suppose the wicked could see their future selves as they will be ten thousand years hence -- could see how full of torment they will be, and what unutterable woes their souls shall bear there; could they endure the sight?

And here does some one say -- How very extravagant you are! Extravagant? Nothing can be farther from the truth than to hold these views to be extravagant. For, grant only immortality, and all that I have said must follow of necessity. Let it be admitted that the soul exists forever, and not a word that I have said is too much. Indeed, when you carry out that great fact to its legitimate results under the moral government of God, all these descriptions seem exceedingly flat -- they fall so very far short of the truth.

6. In the next place let it be considered that neglect of this great salvation is fatal. So our text most emphatically implies -- so the Bible often elsewhere most unqualifiedly affirms. No sinner, therefore, need go about to weary himself to commit iniquity -- as if he would fain make sure his doom; for

mere neglect is fatal. What more should he want?

IV. But let us enquire -- What is to be regarded as fatal neglect?

For all have at some time been guilty of some neglect.

V. We shall reach the true answer to our question by asking another; viz. -- What is effectual attention?

Plainly that and only that which ensures gospel repentance and faith in Christ. Only that which ensures personal holiness and thus, final salvation. That is therefore effectual attention which arouses the soul thoroughly to take hold of Jesus Christ as the offered Savior. To fall short of this is fatal neglect. You may have many good things about you -- may make many good resolves and hopeful efforts; yet failing in this main thing, you fail utterly.

REMARKS.

1. You need only be a little less than fully in earnest, and you will certainly fall short of salvation. You may have a good deal of feeling and a hopeful earnestness, but if you are only less than fully in earnest, you will surely fail. The work will not be done. You are guilty of fatal neglect, for you have never taken the decisive step. Who of you is he that is a little less than fully in earnest? You are the one who will weary yourself for nought and in vain. You must certainly fall short of salvation.

2. It must be great folly to do anything short of effectual effort. Many are just enough in earnest to deceive themselves. They pay just enough attention to this subject to get hold of it wrong, and do only just enough to fall short of salvation, and go down to death with a lie in their right hand. If they were to stay away from all worship; it would shock them. Now, they go to the assemblies of God's people and do many things hopeful; but after all, they fall short of entering in at the door into Christ's fold. What folly is this! Why should any of you do this foolish thing? This doing only just enough to deceive yourself and others, is the very course to please Satan. Nothing else could so completely serve his ends. He knows very well that where the gospel is generally understood, he must not preach infidelity openly, not Universalism, nor Atheism. Neither would do. But if he can just keep you along, doing little less than enough, he is sure of his man. He wants to see you holding fast to a false hope. Then he knows you are the greatest possible stumbling-block, and are doing the utmost you can to ruin the

souls of men.

3. This salvation is life's great work. If not made such, it had best be left alone. To put it in any other relation is worse than nothing. If you make it second to anything else, your course will surely be ineffectual -- a lie, a delusion, a damnation!

Are you giving your attention effectually to this great subject? Who of you are? Have you this testimony in your own conscience, that you seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness? And have you become acquainted with Christ? Do you know Him as your Life and your Hope? Have you the joy and the peace of believing? Can you give to yourself and to others a really satisfactory reason for the hope that is in you?

This is life's great work -- the great work of earth; and now, in whom of you is it effectually begun? You cannot do it at all without a thorough and right beginning. I am jealous of some of you that you have not begun right -- that you have mistaken conviction for conversion. Like some of Bunyan's characters, I fear you have clambered over the wall into the palace, and did not come in by the gate. Do you ask me why I fear this of you? I will answer only by asking a question back. Don't you think I have reason to fear it? Have you the consciousness of being pure in heart, and of growing purer? Do you plan everything with reference to this great work of salvation? What are the ways of life that you have marked out for yourself? And on what principle have you shaped them? On what subjects are you most sensitive? What most thoroughly awakens your sensibility? If there is a prayer-meeting to pray for the salvation of sinners, are you there? Is your heart there?

4. It is infinite folly to make the matter of personal salvation, only a secondary matter; for to do so is only to neglect it after all. Unless it has your whole heart, you virtually neglect it, for nothing less than your whole heart is the devotion due. To give it less than your whole heart is truly to insult God, and to insult the subject of salvation.

What shall we think of those who seem never to make any progress at all? Is it not very plain that they give much less than their whole hearts to this matter? It is most certain that if they gave their whole hearts intelligently to it, they would make progress -- would speedily find their way to Christ. To make no progress is therefore a decisive indication of having no real heart in this pursuit. How can

such escape, seeing they neglect so great salvation?

[Back to Top](#)

The Treasure And The Pearl

Lecture II

March 31, 1858

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 13:44-46: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof, goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man, seeking goodly pearls; who, when he hath found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it."

Here we have two parables to illustrate manifestly one idea. It first compares the kingdom of heaven to treasure hid in a field, which a man, having found, sells all he has and buys it. The second gives us the case of a merchant-man seeking choice pearls, who, having found one of very great value, sells all he has and buys it.

What do this treasure and this pearl represent?

Jesus Christ, beyond a doubt. The parables are intended to show how it is in the kingdom of God. When Christ is really found, He charms the soul away from every thing else.

I. What is implied in finding Christ, this great treasure?

II. What are the conditions under which Christ may be thus seen and found?

III. To notice, in greater detail, the results of thus finding Christ.

I. Here we must enquire first -- What is implied in finding Christ, this great treasure?

1. It is plain that the very idea of finding a treasure and being appropriately affected thereby, implies that the finder appreciates its value. Applying this obvious fact to the finding of Christ, it is plain that men may learn something about Him in the merely speculative sense, and be none the wiser or richer, for they may, in their hearts, reject Him, despite of such knowledge. To find Christ, therefore, in the true sense, cannot be a merely historical finding, or a theological, or a doctrinal finding. In fact, men have often found Christ in these speculative senses, without being led thereby to sell all to buy Him. In the merely historical sense, Christ may be found without any such result, as these parables indicate.

Again, I remark -- In these parables, Christ teaches not only how things ought to be, but how they are -- the actual results of this finding. The repetition in a second parable, reveals His earnestness in inculcating these ideas.

2. It is plain that the finding of Christ in this sense is very much misunderstood. If, in fact, men who really find Christ, sell all that they have, it must be that this finding has taken strong hold of the soul.

3. It must imply a spiritual apprehension of Christ, reaching to His real nature. The mind must apprehend Him as more than a mere man who lived, died, and went to heaven. It must require something more than these views of Christ, to produce the results given in our text. He might have lived and died as the first and greatest of martyrs, and yet, even so, none of these emphatic results would follow. But, plainly, the soul must understand Christ in a truly spiritual sense -- in a sense that takes strong hold of the mind. The soul must perceive the infinite richness, fulness and glory of Christ. Else He will be only a root out of dry ground, and you will see in Him no form and comeliness.

II. Hence, it is essential that we enquire next -- What are the conditions under which Christ may be thus seen and found?

1. You must thoroughly know yourself and your spiritual wants.

Nobody is much interested in knowing a remedy for a disease which he neither feels nor fears. Suppose some great remedy were proclaimed among us, and we were all fully assured that it had performed many cures. The

testimony seems fair; but, if nobody is suffering from the disease, and if none of the people fear it, there will be very little interest taken in it. Perhaps you could not sell an ounce of it, or get the attention of the people to it for five minutes. There is no sense of want, in relation to that remedy.

So, unless people come to have a deep sense of their own spiritual disease, they will not seek after Christ, and, of course, will not find Him.

But, in order to understand ourselves, we must search ourselves most honestly, and be quite willing to weigh ourselves "in the balances of the sanctuary." If a man will not admit these convictions of personal guilt -- will not let the light of God's word shine in upon his heart, and even shine through his heart, there is no hope for him. Self-blinded to his sin and consequent danger, he must go down to eternal darkness. For God does not deal with us as with stocks, but as with thinking minds. He gives us His law as our rule, and asks us to study it and judge ourselves by its demands. Hence, unless one has made up his mind to know himself, and is willing both to take the trouble and to admit to his heart the whole truth -- there is no hope for him. It is amazing to see how much self-delusion there is, and how much lack of self-scrutiny.

2. Another condition of feeling one's need of Christ is that he consider deeply what the Bible teaches respecting himself. It is amazing to see how many read and hear the Bible over and over, and it never gets hold of their attention, and, consequently, they get no just conception of its greatest and most vital truths.

"Why did not you tell me of these things before?" said a young man who had heard the gospel, and who had the finest possible opportunity to know all about it, but who had ruled it out of his mind -- "Why did you not tell me there was such a hell?"

I did tell you; I have often told you and urged it upon your attention.

"No; but you did not get it before my mind."

The reason was, you would not attend to it.

Sometimes one will read a book in time of sermon, as if determined not to hear. Of course, he hears nothing to any purpose. Sometimes, one will sit

down to read a chapter in the Bible. A great many precious things are in it, but his eye slips over everything, for his heart is not there. He is not searching for truth and wisdom as worldly men dig for hid treasure. Is it strange that men fail to find the things of the gospel?

3. Again, another condition is prayer. There must be earnest, persevering prayer, and the reason why is, that you need God's light and wisdom to instruct you, and He gives only to those who humbly ask. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally; and it shall be given him. A unitarian lady, last winter, who had been strong in her position, finally consented to ask the ladies to pray with her and for her. I said to her -- You have not seen Christ. Ultimately, Christ came; and she exclaimed -- "O what revelations did Christ make of Himself to my soul!" By asking for prayer in her behalf, she had laid herself open to the truth, and to the Spirit who teaches truth.

4. Again, you must forbear to make your own experience a standard in such a sense that you will assume that what you have not known is not worth knowing. Beware of this! If you have not so found Christ that He is more to you than all things else, you ought to understand that you have made very little advance in piety if indeed you have made any at all. If you have not found Him spiritually, and so found Him that your soul is seized and held by Christ, you ought to assume that there is something more yet for you to know.

Take care, also, not to make uninspired men your standard, above the Bible. Don't get anybody's biography and read it as your standard; and especially not, the biography of one who has not known Christ. But read your Bible; and be assured there is no teaching so plain as that. If you will go right to the Bible, and get Christ to teach you, all will be well. Raise the enquiry on every passage. What does this mean? Go upon your knees and ask that divine light may shine upon your soul. I know a young man, who, if he found any difficult passage in reading the Bible, would go at once to no other fountain of wisdom save to Christ Himself. And you need not doubt that Christ will teach you if you really go to Him.

5. Moreover, you must beware of prejudice. You may be under the influence of many of which you are not aware. Avoid the posture of committal to any opinions which you have not surely learned from God's

word. Let no such committal stand in your way. I know not how many cases I found last winter of those whose minds had been confused with conflicting speculations about Christ. I often said -- You have been discussing these questions here all your life. A little practical experience of Christ as your Savior from sin, would be worth more than all the speculative wisdom you have attained. I became much interested in the case of one young man who had been abroad to complete his education, but who returned with his faith in Christ and Christianity sadly shaken. His Christian friends had been greatly distressed for him. During the winter, a friend of his wrote to him to come to Boston. When he came, this friend of his did not pretend that she could relieve him of his speculative difficulties, but she gave herself to prayer for him, and so did others. When I met him, it was easy to show him that every form of infidelity is self-annihilating. He admitted this, and finally said that the only two consistent schemes were, the common or orthodox one, and nihilism. I said to him -- Can you believe the latter? He answered, Yes. Then you can believe there is neither matter nor mind? Yes. One more question -- What is that which has this belief? What forms this conception? Is this done by a non-entity -- a mere thing? Is your own mind a mere negation?

Then I added -- Young man, I advise you to pray. You are not so great a man as you may suppose. It could not be amiss for you to humble yourself before God, beg His forgiveness, and implore His teaching. He did pray; and his friends also prayed -- till he came into the light of the gospel and found Christ.

III. I must now pass to notice, in greater detail, the results of thus finding Christ.

1. The text represents self-renunciation as one of them. He who finds the goodly pearl, sells all that he has to buy it. When you thus apprehend Christ, you will say as Paul, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." It is every way natural that this should be so. It will result in fact. Those who find Christ, will forsake all in the sense of disclaiming all right to hold their property as their own. They abjure all selfish holding of property, and all careful anxiety about any thing of a worldly nature.

2. Those who find Christ to be really their Advocate, and know Him to be

made of God unto them their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, will find no more need of legal efforts to work out their own salvation. When Christ does all this for the soul, it is enough, and is felt to be. The sinner needs a righteousness; in Christ he finds it. Find in Christ every thing which before he sought in selfish works, what further need has he of self-righteousness? The old robes, or rather rags, may well be laid off and cast away!

3. The Bible distinctly teaches that unconverted men do not thoroughly understand the gospel, and never would have devised such a scheme. Paul in 1 Corinthians 2, says, "We speak the wisdom of God -- that (long) hidden wisdom, which none of the princes of this world knew, for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, (as it is written,) Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, . . . the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him," (in the gospel system and to be revealed in gospel times;) -- "But God hath revealed them to us by His Spirit." "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, because they are foolishness to him." He does not feel his want of them; hence does not appreciate their value, nor even comprehend their nature. It is doubtful whether Judas ever well understood Christ. He doubtless heard much about Him, and may have had some queries raised in his mind; but, obviously, he did not correctly understand Him.

REMARKS.

1. The Bible is remarkably a dead letter to every man until the Spirit of God convicts him of sin. Its first power on the heart is only to condemn. The sinner's first experience of the power of the Bible is in its condemning sentence, and in its fearful revealings of his own sin. Conviction fastens on him; his soul, full of want, sallies forth after something better.

Have you ever had this experience -- a deep conviction that you must have something better than your own righteousness? If so, you can appreciate the change that takes place, under this conviction, in the soul's estimate of the value of Christ. If any man can introduce an effectual remedy when a fearful disease is raging in every family, it will be of some use to cry aloud in all the streets -- a remedy, a certain cure! A cure for the cholera -- a cure for the plague! If the cholera were here in its fearful terrors; if, casting your eye from the window at any hour, you could see hearses moving on, slowly and solemnly with their

dead; -- in such a state of things, men would gather in troops round the placard, crying out -- Will it bring salvation? Will it stay this fearful plague?

2. So, under conviction of sin, men cry out -- Tell us that again! Even as when the apostles preached with convincing power, men begged of them to tell them more of those glad tidings, on the next Sabbath. Father Oliphant once said -- "I have been reading the Bible now two hours, and have read over yet but two verses." Ah, he had been drinking in their spirit, and partaking of their power! Christ spake to his soul! Said I not unto thee, "If thou canst believe, thou shalt see the glory of God?" And have not some of you lingered long on your knees, while Christ was saying to your inmost heart -- Said I not unto thee, "All things are possible to him that believeth?" The fact is, that when the heart is laid open and prepared to have His glory revealed, a single sentence, a word, has an ocean of meaning. Now, the pearl of great price is found, and verily all else is worthless but Christ. When you speak to them of Christ, they cry -- Tell us that story of the cross again! There is no end to their desire to hear of Christ.

I have had occasion many times to say to my friends -- You can never settle these questions about the person of Christ, by controversy. You must go to Christ for yourselves and say to Him -- Reveal Thyself to me; Thou art divine; let me know it in my own experience. Didst Thou not say -- "When He, the Spirit of truth shall come, He shall guide you into all truth; He shall reprove the world of sin because they believe not on me?" Let that Spirit guide, reprove and sanctify me.

3. Again, it often happens that persons are too self-righteous. You may say to them -- Christ is precious -- the chief among ten thousands; but they don't understand it. Ask them -- Have you ever found Jesus near? They don't know that they have. The truth is, they need to see Him and to get such apprehensions of Him that they cannot but know Him.

4. How few seem to have found Christ and renounced all things for His sake. The Psalmist said -- "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth whom I desire besides Thee;" but, alas, there are not many to sympathize in these utterances of his heart.

Let me say to every unpardoned sinner -- You need to find Christ. You complain of condemnation and bondage. If you can only find that goodly treasure in the field, you will part with all things, as of little worth, that you may gain it.

If ministers do not preach the law, they cannot make men understand the gospel. So long as the spirituality of the law is not understood, people will lose the true idea of Christ.

Sometimes, after the law has deeply convicted men of sin, a single sermon on Christ will bring in hundreds to accept Him as their Savior. But, if men have not this sense of lostness, preaching Christ to them does them no good. You might as well proclaim a remedy for an unknown disease.

Who of you have found Christ? Whoever has will say -- The treasure is far richer than I expected. So it will always be. And with every fresh view of His glories, deeper and deeper will sink your views of self; higher and higher will rise your views of Christ.

If you have not really found Christ, so that you can truly count all things but loss for His name, then you have much more yet to do. You have by no means reached the place yet to rest. O, if theological students were to seek Christ more, and the love of book-learning less, they would surely have far more power. Let them get a rich experience of Christ in the soul, and then they will have one of the first requisites for preaching Christ out of their very souls. It is entirely essential to persuasive eloquence that men should absolutely know that of which they try to persuade others.

On the same principle, every church member needs to have the living gospel in his own heart before he can hope to commend it with any effect to the hearts of his fellow-men. You must yourself find Christ as the merchant-man found a precious pearl; then you can direct your fellows how to search and where to find.

[Back to Top](#)

The Self-Righteous Sinner Doomed To Sorrow

Lecture III

April 28, 1858

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Isa. 50:11: "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of Mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow."

In speaking from this text, I shall enquire,

I. What is this self-kindled fire -- what are these "sparks ye have kindled"?

II. We may next consider the destiny of all these classes.

I. What is this self-kindled fire -- what are these "sparks ye have kindled"?

The answer must be found in the description which the text itself gives, and in the contrast between this class and that described in the preceding verse. The spirit of this class is one of self-dependence, as opposed to the spirit of depending on God. Here we may well enter into particulars, to illustrate some of the many particular forms it will assume.

1. Many assume and take comfort in the assumption that they are in a good state before God. They have done nothing very bad. Setting up a standard of their own by which to judge in the case, they conclude, even on their death-beds, that all is well with them. But these little sparks that cast their glimmer of light over the darkness of the grace, are entirely of their own kindling. They have not carefully compared their own state with the Bible standard of the Christian life. The glimmering light that casts its lurid rays over their death-scene, comes not from the gospel hope, or from divine promise.

2. There is another form of self-righteousness. Some will say to you -- "I have endeavored to do right." Do right! What is the law of right-doing? Is there any other save to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength and mind, and your neighbor as yourself? And does your right-doing come up to the demands of this rule?

3. In another form, the sinner says -- "I am doing as well as I can." But are you quite sure of that? Has your own conscience never condemned you? Have you always honored and loved God as your Father -- and have you always treated all your fellow-creatures as His children should be treated? Have you no consciousness of having come greatly short of your real ability

in these things?

4. Some will say -- "I have at any rate, done a great deal of good. I have been kind to my wife and children, or to my brothers and sisters, and to my neighbors."

5. But if you propose to place yourself on the ground of strict law and justice, the one question which the law of God will ask is this -- "Have you continued in all the things written in the law to do them?" Have you kept the whole law and not offended in one point -- ever?

Anything less than this by ever so little will forfeit your title to eternal life on the ground of law.

6. Others comfort themselves with good resolutions. With those they get up a fire of their own kindling -- and are fain to think that if they are not as good as they should be, they shall be by and by.

7. Many take great credit to themselves for kind feelings and obliging manners. Perhaps by nature they have generous impulses. There are such. Yet they entirely neglect God. They may be very humane. Their bearing towards their fellow-men may not be savage, or oppressive. Therefore they take comfort.

But let such men consider -- the lower animals are more generally kind towards their species than men are towards theirs. Cases are often brought to light in which animals cleave to each other even to death. There is said to be one species of animals so devoted to each other, that if you were to shoot down one of their young, the rest would gather round the dying or the dead, and mourn there, and allow themselves to be shot down till they all lay in death together! Some animals have this feeling; and now shall mankind take great credit for themselves for even far less of it than the lower animals?

8. Some men glory in their reformatory principles. Because they are doing so much to improve society and bless mankind, they assume that all must be right between themselves and God. Often such men seem not aware how much they really depend on their own good deeds and righteousness before the Lord.

9. Many think themselves as good as professors of religion. Measuring

themselves by their neighbors who are in the church, they flatter themselves that they shall be accepted before the great tribunal. It sometimes happens most conveniently for their purpose that there are a few professors whose lives honor ungodliness rather than godliness. Taking advantage of these, they get no small comfort in comparing themselves with ungodly professors of religion.

10. Others strike yet a little higher and think themselves as good as the deacons or as some gospel ministers. Thus their dependence is altogether human in its foundation. They warm themselves with sparks of their own kindling.

11. Many rely on certain experiences, which perhaps are dreams or visions. Yet they think it concerns them little how they live. They are, it may be, utterly selfish, unwilling to do their part for any public object. Or they are grasping, worldly-minded, hard-fisted, ever loving this present world. Strange, yet true -- such persons will fall back on their own experiences, and find in those, a basis for comforting hopes of heaven! In one instance, a man had written out his experience, so that what he might fail to keep in his memory might be faithfully kept on the written record. In his hours of trial he used to get this and read it over. At last he came to his death-bed. There, feeling the need of his old experience, he sent his little daughter to the drawer to get it; when lo! the mice had found and destroyed it! It was eaten up, and his hope had perished! He had to "Lie down in sorrow!"

12. Many prepare for themselves refuges of lies to be used in the same way -- and I may say -- with the same result.

13. Some rely for their defence before God, on their unbelief. They do not believe the Bible, and they really make their great sin their special apology and defence before God! They say -- "Lord, we would not believe a word Thou didst say, and therefore we could be under no obligation to obey Thee."

14. All those nominally Christian hopes that fail to sanctify the heart, are of this self-righteous -- self-dependent sort. Everything, save the sincere dependence on Christ which makes you like Him in Spirit, falls under this general character, and must end in this fearful doom.

II. We may next consider the destiny of all these classes.

On this fearful subject I surely would not say a word, save that silence would be unfaithfulness to your souls. It is no pleasure to me to disturb your fond hopes, or to trouble you with dreaded fears. But how can I be unfaithful to your souls!

Listen then to God's words of warning. Our text has a word for you! Mark what I say -- all ye who hold on to your delusions -- "This shall ye have at My hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow." At whose hand? The hand of Him who speaks in this passage; and He is none other than Jesus Christ Himself. The whole context shows this. He, the Lord of all worlds, cries -- "This shall ye have of My hand." What is this? What will He do? This; "Ye shall lie down in sorrow." When? At the close of life's short day. Then, when the hours of your probation shall be numbered and finished. Then, when your life work shall be over, you shall lie down in sorrow.

1. Sorrow naturally bows one down as under a grievous burden. I have known persons so bowed down under sorrow that they could not rise up. O if they could forget; but they cannot; and they must lie down forever under their load of sorrow.
2. There is the sorrow of self-reproach; who does not know the keenness of those pangs? I remember the case of a mother who reproached herself for neglecting two lost children. She was almost deranged. Ah, she never could forgive herself! Whenever you should mention their case, she would look wild and haggard. I could not understand her appearance until she told me the circumstances. O this was an awful case! So you will reproach yourself for neglecting Christ and salvation. With but too much fearful truth, you will say of yourself -- I have been an infinite fool! Alas, "a wounded spirit, who can bear?"
3. In your cup there will be the sorrow of unavailing regret. Partial losses may be borne, for while they leave room for hope, human fortitude will rally. But if you have lost all -- if there is nothing left to you -- if your eternity is pure and hopeless ruin, then what can you do? O what a thought is that -- your eternity one mass of unmingled ruin! Nothing can remain to you but everlasting, unavailing regret!
4. There will be also the sorrow of a burdened conscience. Each individual

sinner will know that he is condemned by God and by every other being in the universe. He cannot but know that every other being must despise him as a guilty, unworthy wretch! Herein is involved the sorrow of being without friends and without sympathy. Your Christian friends -- really the best you ever had -- will have done all they can for you, and then, compelled by your own folly, they left you to your chosen doom. Ah, they can stand by you no longer! Long had they wept in your pathway to hell; but their tears were unavailing! They leave you and you have now no friends in the universe!

5. Sympathy often blunts the keen edge of sorrow. The tender relations of the present life seem beautifully arranged to help us bear the bitterness of human sorrow. But there are no such relations there! Each wicked man will have too much of his own to bear to think of you. In all that world of woe, there cannot be one sympathizing look; no, not one sympathizing whisper! In this world, though the mind may sink under the keenest sorrow, and go down, down, under its load of bitterest woe, yet even then, a sympathizing tear will bring relief. But no such relief can visit the home of the finally lost.

6. Sorrow is sometimes compared to a consuming fire. The figure is not inappropriate. It has been known to turn the hair all white in a single night. O how does such sorrow drink up the spirit and waste its living energies! But what is this compared with that other sorrow which no man can endure!

7. By an effort of will, we can in this world sometimes rule sorrow out of the mind; but vain are all such efforts there. Think of the appalling emphasis with which Christ speaks of the place "where there is weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth." Or think of the solemnity of His words -- "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" His compassions were so deep that we find His warnings to sinners more emphatic and solemn than those of any inspired prophet or apostle. Not one among them all uttered words so thrilling, so solemn. This is but natural to One whose compassions were so deep and so tender.

REMARKS.

1. A portion of the sinner's final doom will be the natural outgrowth of his self-

deception. When men deceive themselves, they have only themselves to blame. In the very nature of their case therefore, self-reproach must be one of the bitter ingredients in their cup.

2. It is also true (and this is one element of their sorrow,) that God will give expression to His infinite displeasure. He says -- "This shall ye have at My hand." It must be made apparent to the universe that God's hand is in this unutterably awful affliction.

3. It has often been the case here that young people have ruled this subject out of their minds. It hindered their studies. So, assuming that study is worth more than salvation, they have said to Jesus Christ -- "Go Thy way for this time."

4. Some cannot bear to feel sorrow now, and therefore put their sorrows over till they shall come in one eternal flood, that nothing can assuage! They thrust away religious duties now because they dislike them -- as if time could make them more pleasant! Some do not like to have their friends made sad, and therefore they exclude this subject from their attention. How often is this course pursued towards the sick.

5. God's warnings are most emphatic. You see this in our text. It declares most explicitly -- "This shall ye have at My hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow." Listen also to those most emphatic and awful words that fell from the lips of our Savior, "Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in Me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea, And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out; it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." Mark 9:42-48.

Is it not amazing that men can have the hardihood to sneer at such language? Who does not know what such figures of speech must mean? Think of going with two hands, two feet -- in your own human body -- "into hell -- into the fire that never shall be quenched!" Think of a soul immortal -- doomed to endless

sorrow! If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out. Though it be terrible to lose an eye, it is far less terrible than to lose your soul! What emphasis goes with these awful words! How solemnly are they reiterated! With what thunders of power they must have fallen from the lips of the Crucified One!

6. This text and subject should be a warning to the skeptic in his fancied security. Ah, does he think to sneer hell out of existence? Does he vainly dream that his sneers will annihilate that prison-house of woe? Ah! poor, wretched skepticism! How unutterably weak and wicked! Can you warm yourself by such sparks of your own kindling? Thinkest thou to enjoy life where their "worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched?"

7. This subject comes with its warning to the delaying sinner. Now, when pressed to repent, you comfort yourself with the promise -- I shall not always neglect it. Ah, but you may neglect it too long! Ere you are aware, the line -- the unseen line between God's mercy and His wrath, may be forever passed by.

8. Let Universalists take warning. You have but a miserable refuge. You expect to go to heaven because all the wicked are there. Yes, because all the men of Sodom are there, ascending along with the smoke of their blasted, doomed city, when they were "set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire;" -- because they all went up quick to heaven, you expect to go there too! Because all the pirates and murderers of every land and age go there, you expect to get in amongst them! Indeed! But may it not be that your hope, like that of the hypocrite, shall perish when God shall take away the soul?

9. Let spurious converts beware. Those who have long professed piety, but have also long given their hearts to the world, must come within the fearful sweep of the warnings of this text. You are a professor of religion, are you? And yet you live as if this world were your god. How will your hopes abide in the great day that shall search and try men's hopes?

10. Let this warn also, the ambitious, whether students, or ministers, or politicians -- whoever you may be -- take heed lest it come to thee at last, that thou lie down in sorrow!

11. All who live in the experience of Romans 7, whose hearts are in bondage under sin, and not in the liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free; take warning! What are the sparks with which you compass yourself about? These;

that with your conscience, you approve the right, but, with your will, you do the wrong; and can you suppose this will avail you in the great day of the Lord?

12. Ye who depend on the forms of religion without the power of it -- hear what the Savior says in the text: "This shall ye have of Mine hand -- ye shall lie down in sorrow." How do you avoid being aroused and thrown into an agony of anxiety? How is it, ye who are not walking in the Spirit, but in the flesh; you seem to be very much composed. So far from smiting on your breast and crying out -- "Alas, I am undone!" you are finding comfort amid some sparks of your own kindling. What is your comfort? No matter whence it comes if it comes not from Christ. It can be of no value. It is only a flattering unction which you lay to your soul. Wilt thou be warned now? O wilt thou now awake from thy death-sleep, and arise from the dead, that Christ may give thee light?

[Back to Top](#)

Sufficient Grace

Lecture IV

May 12, 1858

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--2 Cor. 12:9: "And He said unto me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

These are the words of Jesus Christ to Paul. Paul had been favored with many wonderful revelations of heavenly things, and tells us that, lest he should be thereby exalted above measure, there was given him a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, to buffet him. It is useless for us to speculate beyond what is written in respect to this thorn. Suffice it that we know God's design in sending it -- namely, to keep his servant from being exalted unduly, to guard him against self-reliance, and to keep alive in his heart his sense of dependence on God. The thorn being uncomfortable, Paul prays that it may depart from him. Christ had a different plan in mind. He lets it remain, but promises abundant grace to meet

the exigency. When Paul comes to understand the plan, he accepts it with joy.

The principle of the divine plan is this: Christ would destroy the spirit of self-dependence -- the great and most besetting temptation of His children. They are continually prone to trust in themselves rather than in Christ. This must be counteracted and cured.

I. The case of Paul illustrates Christ's manner of dealing with His saints.

II. The manner in which we may avail ourselves of this grace of Christ. What are its conditions?

I. The case of Paul illustrates Christ's manner of dealing with His saints.

He must first give them thorns, and make them feel their weakness and wants; then He shuts them up to rely on Himself alone, leading them to die to all dependence on themselves, and to enter with the fullest committal upon dependence on Christ alone. This is needful to the end that they may avail themselves of His strength and may discard their own.

1. "My grace is sufficient for thee," said Christ to Paul; and if we may believe what Paul says of his sinful ways, this must be a very strong case. Paul said he was the chief of sinners. He had been a Pharisee of the strictest sect; in his mad zeal against the friends of Christ, he had persecuted them even unto strange cities; and manifestly, taking into view all the circumstances of the case, he had some reasons for magnifying the grace that could reach such an one as Saul of Tarsus. If Christ could pardon him, it was safe to conclude He could pardon anybody. If grace could humble a soul of self-righteous as his had been, what could it not do? If a man so tempted on every side, once standing high in public favor, but now accounted as "the filth and off-scouring of all things," could yet find grace sufficient to bear all for Christ's sake joyfully, then nobody need doubt the all-sufficiency of this grace.

2. Grace, as here used, implies favor in place of frowns; forgiveness where punishment is richly deserved. So much for the past. For the present and the future, it implied the bestowal of all that direction, support, and consolation which is needed. Christ means to assure Paul that His grace was ample to pardon all the past, and to give strength for every trial and exigency in the

present and in the future. This grace is given, not to hamper but to help; adequate to all emergencies; adapted to meet all present circumstance; evermore sufficient for all his need. Jesus would stand by him as One worthy to save. He would provide for all his wants, and in every strait, open a way of escape. Inasmuch as Paul felt painfully his great responsibility in going forth to the battles of the Lord in his ministerial work, Jesus sought to meet precisely this want in the promise -- "My grace is sufficient for thee." "Let the thorn remain," He would say, "let the burden rest on your shoulders, but be assured My grace shall suffice for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness. I have laid on you these burdens on purpose that in you I might illustrate the riches of My grace."

3. Hence each Christian may apply to himself these precious words -- "My grace is sufficient for thee." Even to Paul, Jesus said -- "My grace is sufficient for thee" to meet all thy responsibilities and discharge all thy duties.

4. This is true of all relations of life. Are you parents? Under all your trials and amid all your wants, the grace of Jesus is sufficient for you. Are you magistrates? You may expect the same. In no extremes of trial, need you suppose your case to be so peculiar as to lie outside of the pale of this exceedingly great promise. For Christ's strength, nothing is too hard. In all states of health, the promise holds good. Are you extremely nervous? And while weakened by this infirmity, does there come on you great and apparently crushing responsibilities? You need not pray Christ to deliver you from these circumstances, but only to give you sufficient grace. This is all you need. You may be brought into peculiar relations to the bad temper of others, and these may be really thorns in your flesh; but even so, Christ's grace is sufficient for you, and you have but to ask and receive. These things are to you the thorn in the flesh. If Christ has manifestly brought you into these circumstances and created these conditions of your state, then these are thorns of His sending.

Are you in feeble health? This is your thorn. Are your neighbors, or your wife, or your children, a trial to you? You may go to Jesus for grace. You need not try to tear yourself away from the thorn, or to tear it out of your flesh; the Lord wishes you to come to Him for patience and wisdom to bear and to act the Christian part. You may be sure that if Christ has put you there,

He has counted well the cost and knows how much grace you need and whether He shall be able to supply you. He has not placed you there to make these things a snare and a curse to you, but to empty you of self and really to save you with great salvation.

5. His grace is sufficient to enable you to maintain the Christian life with honor to the gospel and with peace to yourself. You may rely on this under all circumstances. When you who are students go from this place to your homes, and under all circumstances so peculiar, you fear you shall fall; know ye that this promise is good for all circumstances in which you have a right to be. If you are in yourself unable to stand there, all the better is your case, for then so much the more, will Christ's strength be made perfect in your weakness. You have a right to believe that you shall be all you ought to be in all the circumstances in which Christ may place you. You may expect of Him all He has promised. You may remind Him of this -- that He has called you to trust His grace; that you have no other ground on which to stand; He has shut you up to the necessity of launching forth upon His faithful word. You may say -- Lord, have I not broken away from all other help and cast my self absolutely upon Thee? Say -- "O Jesus, I expect Thy grace will be sufficient for me; and may I not confide in Thee? I have now before me this present temptation and trial; but, Lord, I expect to live a Christian life, and be a faithful man to Thee -- may I not?" Yes, remember, His grace is all-sufficient, and He cannot withhold it from those who trust Him for it. In all the appropriate circumstances of your life, in all lawful business, you may have grace to help. But if you engage in anything unlawful, you shut yourself off from this promise. In the very act of going into unlawful business or circumstances, you virtually say to your divine Master -- "Of course I must expect to go here alone, for it were simple madness to expect Thy presence with me here." Turning thus from Christ is more than mere unbelief; it is self-sufficiency, and rebellion towards God.

6. Most branches of worldly business are essential to our earthly life, and therefore you need not give them up merely because they involve labor and care, for you can perform them in the strength of your Lord. You must not say -- I can not do any worldly business and be a Christian; nor on the other hand should you assume that you can do all sorts of business well by mere grace. You should first enquire if the Lord calls you to that business, for He calls each to the kind to which he is fitted. But mark, let every man have a

single eye, and truly aim in all things, to please the Lord. Suppose it to be your duty to preach the gospel, and the Lord lays the conviction of it upon your conscience; yet you say -- "O Lord, let me do something else, anything else, rather than this." Not so, my brother -- you must follow the leading of the Lord and be found in the path of your duty -- else no grace in the universe can be sufficient for you!

II. Let us next inquire into the manner in which we may avail ourselves of this grace of Christ. What are its conditions?

1. Paul had the utmost confidence in what Christ said. He constantly expected this promised grace to be at hand and ample. He knew and felt his own entire weakness, but rejoiced rather than mourned, for this. "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." "I take pleasure in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in reproaches, in distresses, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong." The promise of Christ entirely relieved all his anxieties.

We are glad that Christ's grace could sustain such a man. He went everywhere declaring the grace of Christ. His own case was a living illustration of this precious truth. I am telling you, he would say, of Jesus Christ. You all see what a temptation I have in my flesh. All this, Jesus helps me to bear by His grace. All the churches knew of his thorn, and saw how he endured and joyfully overcame through all-sufficient grace. They knew how vile a persecutor he had been and how much had been forgiven him. They say also now that his bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible (in the eyes of the world) and they were glad of this, for now they saw what Christ could do for His children. They saw he did not come with excellency of speech or of wisdom, as some of the Grecian philosophers claimed to do, but came simply as a saved sinner, full of grace. I remember the case of a poor man who could not pay his rent. While he was sitting in my study, he learned that his landlord threatened to turn him into the street. Now, said he, I shall see the glory of God, for it was always so -- in my emergencies, God comes near. When I am shut up to God, then He always appears. This simple faith was really edifying to me.

Paul is no longer bowed down in sadness. He knows his responsibilities are great and his burdens heavy; but he also knows who has said -- "My grace is

sufficient for thee." Oh indeed, he knows Jesus Christ! He has seen Him and heard His voice. Now you may see Paul go on calmly and joyfully, taking pleasure in infirmities, and full of triumphant faith. "Ah," he says, "the power of Christ will rest on me, and I may therefore glory in all these things before all the churches and all the world." Now therefore, wherever he goes, Christ shows in him the fulness of the gospel he preaches. Christ in him preached it; Christ in him lived it; and thus, in the mouth of these two witness, every word is established.

2. Again: we must be satisfied with grace for the day. We must have faith to live by the day and by the hour. Suppose these young men, fitting for the ministry, should insist that before they go out to their work, they must have an ocean of grace, so as to need no more little daily rills -- just as if they could not trust Jesus beyond this day, or were going where there is no Jesus. This is wrong.

This grace is like the ancient manna, falling and to be gathered each day for each day's wants. If you gather more, because you are afraid God will not send tomorrow, it rots in your vessel. So of this grace, you need it fresh each day -- grace to preach at the hour; grace to rest and sleep in its time. Sometimes God calls for no labor -- for nothing but peaceful rest. As the mother said to her sick child -- you are too weak to pray loud; but not too weak to trust. So of the wearied body; it is fit only to hang on the Lord and trust. This does not require much strength.

3. Another condition is to commit yourself fully to His faithfulness. Without this, all else avails nothing. As singers who strike their notes timidly, hanging back and letting down, murder all harmony in music; or as those who lead in public prayer can do nothing unless they commit themselves to prayer and lead off trusting in God; or as in preaching, men can do nothing save as they commit themselves to God and to their work, and lead off in humble faith; so must every Christian in all his Christian life. Paul said in his heart -- I know that this promised grace is sufficient for me; then, so trusting, he led off and labored with unfaltering step. Only so, could that grace have availed for all his wants.

When you have committed yourself thus to Christ, this fact becomes a valid argument under all circumstances for you to plead before the Lord.

"Lord, Thou hast given me Thy faithful word and I have believed it. Thou hast led me to believe; Thou hast called me where I am; now, Lord, I have no recourse left but to trust in Thee. I have committed myself to a Christian profession before the world; now, Lord, I must insist on the grace Thou hast promised, so that I may not dishonor Thee. I have left all to follow Thee -- have turned away from my home, from lucrative business, from prospects of fame -- every thing for Thy sake, and now I have no dependence save in Thee; let me now be made strong in Thee."

4. Never shrink from responsibility through unbelief. Never say -- I can't. God's children should at least learn what we try to teach our children. When they say -- I cannot ; we answer -- Don't say that, but say, I'll try. Parents may be unreasonable and ask too much of their children; but God never asks too much. The very requisition is evidence that all is right.

REMARKS.

1. In the connection of our text, we have a case in which prayer is answered to the spirit and not to the letter. Paul prayed God to take away the thorn. This was the letter. The ultimate thing he sought as a Christian was, that it might not impair his usefulness, but might glorify God. This he cared for most of all; and to this, Christ answered -- I will take care of that; it shall greatly glorify God and promote your usefulness.

2. When God answers our prayers in this way, we are in danger of overlooking the fact of an answer. We pray for the ultimate end of the glory of God. This God sees, and to this He answers. In Paul's case, if God had removed the thorn, his evidence that God heard his prayer could not have been so vivid as it was without the removal and with the sufficient grace. But sometimes men are too blind to see such answers. This is often a stumbling-block. You wonder why God does not answer your prayer. He does answer it, better than you had thought.. You may not see it as Paul saw, that God has high and useful ends to answer in giving you the thorn in your flesh. He means to illustrate the power of His grace. Often have I seen persons in sore trials. God had led them into wonderfully trying circumstances; and after they have wondered and questioned long, and have finally turned their hearts to prayer, then they see, and they cry out -- There, there, now all is plain to me. I said with Jacob -- "All these things are against me. Joseph is not, Simeon is not; and ye will take Benjamin too;" and what shall I do for my children! Ah, good Jacob, you are for once mistaken! All these things are

for you, not against you; your eyes shall yet behold your Joseph, and your Simeon and your Benjamin also; and through all coming ages, men shall study these things and glorify God for them.

So some of you may be saying -- All these things are against me; all this bad health -- this great trial -- all is against me. No, no; not one of them! You say -- When shall these things end? God will take care of that. Ah, but say you, I am going down among the breakers. I have lost my faith! Indeed; but you must not lose your faith!

3. When we have thoroughly renounced our self-dependence and are emptied of pride, it is impossible that we should not accept Christ and sympathize with His promise of help, saying -- "Most gladly will I rather glory in my weakness that the power of Christ may rest on me." When one is really crucified to self, it is easy to commit all to Christ and become lost in Him. Then you will rejoice in His promise and rest in His strength. No longer chafed with restless fears, you sit calmly trustful in His power to save. If the winds blow, let out more cable. So the mariners do. They know when the wind is high, it raises the vessel, and she lifts her anchor and loosens its hold. Then they let on more cable and let the anchor sink down deeper among the rocks, and give the ship no chance to lift it from its hold. So let your faith go down deeper and grasp the rock of the promises more firmly. But do you cry out -- The shore is near! -- I am afraid! No, no; never fear. Let out your cable! Give Providence a chance. Let the Lord have room to come in His glory for your relief.

4. In promoting revivals of religion, do not fret yourself. Give the Lord a chance to work. See to it that you are doing what He can bless. Don't shut Him up to the present moment, but pray and hold on! Trust Him and wait till He shall come in His power. Wait, I say, but not in the way of doing nothing. Do all that His providence and Spirit may seem to indicate. So doing, you may trust Him to come in His glorious power in the best possible time.

You cannot possibly be too confident that His grace is sufficient for all your need. You need not fear any where, if you do your part well, that Christ will not do His part equally well. He will give you success and help you to honor His name. O young man, are you afraid to commit yourself to the work of the ministry lest your strength fail you? Remember Him who has said -- "My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

O sinner, His grace is sufficient also for you. Are you ready to commit yourself to His care? Oh, but you say -- I am not a Christian; what right have I to believe that His grace will avail for me? Come and believe; come now, forsaking the ways of sin; so shall you find His promise is to you in all its perfect fulness. Have you a want? Come with your heart all empty; come, bring empty vessels not a few; His grace shall richly fill them all. Don't say -- my circumstances are so peculiar; -- no matter if they are; no matter if such case never was before; will it therefore lie beyond His power to meet it? Nay, verily, not while His name is Jesus; not while He proclaims of Himself -- "I, that speak in righteousness, mighty to save."

[Back to Top](#)

On Following Christ

Lecture V

June 9, 1858

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--John 21:22: "Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me."

These words Christ spake to Peter. He had previously given Peter to understand that in his advanced life his liberty would be restrained, and that he would have the honor of glorifying God by a martyr's death. A question arose in Peter's mind -- more curious than wise -- how it would fare with his fellow disciple, John. So he enquires -- "Lord, what shall this man do?" Gently rebuking this idle inquisitiveness, Jesus replied -- "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me."

1. This reply involves a principle, and hence it has a wide practical application. It is really addressed to us.
2. Assuming it to be thus addressed to all at the present day, what does it teach? What does Jesus say to us?

Suppose He stood where I do this moment and you knew it to be Jesus Himself, and saw that He was preparing to speak. You see the halo of glory around His head; you note the blending of meekness and majesty that identifies Him most fully as one like unto the Son of God, and your whole soul is moved within you to catch every word He may utter. Oh what an earnest expectation! If He were to speak in this house, you would hear the ticking of that clock more plainly than you now do. If you chanced not to catch every word distinctly, you would ask one and another -- What did He say! What was that!

I. What is this command?

II. What now should be the attitude of our minds?

III. What is this thing which He requires?

IV. What is implied in obeying this command?

V. Why shall we follow Him?

VI. Will you set yourself to find some excuse? What are your excuses?

I. He speaks, you observe, in the form of a positive command; what is this command?

Remember, if it be the Lord Jesus Christ, He has the right to command. Who else in earth or heaven has this right more absolutely than He? It must be of the utmost consequence to us to know what He does command us. Whatever it be, it must vitally affect our well-being both to know and to do it. Words from one so benevolent must be for our good. Certainly, He never did speak, but He said things for the good of those to whom He spake.

1. It must also be for the general good; for the Great King and Lord of all never overlooks what pertains to the general good.
2. Moreover, it must be safe to obey. Certainly; how can it be otherwise? Did it ever happen that any man obeyed Him and found it unsafe?
3. Of course it must be our DUTY to obey. How can it be that Christ shall ever command us, and we be not bound solemnly to obey Him?
4. Also it must be possible for us to obey. Did Christ ever enjoin

impracticable things? Could He possibly do a thing so unreasonable?

All these points must be assumed and admitted. How can we ever doubt a moment on any one of them? This then is the state of the case.

II. What now should be the attitude of our minds?

1. Manifestly this -- Let Him speak; we will surely listen and obey. What does He say? Every word He says, I know, will be infinitely good. Let me catch every intimation of His will. "His words shall be sweeter to my taste than honey or the honey comb."

2. But will any of you turn away saying -- "I don't care what He says?" Will you not rather feel this -- "Let Him say what He will, it is all good and I will surely hear and obey it."

3. If such be your attitude towards Him, then we are ready to examine what He says. Observe, He gives us something to be done, and moreover, something to be done by yourself. No matter just now to you what others may do, or what God's providence may allot to them. "What is that to thee?" It has always been the temptation of the human heart to look at the duties of others rather than one's own. You must resist and put down this temptation. Christ has work for you to do, and it becomes you to address yourself earnestly to do it. Observe also, that it is to be done now. He gives you no furlough, not even to go home and bid farewell to those of your house. He can take no excuse for delay.

III. Now let us ask -- What is this thing which He requires?

He says -- "Follow thou Me." What does this mean? Must I leave my home? Must I abandon my business? Am I to change my residence? Am I to follow Him all over the land?

1. The latter meaning was plainly the true one when Jesus dwelt among men in human flesh. He then called certain men to follow Him as His servants and disciples, and they were to attend Him in all His journeyings -- to go where He went and to stop where He stopped. They were to aid Him in His missionary work.

2. Now, Christ is no longer here in human flesh; and therefore following

Him cannot have precisely that physical sense. Yet now, no less than then, it implies that you obey His revealed will, and do the things that please Him. Now, you are to imitate His example and follow His instructions. By various methods, He still makes known His will, and you are to follow whithersoever He leads. You must accept Him as the Captain of your salvation, and let His laws control all your life. He comes to save His people from their sins and from the ruin that sin, unforgiven, must bring down; and you must accept Him as such a Savior. This is involved in following Him.

IV. But here let us enquire somewhat more fully, What is implied in obeying this command?

1. Of course it implies confidence in Him who commands, a confidence in the exercise of which you commit yourself fully to obey Him and trust all consequences to His disposal. There can be no hearty, cheerful obedience without this implicit confidence.
2. It implies also a willingness to be saved by Him -- that is, saved from sin. You make no reservation of favorite indulgences; you go against all sin and set yourself earnestly to withstand every sort of temptation.
3. It involves also a present decision to follow Him through evil or good report -- whatever the effect may be on your reputation. You are ready to make sacrifices for Christ, rejoicing to be counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.
4. It is a very common fault to admit what Christ requires, yet to fail very much in doing it. This is saying, I go, sir -- but going not. Such a man does not follow Christ.
5. He requires immediate action. He has work for you to do today, and He demands of you that you commit yourself to full obedience.

V. Let us next enquire -- WHY shall we follow Him?

Suppose Christ were here personally and from this desk announced this command -- Follow thou Me. Would you ask to know why? You could very soon assign some weighty reasons. Your own mind would suggest them. And do you know any reasons why you should not follow Him? I presume it is settled in

every mind why you should obey this command now and here, without one moment's delay. Is there any of you that can assign any reason why you should not obey this command? Does any of you doubt at all whether this be your duty? Can you think of any reason why it is not?

1. Then it must be your duty, and you ought to do it. The matter should lie in your mind thus -- If this is my duty, of course I must do it at once. Doing duty is the business of my life.

2. You owe it to Jesus Christ to follow Him. If you are a student, none the less should you follow Jesus everywhere. See that young man. You ask him why he goes to college; what does he say? Does he say -- Because I would be better prepared to teach men about Jesus Christ? Coming to his teachers, does he say -- Give me an education; give me all the discipline of mind and heart you can, that I may be the better able to teach and preach Jesus Christ? Tell me all you know of Christ; pray for me that God may teach my heart the whole gospel? Is this what he says? In this sort of way should a Christian student follow Christ.

Do you not owe this to Him? Can any one of you deny this? Have you any right to live to yourselves? If you could gain some good for the moment, could you think it right to have your own way, and disown Christ? What if you were to gain the whole world and lose your own soul?

3. You owe it to yourself to take care of your own soul. God lays on you the responsibility of saving your own soul, and you must bear it. No man can bear that responsibility for you. You must bear it for yourself alone.

4. You owe it to your friends to follow Christ. You have friends over whom you may exert a precious influence. For their sakes you ought to know Christ, that you may lead them also to follow Him. You have friends also who have done much for you and have loved you much. It is due from you to them that you should follow Christ. You owe it to your father and mother. Are they praying souls? It is due to the sympathy they feel for you and to the strong desire they have for your salvation. If they have never prayed, it is time they did, and time that you should lead them to Christ.

5. You owe it to the whole world. There are millions who know not Jesus, some of whom you might teach so that they shall not die and never have

known Him.

6. One more thought as to yourself. Such as you make yourself by obeying or not obeying this precept, you will be to all eternity. What you do in this matter will have its fruits on your destiny long after the sun and stars shall have faded away. You have no right to live so that when you die, men shall say -- There goes from earth one nuisance, and hell has more sin in it now than it ever had before.

7. Again; this is the only path of peace. If you would have peace, you must seek and find it here. Here thousands have found it; but none ever found it any where else.

VI. Jesus Christ says to you -- "Follow thou Me." Will you set yourself to find some excuse? What are your excuses?

1. Do you say -- "There are so many opinions among men. I don't know what to do."

Ah but you do know. It is only a pitiful pretense when you say you don't know your duty. Who of you does not know enough to be simple-hearted and to go on in duty and please God? No opinions of men need stumble you if you simply follow Christ. You talk about the various opinions among Christian sects; but differ much as they may in lesser matters, on the great things of salvation, they are all agreed. They all agree essentially, that to follow Christ in confidence and simple love is the whole of duty and will ensure His approbation. Follow this simple direction, and all will be well with you.

2. But some will say -- "I believe all will be saved."

You do, indeed! Will they all become like Christ before they die? Do they all in fact become holy in this world? Christ is in heaven. Can you go there unless you become first like Him in heart and in life?

What is such a belief good for? Often has this question been forced on my mind in Boston -- what is this belief that all men will be saved, good for? People plead this belief as their excuse for not following Christ, "since we shall all come right at last any how." Can this belief make men holy and happy? Some of you will answer -- "It makes me happy for the present, and

that is the most I care for." But does it make you holy? Does it beget true Christian self-denial and real benevolence? A faith and a practice which make you happy without being holy are but a poor thing. Indeed, it cannot fail of being utterly mischievous, because it lures and pleases without the least advance towards saving your soul. It only leaves you the more a slave of sin and Satan.

3. But you say -- "It makes me so miserable to believe that any will be forever lost!"

What then? What if it does make you feel unhappy? It may make you unhappy to see your guilty friend sent to the penitentiary or the gallows now; but such a doom may be none the less deserved -- none the less certain, because it hurts your feelings.

How can there be any other way of final happiness save through real holiness? The fountain of all happiness must lie in your own soul. If that is renewed to holiness and made unselfish, loving, forgiving, humble -- then you will be happy of course, but you cannot be happy without such a character.

4. Some of you may say -- "I don't believe in the necessity of a change of heart."

Yes you do; you are altogether mistaken in regard to the matter if you suppose you don't believe in the necessity of a change of heart. There cannot be such a man in all Christendom -- a man who does not know that by nature his heart is not right with God; yet that it must become right with God before he can enjoy God's presence in heaven. Is there one whose conscience does not testify that, before conversion, his heart is alienated from God? Do you not know that you are unlike God in spirit and that you must be changed so as to become like God before you can enjoy Him? What! a sinner, knowing himself to be a sinner, believe he can be happy in God's presence without a radical moral change! Impossible! Every man knows that the sinner, out of sympathy with God, must be changed before he can enjoy God's presence and love. Every man, unchanged by God's grace, knows himself to be a sinner and not holy by nature.

A case in point to show the force of truth on even hardened hearts, came

lately to my knowledge. A Christian lady being on a visit to one of the towns in Canada, was called on by a gentleman of high standing in society, but who had always lived a prayerless, ungodly life. A man of strong will and nerves, professedly a skeptic, he yet took the ground before this Christian lady that he was ready, as a means of becoming a Christian, to do any thing that she should say. Well, then, said she, kneel down here and cry out, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." "What!" replied he, "do this when I don't believe myself a sinner?" You need not excuse yourself on that ground, said she, for you know you are a sinner. Having passed his word of honor to a lady, he could not draw back, and therefore kneeled and repeated the proposed words. Arising, he asked, what next? Do so again; and say the same words. He raised the old objection -- I don't believe myself a sinner. She made the same answer as before, and a second time he repeated the words of that prayer. The same things were said -- the same thing done, the third time, and then, hardened as he was, his heart felt the force of those words, and he began to cry in earnest -- "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" His heart broke, and he prayed till mercy came!

So often, when men say they don't believe this and that, they do believe it so far as conviction is concerned. They know the truth respecting their own guilt.

5. But you plead, perhaps, this: I must attend to other duties first; my studies, or my business.

No, my friend; no other duties can come before this. This is the greatest duty and ought to be the first. Hear what the Savior said on this very point. He said to one man -- "Follow Me;" and he answered -- "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." This is a strong case, and is placed on record for our instruction because it is strong. It may seem to you very unnatural that Jesus would call any man away from a duty so obvious and so inborn in every human heart; yet what did He say? He gave no heed to this plea, but answered -- "Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God." Not even the last rites of burial to the dead, must be allowed to stand before obedience to Christ's call. No doubt Christ saw a disposition in this man to plead off, and therefore, He saw the necessity of meeting it promptly. Suppose the man had said at first, "Yes, Lord, I am ready; my father lies unburied; but I am ready if Thou callest me, to follow

Thee even now;" it is at least supposable if not probable, that Jesus would have answered -- Yes; I will go with thee to that funeral. Let us lay the dead solemnly in their last bed, and then go to our preaching.

Another man replied to his call, saying, "Lord, I will follow Thee; but let me first go and bid them farewell which are at home in my house." To him, Jesus replied, "No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Thus Christ teaches that no duty can possibly come before this of giving up your heart to follow Him. You must make up your mind fully to this life-business, and really enter upon it -- else all things else are only an offence to God.

Do you say, I must study? You must first make up your mind to do all for Christ, else study can be no acceptable duty. When Jesus says to you -- "My son, give Me thy heart," He wants nothing else instead of your heart. He does not wish to be put off with some other duty, than the very one He calls for. When He says -- "Follow Me;" He demands an explicit answer, whether you will or not, and He cannot accept anything evasive.

REMARKS.

1. You are now, each one of you, called to follow Christ, with the implied pledge on His part, that if you give yourself to Him, He will give Himself to you. Think of that. Would it not be a blessed thing to have Christ give Himself to you, to be your eternal Friend -- your Portion and Joy forever?

Suppose Jesus were passing along here, and were calling one and another by name to follow Him. When He came near you, would you not be saying in your heart -- "I hope He will certainly call me"? Or can it be you would say -- "I hope He will not call me!" Can it be you could say that? Would you not rather say -- Oh is it possible He will pass me by; how awful! Can it be? And if so, shall I never see Him passing by so near again?

O sinner, Jesus is now passing by you, so near; arise and speak to Him for He does call you; and you must decide now whether you will follow Him or not -- and decide for eternity!

2. Don't think about others. Say not as Peter said -- "Lord, what shall this man do?" This is an old and artful device of your adversary -- this turning your mind to think about others. If you are wise, you will think about yourself only.

3. It is a great comfort to reach the point where you say -- I will follow Him any how, let others do as they please. I will go after Christ. This is just what you should say; and when you come to this point with a full heart, you will find it is a most precious decision.

4. You are now called to decide your own future destiny. Some decision upon it you will certainly make. You take a step here today which may decide all your future being. Is it not well that you take this step right?

(1.) Suppose I should now say -- Come, separate yourselves according to the decision you make. All ye who will follow Christ, come into this aisle; what will you do?

(2.) Will you refuse and say -- I will not follow Christ yet; I have ends of my own to accomplish first; I will not be His servant now? Is this your decision? Shall we ask to have it put on record? It will go on record any how, whether you ask it or not.

(3.) Some of you will perhaps say -- I will not decide just now. I did not come here today expecting to decide so great a question at this time.

What, indeed! Did not you expect to hear a gospel sermon today? And did you not know that in every gospel sermon there is in fact a gospel call on you to repent and follow Jesus?

(4.) But will you now turn again and say -- "Lord, I can't understand, I cannot realize why I should follow Thee." Don't say that; for you can understand it. And you can decide this question today.

But says some young man -- If I should go after Him, I am afraid I should have to forego some of my favorite plans for life. I might have to give up my intended profession. Another might be debarred from some lucrative business that pays better than following Christ.

Then you can go and tell your Savior so. Tell Him how the case lies. Tell Him you cannot trust Him to provide for your worldly interests. You are afraid He would send you also to preach the kingdom of God, and might pay you but poorly for your services. Perhaps He will excuse you from His service here and from entering into the joy of your Lord hereafter besides!

(5.) There is a young man who says -- I can't follow Christ now, because I cannot leave my dear Christian mother. Then go upon your knees and spread out your excuse before the Lord. Say to Him -- My good mother gave me the best Christian instruction and her constant prayers; she did every thing to make me Thy servant; but now since Thou art calling me to follow Thee, I find I cannot go and preach Thy love to a dying world. She cannot spare me and I cannot leave her.

Indeed, you cannot afford to. And your pious mother thinks her claim is above that of the Savior! Well, you must both make your choice.

[Back to Top](#)

Christian Consciousness, a Witness For God

Lecture VI

June 23, 1858

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Isa. 43:10: "Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord."

When I first became religious, it seemed to me very wonderful that in all the preaching I had heard, there had been so little said of the testimony of personal experience. I had often heard appeals to the external evidences of revelation, such as make the reception of the testimony a mere matter of opinion; but I had rarely heard any allusion to the testimony of Christian Consciousness. This seemed to me a great omission.

I propose now to call your attention to the following points,

I. The religion of the Bible is a matter of consciousness.

II. Religious consciousness -- the consciousness of religious truth -- is the highest possible proof of the reality of religion.

III. Witnesses, who testify from consciousness, supposing them to be credible, are the best possible, and such testimony is the best possible.

IV. All counter testimony is merely negative and amounts to nothing.

I. True religion is a matter of consciousness.

1. It is a state of mind, and especially a voluntary state. Essentially, it is a state of voluntary committal to God, in which the mind, deliberately and of its own choice, determines to obey and please God. This action of the will controls the outward life by a law of necessity. Hence as the will is, so must the outward life be. But all acts of will are matters of consciousness, and therefore all true religion must be a thing of consciousness.

2. According to the Bible, every Christian is a new creature -- passed into a new state of life and of moral action. Of this great change he must be conscious. Before it, he lived for self and sin, this was a fact of consciousness; after it, he lives for God; of this he is conscious. Before it he pleased himself; after it he pleases God. Of all this he must be conscious.

Again, he is conscious of possessing various knowledge which he had not before. He knows God. Before conversion, he had the conviction that there is a God, but this alone is no proper knowledge of God. After conversion, he truly knows God. So the Bible teaches. It invites men to acquaint themselves with God, and assumes that when converted they do in fact come to know God in a far higher sense than ever before.

3. So of Christ. Those who do not receive Him as their Savior cannot know Him truly. They must be void of that experience of His power to save, which they might have. The Bible always assumes this.

4. Yet further, real Christians know that God is love. They may have had some idea or notion of this before, but they did not know it. Now they do. Their own experience is a witness to their souls. It has become to them a matter of consciousness.

5. Moreover, they know that Jesus is a Savior from sin. They have tried and proved this precious truth. Whereas He said -- "My grace is sufficient for thee;" they believed and therefore have had the promise verified to themselves.

6. They also know that the Bible is true. They know it is from God, for they

have felt its power -- a power it could never have if it were a fiction and the belief in it a mere delusion. No one can become a Christian without seeing more of God and knowing more of His power and love than any unconverted men can see and know.

7. Christians know that the Bible gives the true account of man's natural state. Their own experience confirms this. So also does their experience show that the Bible gives the true account of the Christian state. This is a matter of everyday testimony. I could refer you to numerous cases in which, under the teaching of their own experience, men have passed at once from a state of doubt as to the Bible to a state of assured faith. Nothing is more common than for men who have been stubbornly skeptical as to the Bible, to see their skepticism instantly depart as soon as they came to feel a just sense of their own sin. The same conviction which flashed on their minds a sense of sin, revealed also the truthfulness of the Bible. They saw at once that their grounds for rejecting it were fallacious -- that its truths correspond so perfectly with their own personal convictions that it must all be true. Such testimony, I say, is exceedingly abundant.

II. Consciousness of religious truth is the highest proof possible of the reality of religion.

On all subjects in which consciousness is legitimate proof, it is the highest proof possible. We cannot doubt that of which we are conscious. We know it to be true. No other testimony carries to our minds such conviction. If therefore we confine ourselves strictly to what we know in consciousness, we cannot be mistaken.

III. Witnesses who testify from consciousness, supposing them to be credible, are the best witnesses possible, and their testimony the best possible.

1. Let it be supposed that their statements are credible; then, if they can testify from their own consciousness, there can be no ground for doubting their testimony. No testimony can be better than theirs.

2. Now if it be true that religion is a matter of consciousness, it follows that the testimony of Christians is positive, and is the best that can be had.

IV. All counter testimony is merely negative and amounts to nothing.

To illustrate this let us make a supposition. Though very strong, it will not be so strong as the case of Christian testimony which I adduce it to illustrate.

1. Let it be supposed that one hundred thousand persons have had a certain disease, have taken one particular medicine, and have all been cured. The point in this case is the strength of the testimony, furnished by their experience. I maintain that, though very strong, it is not so strong as the testimony from Christian experience to the truth of divine revelations. For, in the case of the disease, it is barely possible that nature alone, without the medicine, may have cured every one of them. Yet no reasonable man would doubt such testimony. You would think it ridiculous to call it in question.

2. Suppose further, that the only counter testimony is simply negative. Some men come forward and testify -- "We had the same disease; we did not take the medicine and we were not cured." This amounts to nothing. It is a well known principle in law that such testimony goes for just nothing.

3. But the testimony of Christians is even stronger than the positive testimony of the men cured of disease, for they are not only conscious of being cured of the plague of sin, but they know in their consciousness to what they must ascribe this change. They know what sin is and how it lived and reigned before. They know it never did and never would cure itself. It is a matter of certain knowledge by what means the power of sin in their hearts is broken. They know God as the power that saves. They know the melting, subduing influence of His love. They have felt the transforming power of His truth. One hundred thousand persons who have lived in sin now come forward and testify that, under the gospel, they came into a new life, and became subjects of a new and most blessed influence. Now then, you may look at this new life. You may see them going forward in this new life till they die and lying down at last in death, under its unabated influence. Are not such men the most credible of all witnesses? Is not theirs the most absolute and conclusive testimony? Surely this is perfectly conclusive. To deny it is far more absurd than to deny the existence of such a city as London. You say you don't believe there is such a city as London. You don't! Well, that is not so absurd as to deny the reality of religion and the truth of revelation. What is this testimony? Is it like the testimony of spiritualists, founded on raps and table-tippings? Nothing like it. The senses may be imposed upon. Modern spiritualism has many an open door for

deception or mistake. But this experience of Christians is intensely strong and rich, broad and deep, it pervades the whole mind and character, and leaves no door open for deception or mistake. He who never had it may err by supposing he has had it; but he who actually has it knows that there is divine power in it. He knows that he has God's presence and smiles. Thousands of times, it may be, he has had this experience. He knows that he communes with God. It is not possible that he should know any fact with more certainty than he knows this. To reject such testimony as this is therefore vastly more ridiculous than to call in question the existence of a London.

4. Consequently, the position of infidels is simply ridiculous. What are they doing? They are treating religion as a mere matter of opinion, ignoring all the testimony of consciousness. Shall we give them the credit of being reasonable men? No. I would sooner sit down to prove to a skeptic the existence of London, than admit the attitude of skeptics as to revelation to be reasonable.

5. In this matter, deceived professors have properly no testimony to give. They can only say, they took a quack medicine, and it did not cure them. An ocean of such testimony would be good for nothing. No amount of it can begin to disprove the testimony of those who say they took the true medicine and it actually cured them.

REMARKS.

1. The objection that religious faith is a prejudice of education and nothing better, is altogether groundless. Some young men say -- I have not examined this subject myself. I have been told so and so; -- nothing more. Hence I can easily throw off opinions that have no other and better foundations.

My dear friend, don't you believe your father and your mother? Can you doubt that they love you and mean to tell you the truth? No matter if they have not so much science or so much education in general as many others. This thing is one of experience and not of science; and don't you see that they must know enough to make their experience the best possible testimony?

The fact is, that the testimony on which they rely is the very best that can be. They say what they know, and teach you what they have felt. These are matters

of consciousness to them. Furthermore, you know they love you, and cannot wish to deceive you. Why not then accept their testimony?

2. It is objected, very foolishly, that people are influenced to believe the Bible, by what men say to them. True enough they are, and truly they ought to be. They ought to be influenced by good testimony; why not? God made us to believe in good testimony, and society could not exist otherwise.

3. The great mass of men who admit the truth of revelation and of revealed religion, do it on proper grounds. They do not hold this belief on the ground of an original examination of all the external evidences, but on the evidence of consciousness, either their own, or that of others. This is perfectly substantial and indubitable evidence.

4. It is indeed true that when the doctrines of the Bible are brought clearly before unconverted men, they usually ensure a conviction of their truth. They appear so reasonable that few men are unreasonable enough to deny their truth. But in nine cases out of ten in which men are converted to God, they believed the Bible on its internal evidence, as revealed in Christian consciousness and brought to them by God's witnesses. They have never seen miracles wrought, but they have seen men turned from sin to God and made new creatures in Christ. And they have had the good sense to infer that such great changes must indicate a power more than human. I said they had not seen miracles. In the first ages of Christianity, God deemed it wise to sanction by miracles the men who were to teach and write His word by authority. We have no evidence that miracles are wrought now.

5. It is a great error that so little stress is laid on the testimony of consciousness. Theodore Parker stands up in Boston declaring, that Jesus is only a man and not to be relied on to teach an infallible system of truth. Openly does he reject all proof from consciousness. He thinks the question of revelation is simply and wholly historic. Yet if he would, he might see that there are thousands who can testify that they know God, and that they know Jesus Christ. They can confirm the great doctrines of revelation most triumphantly by their own experience.

It is a great error when Christians allow themselves to be driven by infidels from the testimony of experience to the evidence of the historic argument. They should not allow their enemies to choose the strong-hold in which Christians shall entrench themselves, nor the weapons they shall use in their warfare for truth. Let Christians see that they know their own strength and then use it.

Suppose one should try to prove to me that I do not know God, nor the power of His truth. Shall I try to prove the Bible to be from God by any foreign historic testimony? No; I come at once to my consciousness. Does he reject this? He has no right to reject it. I know what the sinning state is and what the Christian state is also. My experience perhaps takes a broader range than his.

Suppose he denies the real divinity of Christ, and affirms that He is only a man. We meet him with the testimony of Christian consciousness. For almost two thousand years, Christians have been enjoying communion with Christ -- thousands at the same moment in every part of the world. They know this to be the case. They are perfectly conscious of this communion. How will the Unitarian, or rather the humanitarian, explain this? Is Jesus an omnipresent man? Is He so near omniscient too that He can hold communion of mind and heart with thousands of His people at the same instant, "always even to the end of the world?"

It is a great error that Christians should withhold this testimony of experience. Sometimes they are too modest, and seem to think it will be obtrusive. But this is a false modesty. It inflicts a great wrong on the cause of truth. It is a wrong to God. They ought to become His witnesses. It should be remembered that these great gospel truths are not only in the Bible, but they are in us -- in our hearts. Therefore we ought to get over this false modesty which is dumb as to the testimony of consciousness, and not allow the defenders of inspiration to be driven back on to the ground of the historic evidences only.

This testimony settles all the great questions of theology; the divinity and work of Christ; the depravity of man; the work of the Spirit; and the fact of repentance. All these great truths find ample attestation in Christian experience.

Bearing upon the truth of the Christian religion, a very pertinent case is related, on this wise: -- a lawyer attended a public religious conference; took his seat and began to make notes of things said. After the meeting had progressed considerably he arose and said -- I came into this meeting to take testimony. I was anxious to know whether there actually is any sufficient evidence for the Christian faith. I have taken down the names of sixty witnesses. They all speak of what they do know and testify what they have felt. I am constrained to admit that no men could possibly be better certified of the facts than they. Besides, I know these men and I must admit their honesty. I should believe them on any other subject which they understood. I am compelled to believe them now. As I

have been taught and trained to receive testimony, I cannot reject this. No testimony was ever stronger. So he said.

Is not this altogether reasonable? Yes, here was testimony enough. A tenth part of which would convict any man of murder.

This point of our argument is specially forcible now. What clouds of fresh witnesses are rising up in all the land! Indeed God has never since the Christian era suffered His truth to lack this sort of testimony; yet it comes in special copiousness in our own day. Will you not believe it?

6. How awful it must be to bear a false testimony as to God! Professed Christians do this when they forsake Him, and dishonor His truth.

How guilty also it must be to withhold evidence and fail to testify when God calls you to bear witness for Him! It must be awful to bear contradictory testimony, now this and now that. Better it were none at all!! Nothing so shakes the confidence of intelligent men of the world.

Again, it is fearful for the minister to preach the gospel and his church to unpreach it; for him to show what Christian experience is, and his church to gainsay every word of it by their ungodly lives. We should remember that worldly men are always by, taking notes. They are sure to take down our testimony. We ought to see to it that they have no excuse for getting it wrong, and also that they have no false testimony to get. The lawyer did so till he had the testimony of sixty witnesses. Think of that! So it is always. Somebody is noting down our daily testimony. All men are bound to take this testimony. One such witness is good against any amount of negative testimony. "In the mouth of two or three witnesses, shall every word be established."

Probably every one of you would say -- "I have seen some good witnesses on whom I am bound to rely." One evening while I was in N.Y., a Christian lady introduced to me her husband, then in an anxious state of mind, and soon afterwards converted. Then he said to me -- "I have been from early youth skeptically inclined, but my wife has made it impossible for me to become a skeptic. Before me continually was her holy life and her wise and timely conversation, always convincing me and compelling me to believe the gospel a reality. Hers was a constant testimony. I could not gainsay it; I could not disbelieve the gospel in the face of such evidence of its power." So he said to me.

Ought not such testimony to be conclusive?

But many of you are saying -- "I am no skeptic. but I am not ready yet to become a Christian. I cannot make up my mind to begin yet." At one of the meetings in N.Y last winter, the captain of the Brig that spoke the steamer, Central America, just before she went to the bottom of the Atlantic, rose and gave a brief account of that event. Just before nightfall, as the brig came near enough to see the situation of the Central America, her captain saw that something was wrong, therefore bore down towards her to offer his aid. Hauling up near enough to be heard, he put his trumpet to his lips and shouted -- "Can I render you any assistance?" The steamer's captain shouted back -- "Lay by me till morning." Again the brig's captain cried -- "Shall I not render you some assistance?" The second time and again the third, the steamer returned the same answer -- "Lay by me till morning." "Hang out your lights then, so that I can keep you in my eye till the morning comes." The steamer hung out her lights; but before ten o'clock, they went down beneath the surges of the Atlantic.

That, said the captain as he spoke in the meeting, is just what I have been doing in the salvation of my soul. Jesus shouted to me in my distress -- Shall I come near and render you some assistance? But I only answered -- "Lay by me till morning." But when the steamer went down to the bottom and I thought of her captain's cry -- "Lay by me till morning," it made such an impression on my mind, that I said, I cannot wait any longer, lest my vessel go down beneath the fearful billows before another morning dawns.

And now, dear young friends, out on the treacherous ocean of life; bearing down on the breakers of damnation; when Jesus Christ draws near you and hails aloud -- Can I offer you any assistance? Will you answer Him -- "Lay by me till morning?" Will you say that? Ah, should that hoped for morning never dawn on you! Who is that, lifting up His voice and crying aloud -- Can I render you any assistance? That loving voice -- whose is it? Will you put Him over till morning? Alas! that morning may never come!

[Back to Top](#)

God's Love To Us

Lecture VII
July 21, 1858

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 5:8: "But God commendeth His love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

What is meant here by "commend"? To recommend -- to set forth in a clear and strong light.

I. Towards whom is this love exercised?

II. How does He commend this love?

III. For what end does He commend His love to us?

I. Towards whom is this love exercised?

Towards us -- towards all beings of our lost race. To each one of us He manifests this love. Is it not written -- "God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life?"

II. How does He commend this love?

By giving His Son to die for us. By giving one who was a Son and a Son well-beloved. It is written that God "gave Him a ransom for all;" and that "He tasted death for every man." We are not to suppose that He died for the sum total of mankind in such a sense that His death is not truly for each one in particular. It is a great mistake into which some fall, to suppose that Christ died for the race in general, and not for each one in particular. By this mistake, the gospel is likely to lose much of its practical power on our hearts. We need to apprehend it as Paul did, who said of Jesus Christ -- "He loved me and gave Himself for me." We need to make this personal application of Christ's death. No doubt this was the great secret of Paul's holy life, and of his great power in preaching the gospel. So we are to regard Jesus as having loved us personally and individually. Let us consider how much pains God has taken to make us feel that He cares for us

personally. It is so in His providence, and so also in His gospel. He would fain make us single ourselves from the mass and feel that His loving eye and heart are upon us individually.

III. For what end does He commend His love to us?

1. Is it an ambition to make a display? Surely there can be no affection in this. God is infinitely above all affectation. He must from His very nature act honestly. Of course He must have some good reason for this manifestation of His love. No doubt He seeks to prove to us the reality of His love. Feeling the most perfect love towards our lost race, He deemed it best to reveal this love and make it manifest, both to us and to all His creatures. And what could evince His love if this gift of His Son does not? Oh how gloriously is love revealed in this great sacrifice! How this makes divine love stand out prominently before the universe! What else could He have done that would prove His love so effectually?

2. Again, He would show that His love is unselfish, for Jesus did not die for us as friends, but as enemies. It was while we were yet enemies that He died for us. On this point, Paul suggests that "scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man, some would even dare to die." But our race were far as possible from being good. Indeed they were not even righteous, but were utterly wicked. For a very dear friend one might be willing to die. There have been soldiers who, to save the life of a beloved officer, have taken into their own bosom the shaft of death; but for one who is merely just and not so much as good, this sacrifice could scarcely be made. How much less for an enemy! Herein we may see how greatly "God commendeth His love to us, in that, while we were yet enemies, Christ died for us."

3. Notice yet further, that this love of God to us cannot be the love of esteem or complacency, because there is in us no ground for such a love. It can be no other than the love of unselfish benevolence. This love had been called in question. Satan had questioned it in Eden. He made bold to insinuate -- "Hath your God indeed said, Ye shall not eat of every tree in the garden?" Why should He wish to debar you from such a pleasure? So the old Serpent sought to cast suspicion on the benevolence of God. Hence there was the more reason why God should vindicate His love.

4. He would also commend the great strength of this love. We should think we gave evidence of strong love if we were to give our friend a great sum of money. But what is any sum of money compared with giving up a dear Son to die? Oh surely it is surpassing love, beyond measure wonderful, that Jesus should not only labor and suffer, but should really die! Was ever love like this!

5. Again; God designed also to reveal the moral character of His love for men, and especially, its justice. He could not show favors to the guilty until His government was made secure and His law was duly honored. Without this sacrifice, He knew it could not be safe to pardon. God must maintain the honor of His throne. He must show that He could never wink at sin. He felt the solemn necessity of giving a public rebuke of sin before the universe. This rebuke was the more expressive because Jesus Himself was sinless. Of course it must be seen that in His death, God was not frowning on His sin, but on the sin of those whose sins He bore and in whose place He stood.

6. This shows God's abhorrence of sin, since Jesus stood as our representative. While He stood in this position, God could not spare Him, but laid on Him the chastisement of our iniquities. Oh what a rebuke of sin was that! How expressively did it show that God abhorred sin, yet loved the sinner! These were among the great objects in view -- to beget in our souls the two-fold conviction of His love for us and of our sin against Him. He would make those convictions strong and abiding. So He sets forth Jesus crucified before our eyes -- a far more expressive thing than any mere words. No saying that He loved us could approximate towards the strength and impressiveness of this manifestation. In no other way could He make it seem so much a reality -- so touching and so overpowering. Thus He commends it to our regard. Thus He invites us to look at it. He tells us angels desire to look into it. He would have us weigh this great fact, examine all its bearings, until it shall come full upon our souls with its power to save. He commends it to us to be reciprocated, as if He would incite us to love Him who has so loved us. Of course He would have us understand this love, and appreciate it, that we may requite it with responsive love in return. It is an example for us that we may love our enemies and, much more, our brethren. Oh when this love has taken its effect on our hearts, how deeply do we feel that we cannot hate any one for

whom Christ died! Then instead of selfishly thrusting our neighbor off, and grasping the good to which his claim is full as great as ours, we love him with a love so deep and so pure that it cannot be in our heart to do him wrong.

7. It was thus a part of the divine purpose to show us what true love is. And one said in prayer -- "We thank Thee, Father, that Thou hast given us Thy Son to teach us how to love." Yes, God would let us know that He Himself, is love, and hence that if we would be His children, we too must love Him and love one another. He would reveal His love so as to draw us into sympathy with Himself and make us like Him. Do you not suppose that a thorough consideration of God's love, as manifested in Christ, does actually teach us what love is, and serve to draw our souls into such love? The question is often asked -- How shall I love? The answer is given in this example. Herein is love! Look at it and drink in its spirit. Man is prone to love himself supremely. But there is a totally different sort of love from that. This love commends itself in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. How forcibly does this rebuke our selfishness! How much we need this lesson, to subdue our narrow selfishness, and shame our unbelief!

How strange it is that men do not realize the love of God! The wife of a minister who had herself labored in many revivals, said to me, "I never, till a few days since, knew that God is love." What do you mean? said I. "I mean that I never apprehended it in all its bearings before." Oh, I assure you, it is a great and blessed truth, and it is a great thing to see it as it is! When it becomes a reality to the soul, and you come under its powerful sympathy, then you will find the gospel indeed the power of God unto salvation. Paul prayed for his Ephesian converts that they might "be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height; and to know the love of God that passeth knowledge, that they might be filled with all the fulness of God."

8. God sought, in thus commending His love to us, to subdue our slavish fear. Some one said -- "When I was young, I was sensible of fearing God, but I knew I did not love Him. The instruction I received led me to fear, but not to love." So long as we think of God only as One to be feared, not to be loved, there will be a prejudice against Him as more an enemy than a friend. Every sinner knows that he deserves to be hated of God. He sees

plainly that God must have good reason to be displeased with him. The selfish sinner judges God from himself. Knowing how he should feel towards one who had wronged him, he unconsciously infers that God must feel so towards every sinner. When he tries to pray, his heart won't; it is nothing but terror. He feels no attraction towards God, no real love. The child spirit comes before God, weeping indeed, but loving and trusting. Now the state of feeling which fears only, God would fain put away, and make us know that He loves us still. We must not regard Him as being altogether such as ourselves. He would undeceive us and make us realize that though He has "spoken against us, yet He does earnestly remember us still." He would have us interpret His dealings fairly and without prejudice. He sees how, when He thwarts men's plans, they are bent on misunderstanding Him. They will think that He is reckless of their welfare, and they are blind to the precious truth that He shapes all His ways towards them in love and kindness. He would lead us to judge thus, that if God spared not His own Son, but gave Him up freely for us all, then He will much more give us all things else most freely.

9. Yet again; He would lead us to serve Him in love and not in bondage. He would draw us forth into the liberty of the sons of God. He loves to see the obedience of the heart. He would inspire love enough to make all our service free and cheerful and full of joy. If you wish to make others love you, you must give them your love. Show your servants the love of your heart; so will you break their bondage, and make their service one of love. In this way God commends His love towards us in order to win our hearts to Himself, and thus get us ready and fit to dwell forever in His eternal home. His ultimate aim is to save us from our sins that He may fill us forever with His own joy and peace.

REMARKS.

1. We see that saving faith must be the heart's belief of this great fact that God so loved us. Saving faith receives the death of Christ as an expression of God's love to us. No other sort of faith -- no faith in anything else, wins our heart to love God. Saving faith saves us from our bondage and our prejudice against Him. It is this which makes it saving. Any faith that leaves out this great truth must fail to save us. If any one element of faith is vital, it is this. Let any man doubt this fact of God's love in Christ, and I would not give much for all his religion. It is

worthless.

2. The Old Testament system is full of this idea. All those bloody sacrifices are full of it. When the priest, on behalf of all the people, came forward and laid his hand on the head of the innocent victim and then confessed his sins and the sins of all, and then when this animal was slain and its blood poured out before the Lord, and He gave tokens that He accepted the offering, it was a solemn manifestation that God substituted for the sufferings due the sinner, the death of an innocent lamb. Throughout that ancient system, we find the same idea, showing how God would have men see His love in the gift of His own dear Son.

3. One great reason why men find it so difficult to repent and submit to God, is that they do not receive this great fact -- do not accept it in simple faith. If they were to accept it and let it come home to their hearts, it would carry with it a power to subdue the heart to submission and to love.

4. One reason why young men are so afraid they shall be called into the ministry, is their lack of confidence in this love. Oh if they saw and believed this great love, surely they would not let eight hundred millions go down to hell in ignorance of this gospel! Oh how it would agonize their heart that so many should go to their graves and to an eternal hell, and never know the love of Jesus to their perishing souls! And yet here is a young man for whom Christ has died, who cannot bear to go and tell them they have a Savior! What do you think of his magnanimity! How much is his heart like Christ's heart? Do you wonder that Paul could not hold his peace, but felt that he must go to the ends of the earth and preach the name of Jesus where it had never been known before? How deeply he felt that he must let the world know these glad tidings of great joy! How amazing that young men now can let the gospel die unknown and not go forth to bless the lost! Ah, did they ever taste its blessedness? Have they ever known its power? And do you solemnly intend to conceal it, that it may never bless your dying brethren?

5. This manner of commending God's love is the strongest and most expressive He could employ. In no other way possible could He so forcibly demonstrate His great love to our race.

Hence, if this fails to subdue men's enmity, prejudice and unbelief, what can avail? What methods shall he use after this proves unavailing? The Bible demands -- "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" Well may it

make this appeal, for if this fails to win us, what can succeed?

6. If we had been His friends, there had been no need of His dying for us. It was only because we were yet sinners that He died for us. How great then are the claims of this love on our hearts!

7. Sinners often think if they were pious and good, the Lord might love them. So they try to win His love by doing some good things. They try in every such way to make God love them, and especially by mending their manners rather than their hearts. Alas, they seem not to know that the very fact of their being sunk so low in sin is moving God's heart to its very foundations! A sinless angel enjoys God's complacency, but not His pity; He is not an object of pity, and there is no call for it. The same is true of a good child. He receives the complacency of his parents, but not their compassion. But suppose this child becomes vicious. Then his parents mourn over his fall, and their compassion is moved. They look on him with pity and anxiety as they see him going down to the depths of vice, crime and degradation. More and more as he sinks lower and lower in the filth and abominations of sin, they mourn over him; and as they see how changed he is, they stand in tears saying -- Alas, this is our son, our own once-honored son! But fallen now! Our bowels are moved for him, and there is nothing we would not do or suffer, if we might save him!

So the sinner's great degradation moves the compassions of His divine Father to their very depths. When the Lord "passes by and sees him lying in his blood in the open field," He says -- That is My son! He bears the image of His Maker. "Since I have spoken against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore My bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." Sinners should remember that the very fact of their being sinners is the thing that moves God's compassion and pity. Do you say -- I do not see how God can make it consistent with His holiness to pardon and love such a sinner as I am? I can tell you how -- By giving His own Son to die in your stead!

8. Christ died for us that He might save us, not in, but from, our sins. Then must it not grieve Him exceedingly that we should continue in sin? What do you think? Suppose you were to see Jesus face to face, and He were to show you those wounds in His hands and in His side, and were to say -- I died for you because I saw you lost and beyond hope, and because I would save you from your sins; and now, will you repeat those sins again? Can you go on yet longer to sin against Me?

9. You may infer from our subject that Jesus must be willing to save you from wrath, if you truly repent and accept Him as your Savior. How can you doubt it? Having suffered unto death for this very purpose, surely it only remains for you to meet the conditions, and you are saved from wrath through Him.

10. You may infer also that God, having spared not His Son, will also with Him freely give you all things else; grace enough to meet all your wants; the kind care of His providence; the love of His heart; everything you can need. To continue in sin despite of such grace and love must be monstrous! It must grieve His heart exceedingly.

A friend of mine who has charge of one hundred and fifty boys in a Reform School, is accustomed, when they misbehave, to put them for a time on bread and water. What do you think he does himself in some of these cases? He goes and puts himself with them on bread and water! The boys in the school see this, and they learn the love of the Superintendent and father. Now, when tempted to crime, they must say to themselves -- "If I do wrong, I shall have to live on bread and water; but the worst of all is, my father will come and eat bread and water with me and for my sake; and how can I bear that? How can I bear to have my father who loves me so well, confine himself to bread and water for my sake!"

So Jesus puts Himself on pain and shame and death that you might have joy and life -- that you might be forgiven and saved from sinning; and now will you go on to sin more? Have you not heart to appreciate His dying love? Can you go on and sin yet more and none the less for all the love shown you on Calvary?

You understand that Christ died to redeem you from sin. Suppose your own eyes were to see Him face to face, and He should tell you all He has done for you. Sister, He says, I died to save you from that sin; will you do it again? Can you go on and sin just the same as if I had never died for you?"

In that Reform School of which I spoke, the effects produced on even the worst boys by the love shown them is really striking. The Superintendent had long insisted that he did not want locks and bars to confine his boys. The Directors had said -- You must lock them in; if you don't they will run away. On one occasion, the Superintendent was to be absent two weeks. A Director came to him, urging that he must lock up the boys before he left -- for while he was absent, they would certainly run away. The Superintendent replied -- I think not;

I have confidence in those boys. But, responds the Director, give us some guaranty. Are you willing to pledge your city lot, conditioned that if they do run away, the lot goes to the Reform School Fund? After a little reflection, he consents -- "I will give you my lot -- all the little property I have in the world -- if any of my boys run away while I am gone." Before he sets off, he calls all the boys together; explains to them his pledge; asks them to look at his dependent family, and then appeals to their honor and their love for him. "Would you be willing to see me stripped of all my property? I think I can trust you." He went; returned a little unexpectedly and late on one Saturday night. Scarce had he entered the yard, when the word rang through the sleeping halls -- "Our father has come!" and almost in a moment they were there greeting him and shouting, "We are all here! we are all here!"

Cannot Christ's love have as much power as that? Shall the love the Reform School boys bear to their official father hold them to their place during the long days and nights of his absence; and shall not Christ's love to us restrain us from sinning? What do you say? Will you say thus -- "If Christ loves me so much, then it is plain He won't send me to hell, and therefore I will go on and sin all I please." Do you say that? Then there is no hope for you. The gospel that ought to save you can do nothing for you but sink you deeper in moral and eternal ruin. You are fully bent to pervert it to your utter damnation! If those Reform School boys had said thus: "Our father loves us so well, he will eat bread and water with us, and therefore we know he will not punish us to hurt us" -- would they not certainly bring a curse on themselves? Would not their reformation be utterly hopeless? So of the sinner who can make light of the Savior's dying love. Oh is it possible that when Jesus has died for you to save your soul from sin and from hell, you can do it again and yet again? Will you live on in sin only the more because He has loved you so much?

Think of this and make up your mind. "If Christ has died to redeem me from sin, then away with all sinning henceforth and forever! I forsake all my sins from this hour! I can afford to live or to die with my Redeemer; why not? So help me God, I have no more to do with sinning, forever!"

[Back to Top](#)

The Blessedness Of The Merciful - No. 1

Lecture VIII

Blessedness Of The Pure In Heart - No. 2

Lecture IX

Blessed Are The Persecuted - No. 3

Lecture X

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

LECTURE VIII.

August 18, 1858

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE MERCIFUL --No. 1

Text.--Matt. 5:7: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

I. What is mercy? And who are the merciful?

II. Christ commends the exercise of mercy.

III. What is implied in forgiveness?

IV. Mercifulness has no sympathy with sin and never covers it up from view.

I. What is mercy? And who are the merciful?

These are properly the first questions to be considered.

1. Mercy is not to be confounded with goodness, since it is only an attribute of goodness. Justice is another, but justice stands in some respects over against mercy. Goodness is the more comprehensive term, and includes both mercy and justice.

2. Justice treats moral agents according to their character and deserts; mercy treats them better than this, and would do them all the good she can, despite of their ill-desert. Thus God sends rain on the unjust as well as on the just, doing good to those who deserve none.

3. Justice would execute law; but mercy supersedes its execution wherever she can do so with reasonable safety. Justice is apparently exacting, and omits all efforts to bless the guilty, but makes them a sacrifice to the public good, being in these respects quite distinct from and even opposite to mercy. Mercy would persevere in efforts to do the sinner good; would be forbearing towards even enemies.

II. Christ commends the exercise of mercy.

If, says He, ye only love those who love you, what thank have ye? And if ye do good to those who do good to you, what thank have ye? Do not even publicans the same? In this, what do ye more than others?

1. The special manifestations of mercy and justice assume certain peculiar aspects in him who acts as a ruler. Justice becomes more imperative; it may not be at his option to exercise mercy wherever he would. His office demands of him a sacred regard to the general interests of the community. These remarks apply to God in His relations as moral Governor of our race. Those relations hold Him to infinite watchfulness over His kingdom, to secure a due respect for law and the great Lawgiver.

2. But God does not embarrass His creatures in the exercise of mercy by devolving on them the execution of retributive justice under His government. He knows they are incompetent to the responsibility. It is well we are not required to bear it. We are now left free to forgive our enemies and exercise towards them almost unlimited mercy. "Vengeance belongeth to God," and He knows how and when to administer it. But we are fully at liberty to seek their good and nothing but their good, save as God, or the demands of society, may make an exception. You are aware that in some very peculiar circumstances God has forbidden His people to seek the good of the wicked. Of the Ammonite and Moabite, God said (Deut. 23:6,) "Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days forever." When God comes forth to execute His law on nations, it removes them from the reach of our mercy. So when He sends sinners to hell, bringing them there under the perfect execution of His retributive justice, we can pray for them no longer, and may no longer seek their peace. But, universally, unless God forbids us to seek their good, we should seek it earnestly. We are to have a merciful disposition always. God has. We may say of Him truly that the attribute of mercy in His bosom is always alive. --

always boiling up from its deep, eternal fountain. He is never malignant, not even towards His bitterest enemies in hell. He would speak as kindly as Abraham is represented to have spoken in the parable -- "Son, remember that thou in thy life time receivedst thy good things" -- where every word is uttered with all the kindness which circumstances admit.

3. So human magistrates often curb in their tender emotions. Their hearts are full of love, but their responsibilities compel them to the administration of justice, for they are under God "ministers of wrath" to execute His sentence against evil doers.

Let us here note a very obvious distinction between the magistrate and the man. As a man and in his personal relations, the judge may treat the prisoner with the tenderest compassion, while yet as judge he firmly sentences him to a shameful death. The sheriff may strike the fatal blow that cuts the drop with a steady hand, but faint suddenly thereafter under the fearful shock it gives his nerves to send a guilty man suddenly into the eternal world. As a man, he is merciful; as an officer, he is bound to be just.

4. When we read the New Testament we are struck with its broad requisitions to be merciful. In the Lord's prayer, we are taught to pray -- "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," as if we need not expect mercy from God farther than we show mercy to our fellow-men. If my brother trespass against me, said one, how often shall I forgive him? Until seven times? Nay, replied Jesus, but "until seventy times seven." It is your concern always to seek the good of your enemies and treat them universally with lovingkindness. On this our Lord lays great stress, always putting strong cases and requiring this spirit towards all, friends and enemies.

III. What is implied in forgiveness?

1. In God it implies setting aside the penalty of the law. But it cannot imply this in our case, since we have not this responsibility.

2. Pardon under any government sets aside the legal disabilities which the offence created. But in our private capacity, it is only a loving spirit and cheerful manifestations of favor, good-will. Suppose you have been wronged. What does mercy in your case then imply? That you try to reform the offender; and try to save him from the penalty of the law of God under

which he must sink to hell unless he repents. Persistent efforts to do him good comprise the true idea. This is our duty to personal enemies. So Christ teaches us to bless those who curse us, to do good to them that do ill to us. To do this, and to persevere in loving efforts to save them, is mercy.

3. Our Lord urges on His people the exercise of mercy in many forms and with wonderful energy and fulness. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." He insists that we shall not avenge ourselves, or retaliate, but go the full length of mercy.

In these beatitudes, Christ enjoined those forms of virtue which are among the most difficult for depraved human nature. If we compare these with other forms of what we call virtue, we shall see the force of this remark. For example, we regard hatred of sin, a sense of justice and an approval of retribution, as forms of virtue. But they are almost natural, even to depraved hearts. It is natural to hate sin -- all but our own, and perhaps those; certainly we cannot approve them. Men never can love sin for its own sake. They love it for the good, though transient, which they hope to realize from it. Who can have any complacency in the character of the devil? No man can approve of real malignity. This is the reason why you see outbreaks of violence and summary proceedings under lynch law. A striking example was afforded a few years since in a case where a steamboat captain violated a young lady entrusted to his care. When his trial came on at Buffalo, his defence seemed determined to make very light of his crime, and even the magistrate was thought to connive at this policy; whereupon public indignation was so aroused that the people threatened to tear down his office, and did compel him to administer justice in the case. That sort of crime, men could scarcely be found who would tolerate. The virtue implied in such indignation against sin, is comparatively easy. But these virtues, commended in Matthew 5, are real and difficult. Perhaps they are the only sure tests of a regenerate heart. If these are absent, the evidence must be deficient.

4. There is a species of compassion for the offender which apologizes for sin, looking after the protection of the criminal from punishment, and not after the protection of society from outrage. It cares much to screen the guilty, little to promote the interests of peace and purity. Such a spirit we

often see among Universalists. All their sympathies are wont to go with the sinner. They throw their influence in the way of the administration of justice. Where Universalism prevails, it often happens that you cannot get a jury to convict for a capital crime. Manifestly, this spirit is not with, but against, the law of God. It is easy and natural enough for those who mean and hope to escape from all punishment themselves, to take sides with criminals.

5. A merciful disposition is never disposed to take sides with sin and the sinner against right. You see this in the spirit which moved God to send Jesus Christ to die for sinners in order to magnify the law and honor His throne. You see the same thing also in the spirit which Jesus Himself manifested. Both always defended the divine law, and most fully honored and sustained it. Christ came to condemn the sin of the world and not to apologize for it, or justify it. Because He condemned it, He laid down His life for it. He would not ask that sinners be forgiven until He had fully honored and satisfied the law by His own death in the sinner's stead.

It is a curious fact that all that class of men, Universalists, who throw their influence against the administration of law on criminals, set aside the atonement by the death of Christ. They do not recognize the principle on which it rests. They do not believe in making sacrifices of anybody's happiness for the sake of sustaining law and government. What if Christ had been of their mind and had acted on their principle? Then had there been no salvation for our race.

IV. Mercifulness has no sympathy with sin and never covers it up from view.

1. Guilt is a condition precedent of the exercise of mercy. The idea of mercy pre-supposes the fact of guilt. No one can be a subject of mercy save as he deserves punishment.

2. If ill-desert is small in amount, there is scope for the exercise of only a little mercy. If a man deserves State's Prison for three years, mercy can pardon him for three years only.

3. The greater the virtue of mercifulness, the richer is its reward. When exercised under appropriate circumstances, it surely confers intense happiness, but if we exercise justice where the case demands mercy, we fail

of the reward. The exercise of justice also, where the case demands it, confers real happiness, but mercy in its appropriate place, much more. We are all aware that when we exercise mercy rightly, it is a special gratification to us, far above what we feel in the exercise of justice. If the public good demands the execution of justice, we enjoy it, but wherever it will bear to exercise mercy, there is great luxury in it.

REMARKS.

1. How sublime and wonderful is the mercifulness of God! Just think what moral grandeur is evinced in His mercy towards our world! He is not only patient and forbearing, despite of our great iniquities, but He loads us down with favors.

Then think also at what expense to Himself. Suppose a man had injured you and had continued to heap wrongs upon you a long time; but you freely pardon him even at great expense. You give your money, your time and your labor, to provide the necessary means of procuring his pardon, and finally you even lay down your life for him. Would you not think this a wonderful case of love? But, by a most wonderful manifestation, God gave His Son to die for sinners, showing how greatly He delighted in mercy and that judgment is His "strange work."

2. This exercise of rich mercy must have gratified Jesus Christ. Those of us who have exercised mercy towards such as have abused us can appreciate this. We can understand that Jesus must find the richest and most intense satisfaction in the exercise of His great mercy towards sinners.

3. It is by His manifested love that God overcomes the hearts of His enemies. Revealing His great love, He subdues their hearts and brings them under this love-power; and then, though they deserve to be banished forever, He rejoices over them as one who has found great spoil. As when the prodigal son returned, famished and filthy, but penitent, the father is seen rushing forth to meet him, his heart running over with joy.

4. If we may judge of the happiness of heaven from our own exercises, we must conclude that God's most intense happiness is found in the exercise of mercy, and that this is His highest form of virtue. The exercise of mercy has always been with Him a present intention, and in this sense, a present reality.

5. God's mercifulness must greatly strengthen His influence and power as a

moral Governor. Angels desire to look into this scheme of redeeming mercy. They were awake to its first intimations, and as soon as it began to develop itself, they caught up the glorious idea and all the heavenly host were on the wing, rushing down to earth to join in the swelling notes of the first great anthem -- "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace and good will towards men!" Who can doubt that this manifestation greatly increased their happiness and also their holiness -- their love of God and their joy in His reign?

6. This manifestation of God's mercy must confound Satan and all hell. What can they say when they see the cost at which God exercises mercy! How must they be confounded when they see how their plan to overthrow God's empire by the introduction of sin into our world, has served mainly to strengthen it, by His glorious manifestations of mercy!

7. Some have wondered why God did not annihilate Adam and Eve as soon as they fell by sin. The fact is, He could not afford it. By that event, an opportunity was given Him to do a great work for His kingdom. It was a glorious opportunity and He could not afford to lose it. Mercy was a rich and a glorious attribute of His nature, and the time had now come to manifest it on a wondrous scale. In the case of the fallen angels, He had manifested His justice and its fearful forms; but an ocean of mercy was boiling up from the depths of His heart, and how could it be suppressed any longer? Why should He longer forego the luxury of its exercise? Luxury, do I say? Certainly. So great is His mercy, no luxury can be compared to this. Do you suppose He feels it a sacrifice and an unhappiness to show mercy to lost men? No indeed. It is no less true of Him than of us, -- "Blessed is the merciful!"

8. Those who have not from their hearts forgiven all men are not themselves forgiven. I have sometimes seen persons in great distress of mind for a long time, and have asked them -- Are there not persons whom you regard as your enemies and whom you will not forgive? In many cases, this has been the manifest reason why they cannot find mercy. It is very common for persons to linger long under conviction of sin and in great anxiety, utterly unable to find peace because they do not forgive their supposed enemies. Some years since we had among us a poor colored man who, coming near death, was greatly exercised about his preparation. I said to him -- Do you forgive all your enemies? No, said he, by no means; I have been robbed almost all my life long of my liberty, my labor, and my very life, and how can I ever forgive the men

who have done all this? If I cannot be saved without forgiving my enemies, then I must be lost! I found him in this state several times and labored to show him his duty. At length as I entered his room on one occasion, I saw his face in a glow of joy and peace. As soon as he saw me, he cried out -- "I've got over it; God has helped me over; I love my enemies now!" He was indeed a new man and died in the blessed peace of the gospel.

9. Some say -- "I can forgive but cannot forget." Probably they do not really forgive.

Many get a hope and deceive themselves. They do not fully and heartily forgive their enemies, neither does God forgive them.

10. Sometimes men say -- "If those who have injured me have repented, I can forgive them -- not otherwise." That is not the right ground. God will take care of their repentance before Him, and can judge of its sincerity far better than you can. He does not devolve on you the responsibility of finding out whether your enemy is truly penitent or not. All He asks of you is to feel a merciful spirit towards him. That is your part.

11. The gospel is an illustration of the spirit of the law, for the law requires the exercise of mercy because it requires perfect benevolence, and this of course involves mercy. In His death for sinners, Christ gave us the true meaning of the law of God in its spirituality.

12. The gospel therefore is not contrary to the law, but illustrates it truly and beautifully. God's character as seen in the gospel is like His character as seen in the law, save that the latter omits some manifestations made in the former. The manifestations are similar so far as the comparison extends. You have more in the gospel than in the law, but nothing contradictory -- nothing discrepant in the one as compared with the other.

13. The Jews in Christ's time had a very low estimate of the law. Hence Christ needed to labor much to elevate the law above their standard. We see this running through most of His sermons on the mount. The whole system of forgiveness and love of enemies assumed a higher standard. Christ taught men not to resist evil, but to exercise the utmost forbearance and mercifulness. Repeatedly Christ said substantially -- Ye teach a virtue common to saints and to sinners -- doing good only to those who do good to you. I come to give you new

and higher conceptions of virtue.

There is a state of feeling which resembles mercy and is often mistaken for it, but falls short of it. Christ alludes to it when He says -- "If ye love them who love you, what reward have ye?" It is a partial mercifulness while you love only particular persons, and there are some towards whom you have no forgiving spirit. So long as there is one for whom you cannot pray, it is plain there is one whom you do not sincerely love. If you are in such a state of mind that you cannot labor affectionately for his salvation, you prove yourself to be radically wrong. For you are bound to forgive all. Else, how can you honestly offer the Lord's prayer -- "Forgive us as we forgive"? Luke has it -- "Forgive us for we forgive." How can you have the face to say this before God when you do not forgive?

14. It will not suffice to pray -- Lord, enable us to forgive others. This is not the language of the Lord's prayer by any means.

15. Reformers are very apt to be deceived by the exercise of partial benevolence. They mistake hatred of sin for love of souls and to being in general They can denounce slavery and slaveholding terribly; so might the devil. No doubt he abhors it as one of the meanest sins in his kingdom. It is impossible that he should not hate sin and wickedness. He cannot love it for its own sake, for there is nothing lovely in it. He must treat sin and sinners with the utmost contempt, for he is a moral being. No moral being can truly say -- "Evil, be thou my good."

16. It is remarkable that some professed reformers manifest no mercifulness towards sinners, but would apparently bring down curses and vengeance on them instead of blessings. Until they get a right spirit themselves and really try to improve the moral state of men's hearts, they will do little to bless mankind. Until the Temperance Reform took on the Washingtonian type and gave its warm right hand to the drunkard to help him up, it accomplished very little indeed. Then it took a mighty stride. When the temperance men lifted their fallen neighbors up out of the gutter, washed and clothed them, and led them forward in kindness to take the pledge; went to their desolate homes and spread joy in sad hearts there, and supplied wants long unsupplied, then it was that men turned in crowds from the path of the destroyer.

I knew a case in Boston. In a Methodist meeting one cold winter evening, my friend saw a man slip in at a late hour and lean, shivering with cold, over the

stove. After service he spoke kindly to the sufferer, who replied with a humble apology for intruding himself there; said he hoped he had done no harm. On being questioned, he told a pitiful tale of destitution and sorrow, and revealed the fact that he had been living the life of a miserable drunkard, and that his family were suffering extremely. My friend says -- "I will go home with you;" then took his arm and proceeded onward, calling at a provision store to order some provisions sent, and at a coal yard to order some coal. Thus with his own arrival came also these welcome and greatly needed supplies. It seemed to the poor sufferers in that home of sorrow that his visit was that of an angel of mercy. His words too and his whole bearing were those of kindness. He said to the father of that family -- I cannot bear to see you drunk ever again. You must drink no more. I had rather be whipped unto blood than to see you turn back again to the pathway of death.

I mention this case to show you the difference between chasing a man down with justice and following him with mercy.

17. I have spoken of the difference in their relations and duties between the magistrate and the man. The same difference obtains between the citizen and the man. As a citizen, one may be bound to give information against crime, while as a man, he has no right to avenge himself. The execution of law looks towards the protection of the public. In view of the public interests, we have no right to refuse to inform against those who destroy property and disturb the peace. Suppose a villain should come into your house and commit murder there. You are bound to arrest and report him to the proper authorities. The good of other families, exposed to the murderous spirit of such a man, demands it. But at the same time, you are bound to pray for him and do all you can to bring him to real repentance before God. You should say to him -- Come now, you have committed an awful crime; I have informed against you as I was bound to do; but I love you still, and I beg you to repent of your sin and give yourself up to Christ.

18. As a private individual, no man may indulge revenge. Suppose you have been wronged never so much, yet if you cannot pray and labor for the reformation and salvation of him who has wronged you, you are not right before God. If you cannot rejoice in the prosperity of any human being whatever -- if it mars your happiness to see anyone happy, you are greatly wrong in heart. This fact shows how impossible it would be, if you were in heaven, to enjoy its bliss.

Many have a malignant disposition, and seem to love to lay up and brood over their grievances with malignant feelings.

Often backslidings begin with grievances, cherished and not forgiven. You will find that backsliders are almost always censorious. They cherish the spirit of quarrels and go through life elbowing their way along, at odds with somebody always and often with many.

Suppose you die in this state; you surely go to hell! How dare a man live in a state of unmercifulness towards another! It is horrible to live so! You may die suddenly; you certainly cannot die in peace, while that evil spirit of enmity lurks in your bosom. You may have had a quarrel with a neighbor, and are saying -- "If he goes to heaven, I don't want to meet him there." If he should go to heaven, you will not meet him there in your present spirit -- that is very certain. But if he goes to hell, you will meet him there! You cannot go to heaven unless you can forgive everybody, and with a free heart too. One woman who had a bitter quarrel with another was asked -- What if you were to meet her in the eternal world? "I would rake her up in hell" -- was her reply. Do you expect to go to hell? "I have none but the spirit of hell! It burns and boils in my soul perpetually."

Two men, professed Christians, had a quarrel one evening. The next morning, one said to the other -- "We shall love each other better after we have taken a ground-sweat." -- as if lying in the grave till the resurrection would sweat off such rancor of spirit! No indeed, the grave has no such power. The "ground-sweat" never does that work. Nothing but the mercy of Jesus and His dying love can reach this malignity of spirit and cure it; and this cure must be wrought here on earth.

Are you going to your death-bed with an unforgiving spirit? Do you say to your enemy -- He has wronged me; I cannot forgive him? Oh awful state! Suppose I have to preach your funeral sermon. Shall I say -- This man has gone to heaven? God forbid that I should speak treacherously and deceive the living!

But you say, I have been so injured and wronged! You have? And had not Christ too been injured? Yet did He not cry -- "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"? Had not Stephen been injured? Yet hear him pray -- "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge!" Thus men die who are going to heaven. But ye who have no forgiveness in your souls, don't sleep over your unforgiving spirit. Go to

Jesus; bathe your soul in the tears of repentance till you can offer the Lord's Prayer without a fear lest being forgiven only as you forgive others, you should bring down only curses on your soul!

LECTURE IX.

September 1, 1858

BLESSEDNESS OF THE PURE IN HEART --No. 2

Text.--Matt. 5:8: "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God."

I. What are we to understand by "heart" in this passage, and what by a "pure heart?"

II. Let us next consider some of the natural and necessary manifestations of a pure heart.

III. What is meant by saying "they shall see God"?

I. What are we to understand by "heart" in this passage, and what by a "pure heart?"

1. The term, "heart," is used in the Scriptures in various senses -- a fact rendered necessary by the poverty of all language. The difficulty of arriving at the true sense in any particular case is much less than you might suppose, inasmuch as it may generally be determined accurately by the connection in which the word stands and the things said of it.

2. When used of the mind, we of course cannot understand by it the fleshly organ of the body -- the great central power in the circulation of the blood.

But as applied to the mind, it has several somewhat various senses. It is sometimes used as synonymous with conscience; e.g. "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart" &c. It is also used as synonymous with soul, the spiritual as opposed to the material part of man, and here it indicates the fountain of moral action; as "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts" &c. We know that when the mind has committed itself to any chosen end, this very committal controls its action, everything is drawn into the great current. Now it should be noted that the term heart is used sometimes for the mind

considered as thus committed voluntarily to its chosen end.

3. Consequently it is used to denote that in which moral character consists - as, a "pure heart," a "wicked heart" &c. -- and as that which must be morally changed; -- "Make yourselves a new heart" -- "A new heart will I give you" &c.

4. Our text, speaking of the heart as PURE, must mean by it, a committed state of mind -- morally committed to some chosen end. It cannot mean a mere executive volition, but must imply a state as distinct from a single executive volition, and of course a state of moral purity. A wicked heart is a mind in a state of devotion to self; a pure heart, a mind in a state of devotion to God. It is a state of moral purity, resulting from a committal of the soul to God. Of course it includes the affections which by this voluntary committal are drawn into sympathy with the will. The thing in which we are specially active is the committal of our whole mind to the will of God. The rest follows by natural laws.

II. Let us next consider some of the natural and necessary manifestations of a pure heart.

This enquiry becomes all-important to us because only such as are pure in heart are truly blessed. Hence it behoves us to know whether we are of this number.

1. Our Lord has said that "out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh." We may safely infer therefore that if the heart be pure, the conversation will be pure also. The words spoken will be heavenly if the heart be heavenly. Christ affirmed only a natural law when He said that the mouth would speak from the abundance of the heart. The conversation therefore will be pure -- not sensual, not worldly.

2. The heart will appear in the life, for by a law of necessity, the heart governs the life. If the heart is pure, the life not only ought to be pure but will be. If the heart of a man be pure, all else will be pure -- all his activities -- all he does as well as all he says. If any of us suppose that our hearts are better than our lives, we are fundamentally deceived. Nothing can be pure if the heart is not; and nothing can be impure if the heart be really pure. For the heart controls all our activities by a law of necessity; hence there can be no variation from this universal law.

3. A pure heart loathes everything foreign to its nature -- everything unchaste, impure. "I hate vain thoughts," said David, "but Thy law do I love." Great pains will be taken to keep the imagination pure. Persons of impure hearts dwell on the lustful scenes of the past, and linger round the memories of their sinful indulgencies; but the pure heart loathes these things which the impure cherish.

There will be also a great loathing of impure conversation. Those things you would be ashamed of if Jesus Christ were present, you will loathe now. The fact that the pure in heart shall see God shows that they must loathe evil thoughts. Even if filthy dreams are thrust into your mind by Satan, you will repel and rule out their influence the moment you awake, and will dread and abhor such visitations of evil.

The pure heart has a keen sensibility against everything impure, and intuitively repels every approach of evil as it would the devil. This is an instinct of a pure heart.

4. Great prayerfulness is another indication of a pure heart. Such persons will pray a great deal. They have many things which they desire for others, and hence there are many subjects of prayer always present and pressing. Pure hearts literally "pray always" when they are awake, and I have sometimes thought, when they are asleep also.

5. A pure heart will manifest itself in great watchfulness, for we live in a filthy world. As one would walk carefully and circumspectly in the midst of filth, gathering up his skirts to prevent their being soiled, so will they of pure heart guard against everything that would defile the mind.

6. There will be great reluctance to mingle in worldly society, for such society cannot be agreeable. It will be submitted to as a disagreeable thing, as when you go to visit the sick. You do not go there because the surroundings are agreeable. Some of them may be very disagreeable, and some really dangerous to your health. You go to do good, and not to enjoy things agreeable.

7. This state of mind is the opposite of the worldly man's. "God is not in all his thoughts;" but the man of pure heart "sets the Lord always before him." He lives as seeing God, though He be invisible. Hence, he cannot enjoy the

presence and society of God's enemies. If duty calls him among such persons, he will go, yet not to enjoy their society as a thing congenial to his tastes, but rather with a kind of fear and shrinking as if his dangers and temptations were thereby to be greatly increased. I may appeal to every Christian's experience. He knows how he feels when he goes among ungodly men. Ah, he is fearful lest his heart may be drawn away from God, or agonized by the presence of sin against the God he loves. A pure mind, going into the great cities where licentiousness abounds, will feel an intuitive loathing. So, a man who from some eminence should look down on a battlefield and see its carnage and strife and bloodshed, will recoil with horror. Scarcely less will one who goes into a political caucus loathe the manifest selfishness, ambition and false hood which he meets with there. No sympathy can he have with such things. He can go there only with loathing and fear of contamination. I went to one political convention, and I pray God never to let me go to another. Lies were there; falsehood and ambition were there. I longed to get away alone to pray and to weep.

8. The same is true of business. Christians will not go into its scuffles and scrambles, save with loathing and dread. What is there? Who does not know what it is? The spirit of the world. Not that politics or business necessarily imply this; but they usually involve it.

9. A pure heart is pained at the sight of sin. "I beheld the transgressors and was grieved," said the Psalmist. So all pure hearts feel. As far as is consistent with duty, a pure heart will shun contact with the world, submitting to such contact only at the call of duty, and then going with much watchfulness and prayer. So contrary is the spirit of a pure heart from that of the world, there can be no points of sympathy between them. The one is all holy; the other is unholy, and worldly. The enjoyments of the one are all heavenly; of the other, all selfish. There can be no real fellowship between spirits so unlike.

10. A pure heart cannot be a friend of the world, any more than it can of its own personal enemies. "Am not I grieved," says the Psalmist, "with them that rise up against Thee?" "Do not I hate them that hate Thee?" Did he mean that he had malignant feelings? No! but only that as he was in sympathy with God, he could not but love those who loved God and hate those that hated Him.

What is your experience in regard to your personal enemies? You have had opportunity to test your feelings on this point. I have had. You cannot be their friend in the sense of having sympathy with them. Who can be in this sense the friend of the wicked? Not he who is pure in heart. How do we treat God's enemies? Kindly, to be sure, -- with cordiality as sentient beings, but not with such cordiality as implies the least sympathy with their moral life. The Psalmist said -- "I beheld the transgressors and was grieved. Horror took hold of me because men kept not Thy law." How would an angel feel in view of sin? How would the holy in heaven feel if sin were to break out there? Suppose all at once some one in those heavenly throngs should utter disrespectful language against God; would they not withdraw from him -- as Moses cried out when Korah and his company sinned -- "Get away from the tents of these wicked men and touch nothing of theirs lest ye be consumed in all their sins." "Come not, O my soul, into their secret; to their honor, be not thou united."

If you once understand what a pure heart is, you will see that these must be its manifestations. The mind will instinctively avoid all these worldly ends and ways which so charm ungodly men. A pure heart consisting as it does in consecration to God and its necessary results, it must seek its pleasures in doing God's will and in building up His kingdom. Several years ago I knew a Christian brother in one of our great cities who was a teacher. In his summer vacations, he would go into the country, and seeking a retired location, he would set himself there to promote the salvation of souls. He would visit families, get up prayer meetings, and would almost always have a revival of religion. It was remarkable to see how much delight he took in this work. It was the life of his soul. I have known others also who, like him, seemed to realize the idea of walking with God. Such must find their supreme delight in communing with God. Nothing else do they seek so naturally. They must of course loathe whatever interferes with perfect communion with God.

III. What is meant by saying "they shall see God"?

1. The leading idea is, they shall be admitted into His presence to dwell with Him, as, in oriental palaces, those who were admitted saw their monarch face to face and enjoyed his friendship. Only a few -- the specially favored, ever saw the face of the Eastern king. Hence the figure.
2. The words may bear another sense. They shall see God now by an inward

spiritual apprehension of His character. So the Bible teaches. The Spirit of the Lord dwells with those of a pure heart. They are fully conscious of His presence. They see Him in His providences; not any visible form, but yet the real manifestations of His power and of His love. They are aware of His agency. So great is their sympathy with Him, they cannot fail of this. They feel His presence in their secret devotions. They know He manifests Himself to them otherwise than to the world. Often it is with them as if they saw God, even as our senses apprehend their objects, the eye, its sights, and the ear, its sounds. So we seem to receive a new sense when we come into such deep sympathy with God. We have a spiritual apprehension of Gods' presence and character.

3. The Savior says the pure in heart are blessed because they shall come into His presence and enjoy Him forever. But more than this is true; they are blessed here in time. They have in their souls a sense of sweetness and purity; they are conscious of loving God and of having great peace of soul and purity of heart -- which, of themselves, work out great peace and joy.

4. None but the pure in heart can see God. What would heaven be if the impure in heart were to go there? Surely they ought not to go there to defile heaven! It could be of no use to them to go there. It is safe to say, that would be the most awful place for them in the universe. Nothing could be so repugnant to their sympathies -- nothing so horrible to their hearts. When Isaiah had a vision of heaven and saw the seraphim veiling their faces with their wings, and heard them cry -- "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory," what was the impression made on his soul? He cried out, "Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." And not until a seraph touched his lips with a live coal from the altar, and said, "Thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin is purged," could he breathe freely. O sinner, what a strange thought has entered your mind that you should think of going to heaven without holiness! What manifest madness! You doubt whether you need a new heart? Alas, if you once saw heaven, you would see that you could not even desire it without a new heart.

5. The Scriptures represent men as becoming conscious and aware of God's presence. "Lo, God is in this place!" "The Lord is in His holy temple." "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery which none of the princes of this

world knew; but as it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them to us by His Spirit. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." (1 Cor. 2:7-15) A beast cannot understand the experience of a man, for it is not in him. So "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned." Try to make a blind man understand colors; can you do it? Never. You have one entire class of ideas which you cannot communicate to him. So, suppose you try to explain sounds to one who has no ear. He has never heard the sweet sounds of the human voice in conversation or in music, and what can he know of those things? A blind man, being asked what his notion was of scarlet color, replied he thought it was like the sound of a trumpet. So wicked men conceive of spiritual things. The Christian can understand the experience of the sinner, but the sinner cannot understand his. "Himself," says the divine word, "is discerned of no man." Christians have once been sinners; sinners have not once been Christians. Hence the Christian can understand the state of the sinner in his wickedness, and also when he advances to a state of conviction, but the sinner cannot understand his states.

REMARKS.

1. Nothing short of this purity of heart really crucifies one to the love of the world. After his heart is made pure, you have no need to argue with a man to persuade him to give up worldly amusements. Before his heart becomes pure, your arguments avail nothing. He asks you what harm there is in it? You may plead ever so much that he abandon them; it does no good. You may speak against useless ornaments; it does no good; but after they have a pure hart, the work is done. What have they to do with running after earthly things? Before, they would cry -- "How can we live without this pleasure? We are made to have it." But after they have known God, you need not tell them they must lay such things aside. Their own intuitive convictions declare it to their souls. After I became a Christian, though no one spoke to me about it, yet I was ashamed of my ruffles and of my great bunch of watch-seals and keys. I could see that I had worn them for mere show. At once I ceased to care for those vain things. When young converts obtain a pure heart, all they want in the line of dress and

adornment is only so much as will make them most useful.

2. Christians need not be surprised at the apologies the wicked make for worldly fashions. They seek those things as their pleasures, and they will have them in some form. Shut them off in one direction, and they fly to another.

3. Those who are really converted will be shocked intuitively by things that are improper for a Christian. I say, they will, and I mean that they will unless they are led astray by older professors in whom they have confidence. By such influences they are sometimes led astray. But their intuitive convictions are likely to be right. Invite them to a party of pleasure. They have no heart to go. They say rather, "Let us have a prayer-meeting. Cannot we have a season of prayer? I want to spend all the time I can in prayer and praise. Let me bathe my soul in God." They are shocked at the suggestion to go back and sip at the fountain of worldly pleasures.

4. There really is no other happiness in this life save in a pure heart. O how much happiness is missed and lost by seeking it elsewhere. You may weary yourself for nought, in chase after worldly pleasures, but you can find no substantial good save in a pure heart and in God. Go wherever you please, you find it not. You may go to Europe, to the White Mountains, to Niagara, anywhere; all is vanity. You return as empty as you went unless your heart is pure. But if God calls you and your heart is with Him, it matters not where you go -- to the Esquimaux, to the Labrador, to the Hottentots; all is sweet if God is there. But if your heart be not pure, no matter how high in heaven you may be lifted up, there is no bliss there for you. Suppose an angel should open the door of heaven and let you in. Ah, see there! Holiness to the Lord blazes all across those glorious palaces! All heaven is radiant with holiness!

You, young men, are getting an education; but for what? To be a lawyer? And are you ambitious for the distinction of having your hand in everybody's quarrels, and your heart drawn into sympathy with all the worst and meanest human passions? But you say -- Cannot I promote the great ends of justice there? You will be much more sure to promote the end of debasing your own moral principles and feelings. I can speak on this subject from some experience. After my conversion the whole subject of going into court to engross myself in other men's quarrels became unutterably loathsome. I saw that I had never managed a case with real honesty. All I had cared for was to get my case and do well for my client, and my soul turned away from it with loathing. Thou pressed very hard to

engage again, I refused. Now I do not say that no man can serve God at the bar, but I do say that if he has known God indeed, he will not wish to serve in that sphere. He will beg to be excused. A judge in Hartford said to me -- I loathe my business; I am shut up day after day among the vilest of men, and amidst the lowest sort of business. The men who quarrel and fight are our associates. If I were compelled to spend my days there, what a grief to my heart!

There is a nobler office to which you might aspire. Young Tyng -- just about to die, said to his father -- "stand up for Jesus." Blessed brother Tyng! May God give me such a son if I am to have one die before me, and may his last words be such as these! And if I am to die before my son, may such be my last words to my son!

Young man, is not this a noble calling? What do you think of this -- "Stand up for Jesus?" How long ere you will make up your mind and commit yourself to God with all your heart? This is precisely what you must do.

Let me ask any of you who has ever taken one draught from the fountain of the waters of life -- Are not these joys pure and rich above all other joys? You know they are. You can testify to this glorious truth. Does some one come to you and urge you to go into some vain amusement? You say, No! Are you told there is no harm in it? We shall have a good time? You answer -- If you had known how I am permitted to sit amid the overshadowings of my Savior's love, you would not ask me to abandon such joys for anything your vain amusements can offer me.

LECTURE X.

September 15, 1858

BLESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED --No. 3

Text.--Matt. 5:10-12: "Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

Luke reports this part of Christ's sermon on the mount thus:

"Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from

their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in like manner did their fathers unto the prophets."
Luke 6:22-23

I. Jesus Christ was a very faithful teacher.

II. To persecute is to pursue with evil intent.

III. All the truly righteous will be persecuted.

IV. Persecution driven from one form flies to another.

V. No true wisdom and discretion can altogether avoid persecution.

VI. The blessedness of the faithful.

I. Jesus Christ was a very faithful teacher.

He did not flatter His hearers with high hopes of worldly good, but, on the contrary, distinctly assured them that peril was before them. "The time," said He, "will come when he that killeth you will think that he doeth God service." Unlike many reformers, He never sought to induce men to follow Him by fallacious representations.

II. To persecute is to pursue with evil intent.

1. To oppose and seek to injure is obviously the sense in this passage. The persecuted are the objects of this ill-will and prejudice.

2. But you will observe here, that this blessing is not promised, save to one special class of the persecuted -- viz., those who are "persecuted for righteousness' sake." Only those have this promise who are persecuted for their faithful adherence to truth and to God. Men may be persecuted for their faults, or their mistakes, or simply because they fell into bad hands -- yet the Lord speaks not this promise to such.

III. All the truly righteous will be persecuted.

1. So the Bible teaches. "They that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." The inherent antagonism existing between the friends

and the enemies of God renders this forever certain. "If ye were of the world," said Christ, "the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, the world hateth you." Such is the nature of holiness, the antagonism between them is irreconcilable. Hence, righteous men will array opposition against themselves.

2. The forms of persecution will naturally vary with circumstances. No thanks to men who hate God and His people that they do not resort now to fire and dungeons, confiscation, exile and death, as their fathers of old did. It may be far more sinful to speak against a Christian now than it was to murder one in Christ's time, and in the dark ages that followed. The light sinned against has everything to do with the morality of the deed. In those times of ignorance, we should not too sternly condemn the men who took life and verily thought they were doing God service. Let men rather take care lest they evince and indulge a far deeper malignity against truth and God by merely speaking against His people. The spirit of persecution is the same in every age and clime. Difference in its form of manifestation by no means lessen its guilt. Change of circumstances necessitates a change in the form of persecution, yet many only heighten the persecutor's guilt. Men often deceive themselves, supposing they have not the spirit of a persecutor, when it is only due to circumstances that they are not burning their Christian neighbors at the stake. The restraints of public opinion change the form of persecution, yet by no means expel its spirit. Enmity against God is the spirit of murder against God's people. In ancient days the wicked persecuted unto blood because having the will, they had also the power. Yet by reason of their darkness, their guilt may have been less than some of you incur when you only speak against God's people.

IV. Persecution driven from one form flies to another. Driven from the civil sword, it flies to ecclesiastical fulminations.

1. Persecutors always justify themselves by misrepresenting and calumniating the men they would persecute. They maligned the ancient prophets thus as enemies of the State; Christ as a blasphemer; the apostles as those who had turned the world upside down. So it will ever be. Very few indeed will allow themselves to believe that they are persecuting men for their righteousness' sake. But they do allow themselves to be deceived. Nay they may unconsciously court deception. When men love to have it so,

the wish is father to the thought. In our own times men allow themselves to jeer and taunt religious men and religion itself, as if this were not persecution. They allow themselves to be deceived in regard to the character of those whom they persecute. They would be shocked if told -- "you persecute Christ in His people." So they first make it appear that Christ is not in such people, and then give loose to their malignity.

2. Probably there is no community or church in the world in which uncompromising righteousness would not be persecuted in some form, and by some individuals. Sometimes church members are specially inclined to this. It was so in the time of our Savior's earthly life.

3. Spiritual pride may lead to this persecution. Proud men resent even tacit rebuke. Impenitent sinners are, not unfrequently, more ready to receive rebuke than proud Christians. The sinner will say -- your rebukes are deserved; but the proud professor replies -- "thus saying, thou reproachest us also."

4. Rarely in the entire history of the church has persecution shown itself openly, except when it has had the countenance or authority of some professed Christians. The wicked are emboldened to vent the venom they feel by the sympathy, real or supposed, of some who are regarded as Christians. I am sorry to say that ministers of the gospel sometimes lead in this. It was so in Christ's time. The professed religious teachers of that age led off.

5. It is in the very nature of apostasy and backsliding to persecute. Such are its legitimate tendencies. Christ understood this well and implied it when He said -- They will put you to death and think they are doing God service. He meant by this remark to forewarn them against being stumbled by finding professed Christians against them.

V. No true wisdom and discretion can altogether avoid persecution.

1. No true wisdom, I say -- for false wisdom and a false discretion may. If men are ready to sacrifice righteousness, they will very probably escape persecution. But let all men know -- the world is still unchanged -- being as much and as truly the enemy of God as ever. Many seem to suppose that the age of persecution is past -- that the world is greatly advanced. So prevalent

has this idea become that some at once assume a young minister to be indiscreet if he experiences persecution. But the Bible assumes that this persecution will be one of the results of faith and righteousness. Even Jesus Christ could not avoid it. They said He had a denunciatory spirit and was censorious. In prophetic vision, Isaiah said of Him -- We did esteem Him stricken and smitten of God. But Christ did not court opposition, nor say or do anything that should justly excite it. He knew His position and His danger. They were very trying to His human nature, yet He could not shrink from duty.

2. It is remarkable that Christ took the greatest pains to guard His people against assuming that, by prudence, they could avoid persecution. He told them distinctly that God pronounced a woe on them of whom all men spake well, and left them to assume that if they pleased the wicked, they did not please God. It is impossible that true uprightness should be everywhere tolerated.

In fact, this truth lies deep in mans' intuitive convictions and assumptions. No one can suppose that faithful dealings will escape persecution. Not that every man will persecute; for the word and Spirit of God may break down some and turn their hearts. When Nathan came to David and said "Thou art the man!" his first word was -- "I have sinned." This was quite unlike the spirit of some of the later kings -- one of whom said of a prophet -- Take this fellow away and feed him with the bread of affliction and the water of affliction, till I return to this place in peace.

3. It is partly because they assume that faithfulness will bring on persecution that they so often shrink from faithfulness. For example, the unconverted know this and therefore shrink from becoming Christians. You assume that if you turn to God, somebody will laugh at you, or in some way persecute you. You are ashamed to take Christ's name and wear it. If I should now call on all who will stand up for Jesus to rise, many of you would keep your seats. You would show that you are ashamed of Christ, and shrink from bearing reproach for His name. This is one of the principle reasons why men will not come to Christ. There are other reasons; this is one of the strong ones.

This also is one of the things most dreaded by young converts. They have not expelled from their minds their former false notions. For this reason, they

dread to speak to their old associates in sin. They know they shall be persecuted in some way if they do. This fear is one of their earliest experiences. They find themselves misrepresented and reproached, and are thus led to temporize till they lose their communion with God -- their enjoyment of His love and His presence, and so, their usefulness. Often, under this influence they fall so low they never recover.

Alas for poor weak human nature! If anybody speaks against anything they do, oh, it is such a blow! How can they live so! Let them read from Jeremiah 20. I used to read it often and make it the man of my counsel.

"O Lord, Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived; Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed. I am in derision daily, everyone mocketh me. For since I spake, I cried out, I cried of violence and spoil; because the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily. Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name. But His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay. For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Report, say they, and we will report it. All my familiars watched for my halting, saying, peradventure he will be enticed and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him. But the Lord is with me as a mighty terrible One; therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail; they shall be greatly ashamed; for they shall not prosper; their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten."

Under this strong temptation, if young converts fail to be faithful, they will lose their faith and their communion with God. Often in such cases they are not aware of the cause, and say -- What have I done? Oh! have you not neglected to "stand up for Jesus?"

4. Churches also assume that, if thoroughly faithful to righteousness, they must suffer persecution and therefore they temporize and conform to the world. They know that if they are thoroughly honest, they must lose the sympathy of outsiders. Ungodly men will not help them build meeting houses and support ministers. They are afraid. I seldom meet a church really independent, daring to do its whole duty. I never saw one in which all the members were thus bold and firm. Hence in seeking ministers, they look for men who will temporize. Most churches do this. They are afraid to stand by a faithful minister, and face all the consequences. Ministers know this;

they know the church will not sustain them in absolute righteousness. Hence they fall into the policy of preaching about sin in a way which does not show who and what they mean. They always assume that they shall suffer persecution if they do, and they assume this, not without reason. I say this not of all; for there are some, I am happy to say, who would take their lives in their hands and face even death.

Ministers who do trim their ways thus, lose God's presence and their own usefulness. They calculate that it will not do to stand up boldly for Jesus. They think to gain influence, but in fact they lose it -- lose it by the very means they use to save it.

VI. Let us next look at the blessedness of the faithful.

On this point the language of Christ is very strong. He enlarges, saying more than simply that they are blessed. "Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." He would have us understand that those who endure persecution for Christ's sake become exceedingly dear to Him. The fact that they suffer shame for His name endears them to His heart. He sympathizes so deeply with none others.

REMARKS.

1. Christ was persecuted unto death for our sakes. It was for us -- that "by His stripes, we might be healed." Then He stood up for us, when there was no other eye that would pity, and no arm but His that could save. So great was His love that He enjoyed it. We are told it was "for the joy set before Him that He endured the cross, despising the shame." This was not the joy of a personal salvation, but the joy of saving others. So far as the same sort of love animates our service for Him and His people now, so far we shall certainly enjoy this life.
2. The life of one who endures persecution for Christ's sake, is not unhappy, but eminently happy. The apostles were not unhappy men, even when they were hunted from city to city, and made the offscouring of all things. I have been struck to see that many assume persecuted Christians to be unhappy and try to console them. Indeed they make a great mistake in that assumption. For such Christians have joys unspeakable that the world knows not.
3. Those who really stand up for Christ are blessed in it. Persecution cannot make them unhappy. In the midst of gainsaying and calumnies, their peace and

joy abound. A Christian in this state is indefinitely more happy than he who has all the popularity in the world. Joy of soul does not depend on human popularity. Holy men could walk unscathed in a burning furnace.

Therefore let no one bless himself that he is not a subject of persecution -- that he has been wise enough or pious enough to escape it. If you were to take such a man and examine thoroughly his life and character, you would probably find him a temporizing man, not faithful and honest in reproving sin. By a kind of suppleness, he tries to make everybody his friend. The fact that he meets with no opposition does not prove him to be faithful to Christ. It rather proves in him some defect. He does not reprove sin as he ought to.

4. The amiability that avoids persecution is not to be confounded with piety. Generally this is the absence of piety. You see many who scarcely ever reprove sin. They allow those around them to sin unreprieved. When they come upon their death-bed, they will have to say -- I never was faithful to my neighbors and friends. I let many things pass which never should have passed.

5. It is very common for compromisers to take credit to themselves for their success in escaping persecution, while they attribute the persecutions of others to their blunders. I do not deny that some are unwise. But as you find men in our age, a thousand are too conservative where one is excessively sharp in his rebukes of sin. Whoever will be faithful will learn the truth of the inspired words -- "If any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, he shall suffer persecution."

6. Let no man expect to make real friends by compromises. Those who attempt this never increase their real popularity. The fact is, the masses have some conscience -- too much to ensure the popularity of the compromiser. The men who trim to every breeze are sure to forfeit respect and confidence. If you turn away from righteousness to go with the wicked, you surely lose their confidence. They will not send for you on their death-beds. No, they will then wish to see somebody more honest and righteous than you.

7. There is true and real joy in being allowed to suffer for Christ's sake. It lives in the inner soul, and no stranger intermeddles therewith. No man need fear being reproached for Christ's sake. What if you are? Many think -- if we should become Christians and should have to endure reproach for Christ, it would be past endurance! We cannot afford it. All wrong. You cannot afford to forfeit God's favor and blessings. Your real joy depends on your popularity, not with

men, but with Jesus Christ. You need nothing more to ensure your blessedness. A wife can say -- If I only have the approval of my husband, it is enough for me. I can bear the loss of anything else. I can go with him anywhere. So should the Christian feel as to Jesus Christ. "It is Christ that justifies us; who is he that condemns?" One smile from Christ makes earth a heaven. Suppose you are persecuted, and you go home, and there the presence of Jesus is so sweet, His smile so rich, it is all but heaven itself. You look out from under His shadow as from a pavilion of glory! I have often heard Christians say they never were so happy as when most unpopular and most reproached for Christ. I have heard them say -- Those were most blessed seasons. I have seen persons excommunicated for their piety (as was generally thought afterward) who said they never were so happy as then. But persons in those circumstances need to take great care of their own spirit, lest they lose the meekness of Christ and His presence.

8. It is an awful sin to persecute the righteous, or to fail to stand up for them and identify yourself with their cause. How often have I heard Dr. Cheever spoken of in such terms as showed that men really approved his course in the denunciation of slavery and its abettors, while yet they dared not say so. I heard him preach on the influence of slavery on the great revival -- a sermon full of solemn and just denunciations of that great sin. When asked what I thought of that, I said -- "The men who will not stand by that ought to have their names blotted out of the Book of Life."

Do you say, "I cannot do this -- cannot face such reproach for Christ; it costs too much?" If you cannot pay this cost, you may as well give up all your religion. It will do you no good.

9. To persecute Christians is to persecute Christ. He said to Saul -- "Why persecute thou Me?" Yet since Christ was already in heaven, Saul could have persecuted Christ only in the sense of persecuting His friends and followers. It is so now. And the usual form of persecution is gainsaying -- speaking against God's people. I have seldom found a faithful Christian who is not spoken against by his brethren in the church. When I hear certain things said of Christian people, I say -- let me see them before I believe anything good or bad. I have known even ministers to gainsay really honest Christian members. This brother, they say, is a little peculiar, a little eccentric -- a little shattered, crazy, &c. So it was said long ago -- "He that forsaketh iniquity maketh himself a prey." The fact

reveals the low state of religion.

And now, let me come near to you and ask -- Are you suffering persecution for Christ's sake? Where? From whom? Let the question be pressed till you reach the true answer. Observe, I do not ask whether you are persecuted for your faults; but whether the world hates you for being like Christ. This is the question, and it is a very important one. Are we really persecuted for Christ's sake? If you are not persecuted, is it because there are none about you to resist and repel your efforts to reform and to save them? Or is it not rather because you have not piety enough to annoy the ungodly? Are you so worldly that they do not feel annoyed at your influence? Certainly you will not suppose that you are wiser than Christ and His apostles that you should by your superior wisdom escape all persecution when they did not. If you fail of being persecuted, is not this the reason -- ungodly men are not rebuked by your piety?

Young men, prospective ministers, you need not expect that you are going through life without persecution; nor on the other hand, need you fear it. You may even see cases where you will have to take your life in your hands. When that hour shall come, pray; keep quiet; trust God and fear not. There may be violent ebullitions of wrath, but be patient. I have heard men scold and fret, declaring -- I shall never go to that meeting again; but they were followed up with prayer; and by and by they broke down and became as little children. When this change is wrought, they will stand by you as Paul stood by Jesus Christ after his conversion.

Ye converts, did you count the cost and are you patient to meet it now? Do you give up your religion when you go away from Oberlin? If men cast out your name as evil, do you bear it in meekness and patience? Years ago, we used often to hear of the persecutions of students who went out from this place. Some were mobbed, and some were persecuted in other forms. I am afraid of the feeling that we have been too ultra and must compromise the matter a little -- that if Oberlin views are unpopular, we must and may drop them -- suppress them and say nothing about them. This is no way to serve Jesus Christ.

Can you not well afford to make up your minds now to be for Christ? What are you afraid of? Of those who can harm the body and after they have no more that they can do? Let me forewarn you whom ye shall fear -- even Him who after the body dies, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear Him! O that we had among us more men like young Tyng! God grant to me to have a son who

could say thus to me -- "Stand up, father, for Jesus!" How his words ring and echo all around the borders of the churches! That fearless man; God bless his memory! Turned out from one church because he would speak true and earnest words against American Slavery, he went into another, and still his voice rung clear and strong for righteousness. When such a man came suddenly, to death, his dying words -- "Stand up for Jesus," went forth like the peal of a trumpet. Men caught up those words and have placarded them in all the great cities of the land. His death was honored above any other man's in that city for a whole generation. While the names of those who trim to the popular breeze shall rot, his name shall live in honor; and even when the heavens and this earth shall pass away, Jesus will honor him still. Say, young man, do you aspire to real and enduring honor? There it is -- "Stand up for Jesus!"

[Back to Top](#)

On Refuges Of Lies

Lecture XI

September 29, 1858

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Isa. 28. 17: "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place."

All men know themselves to be sinners against God. They know also, that, as sinners, they are in peril and are not safe. Hence their anxiety to find some refuge for safety. They know they might find this in the way of forsaking sin and turning to the Lord; but they do not choose to forsake their sins. Hence there seems to be no convenient resource but to hide themselves under some refuge.

Our text speaks of "the refuge of lies." Yet it is obvious that men who resort to lies for a refuge regard those lies not as lies but as truth. This fact leads us to raise the primary fundamental question--Have we any rule or standard which will show what is truth, and what is falsehood? Men have countless opinions

about religion; these can not all be true;--how can we determine which are true and which not true?

I. We have an infallible test.

II. Things that do not save the soul from sin.

III. What God says.

IV. Many people hide in the church.

I. We have an infallible test.

1. Salvation, to be real and available, must be salvation from sin. Everything else fails. Any system of religion which does not break the power of sin, is a lie. If it does not expel selfishness and lust, and if it does not beget love to God and man, joy, peace, and all the fruits of the Spirit, it is false and worthless. Any system that fails in this vital respect is a lie--can be of no use--is no better than a curse. That which does not beget in us the spirit of heaven and make us like God, no matter whence it comes, or by what sophistry defended, is a lie, and if fled to as a refuge, it is a "refuge of lies."

Again, if it does not beget prayer, does not unify us with God, and bring us into fellowship and sympathy with him, it is a lie.

2. If it does not produce a heavenly mind, and expel a worldly mind, and wean us from the love of the world, it is a lie. If it does not beget in us the love required in the Scriptures, the love of God and of his worship and of his people--indeed, of all mankind;-- if it does not produce all those states of mind which fit the soul for heaven,--it fails utterly of its purpose.

(a.) Here I must stop a moment to notice an objection. It is said, "The gospel does not in fact do for men all you claim. It does not make professed Christians heavenly-minded, dead to the world, full of love, joy, and peace."

I reply: Here is medicine which, applied in a given disease, will certainly cure. This healing power is just what it has and what we claim for it. But it must be fairly applied. A man may buy the medicine, and because it is

bitter, may lay it up in his cupboard and never take it; he may provide himself with a counterfeit to take in its stead; or he may follow it with something that will instantly counteract its influence in the system. In any such case, the efficacy of the medicine is not disproved; you only prove that you have not used it fairly and honestly.

(b.) So with the gospel. You must take it and use it according to directions; else its failure is not its fault, but yours.

(c.) It is of no avail then to say that the gospel does not save men from sin. It may indeed be counterfeited; it may be itself rejected; but he who receives it to his heart will surely find his heart blessed thereby. The gospel does transform men from sin to holiness--does make men peaceful, holy, heavenly, in life and in death. Millions of such cases lie out on the face of the world's history. Their lives evince the reality and preciousness of the salvation which the gospel promises.

II. I will now proceed to name some things that lack this decisive characteristic. They do not save the soul from sin.

1. An unsanctifying hope of heaven. Speaking of what God's children shall be, John says--"We know that when He shall appear we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him (Christ) purifieth himself even as he is pure." A good hope, then, does purify the heart. But there certainly are hopes indulged that fail to purify the heart of those who hold them. Those hopes are lies. They cannot possibly be sound and true. On their very face, it stands revealed that they are worthless--a mere refuge of lies. The stronger and more unwavering they are, so much the more are they delusive. What hope in Christ is that which does not bring the heart to Christ?

2. An old experience, that is all old, is a lie. You have perhaps heard of the man who had his old experience all written down and laid away with his deeds of land to keep till his time of need. This being all the evidence he had, he used to refer to it from time to time for his comfort. At length, when the time came for him to die, he felt the need of this record of his religion, and sent his little daughter to bring it. She returned with only the sad story that the mice had found their way to his drawer and had eaten up the paper--all the dying man's evidence of piety! Alas! he must die in despair! He had

no other hope but this!

On the face of it, such a refuge is only lies.

3. There are two forms of self-righteousness--the legal and the gospel,--both of which are refuges of lies.

The legal depends on duty-doing--evermore trying to work out salvation by deeds of law. The gospel form sets itself to get grace by works. Men try to get a new heart not by trying to turn from all sin, but by praying for it. I meet such a man. He says, "I tried to become religious." Indeed, and, what did you do? "I prayed for a new heart." You did! But you did not do what God says you must--"Make yourself a new heart and a new spirit;" you did not repent--you did not bow your heart to God. Therefore, all your doings come short of what God requires. They fail of saving the soul from sin.

There is a great deal of this gospel self-righteousness--this throwing off the responsibility upon God.

4. Universalism is an old refuge of lies. And here let me give you a case. Being out from home in my carriage, I overtook a young man and invited him to ride. Almost immediately he told me he was a Universalist and came out strongly in defence of his system. I said to him, "I am not well and may not live long, and I do not dare to be deceived in this matter." He said for his part he was sure enough of its truth. He had heard smart men say so, and prove it from Scripture. I said to him--I have one objection. There is a certain train of facts which I cannot account for, if Universalism be true. I have known families once reputed orthodox, which were then upright, moral, and justly respected. These same families I have known become loose in morals, forsake the house of God, turn to strong drink, and become fearfully vicious. Such families I have observed along with this change almost always become Universalists. This is one set of facts.

On the other hand, I have never known a holy, prayerful Universalist backslide into orthodoxy--forsake his Universalism and his morality and degenerate into vice and orthodoxy by one uniform and simultaneous declension. I have known men reformed from drunkenness and vice, and then become orthodox; but I have never known men reform from vice into Universalism. In short, it seems to me that thousands of facts evince a natural

sympathy between vice and Universalism on the one hand, and between virtue and orthodoxy on the other.

By this time, he began to feel troubled, and said, "I am afraid I am all wrong. Would you believe it?" said he, "I am running away from being converted. There is a revival in my place, and I am running away from it." You are! said I. And do you think it will hurt you? Will it do you any harm?

He looked deeply anxious and said--"Had not I better go back? My good father and mother looked sad when I left my home. I don't believe Universalism can save me. Everybody knows it never did save anybody and never can."

5. The same must be said of proper Unitarianism. Some who bear this name are not such in fact. But where you find men who deny depravity, regeneration, atonement, you will certainly find that their system does not make them heavenly-minded, holy and humble. You need not reason with them to find this out; you need only to take the facts of their history.

6. So of Davisism--the doctrines of Andrew Jackson Davis. Do these doctrines make men holy? Never.

I have known a man, once a friend and patron of gospel reforms, who turned back to Andrew Jackson Davis. Did this change make him more holy? No, indeed. He said, "It makes me more happy." No doubt; and for the reason that before he was only and always under conviction, never enjoying the peace of the gospel. What is the use of reasoning about his Universalism? Look at the facts! They alone are sufficient to show its utter falsehood. Universalism never saved any man from sin. It throws no influence in that direction. So of Mormonism, and all similar delusions. We need not stop to write books against this and such like lies;--it stands out on the fore-front of this system that it saves no man from sin. It is therefore a refuge of lies--deceiving men into hopes that can never be realized. So of every creed and system that does not save men from sin and fit them for heaven.

III. And now let my hearers take notice of what God says.

1. He declares, "The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place." No doubt this hail is the symbol of God's displeasure. It is fit that God should be displeased with these refuges of lies.

He loves truth too well to have the least sympathy with lies. He loves the souls of men too deeply to have any patience with agencies so destructive. Therefore, he loathes all these refuges of lies, and has solemnly declared that the hail shall sweep them all away.

2. The waters, he declares, shall overflow the hiding-places. Every resort that leaves the soul in sin is a hiding-place. All religious affectation is such, and is nothing better. To put on the mere appearance of devoutness and sanctimony, as if God could be made to believe you sincere and could not see through it all;--this is a flimsy hiding-place indeed. So of all religious formality--going through the forms of worship, being in the church, being baptized--what avails it all unless their piety be instinct with life and that life be the soul of real holiness?

IV. A great many people hide in the church.

1. Judas Iscariot crept in there to hide. A minister of the Dutch Reformed Church told me once of a case in point just here. A man who had been confirmed in that church was out at sea in a fearful storm. It was a time of intense alarm, and many were exceedingly fearful of death, not to say also of that terrible state beyond. When they said to him, How is it that you are so cool? He replied, "What have I to fear--I belong to the South Dutch!"

2. Many hide under orthodox creeds. They are not Unitarians; they are not Mormons; they are not Universalists; they are orthodox! Such religious opinions held so tenaciously must, they think, ensure their safety.

3. Others hide under the plea of a sinful nature. They are naturally unable to do anything. Here they have found a sure retreat. They are very willing to do all their duty--but this sinful nature is all against them, and what can they do? This is a refuge of lies.

4. Some dodge under professors of religion. I fear there are many such here among us. Alas, your hiding-place will fail you in the day of trial! When the hail comes and the storm rolls up fearfully, and the awful thunder breaks with appalling crash, you will try in vain to find your professor--to hide under his wing! Where is he now? Suppose he were as bad as you claim, how much can he help you in that all-devouring storm? If he is not as good as he should be, you ought to be better than he, and not try to hide yourself

under his shortcomings.

REMARKS.

1. Sinners know these things to be refuges of lies, because they do not save men from their sins. Certainly they must see this and know it to be the truth.

They resort to these refuges, not as being quite fully true, but as an excuse for delay. Miserable subterfuge, this! They are not honest, and therefore need not think it strange if they are deluded.

They admit that if one lives like Christ, all will be well; and they know that nothing less than this will avail for their safety.

2. Of course, to seek a refuge of lies is to tempt God to destroy you. How can it be otherwise?

3. Remember the test--this one plain simple principle: That and only that which saves from sin is true; all else is false and ruinous. Now you all have some hope of a happy future; what is this hope? Good or bad? Is it truthful and sure, or is it a refuge of lies?

Does your hope sanctify you--does it make you humble, holy, prayerful? Does your faith purify your heart? Have you the fruits of the Spirit--love, joy, peace, long-suffering? Have you daily communion with God? Are you so united to him that you can say--Truly we have fellowship with the Father? If so, this will be a hiding-place indeed--not one which the hail shall sweep away, but one which shall save the soul.

Have you the life of God in your soul? Does it pervade your heart, and diffuse itself over all the chambers of your soul? Let nothing less than this avail to satisfy your mind.

Hear Catholics talk about the Virgin and the sacraments and absolution; what are all these things, and a thousand more such, good for, if they do not save from sin? What is the use of running after these things that do not save?

But you say--I love to believe that all will be saved; it makes me so happy. But does it make you holy? Does it renew your heart? This is the only sure test.

But you say, "I do not believe as you do." I answer--Here are great facts. You are

in sin. Are you saved from your sin by your system? If so, well; if not so, then it is not well. Will your believing it to be one way or the other make it so? Does believing a lie make it the truth? If you were to believe that you could walk on the water, or that water could not drown you, and should leap overboard, would your belief save you?

Dying sinner, all those refuges of lies will surely deceive and destroy you. It is time for you to arise and say--I must have the religion of Jesus. Not having it, I cannot go where Jesus is. With a lie in my right hand, what have I to hope for? None of you, I hope, have reached that forlorn state described by the prophet, "A deceived heart hath turned him aside, neither can he say to his soul, There is a lie in my right hand."

O sinner, there is a refuge for you which is not one of lies. There is a hiding-place for you which no waters can reach to overwhelm. It lies far above their course. O, take refuge in Christ! away with these refuges of lies! Cry out--Give me Christ and none besides! Christ and Him only,--for what have I to do with lies and delusions? You need to come into such communion with Christ that his power and presence and fullness shall flow through your heart fully and freely, and be in you a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

[Back to Top](#)

God's Wrath Against Those Who Withstand His Truth

Lecture XII

November 10, 1858

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 1:18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness."

Every word of this impressive passage demands attentive consideration. It would seem that there is no end to its pointed and pungent applications to the practical

life of men.

I. What is meant here by "holding the truth"?

II. What is it to "hold the truth in unrighteousness"?

III. What shall we understand in our text by "the wrath of God"?

IV. How is this wrath of God against such unrighteousness revealed?

V. What is meant by "ungodliness"?

VI. Why is this terrible language used against this sin?

VII. Not only does this sinner care not for God; he cares nothing for the universal good.

I. Let us enquire what is meant here by "holding the truth"?

1. This language is sometimes used to signify holding fast to an opinion -- having certain views as one's own. But in this text, both the original word and the context concur to give another sense. To make it clear, I must first observe that truth is the natural stimulus to action. Its natural influence is to lead men to act. It will always have this tendency unless restrained.

2. Now the word which Paul used here means precisely to restrain -- to hold back the truth, from exerting its appropriate influence. Paul assumes that the men of whom he speaks refuse to comply with the truth -- this being the way in which men hold back the truth

II. What is it to "hold the truth in unrighteousness"?

The meaning of this is often not well understood, and therefore should be carefully considered.

1. The original word for unrighteousness implies deficiency -- a want of righteousness. To hold the truth in unrighteousness, implies that you see your duty, but fail to do it. You restrain the truth so that it does not lead you on to do righteousness. To illustrate this point, suppose that some of you men of business have claims against one of your neighbors. You have sold him goods on time; the day of payment has come, you need your pay; he

knows he ought to meet his promises promptly. You call on him; he acknowledges his obligation -- says he knows he ought to pay you, but yet he fails to do it. In truth he wants to speculate on his money. He can put it out at fifty per cent, and this, he thinks, is much better for him than paying his honest debts. What should you think if when you call on him, and ask him if he ought not to pay, he should laugh you in the face? Indeed, says he, "do you suppose I care what I ought to do?" He scoffs at the idea of moral obligation. Could you find words strong enough to paint his vileness? Yet the whole of it is -- lack of righteousness -- the want of moral integrity and unrighteousness. It is precisely what sinners do towards God when they say I know I ought to love and serve Thee, but what do I care for that? What is that to me? I have my own ends to answer, and I can enjoy myself better in my own way than in God's.

2. This is not too strong language. It does not at all exaggerate the infinite vileness of sinners who practically say -- I know God requires it and I know it is right; but what of that?

III. What shall we understand in our text by "the wrath of God"?

Not any selfish anger, for God has none, and never can have; but a benevolent displeasure, such as a holy and good being must feel towards a wrong so monstrous. Would not you be greatly displeased with such conduct towards yourself? If a man honestly owed you, and yet was reckless of his obligation, would not you think his conduct an outrage, and would you not be greatly displeased? And would you not feel deeply that you have reason for the displeasure you feel? Certainly, and by how much the more holy you are, by so much the more deeply and surely will you be displeased.

IV. How is this wrath of God against such unrighteousness revealed?

1. I answer, partly, in the irresistible convictions of our own minds. We cannot but believe that God is displeased with us for holding back the truth through our unrighteousness. We know this as a first truth, and cannot but know it. It is thus revealed to us in the strongest possible manner. Our necessary conceptions of God are such that it is impossible for us to deny that God is and must be displeased with this sin.

2. Moreover, the Bible reveals this often, nay I might say -- everywhere.

3. Again, God's providence reveals it. We know that we deserve to be damned and sent to hell forthwith, yet we are not, but God lets us live yet longer. It is plain that God arranged many things in His providence for the purpose of reforming us. Hence it is apparent, even from the revelations God makes of His providence, that He is disposed to forgive. Some have said we never could infer God's mercy on grounds of natural theology -- i.e.. from His external providences and apart from a written revelation. Yet who does not know that all mankind have an idea of hope -- and of themselves as "prisoners of hope" -- the question of their doom being not already settled as it would be if they were now in hell.

4. The Bible has settled this question. The original condition of being saved, perfect obedience, has given place to another system in which, men having sinned, pardon is offered; a system which while it shows that God does indeed hate sin, yet shows also that He has mercy in His heart, and longs to exercise it towards the guilty sinner. Hence all along through the past history of our world, God has come forth ever and anon to reveal His indignation against sin, as in the deluge on the old world; on Sodom, on Egypt and on rebellious Israel. Mark how, all down the history of human sinning, God has come forth in flashes of glory and of power, terrible to human hearts! In every way practicable to a system of probation and of mercy, God has revealed His wrath against sin.

5. God reveals His wrath also in that prophetic remorse which agonized the soul of the sinner and forewarns him of the coming wrath of his God. Sinners are afraid to die? Why are they afraid to die rather than live? Because they know themselves to be sinners, and therefore dread to meet an offended God. This dread is prophetic.

6. God's wrath is revealed moreover in the judicial blindness to which God gives up sinners when they have abused His truth too long; in the gloomy death-bed; in the dark despair under which they die. Alas for him! everywhere along his dark way to hell God flashes terror and wrath! Behind all these displays of love and mercy, you may hear the mutterings of offended justice. The flashes of His sword gleam out, revealing His wrath against all unrighteousness.

V. Our text says -- "God's wrath is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness." What is meant by "ungodliness"?

1. The absence of piety towards God. The original word is compounded of two, one of which gives us the idea of worship, reverence for God, and the other indicates the utter absence and want of this. The entire word therefore means no worship -- no regard for God -- no recognition of His goodness or greatness. God comes before the sinner, a glorious object of love and worship, but the sinner refuses to regard Him. Ah indeed, he has no family altar, no closet! Mark this terrible text! God reveals His wrath against all this withholding of love and worship, praise and adoration. See our men of morality who never worship God, never love Him -- never acknowledge Him in any of their ways! Mark, do you hear what God says? Ah, back of all this sweet flowing of mercy, you may hear the mutterings of Jehovah's thunder, His wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness!

2. If you do not worship, love and obey, you are an ungodly sinner, and against you is this awful wrath revealed!

3. Unrighteousness seems to refer to neglect of duty towards men -- refusing to pay one's honest debts -- refusing to meet any honorable obligations. Any neglect of duty to men is unrighteousness. The word means short-comings. Perhaps no other term translates it so perfectly. It embraces all falling short of duty. This is always voluntary and blameworthy; just as you always regard it when you charge the man who owes you with short coming and wrong if he can pay but will not. This guilt is at the door of all who admit that they ought to love God and serve Him, but will not. All ye who withhold from God or man what is due from you -- all ye who allow yourselves to live below your own standard -- on you this wrath must fall. If you allow yourself to live thus in voluntary neglect of your duty, against you is God's wrath revealed. If you find fault with others for neglect of duty, you show in this that you know your own duty and are therefore in the greater sin. It is very common for sinners to do this towards Christians -- to tattle on professors of religion as hypocrites and sinners. So are you, and all the more so because of the clearness with which you can discern the short-comings of others. All ye who hold one thing in theory and another in practice -- who know the right yet choose to do the wrong -- what else can be said of you save that you hold back the truth in unrighteousness? Some professed Christians complain of their own coldness and make many confessions, yet fail just as much again in their

duties. They are like the man who talks well about paying his honest debts - - who never fails to admit his obligations, but always fails to pay. He can but will not! If this bore upon you, you would surely cry out -- What a villain you are! Yet this case scarcely begins to portray the horrible guilt of the sinner against God! Who of you are in this moral attitude towards your Maker? Will you pause and ask -- Who?

VI. Let us also ask -- Why is this terrible language used against this sin?

1. Because this holding back the truth implies the knowledge of it. Men could not hold it back if they did not know it.

2. Because it implies also the ability of obeying it: else men could not be denounced for holding it back and for refusing to obey it. How differently do the scriptures speak on this point from any theologians! The latter are wont to say -- that no mere man can obey God's law. Paul says no such thing. Speaking with special reference to those who had not even a written law, he assumes that they knew enough of God to obey and had ample power to obey. Men, hearing the truth concerning their duty, are not passive -- they cannot be. By their very nature they must have this power to feel its force, and feeling it, to yield, or to resist. The text implies a positive effort to resist the truth -- to rule down its demands. To take deliberately the opposite course to that required is no accidental thing. It is a direct refusal to fulfill our acknowledged obligations to God. This amounts virtually to the denial of all moral obligation and accountability. It is a direct rejection of God's authority. The sinner decides that great question whether God's will shall be law to him by answering -- No. Neither God, His law, nor the sinner's own sense of duty shall be his rule. For the sinner to disregard the known claims of God's revealed truth is nothing less than to decide fairly, openly, to the very face of God, that he will not obey Him. God's known will, he says, is not a reason that shall influence me.

3. Be it remembered, holding the truth in unrighteousness implies that there is no inability to obey it. For if there were such inability, God's wrath could not go forth against the sinner. How very different is this from that theology which represents God's commands as so hard that men, very well disposed to do the best they can, yet cannot obey them!

4. A good reason for such strong language is -- this conduct is total

dishonesty -- a determination to perform no duty to God. It is a full rejection of His claims. It virtually says to God -- I don't care for Thee, say what Thou wilt -- what do I care? I know Thy commandments are right, but I shall withhold my heart; I will not acknowledge God! Certainly this is the very essence of all iniquity -- the sum of all villainy. What would you think if anybody should serve you so? You would feel that you were greatly wronged -- that those who treated you so had not the least particle of moral honesty! If a man should treat you in just this way, and then set up the claim of being fair minded and honorable, what would you say? You would say that so far from being right-minded, he looks with perfect contempt on the idea of moral obligation! It shall not bind him!

To be sure, that dishonest man may pay his debts at the bank, lest else it might ruin his credit, and forbid his getting more money; but suppose you could not reach him with the sense of moral obligation; then would you not say -- he is the perfection of a villain!

5. This language is not too strong. There is no crime he would not commit if it were convenient and he thought it for his selfish interest. Who could trust him? There is no crime on earth or in hell that he would refrain from committing on the score of moral obligation. Why? Because moral obligation does not touch him; he has discarded its claims.

Now what do you say? Is it wonderful that God should speak thus against this sin of all sins? Against him who says -- I do not care for God! Let Him say what He will and do what He will, I care not for my obligations to obey Him!

VII. There is still another point of view from which to contemplate this sin. Not only does this sinner care not for God; he cares nothing for the universal good.

1. God has bidden him care for the good of mankind, love his neighbor as himself; and has placed before the sinner His own example, thus seeking to lead him on in real benevolence. But this sinner will do no such thing. Whereas God's whole law as to fellow beings is condensed into this one precept -- "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," the sinner applies to God the same doctrine which Chief Justice Taney applies to black men in their relation to white. Taney said -- "Black men have no rights which white

men are bound to respect." The sinner says, God has no rights that I am bound to respect. And if He asks me to respect my fellow-men's rights, I will not do it for His sake!

2. This is total depravity. A man repudiating all moral obligation -- going, as to God, into universal repudiation -- a known, willful, persistent repudiation of all moral obligation and nothing less!

3. And this is by no means a caricature. God tries to get your sympathy and to draw you into fellowship with Himself in loving His great family; but you say, No! Let me have no fellowship with God, or with the good among His creatures!

Now ought not God to be displeased with you? Could you respect Him if He were not? Surely, you would say, He is not fit to govern the universe! Nay, He is worse than the sinner since He knows infinitely more.

Now I put this to your conscience, could you exonerate God from great blame if He were to be indifferent to such a sin as this of disowning moral obligation?

Remember, I am not speaking now of open vice, in itself intrinsically hateful and disgusting; but of declining to obey -- of falling short of duty. What would you think of your children if they were to do just that thing towards you -- uniformly fail and refuse to obey your commands, or respect their obligations to you?

Since God feels thus, it behoves Him to express it; why not? What less than this could He reasonably do? Of the wicked God says -- "Whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." You may hear it rolling like distant thunder. O how terrible when it shall break forth in one eternal storm!

Long time Mercy has been holding back the uplifted arm of Justice, while God's heart has been heaving with holy indignation -- so long that you are even thinking He will never arise to vengeance. "Thou thoughtest I was altogether such an one as thyself, but I will reprove thee and set them in order before thine eyes."

REMARKS.

1. This sin is the very essence of all wickedness, because it is the mind resisting the truth and refusing obedience to it when most pressed to obey. It involves therefore the utmost dishonesty. It is withholding your good will from the universe.

Sinner, did you ever think of this, when you refuse to work for God and to feel with Him for the good of the universe -- what if my refusal should really frustrate His benevolent plans? What then? Would not that be an infinite mischief, an untold calamity? But if you refuse to work with Him -- if you set yourself against His plans, no thanks to you that your course does not frustrate all God's benevolence towards the universe! So far as you can do it, it is done, and you have the responsibility of doing all you can to make the universe infinitely wretched, both God and all His creatures.

You think it would be very hard in God to shut you out of heaven -- to say to you as to the rich man, "Son, remember that thou in thy life time receivedst thy good things -- and there are no more for thee!" But why should not He do this? You do not love God's happiness, nor that of your fellow men. You flatly disown all your obligations to do either. You refuse to seek your neighbor's good; no thanks to you if he does not lie down in everlasting sorrow.

Of course in holding back the truth, you set the worst example possible, for more men lose their souls by neglect than by open vice. To set them this example therefore is to tempt them in their weakest, most susceptible point.

2. The more enlightened men are, the greater is their guilt. Sometimes I have had such views of the sins of many here in this matter, that I cannot think of preaching anything else. Some say -- No place like Oberlin -- such Sabbaths, such religious privileges! Yet for all this, it may be the wickedest place on earth, just because it is so highly favored of God with gospel light.

The Jews thought there was nothing like their beloved city -- "beautiful for its situation, the joy of the whole earth;" but yet how terribly did God pour out the vials of His wrath even on that once holy city! He punished them as He rarely ever punished any other nation. Men often bless themselves for their morality and for their gospel privileges; yet who can measure the guilt of those that know their duty so well, yet will not do it! They are like those who will not pay their debts, yet boast of being very moral and very civil. Hear them boast -- We do nothing very bad; to be sure we never mean to pay out debts, but we are not

openly vicious. What would you say of such hypocrites? More than once, when I have attended meetings and have heard Christians confess their backslidings, I have asked -- Do you mean to defend that? Do you intend to go on living so? It is awful to hear men say -- "We know our duty, but we do not do it." Especially so, when they make great professions also, and insist that they hope in Christ. How shocking to hear one confess, as I once heard a man, "Lord, we have sinned against Thee all the day tomorrow; O Lord, forgive us!" What does this mean? Does he assume that he cannot help it? If this be true, why does God condemn men for holding the truth in unrighteousness? I know very well he would have said -- "O, I do as well as I can." If that is true, why does he confess that he is not doing as well as he can -- that is -- why does he confess his sin? Can God respect those who say they are sinning all the time when they do not believe it to be so?

On this point men stop their enquires just where they should not. Certainly they ought to pursue the enquiry till they ascertain what is not sin. For example your neighbor says -- "You owe me." You reply -- "Perhaps not; let us see." You go on and examine till you find how the case is. So you should. So men should do towards God. But suppose you find that you owe your neighbor, and then you stop there and refuse to pay. That is the most provoking place to stop -- the whole question of debt and consequently of duty, being settled, but nothing more done. This is the way many treat God -- the way they shamefully abuse Him!

O sinner; never more complain of your fellow men for not fulfilling their obligations to you while you deny yours to God! Say to yourself -- "It will be soon enough for me to complain of any creature in the universe when I have ceased to repudiate my obligations to God! How can I stand before this appalling fact! Certainly I know I ought to be treated as the universal enemy of God and all the good."

Indeed, if the sinner's eyes were open, he would see God's awful wrath kindling up ready to burst upon his guilty head.

Backslider, is it you? How old is your love? Ye who once plighted your faith and gave to God your right hand, where are you? Have you gone back to sin and shame? God calling after you and you fleeing -- what shall He say to you? Even now His voice rings in your ear -- "Return, O backsliding daughter, for I am married to you." And where are you? Gone after other lovers! Oh shame! What can be more dishonorable -- more shameful!

3. You can see why it is that many persons here seem to grow more and more hardened in sin. It is because they take no action under the pressure of truth upon their heart and conscience. Is it any wonder that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all such sinners? Think now, will you do the very same thing again today? Again, will you practically say -- "I know my duty, but I will not do it." You recollect that Pollock represents the sinner wailing in hell, as hearing continually an echoing response to his agonizing groans -- "Ye knew your duty, but ye did it not." This, O sinner must be the answer forever to all your wailings of sorrow in the world or woe. Sometimes the image of some one, once a dear friend on earth, will come up before my mind as he drinks of the cup of everlasting woe, and I see him fleeing to escape, but the waves of damnation follow hard after him and he is overwhelmed before them! Alas that he did not yield his soul to the claims of truth when he might! I have not often preached on the subject of God's eternal wrath against sinners. Perhaps I have not preached about it as much as I ought to have done. O sinner, when that dreadful wrath shall have fully come, whither can you flee for succor and where can you hide?

While I was in New York many years ago I had a dream which made a strong impression on my mind. I never give heed at all to dreams, save as they serve to impress great truths; then they are of real use. In this dream, I heard awful thunders in one direction. Going to look out upon the face of the sky in that quarter, I was startled to find that the awful cloud had wholly overspread the sky and the thunders rolled from every quarter -- the whole heavens seeming to be a burning mass of flame. Turning my eye downward to the earth, I saw the public square and all the streets, far as the eye could reach, crowded full of men and women, on their knees, wailing in utter agony and terror. I rushed out and pressed my way among them to offer Christ to their agonized souls. Look here, said I, how can you know but you may find mercy in Jesus, even now! Possibly it may yet be in time! But to my amazement and grief, not one would hear me! Alas! Despair was upon them! Her iron grasp had seized upon their souls and there was no escape. Then I saw as I never had before, why sinners cannot and will not repent in the world of despair.

4. I sometimes hear persons sneer at the idea of "the wrath of the Lamb." May God help them see their madness! If the Lamb of God who dies for sinners becomes the Lion of His wrath, so much the more awful must His vengeance be! Sinner, will you still go on, resisting all the claims of God and holding back His

truth so that it shall never save your soul? Having done this all your life thus far, will you do it yet again? How awful! Before God, I charge you today with the great crime of all crimes -- holding back the truth of God from its legitimate influence on your soul. Do you ask what truth? This: Salvation possible today -- offered freely to your dying soul. God calling for the free consecration of your heart, and you refusing. God saying, Come; and your soul responding, No! No salvation, no yielding of my heart to Jesus! When Jesus lifts up His melting voice, saying, "Come unto Me for life," you answer No; Thou shalt not have my heart; Thou shalt not have my soul." This is your ground. All the day long, this is your position. "I will not give God my heart. I will not have salvation at such a price." O how unutterably horrible!

[Back to Top](#)

Abiding In Christ And Not Sinning

Lecture XIII

December 22, 1858

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 John 3:5, 6: "And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins, and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him."

I. The course of thought in this passage is exceedingly significant.

II. Understand what it is to be in Christ.

III. We must sink into Christ.

IV. One cannot live in sin while he abides in Christ.

V. All sin is voluntary disobedience and cannot be anything else.

VI. When we sin, we are no longer in Christ, but out of Christ.

VII. How can we attain to this peculiar and soul-transforming union?

I. The course of thought in this passage is exceedingly significant.

1. First, John affirms one of the plainest truths in the whole gospel system, viz. that Jesus Christ came in human flesh to take away our sins. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." This first truth of the gospel he might well introduce with the words--"Ye know"--for no Christian could be supposed to be ignorant of this.

2. He next advances to another fact in the gospel system--"In him, Christ, was no sin." He must needs be himself sinless--else he could not be adapted to save his people from their sins. His example must shine in the glory of a sinless purity; he must have no sin of his own to de-bar him from communion with the Father.

3. The next step in the chain of thought is that whosoever abideth in the sinless One cannot be sinning himself. To come into relations so close, so intimate, with Jesus Christ is utterly incompatible with present actual sinning. He that is now sinning knows not Christ as his Savior--"hath not seen him neither known him." Precisely this is what John affirms.

He who abides in Christ is not sinning; he doth not commit sin. This is plainly declared.

II. Hence it becomes of the utmost consequence, first, to understand what it is to be in Christ.

On this point our notions should be, not loose and vague, but clear and definite. It must be, to the real Christian life, a matter of untold importance.

1. Being in Christ implies that we are out of ourselves, in the sense in which selfish men are in themselves. It implies that we renounce ourselves as to any will or way of our own. A selfish heart regards itself and its own interests as supreme. The selfish man lives to himself. Self is the precise end for which he lives, labors, plans and cares. Hence, concisely speaking, he is in himself. But to be in Christ, he must cease to live and to be in himself, and must in the same sense, come to be and to live, in Christ.

2. Being in Christ implies that we commit ourselves to him, to be pardoned by his blood, quickened by his grace, controlled by his will. I often think

we are so much in the habit of using these terms--"commit ourself to Christ;" "consecrate ourself to him"--that we come to miss the sense; perhaps we learn to slip over it without getting a full impression, and it may be, without any just impression of the rich and intense meaning. Who that has once felt its full significance does not see that it amounts to far more than that loose notion that so often goes with the phrase?

3. To commit yourself to Christ, implies that you merge yourself in him--make him your end of life--make his glory your supreme end in all you do. You merge your will in his will, so that, apart from his, you have no will of your own. You wish for nothing, save what pleases him.

In some human relations, we have an approximation to this. One so merges himself in the will of another as to think nothing of his own will. The subordinate officer so merges his own will in the will of his commander that he seeks only to learn and to carry out his will. In times of peril, where safety depends on the energetic action of one leading mind--that, say of a sea-captain in a storm, his men think of nothing but to hang upon his will, catch its intimations and hasten to obey.

III. Of course these are only faint illustrations, for we must sink into Christ in a far higher sense than we ever should, or safely can, into any other being.

1. Again, it implies that we take refuge in Him. In many beautiful passages of Scripture, the Christian is represented as taking refuge in Jesus Christ. He is a great rock which casts its grateful shadow in a very desert land; or a jutting rock, cleft on the mountain side, under which one may find shelter from the storm; or a strong tower into which the righteous runs and is safe. So faith takes refuge in him from all the evils of this evil world, and from the more dire wrath that is to come! Faith seeks refuge in him as an atoning sacrifice--as one who has laid his life down for the sins of the world; also as a righteous Advocate before God who always prevails and who will surely plead our cause.

2. So the believer, by faith, loses himself in Christ. He no longer appears as one making atonement for his past sins; he thinks of no such thing, nor does he appear as his own advocate before God; he dares not--would not; it is enough for him that he has Jesus Christ.

3. In some respects the wife loses herself in her husband. According to the law of some countries, she is no longer known in law; she relinquishes her name, her property under certain contingencies, and is known only as being in him. True, some of these laws may have gone too far and may have become odious and offensive; yet as an illustration of the point in hand, they are none the less pertinent. None need fear that they shall be too entirely lost in Christ. To be lost in him is man's highest peace and glory.

4. Again, this relation to Christ accepts him as our "Paracletus," in the sense of 1 John 2:1--"If any man sin, we have a Paracletos with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous." This significant term denotes a next friend, a legal advocate who pleads your cause and who appears for us before the courts. This is a most beautiful figure. Christ takes his people into himself; hides them in himself so that he appears for them and they are not seen. How expressive!

5. Again, by Scripture figure, we are in him as members of his body. He is the Head--the great center and fountain of nervous energy; from which the vital currents flow out to every member of the body. Thus to be in Christ is to be constantly supplied with life-power from him, our Head.

6. It implies, of course, that we are fully possessed and controlled by his presence. The old self is dead and Christ becomes our life. This is one of the most common figures used in Scripture.

Now to those who have never passed through the outer courts into the inner sanctuary of the great spiritual temple, this may seem all dark. Some seem to suppose that the ancient temple did not prefigure our earthly relationships to Christ, but only the heavenly, and therefore they do not once dream that they are permitted now to enter into the holy of Holies. They content themselves to live as the ancient Jews did--drawing never any nearer than the outer court and never assuming it possible for them while they live on earth to have free access within the vail to the very presence-chamber of Jehovah. They forget that the vail of that temple has been rent in twain, and that the fullest possible access is offered now to all Christ's people

"He that abideth thus in him sinneth not."

7. I understand this to be true in the sense that his disposition to sin is taken

away, and his mind is drawn into the opposite attitude--that of true love to God and obedience. He no longer has a selfish disposition; the moral attitude of his soul is reversed.

8. Again, it is true in the sense that, abiding in Christ, we live a life of faith. The heart depends on Christ for its strength, moment by moment, as little children live a life of faith on their parents, while they are drawn by love and live in constant trust. See when the father enters the room, the little ones run to meet him for a smile and a caress. They expect their daily bread from his hands. More yet, their hungry souls live on the tokens of his love and approbation. This is faith working by love. So the Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ. There is no life to him, out of Christ. The fact is, there is a wonderful difference between living on one's self and living on Christ. He who lives on himself is forever anxious, restive, as one who is conscious of being too weak to bear his own burdens; but he who lives on Christ is out of weakness made strong with a strength all above his own. He knows what it is to repose on Christ.

IV. One cannot live in sin while he abides in Christ, because so to abide implies a life of love.

1. This inexpressibly near and precious relation to Christ, called "abiding in him," must surely include love to him as the ruling element. You are in Christ as friend is one with friend. Thus in him, you honor his name, love his character, devote yourself to his interests. To do this is to be controlled by love.

2. The spirit of love goes to keeping Christ's commandments. Our Lord said--"He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me,"--implying that obedience is the natural and necessary outgrowth of love. It should be always understood that love is the underlying principle of all obedience--nothing is obedience but that which springs from love. On the other hand, we cannot disobey so long as love rules the heart.

3. To be in Christ, therefore, is a state of mind which by its own nature excludes sin. Some strangely suppose that they are in Christ as a sort of Federal Head--a representative, in this governmental sense. In this way, they suppose themselves to have an "imputed righteousness"--and to have

this, whether they have any personal righteousness or not. I fear they will not be likely to have any other, unless they come to know him in a more intimate and heart-affecting relation. True, there is a sense in which we are in Christ as our Head--as has been already indicated in our reference to the Bible figure which makes him the head and his people members of his body.

V. It must not be forgotten that all sin is voluntary disobedience and cannot be anything else.

To make anything else sin, is to talk nonsense. Living in Christ, therefore, must exclude sinning.

1. It is generally admitted that this text means so much as this--Those who abide in Christ do not sin habitually; --although there are some who would not say this, for they hold that one may be in Christ and yet live a long time in constant sinning. But in my view this text must mean more than that men do not sin habitually. If John had meant only this, why did he not say this?

2. Besides, abiding in Christ must be more than this, else it does not meet our wants. We need something better and more than being kept from sinning habitually. We need something that will save us really from sinning. Nothing less can supply the great want of our fallen life.

3. In the case of one who truly abides in Christ in the exercise of a living, active faith, to sin--to disobey God--involves a contradiction in terms. To say that one sins while in the exercise of faith and of love, is absurd. Thus the Bible testifies:--"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature"--not merely ought to be, but is. So throughout the Bible. I know not one passage, descriptive of being in Christ, which does not imply living without sin. If it were otherwise--if faith in Christ for salvation from sin left the soul yet in sin, then is faith in Christ a failure; for being in Christ by faith has for its special object, victory over sin. And faith is declared to be that which gives the victory over the world. (1 John 5:4)

VI. Hence when we sin, we are no longer in Christ, but out of Christ.

1. This is implied in the text, and it equally follows from the very nature of being in him.

I am often amazed that people should think they have faith when they have not even so much as conviction of the great truths pertaining to Christ. To be in Christ, men must not only know and feel those truths, but they must receive them to their hearts in love.

2. Faith holds on upon the sustaining arm of Jesus. Thus holding fast, you are sustained. It is only when you let go that you fall. Then you lose his protection, you fail of his support and lose his power. If while you are in vital union with Christ, you sin, then of course he has failed to keep you. The remedy of God's own providing against sin proves unreliable. Reverting to my own experience some years since, there was a long time in which I could see my difficulty. I thought I had faith, but I could see many things in myself that were all wrong--all selfish. My mind became exceedingly exercised and anxious; I could not live so. I even began to question whether I had not misunderstood the Bible by giving its promises too much meaning. I was anxious lest I had overstrained the promises and thereby had come to expect more than God ever intended to grant. I became greatly straitened in my soul until at length I said before the Lord most solemnly--"If thou hast done all for me that is provided in the gospel for thy people, then I am disappointed. I expected more. The gospel has not saved me from sin."

3. I cannot say that I clearly saw that I had availed myself of all there is in the gospel, but my mind was dark and doubtful. So far forth as my preaching was to Christians, it fell far short of the fullness of the gospel. But now my own experience agonized me and in great anguish and by no means impudently or reproachfully, but in the agony of my soul, I spread out my sorrows and discouragements before the Lord.

It was then I saw that, instead of expecting too much, I had expected too little. I had not expected enough. I had by no means attached to these promises their rich meaning, their full and glorious sense.

4. You need to understand, brethren, that you may be in a general covenant relation to Christ, and yet not have this personal faith and this intimate union which saves the soul from sinning, because it so unites us to Christ. The ancient Jews were in this general relation, yet many of them failed of the particular and close union of which our text speaks. Many thousands of them did not receive Christ in a saving sense. Obviously they did not so

receive him any farther than they were actually saved.

VII. Do any say--How shall we get into Christ? How can we attain to this peculiar and soul-transforming union?

1. In the first place do not begin with assuming that the thing is exceedingly difficult. Do not impeach your loving Savior by supposing that He is so far off and so averse that you can have at least but a faint hope of ever finding him. No indeed; for lo, HE CALLETH THEE even now; arise and go to him. He seeks this very union.

2. Then the next and main thing is to cast out from your heart all other lovers--all rivals to your Lord. Let your heart go out to him alone. Let your will be lost in his will; not lost in the sense of being annihilated, but in the better sense of being submitted--merged in his will. Let it be enough for you to know and follow his will.

3. Dismiss all selfish ideas and all selfish pursuits. Cease to form selfish schemes, or to scramble after selfish good. Be satisfied with Christ and his love; so shall he accept your heart's love and make you his own.

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit,

but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible

choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

End of the 1858 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1859
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Lecture I. [On Tenderness of Heart](#)

Lecture II. [The One Thing Needful](#)

Lecture III. [On Self-Denial](#)

Lecture IV. [The Way That Seems Right, But Ends In Death](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

On Tenderness of Heart

Lecture I

January 19, 1859

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--2 Kings 22:19-20: "Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before Me; I also have heard thee, saith the Lord. Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place."

These words are spoken of Josiah, one of the pious kings of Judah. He came to the throne in very early life, yet with a heart tender towards the Lord God of his fathers. It was in an age of abounding iniquity, in which the cup of Judah's transgressions was nearly full. At the time to which our text refers, the copy of the Mosaic law, kept in the archives of the temple, was brought forth, after having been mislaid, or perhaps only long neglected; but be this as it may, the reading of it before the king took hold of his very soul, and enkindled the deepest apprehensions of God's displeasure. Probably the passages read were some of those terrible denunciations against idolatry and against God's own people if they should fall into idolatry. On hearing them, king Josiah said--"Go ye, inquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not harkened unto the words of this book to do according to all that is written concerning us."

In reply to this enquiring of the Lord, He said--"Behold, I will bring evil upon this place and upon the inhabitants thereof; because they have forsaken Me and have burnt incense to other god's to provoke Me to anger; therefore My wrath shall be kindled against this place and shall not be quenched."

But to the good king Josiah, the Lord sent a special message, exempting him personally from this fearful scourge, and assuring him that he should go to his grave in peace and that his eyes should not see all this threatened evil.

It is to our purpose now to enquire,

I. Why did the Lord thus exempt Josiah?

II. A tender heart implies a reverential fear of God.

III. All this is true of God as towards His penitent children.

I. Why did the Lord thus exempt Josiah?

1. Our text informs us--"Because his heart was tender and he humbled himself before the Lord," because, when he heard this fearful threatening, he rent his clothes and wept before the Lord; therefore did the Lord hear his prayer, and grant him personally an exemption from this terrible infliction. In one word, his tenderness of heart averted this judgment from him.

2. The term heart is used in Scripture with some variety of meaning--the special sense being determined by the connection and by the nature of the case. In the present instance, it is manifestly a virtuous state of mind -- such a state as God approves. Hence, it must imply voluntariness. This element may not be the whole of its meaning, but it must be a part -- really included.

3. Hardness of heart is a committed, stubborn state of the will; and over against this, a tender heart is a yielding, submissive state of will.

4. It is also a state of mind susceptible of deep impressions. We know that sometimes our minds are in such a state that God's word makes deep impressions; every message sinks deep. At other times, it makes none at all; our hearts are hard. This difference is a matter of experience.

5. In the case before us, the moment Josiah became apprised of the fearful monitions of God's word against the sins of his nation, his heart trembled; these words took hold with thrilling power. His state of mind gave the truth great force. All of us are conscious at times of this peculiar result when our hearts are tender. Sometimes the mind rules out God's word and allows it no access. But the tender heart is quite the opposite of this; it gives the truth free access and allows it to take strong hold.

6. This state of mind often expresses itself in tears. It did so in Josiah's case. This is a common experience when the heart is tender.

II. A tender heart implies a reverential fear of God.

We see this plainly developed in Josiah. It implies also faith, love, and submission. Unbelief, aversion and stubbornness make the spirit hard and dry--with no tenderness--no tears. But this tenderness of mind is best known to us by its manifestations. Among these we notice,

1. A disposition to confess, as compared with covering up.

The man of tender heart chooses to make full confession. He has no wish to avoid it. He will be deeply honest and thorough in his confessions, because this is congenial with his feelings. He will confess not only what is known, and must be confessed, but everything which his conscience condemns.

2. It manifests itself also in a readiness to accept evidence against one's self. Such a mind does not resist proof because it bears against its personal interests. On the other hand, such a man will go even farther against himself than the proof compels him to go.

3. The man of tender heart cannot endure to make apologies and excuses for sin. He will not make them for himself and will not hear them made for himself by others. He naturally shrinks from them and loathes them. He is amazed that anybody can fear confessing too much.

4. He is also ready to recognize his own complicity with others in guilt--ready, I mean, if such be the fact. When the parent's heart is tender, he will readily assume his share of the guilt of his children. Often it seems to him that the great guilt of a child's sin is on his own soul and he is verily guilty of the blood of his offspring if they die in their sins. He feels himself involved in their wrong doing because he might have prevented it.

Persons in this tender state of mind often see that they are chargeable with the death of Christ. This idea does not seem to them like a fiction, or a fancy of the imagination, but like a reality--as it is beautifully expressed in the hymn--

I saw One hanging on a tree,
In agony and blood;
He fixed His languid eyes on me;
As near the cross I stood.

O! never, till my latest breath
Shall I forget that look;
It seemed to charge me with His death,
Though not a word He spoke.

My conscience felt and owned the guilt;
It plunged me in despair.
I saw my sins His blood had spilt,
And helped to nail Him there.

A second look He gave, that said,
"I freely all forgive;
This blood is for thy ransom paid --
I die that thou may'st live."

This feeling makes the idea something more than poetry. It is a deeply solemn reality--and the legitimate fruit of a tender heart. We see that by our sins we brought ourselves into a state in which Christ must needs die for us or we must perish. Then our tender hearts say--I did as truly bear an effective part in bringing Jesus Christ to the cross as any one of the Jews or Romans did. But the hard heart parries off this sense of guilt, and will not take the conviction of it home to self. Such hearts are far from penitence, and of course, far from pardon.

In a similar spirit, we shall unify ourselves with our friends and neighbors, and hold ourselves responsible for their wrong doing in just so far as we have influenced them to it, or might have influenced them from it.

5. The tender heart trembles at God's word. You see this in king Josiah. He fully believed God's threatenings and felt their justice. Hence how could he do otherwise than fear and tremble?

6. He will also be watchful against all sin; will be exceedingly tender of God's feelings; cannot endure the thought of grieving His heart; fears also to incur His displeasure, but yet more fears to deserve it; has evermore a tender regard to the rights of God, and no sympathy with that recklessness towards His rights that is common with sinners of a hard heart. His fear of God is deep and earnest, but not slavish. I have often been struck with the significance of that Scripture which speaks of God as being the "Fear of Isaac." That good man seems to have had a sweetly solemn, tender frame of mind--in which he walked softly and tenderly before the Lord, a filial fear pervading his mind and controlling his life. So Josiah moved softly and solemnly before the Lord, jealous lest he should do anything to displease

His divine Father.

7. Such a mind will be full of prayer; will seek communion with God and will breathe itself out towards God in humble supplication and trust.

8. One in this state will be submissive under afflictions and grateful on the other hand, for mercies. He will have no heart to complain of his neighbors, his friends or his enemies even, and least of all, of God, but in the deepest poverty would say with the poor woman asking God's blessing over her bowl of water and crust of bread--"All this, and Jesus too!" Like this I heard one man say--"I have many things to be thankful for, and little to complain of;" yet I have occasion to know that his circumstances were those of very great trial and privation.

9. The tender heart will manifest itself in great charity in judging of other's conduct and motives. One in this state of mind will readily suppose there may be good reasons for whatever appears wrong. He will assume that good men apparently in fault, may not be so bad as might be supposed from certain appearances. He is disposed to make apologies, and shrinks from injuring others in their reputation. In a case where several are involved in the same general wrong, the man of tender heart will apologize for the rest and take the blame largely to himself, instead of apologizing only for himself and blaming only his associates. He will say, "I am greatly to blame; if I had done all my duty, they might have done much better than they did."

10. This tenderness will manifest itself in making all possible restitution. For, such a mind is sensitive to its own faults, yielding and tender. In this spirit if you have wronged anyone you will hasten to make it right. If you have injured another's feelings, you will seek to heal the wound.

11. It is altogether natural to such an one to flood off the heart's sorrows with tears. Confessions for sin bring tears from your eyes in copious measure. The will and the sensibility are in such a state that tears will come. So the Lord said to Josiah--"Because thine heart was tender and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord; and hast rent thy clothes and wept before Me; I have also heard thee, saith the Lord."

A hard-hearted, selfish soul will not understand this tenderness or these tears;

will not appreciate or respect it, but there are some who can both appreciate it and respect it. When parents see it in their children, their souls are deeply moved. It is truly affecting to notice how such manifestations touch the hearts of parents. Their anxieties for the wandering one have been, we may suppose, very great; but when they see him returning, and mark the proofs of a tender heart, how their souls yearn to embrace that child in parental love! The father in the parable saw his prodigal son coming while yet he was a great way off, and he could not wait; he ran to meet him, fell on his neck and kissed him.

III. All this is true of God as towards His penitent children.

1. Indeed in view of such manifestations, He is as much more affected than earthly parents are as He is greater and better and more loving in heart than they. It is remarkable to notice how often in the Bible God is said to have been affected by the tears of His people. If you were to turn over your Bibles and to note these passages, you would be surprised at their frequency and no less at their beauty and power. Hagar--out in the desert--her water all spent, cast her only son under one of the shrubs and went and sat down a good way off saying -- "Let me not see him die!" and like a true mother, "she lifted up her voice and wept." But God heard the lad's feeble, moaning cries, and God saw those mother's tears and He opened her eyes to see a well of water for his life.

Hannah, mourning before the temple for her barrenness, wept, and the Lord saw her tears and heard her prayers. Hezekiah wept that he must die so soon and leave so much of the work he sought to do undone; and then God said-- "I have seen thy tears; I have heard thy prayer; behold, I will add to thy days fifteen years." Peter, convicted by one look of His Master, "went out and wept bitterly." Nothing more is said of it; but the breach was healed; his penitent soul found pardon.

2. Often the historian records that when God's guilty people humbled themselves and wept before Him, God came down to restore and to save. Greatly moved by their tears, He could not bear to see them perish, but hastened down to bring deliverance and to wipe those tears away. Just as the mother hears the first cry of sorrow from her child, and hastens to wipe the tears away and to minister comfort to the broken hearted. Indeed He has said -- "To this man will I look even to him that is poor and of a contrite

spirit and who trembleth at My word."

REMARKS.

1. This tenderness of heart is the condition of enlargement in grace. You will notice that this tenderness and solemnity, in the case of sinners, always precedes peace and enlargement. Who has not seen men in great agony and trouble for their sins? But soon their heart was humbled, subdued, tender, and then came pardon and peace. They were like a weaned child; ready to confess and to take blame to themselves. If you notice humility and tenderness, you expect enlargement to follow.

2. A genuine revival is sure to manifest its power on the heart by many tears. It was noticeable in the last revival in Rochester that men of the highest standing in society, arising to speak in religious meetings, were melted to tears. They could not speak without weeping. This indicates a true revival. Whenever any heart becomes tender, you will see this manifestation. There will be a deep breaking of the sensibilities. This state of mind is an essential condition of prevailing prayer. When you hear persons speak of their great struggles in prayer and the failing of an earnest spirit of supplication upon their souls, they can only speak of tears and overflowing griefs in view of the sin against which they are praying. Then they gain the assurance that God has heard their cries. Ah, that was a solemn hour! When you rose from your knees, you could hardly bear the sound of your own footsteps, so solemn was the place, so tender your spirit and so imbued with the sense of a present God!

3. This state of mind leads one to unify himself with a whole people, as Daniel, praying for his people, confesses the sins of the whole nation; and unites himself not only with the men of that age but of many ages past -- saying, "because for our sins and for the iniquities of our fathers, are Jerusalem and Thy people become a reproach." This readiness to unify one's self with others is altogether natural to a tender heart, because this is a spirit of love. So kind Josiah, filled with astonishment and sorrow that the people of God has so departed from the Lord, unified himself with the whole nation and wept for their sins. So Jesus Christ blended His sympathies with the world of sinners whom He came to save, and seemed really to be bearing the sins of the whole race. He had no occasion to confess sins of His own; but He did bear the sins of others on His holy soul -- as the prophet said of Him in anticipation -- "He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."

4. Every real Christian knows what this spirit is -- of deep sympathy with others in view of their sorrows not only, but of their sins. Pastors of churches often feel it for their people. It often seems to them that they must confess their complicity with the sins of the church, partly because the church might have done better if their pastor had; and also because their love and sympathy draw them to confess and to pray for those they love. The same is true of deacons and private members. They have similar reason to take the whole membership on their hearts, crying, "O God, we have broken Thy covenant! Let Thy mercy reach us in the depth of our guilt." How natural it is for those who are in this tender and humble state of mind to shoulder the whole responsibility for the sins of the people with whom they are associated. I pity that professed Christian who does not in his experience know what this feeling is. What would you think of yourself as a parent if their were great sins in your family and you did not confess them? One who has this tenderness of heart has eyes keen to discern his own guilt, and to see in how many respects he has lacked the unction and power which might have saved others from sin. So in the case of husbands and wives. If one is not converted, the other mourns and confesses, and is afraid of becoming in any way the occasion of the other's sin and impenitence. A tender heart can see ten thousand things to confess and to mourn over. If you could hear the secret prayer of some Christians, what do you suppose would be your impressions of them? They might be like those of a servant girl who overheard the broken-hearted confessions of her mistress and her sad complaints of her own sins, and then went away and said, "My mistress is a hypocrite, I know, for she as much as confessed it!" The girl could not comprehend such confessions.

5. Again, with a tender heart, it is easy to forgive. Who can lay up any thing against another, when the heart is tender? It is altogether natural in such a frame of mind to forgive and even to weep over an enemy.

When a whole church are in this tender frame, it is exceedingly easy to settle difficulties and heal up old sores. Then those who should confess will surely do it; and indeed those who have little if any complicity in the wrong things will be ready enough to confess and weep and pray that all may be healed.

Brethren, do we not all need such a revival of tenderness and of humility and of broken and contrite hearts? Do we not need one that shall break up and subdue our pride and our hardness of heart? Beloved, do you know what this is--this readiness to confess and to make restitution? Have you ever felt this? How long

since you have felt the power of such a revival? How long since your soul has been melted to tears for your own sins first and then also for the sins of others? How long is it since you and I have known what it is to tremble before the word of the Lord? This, surely, is what we all need.

6. Sometimes a tender spirit of confession is checked. Someone suggests that you are going too far, confessing too much. He is afraid that some advantage will be taken of it; and so he holds himself and his brethren back, and by consequence his heart becomes hard and he hardens the hearts of his brethren as well. Some years since Josiah Bissel of Rochester--a man quite prominent as a reformer--was greatly moved with the spirit of tenderness and confession. It so happened that his earnestness in reforms had made him some enemies, and there were those who suggested to him to be sparing of his confessions lest they should take undue advantages. "No," aid he, "I will not be kept back by any such fear; I must confess according to the movings of my own soul. Let no man hinder me! My heart must be right with God, whatever becomes of my reputation. I love to confess my sins and nothing shall hinder me. My enemies are not likely to charge upon me more than I am guilty of. They may charge me with other things; scarcely can they with more!"

So this noble hearted man said and felt. The people were wondering at such a manifestation of humility and tenderness; but it soon appeared that God was preparing him to die. A few months only and the Lord gave him a place among those who wear white robes, being washed from their sins in Jesus' own blood! Brethren, do not fail to pray for a tender and humble heart.

[Back to Top](#)

The One Thing Needful

Lecture II

February 2, 1859

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Luke 10:41-42: "Jesus answered, and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou

art careful, and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her."

This text is introduced in the sacred narration, thus --

"Now it came to pass, as they went, that He entered into a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to Him, and said, 'Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore, that she help me.'"

Thus it appears that on this memorable visit made by Jesus to this family, Mary gave herself up immediately to be instructed. She sat down at once at His feet to hear His words. "But Martha was cumbered about much serving," and was almost ready to complain of Christ that He would let Mary neglect the work and throw it upon her. Martha was the housekeeper and made herself a good deal of trouble in the matter of extra entertainment of guests. Jesus replied to her, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things." She was full of anxiety -- not about one thing only, but many; her mind was taken up and divided, anxious, in a state of great perturbation. This thing and that thing must be attended to. But Christ does not care for the "many things." In His view the many things were of small value; and only the one thing had a value supreme and immeasurable. This one thing He puts in opposition to the many things chosen by Martha. Mary had discriminated and chosen wisely, and had therefore taken the right thing for her portion. You, said He to Martha, have many things in your heart; Mary has seized upon the one thing, the good part, which she shall never lose.

The very emphatic manner in which Christ speaks of this one thing, might imply that but one thing is of any use; or it might mean that but one thing is indispensable -- all the rest being naturally inferior and such as one may afford to forego.

I. What is this one thing needful?

II. Why is but one thing needful?

III. The thing the sinner needs is escape from their consequences. What are these consequences?

IV. By a saving knowledge of Jesus, one gets rid also of despair.

I. What is this one thing needful?

1. Evidently it is a saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. To this Mary gave her earnest attention. Jesus had come to her house; immediately she gave herself up to sit at His feet and to hear His words. Christ was not displeased with her seeming inattention to His earthly wants. It did not offend Him that she should be so entirely engrossed with her own salvation. He noticed her fixed attention, her tearful eye and her trembling voice, and He would not have her diverted to anything else.

2. On the other hand, Martha was careful to entertain Him well, and doubtless had a high regard for Him as a friend. But she had not well understood His mission and her own need to know it. Mary did understand these things and Jesus rejoiced to see that she did.

3. The words of Jesus show that in His view there is no comparison between the one thing and the many things. They may be contrasted; they cannot be compared. The many things are mere trifles, finite, and of small account; but the one thing is infinite. The many are temporary, for a moment only; the one is perpetual. The finite and infinite can never be compared; they may naturally be contrasted. Christ did not intend to say that these many things had no value; but did intend to say that the one thing is not merely a good, but an indispensable good. As to those other things -- the many -- for which Martha was so careful, if He had no supper, no matter. He could not forgive Martha for not giving herself up to what both she and Mary needed so much. It was a natural necessity that Martha should have Christ for her Savior. Nothing else can suffice, or can supply the want of this.

II. Why is but one thing needful?

Because if we have this one thing, we shall escape all that we need to fear as the consequence of our sins. Let us consider what this is and must be from its own nature.

III. The thing the sinner needs is escape from their consequences. What are these consequences?

1. I often trace the different steps in the experience of different persons. Some seem to have always regarded God as their Father, but to have not seen Christ. I mean, have not seen Christ in the sense of the hymn,

I saw One hanging on a tree,

In agony and blood;

It is one thing to estimate God as a Father, and another to see Christ. Seeing Christ in this sense is the natural result of being deeply convicted and of feeling frequent remorse for sin. This remorse for sin seems to be the indispensable condition of seeing and appreciating Christ as a Savior. It is remarkable that remorse for sin always ceases with the exercise of true faith in Christ. It is worthy of enquiry -- Why is it that a saving knowledge of Christ not only gives the sense of pardon, but wipes out the dreadful remorse? So removes it that it is gone and cannot be found? Yet such is the fact. No one who has had this experience could ever afterwards doubt the reality of justification by faith -- so great is the power of believing on Christ on one's own state of mind. Remorse -- that most horrible condition of mind -- can never be expelled permanently, save by faith in the Lord Jesus. With this faith there comes into the soul a blessed sense of peace and pardon. This expels remorse; nothing else can.

2. Under this remorse, we are so displeased with ourselves that we cannot help feeling that God is angry against us -- not with malicious anger, but yet with such anger as crushed the spirit down -- a sense of God's infinite displeasure against sin. Put a man in heaven, he could not be happy there without this deliverance from remorse.

IV. By a saving knowledge of Jesus, one gets rid also of despair.

1. Think what despair is; estimate its unutterable agony, and then add to it this horrible, remorseful state of mind, and you have the consummation of sorrow and wretchedness.

2. I have seen persons in despair who yet seemed not to be remorseful. They could not believe that God could forgive them; yet the keen gnawings of remorse were not there. But sometimes I have seen both these things together; and there was perfect misery! How awful! How horrible!

Those of you who have felt this have said -- I cannot live so five minutes; I cannot endure this crushing weight of woe! Sometimes the sense of one sin is enough to cut down and crush out all our life. How dreadful then it must be when sin after sin comes rushing down upon us with unendurable self-reproach and condemnation! Naturally this remorseful sense of sin is an ever growing quantity. Suppose one to have it, going on from bad to worse. All the pain which the mind can inflict on itself it does with accumulating force, mountain on mountain; ocean on ocean.

3. Sometimes one may suffer in body all the body can endure, but the soul be in perfect peace. This state I have known to continue a long, long time; but it is by no means to be compared with the horrors of remorse. No pains of body alone can be compared with the agonies of the soul.

Besides this, think of soul-agony, enduring forever. Let the pain be ever so trifling, yet if there be no limitation of time -- if it can never end, how dreadful! No matter whether it be a governmental infliction, or a natural consequence; in either case, the results are, beyond measure, awful. Now to suppose anything can be a good, compared with deliverance from such sin and from such consequences of sin, is utterly preposterous. All things in the comparison, are as nothing.

4. It is amazing to hear some men speak of religion. When you exhort them to become religious, they feel nothing. I met a man of this class some years since and said to him -- "Are you a religious man?" "No sir." "Ought you not to have religion?" "O, I suppose it would do me no hurt!" Think of that -- "no hurt!" He doesn't think it would hurt him to love God, and to love Jesus for His Savior and Friend! Strange that men do not see that if religion is anything, it must be everything.

5. If you have this one thing, you have everything of highest value; you have the great thing -- eternal holiness and happiness -- an enduring happiness gained, and an ever-growing misery escaped. O what an aggregate of solid misery and woe! All the misery of hell up to this day is nothing in the comparison with the prospective misery of one lost soul. Accumulate all the miseries of war, pestilence and famine; pile them up heights over height; -- all is not to be compared with the misery of one lost soul in hell. You have often heard the illustration from the supposed case of an old bird who takes one sand from our globe -- supposing it to be all sand

-- one each thousand years. You say what an amazing period of time ere this globe will be exhausted. But still the soul of man lives on yet, after this globe has been exhausted of its matter and reduced to nothing -- losing one particle of sand each thousand years. And you may add still to this supposition that this same old bird removes another globe in the same way, and still another and another all the planets of our system and then the sun and then all the other suns which glitter only as stars to us because of their immense distance; let her take them all away -- all the stars and all the nebul -- one grain at a time and only one for each thousand years; let her go on till she has worn out ten thousand pairs of wings and ten thousand beaks -- what then? Eternity is not exhausted. There has not been even a beginning made towards exhausting it. That little child, reposing in its mother's lap, shall outlive all the suns and all the planets of the universe.

Suppose that little one, many years ago, had gone to heaven, and you were now to see him face to face and he could tell you what he has become; and how his mind has been expanding, and his heart become like Christ's; you see that he now knows more than you can conceive. But let that little child go on still in the same career of progress, and the day will come when he will know more than all the angels of heaven know now.

Suppose that you could see Mary -- that Mary who once sat at Jesus' feet -- as she is today -- not as she was then with her eye fixed on Christ and the tear quivering in it -- but as she is now. You would think her more than an angel, and almost divine. So glorious! so heavenly! What a part that must have been which she then chose! Well might she forget everything else. O yes, for the Savior had come, and now is the time to rush to His feet and catch the words of life from His lips. And has He really come to offer her the peerless blessing? How then can she be expected to care much for the little things that so encumber Martha.

REMARKS.

1. Christ says -- "Mary hath chosen;" -- from which you may see that something is to be chosen. To do this choosing must therefore be the great business of life. Christ presents Himself before us to be chosen. The thing to be done is to choose Him and to receive Him thus as our own portion. Mary made this wise discrimination, and seized on the one good part. Perhaps she did not understand that the thing to be gained as her life's great labor was to be chosen and then

seized upon.

2. Nothing should divert us from this choice. The mind needs to seize upon it with all its strength. If Mary had run about the house, and set her heart upon getting a good supper for her guest, she would have missed this good part and lost it, perhaps forever. Her mind needed to be fastened, and her attention held until her heart's great choice was fully made. Christ encouraged her to sit there and attend to His life-giving words. When Martha came along, fretting and complaining, Mary may have been deeply grieved. But Jesus took her part, and replied for her, so that she had nothing to do but to bend her ear and her whole heart again to the words of her Lord. Thus to this one thing to be chosen, everything else should yield. Christ said -- "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

3. Many never fulfill the conditions of this choosing -- never give their fixed attention to this subject. There are multitudes who have seasons of serious thought; but Satan says to them -- "You must not neglect any of your duties;" -- and in this temptation, Christians are sometimes his most effectual allies. Christ says, "Sit down and give your attention earnestly to this one thing." This attention must be a necessity -- a thing indispensable to the wise and blessed choice. You never get the good thing save as you fulfill this condition. Undoubtedly it was Mary's duty to sit down and to give her whole mind up to thought and feeling, so that His truth might find its way to her soul. Christ wanted to save her soul; He saw the way opening -- saw the need of continuous attention, and therefore directed His efforts to this end.

4. If this one thing is secured, all that is really important is gained; if this is lost, all is lost. To secure this one thing needful, there must first be fixed attention, diligent hearing and earnest thought.

5. This leads me to say that some people seem to have forgotten the conditions of having a general revival, or else have made up their minds never to have one. How difficult it is here for the people to agree to make a general effort. When some are ready and urgent, others are not. But if you mean to have a general revival, you must have a general attention; if your heart be for an extensive revival, you must have an extensive attention. If as soon as the church begins to feel the importance of a concerted movement, one goes off to this thing and another to that, all comes to nought. I do not suppose that true Christians intend to frustrate a revival, but they really do so without purposed intention.

Think of the men among us who have been here for years but are not converted. Shall they be saved? Thus far they are only more hardened. Will they ever choose that good part? When shall it once be? I will tell you. It will be when Christian people shall unite in treating this matter as the one thing needful. Then, when unconverted people see that Christians are absorbed in efforts to save them, and treat everything else as of no value, compared with their souls, then you may expect them to believe you are sincere, and then your example and efforts will have weight. But suppose a general effort to promote a revival is made; they are invited to come in; but they hear that a party is being gotten up at this place and another at another place and that many professed Christians attend these parties, what will they think of it? Must it not tend to banish all serious thought from their minds?

On the other hand, if you all come to the prayer meeting, you cannot keep these men away. They will get ahead of you all.

6. Now if this saving knowledge of Christ be the one thing needful, will you not treat it as if it were?

What will you do now? Some of you may say -- If I should do as Mary did and get no supper for my guest, and prepare him no lodgings, then what would he do? Jesus Christ would say to you -- You don't know your duty!

Christ demands your heart, young man, and yours too, young woman. Do you say -- I must study while I am here, for I am here to study? But what of your soul? Is it nothing to you that you lose your soul?

Will you, Christian, fulfill your part of the conditions of a general revival? Do you answer -- I will give my whole heart to it? I will bend to it my utmost efforts? Then it will not be long before each one will have chosen the one thing needful. Christ would say -- You have all chosen that good part which shall not be taken from you.

7. Each one must take up this matter for himself. It is in its very nature a personal thing.

Conversion will be more or less sudden -- other things being equal -- according as you give up your mind more or less singly and exclusively to the effort. Until you give up your heart fully, you do nothing to purpose.

I once attempted to labor as an evangelist with a church which seemed determined not to make any change in their usual habits. Their custom was to have a sewing society once a month. The minister would go and close with prayer. I had been engaged for some time preaching every evening and minds were becoming solemn; when all at once I heard that the preaching was suspended because of the sewing circle. Preaching went over. By and by, when the interest had become yet greater, another sewing circle, and no preaching. Everything was fixed and nothing could be changed. When I found out all this I said to them -- I cannot stay here, good bye. If any people want a revival, they must consent to give their attention to it.

Many of you are crying out -- Who will show us any good? Our text answers -- Jesus Christ. He will show you the good part which shall never be taken away from you. Will you have it?

"Say, will you have this Christ or no?"

But one thing is needful; do not distract your attention among other things that are comparatively worthless.

[Back to Top](#)

On Self-Denial

Lecture III

April 27, 1859

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Luke 9:23: "And He said to them all, 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'"

In order to understand this solemn declaration of our Lord, the first important point to be ascertained is this --

I. What is the true idea of taking up the cross and denying one's self?

II. Why does Christ demand of us self-denial?

III. Our text says -- 'Take up your cross daily.'

I. What is the true idea of taking up the cross and denying one's self?

1. This question presupposes the existence of appetites and propensities which call for indulgence, and then it means, obviously, that in some cases this indulgence must be refused. This is the precise point of the text -- a man who will follow Christ must deny himself in the sense of denying the gratification of all appetites and propensities whenever and how far soever such gratifications are forbidden by the law of benevolence. All impulses towards self indulgence, whether in the line of avoiding things we fear, or seeking things we love, must be denied, and ruled down by a determined will whenever indulgence is not demanded but is forbidden by the law of love. Within the limits of God's law, these constitutional appetites may be indulged; beyond those limits, they must be denied. At whatever point they run counter to the law of love to God or love to man, they must be put down.

2. The thing demanded therefore by this law of Christ's kingdom is, that you consult and obey the will of Christ in this whole matter of self-indulgence; that you obey neither desire nor appetite -- that you never gratify your love of approbation -- never seek any forms of personal enjoyment in disobedience to Christ. You must never do this where duty is known, lest you displease God, for plainly He has rightful control over all your powers.

3. Under this principle you must do all your duty to your fellow men -- whether to their bodies or to their souls, denying all those worldly desires and propensities which would conflict with this duty, making Jesus Christ Himself your model and His expressed will your perpetual rule.

II. The question will arise in many minds -- Why does Christ demand of us self-denial?

1. Is it because God loves to see us self-mortified -- because He takes pleasure in crucifying the sensibilities to enjoyment which He has given us? By no means. But the true answer is to be found in the fact that He has

made us rational and moral beings -- our rational faculties being intended for the control of our entire voluntary activities, and our moral nature rendering us properly responsible for the self-control which God requires. In the lower orders of creation around us, we see animals void of moral responsibility because they are constituted irrational and incapable of responsible moral action. To them, propensity must be law, because they can know no other. But we have a higher law to obey than they. Their highest good is promoted by their obedience to mere physical law; but not so with us. Our sensibilities are blind, and therefore were never intended to be our rule of life. To supply such a rule, God has given us intelligence and conscience. Appetite therefore cannot be our rule, while it can and must be the rule of all the lower, irrational animals.

2. Now it is a fact that our sensibilities are out of harmony with our conscience, often clamoring for indulgence which both reason and conscience forbid.

If we give ourselves up to the sway of appetite and unguided sensibility, we are surely misled. These appetites grow worse by indulgence, a fact which of itself shows that God never intended them to be our rule. Often artificial appetites are formed, of such a nature, moreover, as to be exceedingly pernicious in their effects.

Hence we are thrown into a state of warfare. Constant appeals are made to us to arouse our propensities to indulgence; and over against these, constant appeals are made by the law of God and the voice of our reason, urging us to deny ourselves and find our highest good in obeying God. God and reason require us to withstand the claims of appetite sternly and firmly. Note here that God does not require this withstanding, without vouchsafing His aid in the conflict. It is remarkable how the resolute opposition of any appetite, in the name of Christ and under the demands of conscience will readily overcome it. Cases often occur in which the most clamorous and despotic of these artificial appetites are ruled down by the will, under the demands of conscience and with the help of God. At once they lie, all subdued, and the mind remains in sweet peace.

3. Here let us consider more attentively that we are conscious of having a spiritual and moral nature as well as a physical. We have a conscience, and we have affections correlated to God, as truly as we have affections

correlated to earthly things. There is a beauty in holiness, and there are things correlated to our spiritual tastes as truly as to our physical. Under proper care and effort, our religious nature may be developed towards God, even as our physical nature is towards earthly objects. We are social beings in our earthly relations and not less so in our spiritual nature. We are social spiritually as well as physically, though we may not be aware of it, because our spiritual sociality may have been utterly uncultivated and undeveloped. But we really need divine communion with God and social fellowship with our Infinite Maker. Prior to regeneration this moral capacity of ours is a waste. All men have a conscience and may be aware of it, but they have no spiritual affections towards God, and hence they assume that religion must be a very dry thing. They cannot see how they can enjoy God's presence and prayer. They are all awake to earthly fellowship and friendship, but dead to fellowship and friendship with God. Their love in the form of affection has been drawn out towards man but not towards God. They seem not aware that they have a nature capable of being developed in loving affections towards their divine Father. Hence they do not see how they can ever enjoy religion and religious duties. The coldness of death comes over their souls when they think of it.

4. This spiritual side of our nature needs to be cultivated. It has been so long kept back and crushed down, it greatly needs to be brought up. But in order to do this and develop the spiritual side of our nature, it is indispensable that the worldly side be crushed and brought under. For flesh is a dangerous foe to grace. There is no harmony, but only repellency and antagonism between the earthly affections and the heavenly. Unless we subdue the flesh we shall die. It is only when, through the Spirit, we mortify the deeds of the body that we can live.

The Roman church has in past ages distinguished itself for its mortifications of the flesh -- externally considered. These mortifications have thrown off the Protestant world into the opposite extreme. Among all the Protestant sermons I have heard, I do not recollect one on the subject of bearing the cross and denying one's self. I must think that this subject is exceedingly neglected among our Protestant churches. Papal Rome having run wild with this idea, Protestants have taken fright and run off into the opposite extreme. Therefore we need a special effort to guard against this tendency and to bring us back to reason, sense and scripture.

Until I was converted I never knew that I had any religious affections. I did not even know that I had any capacity for spontaneous, deep, outgushing emotions towards God. This was indeed a dark and fearful ignorance, and you may readily suppose I knew little of real joy while my soul was so perfectly ignorant of the very idea of real spiritual joy. But I take it this absence of all right ideas of God is by no means uncommon. If you search, you will find this to be the common experience of unconverted men.

5. We all know that the gratification of our animal nature is pleasure -- not the highest sort indeed, yet is a kind of pleasure. How much more must the gratification of our nobler moral affections be joyful! When the soul comes to feast on its spiritual affections, it begins to taste real happiness -- a bliss like that of heaven! I fear many have never comprehended what the Bible means by "blessedness."

6. Now let it be well considered that the spiritual side of our nature can be developed and gratified only by a benevolent crossing of our appetites -- a crossing of them, I mean, under the demands of real benevolence towards our fellow men and towards God. This must be our aim, for if we make our personal happiness the end, we can never attain to the exalted joy of true fellowship with God.

It is curious to see how the sensibility is related to self-denial, so that denying ourselves from right motives becomes the natural and necessary means of developing our spiritual affections. Beginning with taking up the cross, one goes on from step to step, ruling down self-indulgences and self-gratification, and opening his heart more and more to fellowship with God and to the ripper experience of His love.

7. A further reason why men should deny themselves, is that it is intrinsically right. The lower appetites ought not to govern us; the higher laws of our nature ought to. The evidence of this is simply the evidence which proves it to be the duty of beings created rational to use their reason and not degrade themselves down to the level of beasts.

8. Another reason is that we can well afford it, for we are surely the gainers by it. I admit that when we resist and deny the demands of self-indulgence, it goes a short way and on a small scale, against happiness; but on the spiritual side we gain immensely, and immensely more than we lose. The

satisfaction which arises from real self-denial is precious. It is rich in quality and deep and broad as the ocean in amount.

9. Many think that if they would find pleasure they must seek it directly and make it their direct object, seeking it moreover in the gratification of their appetites. They seem to know no other form of happiness but this. It would seem that they never have conceived the idea that the only way to enjoy themselves really is to deny self, fully up to the demands of right, reason, and of God's revealed will. Yet this is the most essential law of real happiness. Where shunning the cross begins, true religion ends. You may pray in your family; you may sternly rebuke sin wherever it is disagreeable to yourself, and do all this without Christian self-denial; but while living in habits of self-indulgence, you cannot stand up for Christ and do your duty everywhere manfully, and especially you will be all weakness when the path of duty leads you where your feelings will be wounded. And no man can expect to escape such emergencies always. If then you would maintain the path of duty without swerving, and enjoy real life and blessedness, you must determine to deny yourself wherever God and reason demand it, and fully up to the extent of those demands. So will you gain more than you can lose. If you are firm and determined, your path will be easy and joyous.

10. It often happens that the entire drift of a Christian's feelings is towards self-indulgence, so that if he allowed himself to be guided by his feelings he would surely make shipwreck of his soul. God, on His part, shuts him up to simple faith. Then if he follows the Lord's guidance, he will triumph, and all suddenly his "soul is like the chariots of Amminadab." A case in point is now before my mind of a man who once lived here. After a period of Christian life, he went from our place, backslid from God sorely, became almost an infidel, quite a Swedenborgian, became wealthy, and just when you might suppose him to have gained the heights of earthly happiness, and when he supposed so himself, he became, instead completely wretched. He was forced to fall back upon himself and say -- I must return to God and do His will -- the whole of it, whatever it may be, or I shall utterly perish. I will, said he, put an extinguisher upon every worldly affection. Nothing that is hostile to God's will shall be tolerated a moment. No sooner had he done this than all his religious life and joys came back again. Then his wife and neighbors began to say of him, "He is indeed a new man in Christ Jesus." From that day, the peace of God ruled in his heart and his cup of joy was

full to overflowing. Any man, therefore, can afford to deny himself, since thereby he opens his heart to the joys of immortal life and peace. This is the only way of real happiness.

11. This subject explains many of the otherwise strange facts of Christian experience. Here is one man who cannot pray before his family. Enquire more deeply into his case and you will probably find that he cannot enjoy anything in religious duty. Enquire yet further into the cause and you will find that he does not deny himself, but lives under the laws of self-indulgence. Poor man, he cannot please God so!

12. Another cannot come out and confess Christ before men. The truth probably is that he has not made up his mind to deny himself at all. On the contrary, he really denies Christ. He shuns the cross. Ah, that is not the way to heaven. In that path you can have no communion with God. Try it a thousand times and you will still find the same result, no peace, and no communion with God.

III. Our text says -- "Take up your cross daily."

1. So you must. This is the only possible way of holy living. And it must be done firmly, sternly and continually. It must be made your life-work, save as you gain a respite by substantial victory over your propensities to self-indulgence. Let a man attempt to rule down the appetite for alcoholic drinks, and do it at special seasons only, say once a day, or once in a week, while all the rest of the time he gives himself to full indulgence, he must utterly fail. He never can succeed unless he takes up his cross daily and bears it all the time. Absolutely he must persevere, or his efforts are all for nought. Precisely in proportion as we sternly take up our cross, it grows light and we grow strong to bear it. When a man indulges himself in tobacco, each day's indulgence makes him more a slave. On the contrary, each successive day's abstinence makes him more a conqueror. If a man resolutely declares -- By the help of God, no lust, no appetite, shall have dominion over me -- then holding on, he comes off conqueror. The more firmly you adhere to this principle and the more steadily you rule down the clamors for self-indulgence, so much the more speedily and surely do you gain the victory. Although at first you take up this work tremblingly, if you hold on, you will gain ground. These appetites will take less and less hold upon you. Bearing your cross will itself make you strong for your toil in the

Christian life.

2. Shunning the cross grieves the Spirit. If you neglect duty, if you fail to pray in your family, omitting it perhaps because you have company present, you may be very sure the Spirit of God is grieved. Satan throws these temptations in your path, and you give him every advantage against you. You will perhaps try to pray while in this state; but, oh! God is not with you! You have been placed where you should have done some things unpleasant to flesh and blood; you evaded the claims of present duty; you went to bed at night without doing your duty. How was it then with your soul? Did not dark clouds shut off the light of God's face? Did you have any comfort of His presence? Or any communion with your Savior? Pause and ask your heart for the answer.

REMARKS.

1. So long as the religious sensibilities are not developed, men will of course feel a strong demand for worldly affections. What do they know about the religious affections of the heart? What do they know of real love to God, or of the consciousness of the Spirit's witness to their hearts that they are God's children? Really nothing. They have never crossed their sensual propensities. Of course they have not taken the first step towards developing the heavenly affections of the heart. Consequently all their enjoyments are earthly. Their hearts are only below. But just in proportion as they deny themselves do they fall into adjustment to their spiritual nature.

2. It is a great and blessed thing for the Christian to find his nature conformed progressively more and more to God; to find it manifestly coming round right and adjusting itself under divine grace, to the demands of benevolence.

3. Cross bearing, persisted in, brings out a ripe spiritual culture. The soul longs intensely for spiritual manifestations and loves communion with God. Hear him say -- How sweet the memory of those scenes when my soul lay low before God! How did my heart enjoy His presence! Now I am always sensible of an aching void unless God be there.

4. When men go about to seek enjoyment as an end, they surely miss it. All such seeking must certainly be in vain. Benevolence leads the soul out of itself, and sets it upon making others happy. So real blessedness comes.

5. Your usefulness as Christians will be as your cross bearing and as your firmness in this course of life. For your knowledge in spiritual things, your spiritual vitality, your communion with God and, all in one word, your aid from the Holy Ghost, must turn upon the fidelity with which you deny yourself.

6. If you have once known the blessedness of spiritual life, and your heart has been molded into the image of the heavenly, you can no longer return to the miserable flesh-pots of Egypt. There is no longer any possibility of your enjoying earthly things as the portion of your soul. Let that be considered settled. Abandon at once and forever all further thought of finding your joys in worldly, selfish indulgences.

7. To the young, let me say, your sensibilities are quick and lean to worldly things. Now is the time for you to be stern in dealing with your self-indulgent spirit before you have gone too far ever to succeed. Are you strongly tempted to give way to self-indulgence? Remember it is an unalterable law of your nature that you must seek your peace and blessedness in God. You cannot find it elsewhere. You must have Jesus for your friend, or be eternally friendless. Your very nature demands that you seek God as your God -- the King of your life -- the Portion of your soul for happiness. You cannot find Him such to you save as you deny yourself, take up your daily cross, and follow Jesus.

8. To those of you who being yet in your sins, cannot conceive how you can ever enjoy God, and cannot even imagine how your heart can cleave to God, and call Him a thousand endearing names, and pour out your heart in love to Jesus, let me beg of you to consider that there is such communion with God -- there is such joy of His presence, and you may have it at the price of self-denial and whole-hearted devotion to Jesus; not otherwise. And why should you not make this choice? Already you are saying -- every cup of worldly pleasure is blasted -- dried up and worthless. Then let them go. Bid them away, and make the better choice of pleasures that are purer far and better and which endure forever.

[Back to Top](#)

The Way That Seems Right, But Ends In Death
Lecture IV

July 6, 1859

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Prov. 16:25: "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

The same words occur also in Proverbs 14:12, showing that the sacred writer felt deeply the force of this truth.

We must first enquire,

I. What is meant by seeming to be right.

II. What is the doctrine of the text?

III. This one way, what is it?

IV. Why do men think this way to be right?

V. But why do men thus deceive themselves?

VI. This sort of obedience is not the way to heaven.

VII. How should a man act if he may not do what seems to him right?

I. What is meant by seeming to be right.

The original word denotes what lawyers express by saying a thing is right "prima facie" -- on its face -- at first appearance -- as the case presents itself at first view and without looking at the other side. Unless objections appear, it is to be assumed as true. The word implies a want of certainty. It does not preclude doubt or further investigation. Indeed if the matter be one of any importance, there ought to be further investigation, notwithstanding all this appearance of being right. The original word applies naturally to an opinion adopted loosely, on a merely surface view and without honest and thorough investigation. It also implies a credulous state of mind as to this way that seems right. The mind is very willing to satisfy itself with a mere seeming.

Such I take to be the meaning of the phrase "seemeth to be right."

II. What, then, is the doctrine of the text?

1. Plainly this -- that we may think we are right and are doing right, when in truth we are utterly wrong. It may seem that we are in the way to heaven, while we are really in the way to hell.
2. Hence it is of vital consequence to enquire and ascertain what this way is. It is remarkable that the text speaks of one way, there is a way that seemeth right to a man. It does not indeed expressly affirm that there is but one, yet it may be inferred that the writer's mind rested on one general way in regard to which men deceived themselves to their ruin.

III. Let us therefore enquire for this one way, what is it?

I answer, in general it is the way of obeying God's commands merely in the letter and overlooking the Spirit. In this way men overlook that in which alone real obedience to God consists, namely, the state of mind -- the real motive and spirit in which a deed is done. Men do what their conscience demands, outwardly, but not with the heart. They obey in the letter, but they disobey in the spirit. Their obedience is constrained, not loving and cheerful; and therefore, it is really no obedience at all. They yield to the demands of their conscience as to the letter of the precept; and there, with them, obedience ends. This seems to them to be obedience, and therefore they expect from it God's favor and heaven at last; but they deceive themselves; for the end of this way is only death.

But it will be well to enquire here --

IV. Why do men think this way to be right?

Because it is required, both by conscience and by the sacred scriptures. For example, honesty in business; prayer to God. These and similar duties, both conscience and the Bible require. Of course it seems right to do them. And it truly is right. Outwardly, it is the thing God demands. But they overlook the fact that God does and must demand something more than the outward. They forget that real obedience consists in the loving state of mind in which the externally right things are done. They forget that, while "man looketh on the outward appearance, God looketh on the heart."

V. But why do men thus deceive themselves?

1. Because they are in a dishonest, selfish state of mind. They are in a state like Paul's when he verily thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth; but the reason of his verily thinking so lay in the strong committal of his soul to Judaism and to his selfish interests in that system. Really he was not in an honest state of mind, and therefore was not prepared to judge truly in such matters. In a dishonest state of mind, men are satisfied with cheap service done for God. They are by no means careful to give Him good measure. Perhaps they do not even think for a moment that, by the very necessity of His position as Moral Governor of the universe, He must demand the sincere homage of the heart. They think to turn Him off with miserably cheap service. They would not themselves be satisfied with such service from their own wives or children. A merely outside show of obedience and affection would not satisfy them. Yet strangely they assume that such outside obedience in their case will satisfy God! Being in a thoroughly selfish state of mind, they are blind to the spiritual demands of God's law. They have no just conceptions of the real nature of their own righteousness. They assume it to be a fair and perfect robe, but God accounts it only as filthy rags -- not rags only -- but filthy rags -- loathsome and foul -- intolerable.

2. Such persons are blind to the spirit of God's law. For example, the law which requires them to pay a debt to a neighbor. In a selfish spirit, one will pay such a debt because the civil law demands it, and he cannot avoid paying it. Or he may do it selfishly to sustain his reputation. But the truly benevolent man pays this debt out of love to his neighbor. He remembers the law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," and he considers nothing less than this, as real obedience to God. Because he loves his neighbor, therefore he pays to him what he owes him. This, and this only is obeying in the true spirit of obedience.

3. So selfish men go to the house of God to please themselves and not to please God. They have no heart in it. This seems to them to be right, but it seems so, only because they are selfish, and do not deeply consider the matter. They do not ask themselves -- Would I be pleased with such service from my wife or from my children? Would I be satisfied if my servants thought only of the outward appearance and had no proper respect for my feelings and wishes?

This kind of service is all wrong, however right it may seem. It does not answer the demands of the law of God. This law demands the homage of the heart, and can accept of nothing less. How then can it accept that which is wholly selfish?

VI. This sort of obedience is not the way to heaven.

1. It does not make the heart mellow, humble, holy; indeed it has no such influence at all, but rather the opposite. It only makes the heart vain, proud, hard and yet more selfish.
2. It should never be forgotten that any obedience which is not from the heart and from real love is no obedience at all.
3. People are prone to congratulate themselves on their selfish and external obedience, but such obedience is not performing their duty to God or to man either. It leaves the soul in sin and in bondage.
4. This delusion is wholly inexcusable.

VII. Some men, willing to justify themselves, will ask -- How should a man act if he may not do what seems to him right?

1. I answer, he may and must do what seems right to him; he must follow the dictates of his conscience; but he must see to it that his mind be honest and that his conscience be enlightened. For this, he is responsible. He can be honest; he can open his eyes to see God's claims in their true light.
2. Such selfish men obey their conscience only apparently, not really, for in its proper action, conscience requires a right heart. It demands all this and is satisfied with nothing less. Conscience requires that the mind be upright and the heart truly obedient. It cannot be satisfied with obedience that is merely in the letter and not in the Spirit. Hence it is plain that selfish men do not really obey conscience.
3. Again, their obedience is only servile. It is not done in the spirit of heaven and does not mold them into this spirit. It has no tendency to prepare them for the purity of heaven, and cannot, therefore, fit them to enter easily and naturally into the obedience and worship of that world of purity and love. God requires something more than a mere seeming to be

right, and selfish men really know, deep in their heart, that such worship is only a seeming.

REMARKS.

1. This class of persons abstain from open vice. Such vice cannot seem to be right to anybody. With any amount of effort, they cannot make it seem right. Hence this way that seems right to a man must be one of strict outward morality and of correct external observance. If men do what seems to be their duty, they cannot stop short of this, for nothing less than this can ever seem to be their duty. A man has been to meeting; he has paid his honest debts; therefore, say they, all is right. All this looks right; nothing less than this could even look right. But those who neglect the outward cannot even suppose their course to be right. It cannot seem right to an honest mind. They trust they are right, they say. Ask them -- Are you walking with God? I trust so, they reply. Are you resting on Christ alone? I hope so. But you observe they speak only with much qualification, not with confidence. This is quite different from the manner of the sacred writers. They do not say -- We trust we are right; we hope we are God's people; but they say -- "We know in whom we have believed;" "We know that we have passed from death into life because we love the brethren." The men of whom the text speaks, say all that they dare say -- all they ought to say of themselves. It is only a faint sort of hope and trust that they have. They altogether lack the clear, strong, decided conviction which the inspired writers felt and expressed.

2. Again, they look only to the proximate intentions -- not to the ultimate; they think only of the outside. They went to public worship; yes they were there. That was all. They do not claim their hearts were there. Ask them, Is that obeying God? I hope so, say they -- but in their hearts their confidence that God can accept it must be very weak. Are the old heart and the new one, just the same? Is the new no better than the old?

3. Men will often deceive themselves even out of the Bible itself. The things said in the Bible of sinners and hypocrites they apply to Christians and so they find something which both meets their case and encourages their hopes that they are Bible Christians. How sad a thing is this!

4. These self-deceived men have no heart in their worship of God. Their souls are not all liquid, flowing out in praise, and full of love and of heaven. There is

none of the spirit of heaven in their hearts. Yet they think they mean to do right and to do their duty. It seems so to them. They are in the way that seemeth right. They read their Bibles; they go to the house of God; they do a great many things; but all goes no farther than right seeming. It is right only in the outward -- the letter. The inward is still all wrong. Jesus Christ is not formed in them, the hope of glory. How awful that men should be deceived by this mere seeming! Mark that man. He goes on with his doings, his hope perhaps still growing a little brighter. How awful to think that he must wake at length in hell! A woman who had lived long with a dull Christian hope, but seemed to herself to be nearly ripe for heaven, drew very near to the grave; she sunk away, and they thought she was really dead -- when suddenly she started up, shrieked once with an expression of unutterable horror, -- Is this hell? then fell back again and passed away! We cannot know what she saw! Yet who would wish to die so?

My dear hearers, the time is short ere we shall know our fitness or unfitness for the eternal world, past all uncertainty, or mistake. No longer here; the places that know us now shall know us no more then. If this day were to be your last, what would you do? Would you not say, I cannot be satisfied with a mere seeming -- I must absolutely know that all is right? What is your state today? Do you say -- I have examined my foundation; I have not been satisfied with merely seeming to be right? But even you, if this day were surely known to you to be your last, would say, (would you not?) I must be more certain. I must go over this whole ground again, for how can I rest while the least possibility of doubt remains! Let this work be honestly done, from first to last; lay your soul bare to the searching of God's word and Spirit; cry unto Him -- "Search me, O God, and try my thoughts; prove me and know my ways, and lead me in the way everlasting." Leave no room for mistake in a matter of such enduring moment. See to it that you, at least, be not of those who go in a way that seemeth right, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being

established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

End of the 1859 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1860
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Lectures I. & II. [On Loving God- No. 1](#)
[On Love To Our Neighbor- No. 2](#)

Lectures III. & IV. [Spiritual Delusion- No. 1](#)
[On Leaving One's First Love- No. 2](#)

(This 2-part sermon was listed in the Table of Contents of the "Oberlin Evangelist" as "Spiritual Declension")

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

[Back to Top](#)

On Loving God - No. 1
Lecture I
On Love To Our Neighbor - No. 2
Lecture II

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

LECTURE I.

June 20, 1860

ON LOVING GOD --No. 1

Text.--Matt. 22:37-38: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment."

The connection in which this passage stands is striking. Our Savior was constantly engaged in rebuking the delusions and sophistries of the Sadducees. They were a sect of semi-infidels, embracing in the times of our Savior, many of the rich and honored of the nation. On this occasion, Matthew remarks that when the Pharisees had heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they gathered about Him, and one of them being a lawyer (not an attorney in our modern sense of lawyer, but a man who was skilled in the Mosaic law,) asked Him a question, tempting Him. It was this: "Which is the great commandment of the law?"

To this question, Jesus promptly answered as in our text: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Mark how comprehensive our Lord makes His exposition of the fundamental law. All the books of Moses and the prophets hang upon it -- are embraced within it. Everything indeed written or unwritten -- the entire preceptive part of religion is here. It covers the whole field of moral obligation to God and to man.

It would require a whole course of lectures to discuss this subject fully. I propose only to touch briefly on some of its main points:

I. The kind of love here required.

II. I must next notice some things implied in this love.

III. I must next enquire -- What are the grounds of this obligation to love

God?

IV. Next let us notice the natural consequences of refusing to render this supreme love and service to God.

V. I must next notice some delusions which prevail on this subject.

I. The kind of love here required.

You will readily see that this is a vital question. How can we hope to obey this first and great commandment, unless we understand what it requires?

1. I observe then first that it must be a voluntary thing -- not involuntary, as is shown plainly by the fact that it is required. Nothing but what is voluntary can be properly demanded. The justice of God forbids Him to require and demand on pain of damnation, things that are beyond our power to do -- that lie not within the control of our voluntary powers. This fundamental precept of the law cannot therefore be a thing of such sort that we have no voluntary power to do it. In all reasonable law, every precept requires only voluntary action; otherwise it is absurd.
2. It is an essential feature in the character of this love, that it be supreme -- else it cannot be right in kind. The language used by our Lord most fully implies this -- "Thou shalt love with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind."
3. It must be an abiding love. It must be a state of good-will, as distinguished from transient acts. A state of mind that is continuous must manifestly be implied and required.

II. I must next notice some things implied in this love.

1. If this love be good-will -- a perpetual purposing to promote the highest happiness of all, then it must imply a life devoted to this object. The love of the heart naturally and surely controls the life. Supreme love to God must therefore imply supreme devotion of the life to God, and by this I mean, to pleasing God and doing faithfully all His known will. If love be supreme and abiding, it must forever control the life and hold it to perpetual devotion, to the things that please God.

Here some will ask -- "What can we do for God? What should He care what we do?"

Ah, do you assume that God does not care what we do? Did God have no care for it when those two young men shot down a father and mother in the field, and left their children orphans? To suppose this, were to suppose that He is no Father of His creatures at all.

2. Again, this law of love implies that we find our highest pleasure in seeking to know and do God's pleasure. If we have this love, it will be most grateful to us to please Him. It will be a richer joy to us to please God than to please ourselves. It will be our supreme pleasure to please God. We shall devote ourselves to pleasing Him and shall both seek and find our chief joy in this.

We sometimes see human beings so devoted to each other that they find their supreme pleasure in promoting each other's welfare. Such devotion, obedience to this great law implies, towards God.

3. Again, the exercise of this love implies a sympathy with whatever pleases God, so that anything that anybody does to please God will surely please us. We shall naturally have a great complacency with anything that pleases God.

4. On the same principle, it implies a state of mind that will be pained with anything that displeases God. If we love God supremely, we shall account anything done against God as if it were done against ourselves -- nay, more painful than if done against ourselves merely. It will give us more pain than if done against ourselves only.

5. Of course it also implies that we are joyful in the exercise of self-denial for Christ's sake.

It sometimes happens that persons receiving favors from us, express so much gratitude that we are ready to thank them for the privilege of doing anything for them. See that little child sick and faint; she motions for a drink of water. Poor child; she can only lisp out, "Thank you, Ma!" Her mother did not need those uttered thanks. The grateful look sufficed. Nay, she so loved that dear sick one that it was joy enough for her to do anything for her welfare, because of the love she bore. You have felt this. You have felt such love, and

such joy in doing any kindness to one you love that you were ready to thank that dear one for the privilege of doing him any good. Your heart has been so set on doing good that you have felt it more blessed to give than to receive.

So God feels. God's love is of this sort -- pure good-willing -- pure love of doing all the good He can safely and wisely, to His children. His children feel so towards Him. If they can do anything for His cause, it is the highest joy of their heart. Suppose the Lord were to say to some of you -- You may do any way you please. Would you not at once reply -- Not so, Lord, but rather anything that pleases Thee? Nothing else can ever please me, but doing what pleases Thee. What do I live for but to please and honor Thee?

6. If you find one who cannot deny himself, but chooses his ways to please himself otherwise than in pleasing God, you may know he does not love God.

7. If you seek anyone's good with real love, you will certainly avail yourself to every means to learn what will please him. So of loving and pleasing God.

8. Of course supreme love implies a greater dread of displeasing God than of displeasing anyone else. Nothing will distress one who loves God, so much as the thought of displeasing Him.

You may each and all, apply every one of these principles warm and fresh, to your own heart in self-examination. Say, does my love to God bear this test?

9. Again, if you truly love God, there will always be a spontaneous sorrow if you become conscious of having displeased Him. If you should be overcome by temptation, you would not need to make a great effort to feel sorry for it. When you have injured any friend whom you love more than any other being, you can easily regret and sorrow over the sad wrong.

10. Again, when the heart is supremely engrossed with love to God, the thoughts will turn naturally towards Him. Where our treasure is, there will our heart be also.

11. Moreover God will become the object of our complacent affections. The fact that He is infinitely lovely and good, will secure in our hearts an intense complacency in His character, words, and ways.

12. We shall find supreme satisfaction in His service. We always find most satisfaction while pursuing the objects on which our affections are concentrated.

13. There will be a perpetual reference to God in all we do. Take the case of a man supremely devoted to his family; he will see everything in the light of its bearing on his family. So a father will do for his children if he supremely loves them. So a husband for his wife; every thing will be referred to the question of the happiness of the loved one. Thus real love to any friend begets spontaneous sympathy with him and with all his interests, and equally spontaneous sympathy against all his enemies.

III. I must next enquire -- What are the grounds of this obligation to love God?

It is not that God has commanded it. We do not and cannot love merely out of regard to authority. God does not expect that His mere authority will beget and ensure love. But He bases His claim for our love on His own infinite worthiness, and on the infinite importance of having His creatures obey Him. The obligation to love God must always be equal to the value of God's happiness and glory, and to the good of His creatures as depending on His relations to them. To withhold due love from God is therefore to derogate from His rights and claims, and by consequence, from the rights and claims of the universe He has made and rules over to bless.

IV. Next let us notice the natural consequences of refusing to render this supreme love and service to God.

1. First, refusing to love God, you must inevitably lose all true peace of mind. Every rational being is so constituted that he cannot be satisfied unless he gives God his heart's best love. He cannot have peace with God, nor peace with himself. So long as this love is withheld, his soul will be uneasy and jarring because supremely selfish. [sic.]

2. Then also there are governmental consequences. God must condemn those who deny to Him the love of their heart and the devotion of their life. He must regard them with holy displeasure. By all the love He bears to the best interest of His creatures, He must disown and be displeased with those who array themselves against Himself and His great family. He is bound to

reveal to all His creatures His displeasure against those who hate both Him and them. He ought to make the fact of this displeasure as patent as He possibly can, for the happiness of the universe depends upon His revealing it most fully. He should make the revelations of His heart and of His hand against sin as nearly according to the right and justice of the case as He can.

3. Consequently He must make this revelation as enduring as His own government. Both the natural and governmental consequences of sin must be as enduring and as striking as God can make them. Else God cannot do justice to His responsibilities as the Great Moral Father of the universe.

V. I must next notice some delusions which prevail on this subject.

1. Men get up some other standard of right. By a sort of mutual consent or conventionalism, they frame a code of morals in trade -- morals in social life or in politics, and then take great credit to themselves for having done right.

Now let men devise their own codes and notions as they may, this law of God is forevermore the one great and only standard of right. Nothing is right except it be in accordance with this law. If men talk about doing right, on any rule of right short of this, they egregiously deceive themselves. What do you mean to doing right? Do you mean that your life is a constant offering to God? Do you offer yourself to God as a living sacrifice? If not, why do you talk about pleasing God? Do you say -- I pay all my debts; I live fairly in society; I injure no man?

Suppose it were true that you were doing no wrong to your neighbor, yet how is the case between your own soul and God? If you care nothing for Him, what is this but, as far lies in you, to dethrone God, to deny His right to reign, and to deny His parental love and care over all His creatures?

Place before your mind a band of robbers, outlaws against all human governments. They may have what they are pleased to call excellent rules among themselves; they may treat each other with great kindness; when they have sallied out of their fastness and come down upon some lovely, quiet village; burned down their houses, murdered whoever resists, and plundered them of everything they care for, they go back, and divide this booty perhaps very honorably among each other; they are careful to provide for their sick,

and they take great interest in training themselves to adroitness and skill so as to rob and murder with the best success.

Now what of all the good and right things in these bandits? What would you think of them if they were to justify themselves before the bar of mankind, by appealing to their kindness to each other, their justice to each other, and their great diligence in caring for everything that would make them good and successful robbers?

Just so, all sinners are out-laws as to God. They have their own ways and choose none of His; as towards God their whole spirit is transgression, just as the band of robbers subsist on the principle of setting at nought all human governments, and abjuring all obligation to seek or to respect the welfare of their fellow beings, outside of their own pale.

A gang of these outlawed freebooters, if arrested and brought before a court of justice, might be very apt to say, if they dared -- Why, what evil have we done? Naturally, if they chance to escape, they go back to their comrades and appeal to them -- Have not we done right? Are not we all good fellows? To which the whole band respond -- "First rate; all noble and true, generous fellows!"

A pretty farce this, to play before the face of the civilized world!

Suppose a pirate ship should be fitted up with her black flag and cross bows and her brave buccaneers, and then boast of being the best managed ship on the seas. Nowhere, say they, can you find seamen so experienced, so brave, so faithful to their commander; nowhere else officers so daring and so true.

But what commendations are these to pirates? Do they sanctify the guilty business of piracy?

But the pirate may still ask -- What have I done? Pause and see what. Just what the selfishness and wickedness of your heart has prompted; nothing else; nothing better. Men could do nothing in the pirate's business without these virtues. Those therefore who choose a pirate's life must pay at least so much homage to virtue as to be truthful, kind and generous to each other. And then shall they be blind enough to plead in self-defense that they are very moral pirates -- very kind and true to one another, and very much devoted to their business?

2. Like the self-justifying pirate, so the sinner asks -- What have I done? Done? You have waged war against God and all the nations of men. And can you call that, doing right? Will you plead that you are trying to do right?

It is a very simple thing to examine yourself and to know whether you are right as before God and His law. Is it your great aim to please God? Is it the business of your life? What have you done today to learn His will and to do His pleasure? Have you given yourself to prayer and to the faithful study of His word? Have you been seeking in all possible ways to please and honor your Father in heaven? Have you not been pluming yourself to display your beauty? Or is it true that you really bathe yourself in His presence all the day long and deem yourself blest then and then only then when you have the consciousness of pleasing Him?

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

LECTURE II.

July 4, 1860

ON LOVE TO OUR NEIGHBOR--No. 2

Text.--Matt. 22:39: "And the second is like unto is; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

In speaking upon this portion of our Lord's epitome of the divine law, I will first enquire

I. What kind of love is here required;

II. Second, state some of the things implied in this love;

III. Third, show that nothing short of this love is true humanity; and

IV. Lastly, that nothing less is true morality.

I. The love required toward our neighbor is certainly not complacency in his character.

1. Complacency is approbation and delight in character; but our Lord makes no distinction between the good and the bad, and therefore He requires us to love them all. But it cannot be that He requires us to approve and delight in the character of bad men; and hence we must conclude that the love of complacency is not in His mind, and is not the thing He requires. To have complacency in the character of wicked men as wicked, is to be as bad as they. This no reasonable man can suppose to be what the Savior requires, or what He interprets the law of God to require.

2. Again, it is not the love of fondness which we sometimes feel towards particular individuals. Some persons are naturally pleasing to certain other persons; some are so to all, being naturally amiable and adapted to awaken pleasing emotions. But this is not the love referred to in the text.

3. Again, this love cannot be involuntary. As I said before of the love required towards God that it must be a voluntary act and could not be involuntary because if it were, it could not be justly demanded; so I say of this love to our neighbor. It cannot be involuntary, for if it were, no just being could require it.

4. Positively, this love to our neighbor is and must be good-will. God's love to man is good-will -- a pure and strong interest in his welfare, a desire for his happiness, and the positive willing of his happiness as the object dearest to his heart. The way in which His great love has manifested itself proves this. Our very reason affirms that this is the love God has borne and now bears to our race. Consequently we must conclude that this is the love which He requires men to exercise towards each other.

5. Note again, that this love requires us to esteem our neighbor's interests as our own. This rule applies to all our neighbors -- to our enemies as well as to our friends.

6. Again, it is a constant love; not fitful and evanescent; and not impulsive, but flowing from a fountain of good-will, ever enduring. It is a state of mind -- an established state, which regards our neighbor's interests as our own.

II. I pass now to name some things implied in this love.

1. It does not imply the universal and equal distribution of our energies and

means among all mankind, or even among all who may be near enough to be known to us. It cannot mean to imply this, because with such a meaning, it would be impossible to obey it.

2. There can be no doubt that the law of God demands good-will towards all mankind, always, under all circumstances; but there are circumstances which forbid such modes of expressing it as would be proper at other times. A criminal, suffering the just sentence of human law, must not have from us the same acts of good-will as would be fitting after his sentence is served out, or if he were not under sentence at all. The relation which sinners come to sustain towards God under the sentence of His law is such as forbids Him to bless them. It is not that He has ceased to love them in the sense of a deep, intense interest in their happiness; but He loves all the rest of His intelligent creatures, no less, and their interests demand of Him that He should execute His righteous law against the wicked. Hence He cannot give them even so much good as a cup of cold water.

3. The same circumstances may sometimes demand of us the same withholding of positive efforts to do good to the wicked.

4. Again, since each one is by this law required to love his neighbor, it is plain that God intends these kind offices should be mutual. If God does us good, we should seek gratefully to do Him good. If He promotes our interests, we should strive to promote His.

5. So of children as towards their parents. Children should not always receive and never give, but should account it a great privilege to repay their parents for the labor and care bestowed on themselves. When parents are spared in life so long as to become old and helpless, their children should rejoice in the opportunity to requite the favors shown them when they too were helpless.

6. So of subjects and rulers. So between pupils and teachers, there are reciprocal interests. On neither side should it be all receiving and no giving; but there should be mutual receiving and giving on both sides.

7. In like manner this Institution, including its teachers and its students, sustains close relations to its founders and patrons. Others have labored; we enter into their labors. Others have given their money; we are enjoying its

benefit. There is not a building here but is indebted to some donors abroad. Others have prayed, and we have received blessings from God for those prayers.

8. Hence we should seek to requite those favors, doing all we can to promote the very objects to which those Christian friends have so devoted their wealth and their prayers.

So ministers who preach and their people who hear, should be mutually giving and receiving good, to and from each other. All of us, instead of being merely recipients of good from others, should strive to do good to others also, rendering back into their bosoms liberally.

9. Why should not this principle apply to all men towards God? Ye who have never cared for God; is it right that you should receive everything from God and make Him no returns of love and obedience? Have you no zeal for His honor and no devotion to His interests? He has nourished and brought you up as a child, and you have done nothing else but rebel against Him. Is that right? Why should you not rather say, God has given me talents and I must render back to Him in their use as I may have opportunity? Certainly you must regard God as your neighbor in this sense, that He has interests and rights, and you are under the highest obligations to requite Him for unnumbered favors.

10. The same is true also of your relations to the church of Jesus Christ. How much do you owe to Him? In view of it all, have you any right to say - "Not one word of acknowledgement, not one thank-offering shall He ever have from me!" What do you not owe Him! Has it ever occurred to you how really you owe to Him your very existence, since, but for His mission of mercy, you had never lived? But for that offering and sacrifice on Calvary, none of us could have had any existence at all. But for that, Adam and Eve must have been cut down at once in their sin, the law taking its course of righteous judgment. -- "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." You live, therefore, only because God has had mercy on our race. Come now, walk up at once to meet the claims of this great truth. Are you not indebted to God for everything? And will you pay back absolutely nothing? Here you are in the house of God, surrounded with an atmosphere of prayer, instead of being in hell, shrieking and wailing in the depths of despair!

Do you say "I don't owe Christ anything?" But you profess to be respectable. Yet who can respect you if you treat Jesus Christ so? Have you no sympathy with His great sacrifices and sufferings to save you? Would you leave all the labor and sacrifice for Him, and make no response of love or gratitude? Will you utterly refuse to love Him? Do you say -- "He is welcome to love me and to die for me; but I have nothing to pay him in return? I leave it for him to do and to suffer all, and not a word of things can he have from me." Do you think this is right? Is it generous? Ought it to be deemed respectable?

III. Nothing short of the love here required is true humanity.

It is not true humanity to do good only to one's own offspring. They are regarded as parts of one's self, and hence doing good to them only, is nothing beyond a slightly enlarged selfishness. Nothing is really love to man -- true humanity -- except that love which estimates human well-being for its intrinsic value, and loves man as man.

IV. Nothing short of this is true morality.

1. Nothing less is required by our reason and our conscience. To lay special stress on our own interests because they are our own is not true morality. It is not, even though we aim to be honest in seeking the good of particular individuals. If it be only special individuals that we love, this is partiality.

2. Again, no man loves his friends in the sense that pleases God, unless he also truly loves his enemies. Suppose a man does love his friends. Hear what Jesus Christ says of precisely this case: "If ye love them who love you, what reward have ye?" "Do not even publicans [notorious sinners] the same?" Jesus Christ says: "Love your enemies." It can never be supposed that one does right unless he loves his enemies. Some one says: "There are certain persons whom I never wrong." What is the motive that leads you to do them good and not evil? If you truly loved your neighbor for right reasons, you would love every neighbor, and you would take every living man for your neighbor in the sense of this law. You would love every known being, because you would love to promote the happiness of all sentient existences, and you would aim to love each one according to the value of his well-being. Real benevolence would as truly seek to do good to enemies as to friends, if it could reach them, and do them as much good.

Understand, that to love your friend aright, you must love him as God does, and for the same reasons. You can not love him aright unless you love your enemies also and for a similar reason. No man does anything for his friend acceptably to God, unless he would do as much for his enemies, if he could. God can give him no credit for doing good to his friends, unless he does it on a principle which would make him do as much for his enemies if he could. No man does any duty acceptably to God for one man, while he refuses or willfully neglects to do the same for another; and this I put on the ground that God's law requires you to love all your neighbors -- every neighbor; and if you have the spirit of obedience to God, you will.

3. No man does right in any proper sense who does not act from universal and disinterested love. On any other ground it cannot be acceptable for one moment. That mother nursing her babe has no credit from God for this, if she does it on no higher principle than the mere animal. She is bound to love her own offspring because God has placed her in precisely those relations. But let her by no means think she has any credit from God for obeying merely her animal instincts. Her soul should go higher than the mere animal. She is bound to study to please God.

4. Nothing short of this can be the condition of salvation. No man can be out of sin and in grace who is not brought into a state of true love to his neighbor. What would become of a man, applying at heavens' gate for admittance, who should meet there an enemy -- a man he had never loved, whom he had hated and never prayed for? Could he pass by such a man into heaven?

5. How could you enjoy heaven without a holy heart? Some of you would hasten out as we have sometimes seen rude, unmannered boys rush to get out of church, even before the services of worship were closed. He who loves his neighbor will understand that it is one of his neighbor's rights to enjoy the public worship of God without being disturbed.

6. Without this love, salvation is naturally impossible. It is governmentally impossible; it cannot be, so long as God rules and cares for the interests of his great kingdom. The entrance to heaven is so guarded all round about that nothing shall by any means enter that worketh abomination -- nothing unholy. A man go there in his selfishness! Not if God can keep him out!

REMARKS.

1. If all men obeyed the laws of God, society would be perfect. I do not mean that there would be no further progress, no advance, no improvement; no, not this, for much remains to be done. But this is true, that morality would be perfect; there would be no more war and strife. Every family would be a little emblem of heaven. Every community would bear the image of heaven. The wings of angels would come down so near, they would fan such loving hearts; and heaven's doors would stand open all day long before such a people.

2. We see how we are to treat those who are oppressed and in slavery. We are to put ourselves in their position and enquire what we should ask them to do for us, in their circumstances. Suppose that I and my family are in slavery. Election is coming on. Have I a right to expect that my friends in Ohio will cast their votes so as to bear most directly upon my liberation? I should be very prone to think that no man ought to cast his vote against my liberty, for the mere sake of money or office. Even politicians can see how shameful and how outrageously wrong it is to hold man as a chattel. That this should be deemed a Bible institution is of all monstrous things most monstrous! It is so revolting that I cannot well imagine how anybody can be honest in holding this opinion. Yet let us be candid: I can easily see that the merely legal relation may exist without any violation of the law of love.

3. This golden rule is equally applicable everywhere and in all circumstances. It is good when applied in the matter of asking favors. We ought not to ask a favor of any man when a knowledge of his circumstances and a proper sympathy for his welfare, such as we would have him feel for ours, would forbid it.

4. The same is true of receiving favors. This law, honestly applied, would show us what favors we should be willing to allow others to do for us. Sometimes we cannot properly allow others to do us favors. If a poor man has labored for me a month and refuses to receive compensation, I too must by all means refuse to receive his labor as a gift. A proper regard to his circumstances compels me to refuse so great a gift from him. He cannot afford to give it; there fore I cannot afford to receive it.

5. You may see from this subject what the morality of unregenerate men is. It is not morality at all, in any just sense. All their morals is only sin.

6. You may also see God's personal relations to selfishness. Every particle of selfishness is personally hostile and hateful to God. It is so utterly unlike his heart, so totally opposed to all his principles and to all his acts, he can have no fellowship with it. He must forever hold it in utter abhorrence.

7. You may also see his governmental relations to sin. He can bear the personal insult and he does -- does for the time, and, but for governmental reasons, would pass it over perhaps forever. He endures with sinners now; he does not fret; does not manifest excited passion, as men do under insult; but the governmental bearings of sin he cannot overlook. The selfishness of men towards himself and towards each other, he must see. He is a magistrate, bearing the highest responsibilities of the universe. All eyes are turned upon him. He must mark the iniquities that are done among his subjects and his creatures. He must see all their wickedness, biting and devouring one another, trampling each other down. All eyes are upturned towards him. What says the Judge of all the earth to this! Ah, this must be answered! God's relations to his government make it an awful thing for man to love selfishness.

8. Every selfish sinner is in certain peril of eternal death. Men know this and cannot but know it. God's mercy flows at your feet, a deep, broad, glorious current; yet you heed it not! Yet you thrust Jesus away! You have done so often and long. Can you do it yet longer? Jesus with bleeding heart and loving hand pressing near to save you, but you are saying -- Depart from me! let me alone in my sins yet longer! I will not have this man to rule over me, nor to save me, on such terms of salvation!

O sinner! will you still pursue a course so ruinous, and so outrageously abusive to Jesus Christ?

[Back to Top](#)

Spiritual Delusion - No. 1

Lecture III

On Leaving One's First Love - No. 2

Lecture IV

(This 2-part sermon was listed in the Table of Contents of the "Oberlin

Evangelist" as "Spiritual Declension")

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

LECTURE III.

August 1, 1860

SPIRITUAL DELUSION--No. 1

Text.--Rev. 2:4: "Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."

This passage is found in Christ's message to the church of Ephesus. In these messages, Jesus appears in unearthly majesty walking amid the golden candlesticks which represent the churches. Thus He indicated that His eye can never cease to be fastened on His professed people.

It is very noticeable in all these epistles that Christ commended wherever He honestly could. He found some things to commend in the Ephesian church. "I know thy works," said He, "and thy labor and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil, and hast tried them who say they are apostles and are not, and hast found them liars." They were opposed to many forms of iniquity even as you are to slavery. They pushed some useful reforms no doubt, perhaps with zeal as you do, for Christ says of them -- "Ye cannot bear them that are evil." They held fast their orthodoxy; for they tried false apostles and proved them liars. They had also "borne and had patience, and for Christ's name, had labored and had not fainted."

"Nevertheless," -- despite of so many good things, -- Jesus said, "I have this against thee, that thou hast left thy first love." The words I have here used express the true sense of the original. Christ did not mean, "I have a small somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love," but "I have this solemn charge against thee" -- viz. that thou hast left thy first love. This is precisely the sin they had committed.

Does it not strike you, my brethren, that their case was remarkably like your own? They had many good things; great reformatory zeal; had hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans which said Christ, "I also hate," -- but they had left their first

love.

So, it often happens that after one's first love is gone, the heart still hates and denounces manifest, outrageous evil. We see this in many churches and in many prominent men of our age. O, if they might only take counsel from the messages of their professed Lord!

In discussing the subject involved in the text, I shall show,

- I. What the first love of the Christian really is;*
- II. How this may be distinguished from spurious religion;*
- III. How the true love of any Christian may be infallibly known;*
- IV. When it may truly be said that persons have left their first love;*
- V. Let us next enquire how Christians come to lose their first love;*
- VI. Show the consequences of this sin.*

I. What the first love of the Christian really is.

1. It is in one word, devotion to God. It may be illustrated in many ways. You may take, for one, the devotion of a true wife to her husband. This is God's standing illustration. You find it everywhere in the Old Testament prophets, and often in the New Testament.

What do we see in the devotion of a wife to her husband? Or of the husband to his wife?

The desire to please each other. Each is set upon promoting the other's happiness.

Or you may study the devotion of the father and the mother to their child. They live their life over in the little one. How many are living and toiling all their lives to get something for their children.

2. The essential element of this love to Christ is voluntary. It implies voluntary consecration, giving one's self up to the promotion of the highest good of the person loved. This good-will carries with it the affections. Such is the relation of the will to the sensibility that when the will is fixed, the

sensibilities are borne along in harmony with it.

Voluntary love is in this respect entirely different from natural affection. In voluntary good-willing, the will acts first, takes the lead, and carries the sensibility after it. The affections and sensibilities do not lead the will, but follow it.

3. But in natural affection, this order is reversed. The natural impulses go forward and take the lead. In the conjugal relation, the taste is gratified and leads on to the devotion of the will. Hence this devotion is not obedience to the law of God -- that is, it may exist without any thought of God's law. It is often controlled by the tastes and the sensibilities only.

4. But in religion this order is reversed. The will is first committed. This draws after it the sensibilities. The Christian purpose has respect to God's law; conscience demands obedience; the will yields and becomes fixed in obedience to God; then and thenceforward, it carries with itself the emotions and sensibilities. This distinction is worthy of special regard.

II. Let us next notice how true Christian love differs from the spurious.

1. Just as prudential marriage differs from a marriage of sincere affection. These prudential cases sometimes take place; a man marries a woman for her property, or for her talents, or for her value in the family. The woman is dependent, wants a home, so she gives her consent. There is no real love on either side, although each may suppose the other to love sincerely.

2. On precisely this principle some persons become religious, and with the same consequences. They think it very imprudent, not to become Christians, since they may die and go down to hell. Hence they become religious from mere prudence. Just as in a prudential marriage, the woman consents in order to provide for her own support and safety, and having got what she aimed to get, she is satisfied. Little does she care for her husband's comfort or happiness.

But if she had married from real love, she would go with her husband to prison and to death. She would be truly devoted to his interests. If he were sick, she would not eat or sleep but he would have all needful care. One of these wives makes herself her chief end; the other, her husband.

3. So, true Christian love makes Christ its end; the spurious makes itself its end. True love adores Christ, holds Him in highest reverence and purest affection, and the heart is so drawn out that even life is not held dear if one may only please Christ and be found in Him.

III. I am next to show how true Christians may be infallibly known.

1. Just as true love in the marriage relation may be known. For so far as this point is concerned it matters not which is first in time, the will, or the sensibility. It makes no difference as to the manifestations of real love, whether it began with the purpose of the will as in love to God, or with the attractions of the sensibility, as in conjugal love.

I say then that true love to Christ will bear the same characteristics, the same infallible proofs, as the true love of a husband or of a wife.

The loving wife does not need a formal code of law to induce her to do all she can to please her husband, for she has the law written on her heart, and this law of love inwardly impels her to do all the duties of her station. So the Christian does not need the impulses of law, for the law to him is not now written on stone, but on the heart of flesh. I do not mean that the law becomes part of the constitution, but that it has become seated in the heart.

Mark again, Christians who are truly in love to Christ, cannot neglect Christ. As the wife who loves her husband does not and cannot neglect him, for the reason that she is so united to him in heart; so the Christian, truly loving Christ, cannot neglect Him. Christ is in all his thoughts. Never was a bride more in the thoughts of her husband, or a husband in the thoughts of his bride.

2. Of course if love to Christ be true, it must be supreme. Nothing else can compare with it in strength. The Christian can by no means find it in his heart to neglect Christ. What! neglect his own Redeemer! Neglect those precious words that reveal to him his precious Savior! No more than a faithful wife can neglect a letter just received from her long absent husband. So the convert reads his Bible -- reads and loves -- reads and weeps, and still looks through his tears to read more. He finds so many loving promises, so many fond utterances of love. Never did a friend receive anything so rich and so dear from a friend as this Bible which the Christian

receives from God.

3. Such a Christian can never neglect worship of God. His soul is full of worship. To him the very sound of prayer or praise is full of worship and of love. Never shall I forget how much, soon after my conversion, it affected me to hear the voice of prayer. It was in a barn, during a revival of religion. It seemed to me like the praises of heaven. I wept for joy. I caught some of the words. O, how precious to me was the thought -- There is a soul in communion with God! What! can a Christian in his first love neglect God? What! a convert need urging to read his Bible? Need to be urged to pray? Tell me, do you need to urge your wife to do her duty? If you do, you have lost her love. So the Christian needs no more urging. It is all in his heart without being urged. He will do all for Christ that he can. It is as spontaneous as his life.

4. Christians in their first love are not easily prevented from doing all they can to manifest their love in the performance of their duty to God. They will be careful to lay their plans so as to have plenty of time to spend with God. They will not embark in selfish, worldly schemes which make it necessary to turn aside from the great duties of their calling as Christians. What would you think of the wife who should have so many other things to divert her that she could not please her husband? So persons in their first love will not have separate ends to divert themselves from labor for the salvation of souls.

5. Again, Christians, in real love to Christ, will spontaneously avoid whatever they suppose will displease God. It is impossible while truly loving God with their heart, that they should not avoid displeasing Him. What would you think of a wife full of love to her husband, yet continually doing things to displease him? The thing is impossible, absurd!

6. It is no dreadful thing to the loving Christian to give up all sin. Yet sinners look on this as a dreadful thing. To bid farewell to such pleasures forever! But the young convert feels no such attractions and bonds holding him to the follies of the world. No loving, faithful wife has trouble with a heart going after other lovers. No true husband has conflicts and struggles to prevent his conjugal affections from sinful wanderings. It is no trial on either side to restrict their conjugal love to each other. They do it naturally.

7. The Christian's love is in a yet higher sense spontaneous in his supreme devotion to God. The very thought of displeasing God makes him tremble. The very danger makes him turn pale.

8. Again, first love makes it a standard principle to do the whole will of God.

9. The convert will study the scriptures to learn there what will please God. So the affectionate wife or husband, parent, or child, always strives to anticipate the wants of the loved one, and do what can be done to promote his real happiness. Loving hearts make swift feet and willing hands. Whatever we see that we can do for those we love, we shall do with alacrity and with joy.

10. Look into any of the relations of life where true love exists, and there you find this devotion to the interests and well-being of the loved one. Neither wife or husband, if really loving deem any suitable service for the other a task, but rather do all they can with the utmost joy. The secret of this is that they neither of them seek their own good supremely, but each the other's good. If these things were done selfishly, it could be but a poor and sorry satisfaction. But done in love, no joy can be richer. The labors of love are always sweet. If you ask the Christian what gives him the greatest joy, he will answer -- To please God, to have the consciousness of having aimed supremely to please Him, and the divine testimony that our aims and efforts have come up in remembrance before God. Ask the living Christian what gives him the greatest sorrow? He answers, that I should grieve my Savior; that I should ever displease him.

11. Again, a Christian in a state of real love to God will love God's friends, even as God Himself does, and His enemies, with the same love of pity, not of complacency, that God feels towards them. He will love to pray for God's enemies.

12. His mind will be given to God and not to worldliness. This is true both of his voluntary, purposed control of his own thoughts, and also of the natural proclivities of his mind; for where the treasure is, there will the heart be also. He will love to converse about God and will speak not coldly but warmly, as one who loves.

13. He is not given to fleshly indulgences -- is not mainly asking, "What shall I eat or what shall I drink, or wherewithal shall I be clothed?"

14. He will have a zeal for souls, warm, spontaneous and loving.

15. His spirit is universally forgiving. That love for others which is often so partial and limited in its regards, he delights to extend to all. If of old he had hard feelings towards others, now all is changed. He loves everybody, and finds it easy to forgive, even as we forgive our children easily and joyfully. He cannot retain hard feelings. Parents toward their children may become hard-hearted and lose even their natural affection, but converts, in the freshness of their affection, have more than a mother's and a father's love. If you have ever felt the saint's first love, you know this. You may have had prejudice, or ill-will before, but all that is passed away now. You love to pour out your soul in confession.

16. The Christian's love is always charitable. It thinketh no evil -- is not suspicious, but inclines to impute good and not bad motives. It is also patient and meek under injuries; ready also to press forbearance even to the extent of long-suffering.

17. Such a man has no enemies. Not that others may not hate him bad enough to kill him; but he hates no one. He has no quarrel with his neighbors. If they hate and persecute him, he knows it must be a mistake, because they misapprehend him. So completely is his selfishness subdued and supplanted by love, that he has none of the rasped feelings of wicked men.

18. True Christian love has great joy in God. This is a new experience -- new as the love which gave it birth. Strangers to love are stranger to real joy. They may have a low, base sort of joy in themselves, that they shall be saved, and are out of danger of perdition; but this is only a selfish joy. Self, not God, is its object.

19. Again, great peace is characteristic of true love to God. Their peace is like a deep flowing river. There is no state of mind in which one is so conscious of a divine flowing, a deep moving current, which no language can so fitly describe as this of scripture -- "like a river." Not like the river that dashes furiously and roars boisterously; but like the waters of Siloam

that flow gently.

20. This experience is always new to the young convert. He knows he never realized this love and peace before.

21. This peace never can exist without love, nor indeed can this true love exist without producing this peace of soul. You cannot interrupt this peace if the love rules there. It is a peace and repose like that you feel in friends when you are sure you know them and may confide in them most entirely and without fear. The mind, conscious of being in sympathy with God, is of course full of peace.

22. Again, obedience will be universal. A soul moved by love does not find some things hard and some things easy, but finds all easy and sweet to do for God. Some persons find in their experience that they shrink from some duties, while they can perform other duties with tolerable ease. Not so the Christian whose soul is full of love.

23. Again, when this love is fresh, the soul is conscious of a great cleaving to Christ. No other consciousness can be more full and distinct than this that the affections are fastened on Christ. The very thought of Him, the bare mention of His name, suffices to stir up all the tenderest sensibilities of the heart.

24. In this state of mind, you do not easily feel the force of any temptation. No external influence is properly a temptation till its alluring influence is felt -- till it sensibly acts on our sensibilities. Mark the case of Eve. Her sensibilities were not excited instantly. They seem not to have been moved by the first suggestion. It was rather under the repeated suggestions of the serpent tempter and the combination of appeals to her various sensibilities to pleasure through the eye, the taste, and her thirst for knowledge, that she finally yielded. Under the influence of a convert's first love, it is always very hard for a temptation to reach the sensibilities, so that its influence is felt as an impulse towards sin. When the heart is left loose, floating, so to speak, at large with no object of love on which the affections are fixed, temptations come in easily and get hold readily. They find the heart unoccupied. It must be a state of fearful danger in such a world as this, to move about with a soul open to every bad influence. How different the case of those whose soul is filled already with the love of Jesus!

LECTURE IV.

August 15, 1860

ON LEAVING ONE'S FIRST LOVE--No. 2

Text.--Rev. 2:4: "Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."

In speaking from this text, I was to enquire --

- I. What the first love of the Christian really is;*
- II. How this may be distinguished from spurious religion;*
- III. How the true love of any Christian may be infallibly known;*
- IV. When it may truly be said that persons have left their first love;*
- V. Let us next enquire how Christians come to lose their first love;*
- VI. Show the consequences of this sin.*

Three of these points, first in order, have been already considered. We now come to the fourth.

IV. When may it truly be said that Christians have left their first love?

The state in which one has left his first love is far different, and almost the opposite of that which I have just described. If you were to recall each separate characteristic of a convert's first love, you would find the corresponding characteristics of one who has left his first love right over against them. Whereas the former did not need the constraint of law and precept to induce him to obey, but obedience was spontaneous, in the latter case obedience has ceased to be spontaneous, and the man needs to be coerced by the scourge of law and penalty to induce him to obey. When you detect this in yourself, you may know you have left your first love.

1. So the convert in his first love will not, and cannot neglect God. He will not neglect his worship or his fear.

But after he has left his first love, he neglects God and his worship. He naturally neglects secret prayer. He can be absent from the communion of the supper and from the worship of God in the Sabbath Congregation. When you see this neglect, whether in yourself or in another, you may safely infer that "first love" has gone.

2. On the same principle, one who has left his first love will neglect God's word. The soul in the fullness of its love, will not neglect the Blessed Bible. Often you will hear him cry out -- "O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day." You may perhaps hear him declare that no words can express his joy in reading it. But now, alas, it lies on its shelf unread. As you pass through the room, or as you take up your daily paper or some empty tale, practically saying -- I prefer this to God's word; it might well left up its voice to rebuke and reproach you! What! is this the way you treat God as he comes before you in his revealed word?

Now when professed Christians are inclined to neglect their Bibles, and their accustomed times and places of social worship, and when they need to be preached to earnestly, and almost sternly, to bring them to even a reluctant attendance, you may know their first love is gone. The Christian in his first love cannot be induced to neglect such meetings. Sometimes he will go though very much unwell. No trifling excuses will be made for non-attendance. He will not allow the demands of business to detain him. Serving God with them is always above and more than business. Nay, business is all made subordinate to serving God, so much so that he would do no business at all if he could not honestly serve and please God in and by it.

3. Again, when one has left his first love, there is no spontaneous avoidance of evil habits. If he does anything in this line, it is all constrained. His heart is manifestly not set upon it, and love does not constrain him.

4. Again, comparing these two classes -- those in their first love, and those not in it; the former are God-minded; the latter, world-minded. The former are minded towards God, as opposed to being minded after the flesh. The latter are strongly minded towards the world. Their thoughts are engrossed with earthly things. If reformed from any vice, back he goes as the dog to his vomit. Any appetite readily enslaves him. All slavery is bad; none so bad, so tyrannous, and so debasing, as this.

The former has a universal zeal for God and his cause. The reason is, his heart is there. In the case of the latter, all zeal seems to have died out. If you ever get him to speak about religion, you will readily see that he has no heart in it.

(1.) Again, they do not labor for souls. They do not feel any real love for the souls of men. It is plain enough that such love does not fill their hearts.

(2.) They have no spirit of universal forgiveness. They will often say -- "It is soon enough to forgive when I see proof of repentance." And they are none too ready to see and accept this proof.

5. In the exercise of first love, one cannot have animosity and ill-will. It is all gone out of sight. All enmities have ceased. Its spirit is dead.

But when first love has languished, how irritable! How uncharitable! How many bickerings! How full of heart-burnings! Where these feelings exist, you may know the heart is far from God.

He will perhaps say in self-vindication -- The man greatly abused me! Indeed! Then hear the dying Savior cry -- "Forgive, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" Or think of Stephen when the hurled stones smote him down -- "Lord lay not this sin to their charge!"

6. Are not those cases God-like?

But he who has lost his first love has no such sympathies.

7. In the life of its first love, the convert has peace like a river. Not so when one has lost his first love. He knows he has no such peace. In one's first love, he is full of gratitude, love, trust in Christ. When first love is left, these first and blessed frames of soul pass away.

V. Let us next enquire how Christians come to lose their first love.

This point often seems full of wonder. They don't know how it comes to pass, and are in great confusion. They do not see the philosophy of this rapid decline and loss of first love.

1. It is often to be ascribed specially to the seductive arts of Satan. These are so manifold and almost universal that no Christian altogether escapes their assault. None of the children of God "are ignorant of his devices." Satan seduces God's children more artfully and with more direct purpose to draw into sin than any vile seducer who goes about to ruin the virtue of women.

2. Take the case of Eve as tempted by Satan. After long parley, he at length gained her attention. This was his first artful, dangerous step. Then he went on saying smooth things -- gentle insinuations against God -- seductive solicitations addressed to her love of knowledge, and her animal appetites -- until his point was gained.

3. This is Satan's policy. To the young man, he says -- You must go in company with the wicked. Take care not to be too particular. You want to make your mark in the world. Strike boldly, and high.

Here is a case for illustration. In 1830, a Christian lady of N.-- was very full of prayer and of the Holy Ghost. In this frame she went on well for a time, till one evening in public service, during the closing prayer as she was asking -- What can I do for Christ and his cause? the suggestion came powerfully -- Buy a lottery ticket; you may be sure of getting the highest prize, because your only object is to please God and help forward his kingdom.

Her first thought was -- No; that will never do for me! But the response came -- It will certainly be a prize; somebody will get the prizes; better you than any one else because you mean to do good with it.

She yielded and went immediately out from the meeting. She is now prepared to justify her purpose to buy a ticket, insisting that the suggestion came to her immediately from the Spirit. She went and bought her lottery ticket. No sooner done than Satan changed his tone, and thundered in her ear -- Now you have committed the unpardonable sin! You are forever certain of damnation! Now go and take your life. Why should you live any longer? -- That was Satan -- the arch-deceiver of souls.

4. Very much like this is his way of tempting businessmen. Make money whatever you do or fail to do, make money; then you can do good with it. To Christians of this generation, as to Jesus in the wilderness, Satan offers

all the world if they will only bow down and do homage to him. O this is a terrible snare!

5. Satan tempts converts by the seductions of the flesh. To one he says -- Take tobacco; it will be good for your cold stomach, or for your teeth, or for your nerves. To others he has other forms of seduction. Everywhere he is the great Seducer.

VI. But I must hasten to speak of the consequences of losing one's first love.

1. Persons who have taken the first step know it. They know that their neglected Bible and closet and sanctuary could tell the story. They are brought into bondage. They lose the sense of free and open communion with God. They might know what has befallen them, even as the wife who has given her heart to another than her husband might know her guilt and shame. So the fallen Christian who serves God only because he must. Think of his case. His heart will not go forth freely and lovingly to God. He has lost the spirit of prayer. His comfort is gone. Whereas once it was the daily comfort of his soul to please God, it is so no longer. He has lost his God.

2. He has fallen into great doubts as to his good estate. Perhaps he never was a Christian. His hope is almost gone; he can scarcely sustain a very trembling hope. Yet he thinks a great deal about his hope. A convert in the strength of his first love makes little of hope -- thinks little about it; thinks much more of Jesus than of his hope.

3. He has the spirit of self-condemnation. I have seen brethren so cast down, the very lines of their face revealed self-condemnation.

4. His heart will not pray. It is not congenial. All is intellectual, and void of emotion. His soul is sluggish, his heart inert. This is another consequence of losing first love.

5. He cannot realize the truths of religion. To him, they seem only a dread theory. They have lost their hold upon his heart.

(I wonder if any of you are saying in your heart -- He is just reading off the history of my experience. Who has been telling him how I feel?)

Now all these experiences are just what a loveless wife would have as towards

her husband. Take one who has once known true love, but has been seduced by some villain. What is left to her? Not her joy in wedded life -- not her peace of mind -- not one joy that a virtuous woman can prize. Where is she? Just where you are if you have left your first love towards Jesus Christ. You are the loveless wife or husband.

REMARKS.

1. Where does this sermon find you? Have you ever had this first love? In delineating the convert's first love, I have only given its general type and not its higher and more advanced manifestations. Hence if you have not had this, you must say -- I have had nothing.

Now let me ask -- As I described this first love did you say -- I know all that; I have felt it; I have loved the precious Bible; I so loved meetings for prayer that I could have stayed in the hallowed place all night; yes I have known all that.

Have you the same spirit now? Can you say, Indeed I know by my own precious experience what all that is now?

2. But some of you are not there. On the contrary you know you have lost your first love. Yet let me ask -- Have you no heart to return? Do you say -- I would fain return, but I know God will not accept me. How can he accept so vile a being as I -- and one who has dishonored him so falsely? Ah but you may have confidence if you will return, for he says, -- "Return unto me, and I will return unto you."

3. Are you still making the profession of loving Christ while yet your first love is gone? How odious must that profession be to Jesus Christ? Suppose you are a wife and your husband should run off after other lovers and scatter his ways to the ends of the earth. Then when he should hear of your grief, suppose he should come back with flattering lips and a lying tongue, but no confessions, would you not say -- Away, away with such hypocrisy and such infidelity! And will you come to God in like manner with lying lips? And can you delude yourself with the thought that you can deceive the omniscient God?

4. It is your business at once to return, but not with a proud heart. It is not our business to ask how you shall be received, but whether you can be, upon any confessions you can make and any mercy God can show. As a wife who had played the harlot should lay herself at her husband's door and humble herself

greatly for her sin, making no conditions as to her being received, but be humble enough to accept any conditions gladly; so your business is to return to your Father's house and repent deeply in sackcloth and ashes there. No backslider ever returned really to God until they had this spirit -- I will go back in all my guilt and lay my bones there.

"I can but perish if I go;
I am resolved to try;
For if I stay away, I know
I must forever die."

Sinners who have never come to Christ at all must come in this same spirit. Let no such sinners be ashamed to say -- I have wronged Jesus Christ and have abused his love exceedingly. I will surely go and confess it all, though all the world revile and disown me for it. And return now, for this is your accepted time; perhaps your last time.

Can any of you say -- I have no need to return? If so I am glad for it.

5. But some of you have left your first love. And what reason did you have for it? Are you like that poor unfortunate wife who was so mistaken in her husband, whose soul is full of sorrow, who is lost for life because she did not know the man before she married him? Is that your case? And did Jesus Christ deceive you? Did he prove unfaithful in his love to you? Has he treated you so ill and abused you and wounded your feelings?

How is this?

How? Hear what the Lord says: What have I done to you that you should lose your first love to me? Have I been a wilderness to you? Has my heart been cold towards you? Wherein have I wearied you? Testify against me. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord."

Yes, come, wanderer from God, and consider your ways.

Why are you afar from God to-day?

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected,

appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it.

The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

End of the 1860 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1861
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Lecture I. [Christ's Yoke Is Easy](#)
- Lecture II. [Christ Our Advocate](#)
- Lecture III. [Living To Please God](#)
- Lecture IV. [Wherefore Do The Wicked Live](#)
- Lectures V. - VII. [Hardness Of Heart- No. 1](#)
[Harden Not Your Heart- No. 2](#)
[Tender-Heartedness- No. 3](#)
- Lecture VIII. [The Kingdom of God In Consciousness](#)
- Lecture IX. [Looking To Jesus](#)
- Lectures X. & XI. [Profit and Loss; Or The Worth of The Soul- No.'s 1 & 2](#)
- Lectures XII. & XIII. [Sinners Not Willing To Be Christians- No.'s 1 & 2](#)
- Lectures XIV. & XV. [Holding The Truth in Unrighteousness- No.'s 1 & 2](#)

Lecture XVI. [Any One Form of Sin Persisted In Is Fatal To The Soul](#)

Lectures XVII. - XIX. [Revival- No.'s 1 - 3](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

[Back to Top](#)

Christ's Yoke Is Easy

Lecture I

January 2, 1861

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 11:29-30: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

I propose to remark especially on the first clause of each of these verses -- "Take my yoke upon you -- for my yoke is easy."

I. What is intended by this yoke?

II. What is it to take the yoke of Christ?

III. Christ's yoke is easy.

IV. To whom is this yoke of Christ easy?

I. In enquiring upon this subject the first question is, What is intended by this yoke?

The yoke of Christ is his revealed will, his authority. The word here rendered yoke literally means a band, or something that binds.

II. What is it to take the yoke of Christ?

1. To take the yoke of Christ is to accept his will as our universal rule of

action.

2. To take Christ's yoke is to enter into a voluntary state of entire subjection to him.

3. To take Christ's yoke is to commit ourselves to a state of voluntary, loving, confiding servitude.

4. To take Christ's yoke is to commit ourselves to universal obedience to Christ from love to him, sympathy with him, and confidence in him. This is no doubt the true idea of taking Christ's yoke upon us.

III. Christ's yoke is easy.

1. This the text affirms. The meaning of the word is agreeable, gentle, gracious, useful, kind.

2. Christ's yoke is easy because it is love's yoke. It is good-will universally to us. Every requirement is imposed upon us for our own good, and the highest good of the great family of which we are members. Christ's will is never arbitrary, never capricious, never selfish, requires nothing of us at any time without the strictest reference to our own highest good.

3. His yoke is easy because he never prohibits anything, and never imposes upon us any restraint except for our own good, or for the good of the race to which we belong. If at any time he restrains us, or deprives us of anything that we would like, it is love's restraint. He sees that it would be injurious to us, injurious to the world, and consequently dishonorable to him; and therefore enlightened love compels him to restrain us.

We are ignorant, often not able to judge for ourselves; we often suppose ourselves to need that which would greatly injure us. He is infinitely wise, his love is always directed by infinite wisdom; and therefore in everything in which he commands or restrains us, love is his only motive.

4. The service which we are required to render him is only a love-service. It consists wholly in love, and its spontaneous fruits and results. He requires nothing but what love will willingly, and joyfully, and spontaneously do. He requires us to love him; and surely this requirement cannot be grievous, inasmuch as he presents to us infinite reasons for loving him.

5. Christ's yoke is easy because the state of servitude into which we voluntarily enter, is a state of the highest liberty, the truest, most perfect liberty. It is just that course of life and conduct which, above all others, a loving heart prefers. It is really doing just as we please. A heart that loves Christ supremely, is the only heart that really takes this yoke of Christ. Now this loving state of mind prefers above all other courses of life just that which Christ requires. It is therefore doing according to our own highest pleasure to do his pleasure; and therefore his service is the truest and highest liberty.

6. Christ's yoke is easy, because, although a state of subjection, it is the very opposite of a state of bondage. Although his yoke is a band, still it is love's band. It is the opposite of slavery. This service rendered to Christ is not a legal con-straint or re-straint. It is not slavish fear, it is not the thumbscrew of conscience to a must-do, a must-serve-the Lord; but it is a preference of him and his service so deep and radical, and all-pervading, that no other conceivable way or course of life is so agreeable as just that which Christ requires.

7. Christ's yoke is easy because it is not only agreeable, but in the highest degree useful to ourselves, to our friends, to the world, to the kingdom of Christ.

As I have already said, the word rendered easy, means sometimes useful, agreeable, kind, gentle, gracious. If Christ's requirements were such as consulted only his interests and not our own, his yoke might not be so easy. But since he loves us, is aiming by his requirements to secure our own highest good, has no selfish end whatever in view in any case, his yoke is truly easy in the sense of being in the highest degree useful to us.

8. Christ's yoke is easy because he only requires a love-service; and he gives us a love-reward. He does not stipulate to pay us upon the principle of justice; nor do we stipulate to serve him for pay. He has no servants but love-servants. Those that sympathize with him, that love his person, are devoted to the great interests for which he lives, and have entire confidence in him. In short, all his servants serve him because they love him and love his service. To all such he gives a love-reward. It is not pay on the score of justice, it is not what they deserve, but what his bountiful love is pleased to give them. He gives them more than pay, more than a reward on the

principle of justice, infinitely more. His servants all prefer to leave the reward with his love, they want no stipulation as to wages. We serve him because we love him, and he rewards us because he loves us. All this makes his yoke very easy.

9. Christ's yoke is just as easy as enlightened, true love can make it. I said enlightened love, I said true love; that is neither enlightened nor true love that indulges children to their own injury, that suffers them to act upon their impulses without restraint or requirement. Christ loves us too well to indulge us to our hurt. His love is too true to let us go ungoverned, and grow up in self will and perverseness. This yoke is a state of servitude for our own highest good and hence for his glory. He subjects us to his will, and requires us to seek his pleasure because his pleasure is always good. He does not make us slaves, and compel us to serve him in order to promote his interests, without reference to our own. The service which he requires of us does indeed glorify him just for the reason that he governs us for our own good. For if he did not govern us for our own good, it would not be glorious for him to govern us. If the service which he requires of us were not for our own highest good, it would be disgraceful to him, and not for his glory. But because his government is entirely unselfish, because his heart is set upon doing us good, because he has been willing to deny himself for the purpose of promoting our good, because he brings us into a state of voluntary subjection that he may restrain us from doing ourselves and those around us any harm, and requires of us just that course of life which shall conduce most to our peace, our comfort, our highest good in time and in eternity, therefore the yoke is easy and the service redounds to his glory.

10. The things which he requires of us are most in accordance with our whole nature. This state of servitude is in entire accordance with our own highest reason, with the most enlightened dictates of our conscience, with the truest, most healthy, and most rational gratification of our every susceptibility of our being. He lays no appetite or passion under any restraint but for our own highest good. So it is with every restraint, every cross, every trial -- every thing in his whole treatment of us is demanded by our nature and relations as the condition of our highest well-being.

11. In short, Christ's yoke is easy because it is really more of a divine charm or enchantment, than a yoke of bondage. The soul enters into a state of

servitude, and takes this yoke, because constrained by a view of his love. It continues in this service, and clings to this state of servitude, because bound fast by the cords of this love of Christ. In short, this servitude consists in just this, it is the soul's continual offering of itself as a living sacrifice to Christ, a mere yielding of itself to the divine charm of Christ's all-prevailing love. The soul is drawn in this servitude, and not driven. It is called with an effectual calling; it is persuaded by an effectual persuasion; it is overcome and conquered, and subdued, and held by the charm of Christ's love.

IV. I enquire in the next place, To whom is this yoke of Christ easy?

1. Not to the hypocrite who only profess to take it, but does not in fact love the Savior. There are many who profess to be religious, and to be the servants of Christ, who are continually complaining of the severity of the servitude. To them his commandments are grievous, his yoke is heavy, unendurable. They will sing,

"Reason I love, her counsels weigh,

And all her words approve;

But still, I find it hard to obey,

And harder still to love."

This class of persons are living in the seventh of Romans. They make their resolutions, and as often break them. They cry out, "O wretched man that I am." The Bible has said, "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." It has also said that Christ's "commandments are not grievous." And in this text we have Christ's own testimony that his yoke is easy. But there are many professors of religion who regard religion as a thorny way.

"True, 'tis a strait and thorny way,"

they say. With them it is not as "the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Their experience is not in accordance with the Bible at all. They do not find their religion a peace-giving religion. They do not know the kingdom of God in their experience to be "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." The fact is, they have made a radical mistake; they

have not taken Christ's yoke. They have taken the yoke of the law upon stiff necks, and therefore they find their religion a perfect bondage. Let no such one suppose himself to be really in the accepted service of Christ.

2. Christ's yoke is not easy to the selfish, who only take it outwardly, from fear or hope of reward. There are many who profess to be Christians, who have no true love to Christ himself, no true sympathy with him, so consequently they have no joy in his service, no pleasure in it for its own sake. They have undertaken to be religious simply to secure something for themselves; and they work hard to make something out of it. But they do not find Christ's yoke easy because it is not a spontaneous love-service. It is not that course of life which above all others they choose because they love the Savior supremely, but it is something which they must comply with as a condition of being saved. It will not do to lose their souls, therefore they must be religious at any rate, though they find it exceedingly hard to be so. But this is not Christ's yoke, this is not a love-service; this band is not a band of love that binds them to the cross of Christ.

3. Christ's yoke is not easy to the self-willed. There are those who profess to be religious whose wills have never been subdued to Christ. They are like unweaned children; and they are continually chafing in their bondage as if Christ's yoke were iron. Of course their state of servitude is not a love-service, is not the true yoke of Christ.

4. Christ's yoke is not easy to any who are not constrained by his love.

But it is easy to every one who really understands what his yoke is, and truly takes it upon himself. It is easy to all who truly choose Christ as their sovereign Lord, their Head, their Savior, who enter into sympathy with him and have confidence in him, who make common cause with him and merge their will in his, who in all things trust him. To all this class, who thus really take this yoke upon them, it is easy. And I might add, that the same is true of all the burdens which he really imposes upon us. Christ's yoke is easy and his burden is light to all truly loving, confiding, and submissive souls.

REMARKS.

1. Then let it be understood that Christ's real yoke, or the true service of Christ, is never hard. His real yoke is never heavy. It is self-will and selfishness that at

any time fault the yoke or the service of Christ.

2. If what we call religion is burdensome, it is not Christ's yoke, it is not Christ's religion. If we make an uphill business of it, and if we find it "hard to obey, and harder still to love," Christ says to us, Who has required this at your hand? What I require of you is a love-service, not this slavish service.

If you love me not, if you do not serve me from love, I abhor your doings. Let no one think himself truly religious whose religion is a bondage, and not the highest liberty.

3. Whatever is hard in religion is made so by our want of heart, our want of love, our want of confidence; and is therefore not Christ's yoke at all. It is not true religion, it is not Christian liberty, but legal bondage.

4. All truly religious duties are easy. If we make them hard, they are not a love-service, and not what Christ requires. If we make them hard we spoil them. If we go complainingly about his service, grumbling about the difficulties and the hardness of his service, he loathes our bondage, he cannot accept it.

5. Let it be understood, then, that they who make religion a hard, up hill matter, have no Gospel religion. They are wearing, not Christ's yoke, but the yoke of the law; and that, too, laid upon their stiff-neckedness and unbrokenness of heart.

6. This subject will throw light upon the true nature of the Christian warfare. This is not hard, a something to which we are to be screwed up, and whipped up, by our conscience. It is only love to Christ spontaneously resisting temptation to displease him. It is not hard work for the most affectionate husband or wife to resist infidelity to him or her whom each loves most. This resistance is not that to which we are whipped up by a mere sense of obligation, or fear of consequences. It is the spontaneous resistance of love to that which is entirely inconsistent with it. Such is the Christian warfare.

7. Nothing that love cannot well afford to do is ever required of us in our Christian life. Of course if everything is for our highest good, as well as for the highest glory of Christ, love can well afford to do it, or abstain from it.

8. Love cannot afford to have one of Christ's commandments abated, nor one of his prohibitions relaxed. His will is perfect; his true service is the perfection of liberty; his true yoke is as easy as possible.

9. Let no one judge of Christ's religion by the common representations of it. Should we judge of Christ's religion, from the complaints of many of its professors, we should infer that Christ kept his children on short allowance, that he required "brick without straw," that he is a hard master and even a cruel slaveholder. Their mouths are full of complaints. They do not hesitate to say in their prayers and in their conversation that which implies that Christ's commandments are most grievous, that his yoke is too heavy to be borne, that he supplies their spiritual wants so sparingly that he keeps them little short of absolute famine and starvation. Nay, they represent the commandments as beyond the possibility of obedience, and the service which he requires as so entirely above their reach, that by no grace received in this life are they ever able to obey him. Now this is surely as opposite to the teachings of Christ and this text, as possible. Just compare this text and many similar ones, to the old confession of faith, that "no man, since the fall, is able, either in his own strength or by any grace received in this life, to obey the commandments of God."

Where did they get this? Is this in accordance with Christ's teaching in this text? Is this according to the text in which it is said, that "his commandments are not grievous," and that all "his ways are ways of pleasantness and all his paths are peace"? The fact is, that Christ's religion has been grossly misrepresented by its professors.

Such a statement as this in the confession of faith is a stumbling block, and as contrary to the teachings of Christ as possible.

10. You that are not Christians may see your mistake in this regard. You have been misled. You have been deceived by the complaining spirit that you have heard among professed Christians. You have thought religion was hard, something unendurable, impracticable, something not suited to your present nature, relations, and condition. But those that have stumbled you are not Christians. If you would read your Bible you would see that these complaints are not the Christian spirit; and that all this talking and praying which really implies that religion is an up-hill matter, something so far above our reach as to keep the mind in a constant strain that is unendurable by human nature -- that this is all a mistake.

The fact is, the kingdom of God, when it is really established in the soul, is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." It is the charm of Christ's love revealed to the soul, sweetly drawing it away into a perpetual offering of

itself to a delightful love-service to Christ. Everything that is hard about it is made so by unbelief, by a want of love, by self-will. All that, therefore, is without the pale of Christ's true service. Whatever is not done for love, is no acceptable service rendered to Christ.

11. Those of you whose religion is a bondage, can in the light of this subject discover your mistake. Who has required this bond-service at your hands? Christ is no slave-holder. He employs no slave-drivers to whip you to duty. If the law as a schoolmaster had brought you to Christ, you would have escaped from this bondage.

But, beloved, do not mistake your bond-service for true religion. Do not mistake the yoke of the law for the yoke of Christ. Do not mistake, do not mistake this drudgery in which you engage, and which you call religion, for that spontaneous love-service which Christ requires. The difficulty is, you have not taken Christ's yoke.

12. In the light of this subject, all professors of religion can see whether and how far you really serve Christ. Do you ever find passages in your experience, in which all is a spontaneous love-service, natural, peaceful, joyous? If you have never had this experience, you have never yet come to Christ at all. If you have had this experience and have fallen from it, you have fallen from the real acceptable service of Christ.

Your present state, and your present religion, is not a Christian state of mind, nor the accepted service of Christ. You have fallen into the bondage of your own unbelief. And who has required this bond-service at your hand? This is not Christ's yoke.

13. How much ruinous misapprehension exists in regard to what constitutes the Christian religion. The great mass of professors of religion are in such bondage - - and the same is true, I fear, of many ministers, -- that they grossly misrepresent the religion of Jesus. By their teaching, by their prayers, by all that you see and hear from them, you would get the impression that the religion of Christ is the most difficult, up-hill, unendurable task, that ever any one undertook. It amounts to a gross libel upon the religion of Jesus. They profess to be Christ's disciples, profess to wear Christ's yoke; and yet "it is that which neither we nor our fathers have ever been able to bear."

Alas! that Christ is so dishonored, so contradicted, so misrepresented, his religion presented in such a repulsive light as to frighten the young, and make them think it is unendurable, except as the less of two evils. It may be a less evil, they think, to wear this yoke of iron than to go to hell; but it is at best so hard, so void of comfort, so almost unendurable, that for this life, to say the least, a course of sin is far preferable to Christ's religion. So far as this world is concerned, they cannot afford to be religious. It is only to escape from hell that the thought, or the effort, can be endured. But how gross is this misrepresentation; and how fatal is the delusion that this fastens upon the minds of those that are not religious.

14. It is not merely a ruinous misapprehension to those who are without, but to those who belong to the church and yet are living a life of bondage. Their misapprehension of the religion of Jesus is destructive. It is not only a stumbling block to others, but the ruin of their own souls. When will these bondmen learn that this is not what Christ requires at their hands? He pities your agonizing struggles to wear the yoke of the law which neither you nor your fathers have been able to bear. He beseeches you to really give him your hearts, to enter into his love-service, to take his sweet yoke of love upon you that you may breathe easily and walk at liberty as the sons of God.

15. What folly to make only a pretense of being Christ's servants, to pretend only to wear his yoke. This is of no use. To render him any other than a love-service is not truly to serve him at all; you gain nothing by it to yourselves; you do no good to others by this bond-service; you do not meet the wishes of Christ at all. What motive then can you have for this folly? Do you not know that Christ is greatly dishonored by those that leave their hearts in the world, and consequently make their religion a bondage? I beseech you misrepresent him not; deceive not yourselves. Mislead no others. Serve him lovingly, or attempt not to serve him at all. Take his easy yoke and render him a love-service, or no service at all. "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver," and a cheerful giver only. He will not accept a service that is not a heart-service, that is not a free-service.

16. Remember that all duty acceptably performed, must be free, it must be cheerful, it must be loving. Let no one deceive himself by supposing that he does his duty, when he does it in the spirit of bondage, and not from love.

17. From what has been said, it must be seen that there is real enjoyment in wearing Christ's true yoke, in all true religion, in all that Christ really requires.

We always enjoy pleasing those whom we most love. In this we necessarily find our truest and highest enjoyment, in the promotion of the honor and in doing the pleasure of those whom we supremely love.

Whatever is not enjoyed, is not true religion. We often hear people say they do not enjoy religion. They are religious, they say, but they are not at present enjoying religion. But this is a mistake. If they have true religion, that is, the religion of love, it must in its very workings, produce enjoyment.

18. If you look steadily at this subject, you will see how much Christ's account of his real service differs from the common experience. Now, is Christ's account of his own religion to be taken as true? or are we to suppose these experiences, that are really inconsistent with it, are true religion? Christ's own account of his religion must stand! He has told us what service is acceptable to him, and he is to be the judge in such matters. Let no one pretend that his experience is Christian, unless he finds that Christ's yoke is easy.

19. This false, but common experience, is the world's great stumbling block, and legal ministers are helping forward the calamity. Really, many of the representations from the pulpit are such a gross misrepresentation of the true religion of Jesus, that whole churches are in bondage and the ungodly without the church are perfectly afraid of religion.

20. Christ is not responsible for these slavish experiences. They are only the result of selfishness and unbelief. He cannot away with them, he abhors them. They are his dishonor, the church's stumbling block, and the world's ruin.

21. Christ's true service is the soul's true rest. In immediate connection with the text, you remember he said "ye shall find rest unto your souls." True religion is truly the soul's recreation, the soul's amusement, the soul's highest liberty; it is the rest of faith, the deep repose of loving confidence. It is love, and only love, with its spontaneous fruits. This is the whole of it; and this is the best and truest sense the soul's rest.

22. The real service which Christ requires of us could not be easier and still be real. Did he require less than love with all its spontaneous fruits, it would not be real. But if it is love and its spontaneous fruits, it could not be easier.

23. We cannot afford to have less to do than Christ calls upon us to do. We need

not fear to have more to do than is for our own highest good.

24. We cannot afford to have less to bear, fewer crosses, fewer duties, fewer burdens. We cannot afford to have anything lighter, anything easier, or anything more agreeable. The whole of his service is the most useful, the most truly agreeable, the most in accordance with our whole nature and all our relations, of any course of life possible or conceivable.

And now what do you say? Will you that never have taken Christ's yoke, now take it? Will you now offer yourself a willing sacrifice to be Christ's living servant forever? Will you who have worn the bondage of the law, lay it aside, give up your selfishness, your self seeking, your unbelief, and truly embrace Christ, and take his easy yoke, and find rest for your souls?

[Back to Top](#)

Christ Our Advocate

Lecture II

January 16, 1861

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 John 2:1, 2: "And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

The Bible abounds with governmental analogies. These are designed for our instruction; but if we receive instruction from them, it is because there is a real analogy in many points between the government of God and human governments.

I propose to inquire,

I. What is the idea of an advocate?

II. Purposes for which an advocate may be employed.

III. The sense in which Christ is the advocate of sinners.

IV. What is implied in his being the advocate of sinners?

V. The essential qualifications of an advocate under such circumstances.

VI. What his plea in behalf of sinners is.

I. What is the idea of an advocate when the term is used to express a governmental office or relation?

An advocate is one who pleads the cause of another, who represents another, and acts in his name; one who uses his influence in behalf of another by his request.

II. Purposes for which an advocate may be employed.

1. To secure justice, in case any question involving justice is to be tried.
2. To defend the accused. If one has been accused of committing a crime, an advocate may be employed to conduct his trial on his behalf; to defend him against the charge, and prevent his conviction if possible.
3. An advocate may be employed to secure a pardon, when a criminal has been justly condemned, and is under sentence. That is, an advocate may be employed either to secure justice for his client, or to obtain mercy for him, in case he is condemned; may be employed either to prevent his conviction, or when convicted, may be employed in setting aside the execution of the law upon the criminal.

III. The sense in which Christ is the advocate of sinners.

He is employed to plead the cause of sinners, not at the bar of justice; not to defend them against the charge of sin, because the question of their guilt is already settled. The Bible represents them as condemned already; and such is the fact, as every sinner knows. Every sinner in the world knows that he has sinned, and that consequently he must be condemned by the law of God. This office, then, is exercised by Christ in respect to sinners; not at the bar of justice, but at the throne of grace, at the footstool of sovereign mercy. He is employed, not to prevent the conviction of the sinner, but to prevent his execution; not to prevent his being condemned, but being already condemned, to prevent his being

damned.

IV. What is implied in his being the advocate of sinners?

1. His being employed at a throne of grace and not at the bar of justice, to plead for sinners, as such, and not for those who are merely charged with sin, but the charge not established. This implies that the guilt of the sinner is already ascertained, the verdict of guilty given, the sentence of the law pronounced, and that the sinner awaits his execution.
2. His being appointed by God as the advocate of sinners implies a merciful disposition in God. If God had not been mercifully disposed towards sinners, no advocate had been appointed, no question of forgiveness had been raised.
3. It implies also that the exercise of mercy on certain conditions is possible. Not only is God mercifully disposed, but to manifest this disposition in the actual pardon of sin is possible. Had not this been the case, no advocate had been appointed.
4. It implies that there is hope, then, for the condemned. Sinners are prisoners; but in this world they are not yet prisoners of despair, but are prisoners of hope.
5. It implies that there is a governmental necessity for the interposition of an advocate; that the sinner's relations are such, and his character such, that he can not be admitted to plead his own cause in his own name. He is condemned, he is no longer on trial. In this respect he is under sentence for a capital crime; consequently he is an outlaw, and the government can not recognize him as being capable of performing any legal act. His relations to the government forbid that in his own name, or in his own person, he should appear before God. So far as his own personal influence with the government is concerned, he is as a dead man--he is civilly dead. Therefore he must appear by his next friend, or by his advocate, if he is heard at all. He may not appear in his own name and in his own person, but must appear by an advocate who is acceptable to the government.

V. I next call attention to the essential qualifications of an advocate under such circumstances.

1. He must be the uncompromising friend of the government. Observe, he appears to pray for mercy to be extended to the guilty party whom he represents. Of course he must not himself be the enemy of the government of whom he asks so great a favor; but he should be known to be the devoted friend of the government whose mercy he prays may be extended to the guilty.

2. He must be the uncompromising friend of the dishonored law. The sinner has greatly dishonored, and by his conduct denounced, both the law and the law-giver. By his uniform disobedience the sinner has proclaimed, in the most emphatic manner, that the law is not worthy of obedience, and that the law-giver is a tyrant. Now the advocate must be a friend to this law; he must not sell himself to the dishonor of the law; nor consent to its dishonor. He must not reflect upon the law; for in this case he places the law giver in a condition in which, if he should set aside the penalty and exercise mercy, he would consent to the dishonor of the law, and by a public act himself condemn the law. The advocate seeks to dispense with the execution of the law; but he must not offer as a reason, that the law is unreasonable and unjust. For in this case he renders it impossible for the law-giver to set aside the execution without consenting to the assertion that the law is not good. In that case the law-giver would condemn himself instead of the sinner. It is plain, then, that he must be the uncompromising friend of the law, or he can never secure the exercise of mercy without involving the law-giver himself in the crime of dishonoring the law.

3. The advocate must be righteous; that is, he must be clear of any complicity in the crime of the sinner. He must have no fellowship with his crime; there must be no charge or suspicion of guilt resting upon the advocate. Unless he himself be clear of the crime, of which the criminal is accused, he is not the proper person to represent him before a throne of mercy.

4. He must be the compassionate friend of the sinner. Not of his sins, but of the sinner himself. This distinction is very plain. Every one knows that a parent can be greatly opposed to the wickedness of his children, while he has great compassion for their person. He is not a true friend to the sinner who really sympathizes with his sins. I have several times heard sinners render as an excuse for not being Christians, that their friends were opposed

to it. They have a great many dear friends who are opposed to their becoming Christians and obeying God. They desire them to live on in their sins. They do not want them to change and become holy, but desire them to remain in their worldly-mindedness and sinfulness. I tell such persons that those are their friends in the same sense that the devil is their friend. And would they call the devil their good friend, their kind friend, because he sympathizes with their sins, and wishes them not to become Christians? Would you call a man your friend, who wished you to commit murder, or robbery, to tell a lie, or commit any crime? Suppose he should come and appeal to you, and because you are his friend should desire you to commit some great crime, would you regard that man as your friend?

No! No man is a true friend of a sinner, unless he is desirous that he should abandon his sins. If any person would have you continue in your sins, he is the adversary of your soul. Instead of being in any proper sense your friend, he is playing the devil's part to ruin you.

Now observe: Christ is the compassionate friend of sinners, a friend in the best and truest sense. He does not sympathize with your sins, but his heart is set upon saving you from your sins. I said he must be the compassionate friend of sinners; and his compassion must be stronger than death, or he will never meet the necessities of the case.

5. Another qualification must be, that he is able sufficiently to honor the law, which sinners by their transgression have dishonored. He seeks to avoid the execution of the dishonored law of God. The law having been dishonored by sin in the highest degree, must either be honored by its execution on the criminal, or the law-giver must in some other way bear testimony in favor of the law, before he can justly dispense with the execution of its penalty. The law is not to be repealed; the law must not be dishonored. It is the law of God's nature, the unalterable law of his government, the eternal law of heaven, the law for the government of moral agents in all worlds, and in all time, and to all eternity. Sinners have borne their most emphatic testimony against it, by pouring contempt upon it in utterly refusing to obey it. Now sin must not be treated lightly; this law must be honored.

God may pour a flash of glory over it by executing its penalty upon the whole race that have despised it. This would be the solemn testimony of God

to sustain its authority and vindicate its claims. If our advocate appears before God to ask for the remission of sin, that the penalty of this law may be set aside and not executed, the question immediately arises, But how shall the dishonor of this law be avoided? What shall compensate for the reckless and blasphemous contempt with which this law has been treated? How shall sin be forgiven without apparently making light of it?

It is plain that sin has placed the whole question in such a light that God's testimony must in some way be borne in a most emphatic manner against sin, and to sustain the authority of this dishonored law.

It behooves the advocate of sinners to provide himself with a plea that shall meet this difficulty. He must meet this necessity, if he would secure the setting aside of the penalty. He must be able to provide an adequate substitute for its execution. He must be able to do that which will as effectually bear testimony in favor of the law and against sin as the execution of the law upon the criminal would do. In other words, he must be able to meet the demands of public justice.

6. He must be willing to volunteer a gratuitous service. He cannot be called upon in justice to volunteer a service, or suffer for the sake of sinners. He may volunteer his service, and it may be accepted; but if he does volunteer his service, he must be able and willing to endure whatever pain or sacrifice is necessary to meet the case.

If the law must be honored by obedience; if, "without the shedding of blood, there can be no remission;" if an emphatic governmental testimony must be borne against sin, and in honor of the law; if he must become the representative of sinners, offering himself before the whole universe as a propitiation for sin, he must be willing to meet the case and make the sacrifice.

7. He must have a good plea. In other words, when he appears before the mercy-seat, he must be able to present such considerations as shall really meet the necessities of the case, and render it safe, proper, honorable, glorious in God to forgive.

VI. I now come to inquire, what his plea in behalf of sinners is.

1. It should be remembered that the appeal is not to justice. Since the fall of

man, God has plainly suspended the execution of strict justice upon our race. To us, as a matter of fact, he has set upon a throne of mercy. Mercy, and not justice, has been the rule of his administration, since men were involved in sin.

This is simple fact. Men do sin, and they are not cut off immediately and sent to hell. The execution of justice is suspended; and God is represented as seated upon a throne of grace, or upon a mercy-seat. It is here at a mercy-seat, that Christ executes the office of advocate for sinners.

2. Christ's plea for sinners cannot be that they are not guilty. They are guilty, and condemned. No question can be raised as it respects their guilt and their ill-desert; such questions are settled. It has often appeared strange to me, that men overlook the fact that they are condemned already, and that no question respecting their guilt or desert of punishment can ever be raised.

3. Christ as our advocate cannot, and need not, plead a justification. A plea of justification admits the fact charged; but asserts that under the circumstances the accused had a right to do as he did. This plea, Christ can never make. This is entirely out of place, the case having been already tried, and sentence passed.

4. He may not plead what will reflect, in any wise, upon the law. He cannot plead that the law was too strict in its precept, or too severe in its penalty; for in that case he would not really plead for mercy, but for justice. He would plead in that case that no injustice might be done the criminal. For if he intimates that the law is not just, then the sinner does not deserve the punishment; hence it would be unjust to punish him, and his plea would amount to this, that the sinner be not punished, because he does not deserve it. But if this plea should be allowed to prevail, it would be a public acknowledgment on the part of God that his law was unjust. But this may never be.

5. He may not plead anything that shall reflect upon the administration of the law-giver. Should he plead that men had been hardly treated by the law-giver, either in their creation, or by his providential arrangements, or by suffering them to be so tempted--or if, in any wise, he brings forward a plea that reflects upon the law-giver, in creation, or in the administration of his

government, the law-giver cannot listen to his plea, and forgive the sinner, without condemning himself. In that case, instead of insisting that the sinner should repent, virtually the law-giver would be called upon himself to repent.

6. He may not plead any excuse whatever for the sinner in mitigation of his guilt, or in extenuation of his conduct. For if he does, and the law-giver should forgive in answer to such a plea, he would confess that he had been wrong, and that the sinner did not deserve the sentence that had been pronounced against him.

He must not plead that the sinner does not deserve the damnation of hell; for, should he urge this plea, it would virtually accuse the justice of God, and would be equivalent to begging that the sinner might not be sent unjustly to hell. This would not be a proper plea for mercy, but rather an issue with justice. It would be asking that the sinner might not be sent to hell, not because of the mercy of God, but because the justice of God forbids it. This will never be.

7. He can not plead as our advocate that he has paid our debt, in such a sense that he can demand our discharge on the ground of justice. He has not paid our debt in such a sense that we do not still owe it. He has not atoned for our sins in such a sense that we might not still be justly punished for them. Indeed such a thing is impossible and absurd. One being cannot suffer for another in such a sense as to remove the guilt of that other. He may suffer for another's guilt in such a sense that it will be safe to forgive the sinner, for whom the suffering has been endured; but the suffering of the substitute can never, in the least degree, diminish the intrinsic guilt of the criminal. Our advocate may urge that he has borne such suffering for us to honor the law that we had dishonored, that now it is safe to extend mercy to us; but he never can demand our discharge on the ground that we do not deserve to be punished. The fact of our intrinsic guilt remains, and must forever remain; and our forgiveness is just as much an act of sovereign mercy, as if Christ had never died for us.

8. But Christ may plead his sin-offering to sanction the law, as fulfilling a condition, upon which we may be forgiven.

This offering is not to be regarded as the ground upon which justice demands

our forgiveness. The appeal of our advocate is not to this offering as payment in such a sense that now in justice he can demand that we shall be set free. No. As I said before, it is simply the fulfilling of a condition, upon which it is safe for the mercy of God to arrest and set aside the execution of the law, in the case of the penitent sinner.

Some theologians appear to me to have been unable to see this distinction. They insist upon it that the atonement of Christ is the ground of our forgiveness. They seem to assume that he literally bore the penalty for us in such a sense that Christ now no longer appeals to mercy, but demands justice for us. To be consistent they must maintain that Christ does not plead at a mercy-seat for us, but having paid our debt, appears before a throne of justice, and demands our discharge.

I cannot accept this view. I insist that his offering could not touch the question of our intrinsic desert of damnation. His appeal is to the infinite mercy of God, to his loving disposition to pardon; and he points to his atonement, not as demanding our release, but as fulfilling a condition upon which our release is honorable to God. His obedience to the law and the shedding of his blood he may plead as a substitute for the execution of the law upon us--in short, he may plead the whole of his work as God-man and mediator. Thus he may give us the full benefit of what he has done, to sustain the authority of law and to vindicate the character of the law-giver, as fulfilling conditions that have rendered it possible for God to be just and still justify the penitent sinner.

9. But the plea is directed to the merciful disposition of God. He may point to the promise made to him in Isaiah, chap. 52, from v. 13 to the end, and chap. 53, vs. 1-3.

"Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high.

"As many were astonished at thee; (his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men:)

"So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

"Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?

"For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him."

10. He may plead also that he becomes our surety, that he undertakes for us, that he is our wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; and point to his official relations; his infinite fullness, willingness, and ability to restore us to obedience, and to fit us for the service, the employments, and enjoyments of heaven. It is said that he is made the surety of a better covenant than the legal one; and a covenant founded upon better promises.

11. He may urge as a reason for our pardon the great pleasure it will afford to God, to set aside the execution of the law. "Mercy rejoiceth against judgment." Judgment is his strange work; but He delighteth in mercy.

It is said of Victoria that when her prime minister presented a pardon, and asked her if she would sign a pardon in the case of some individual, who was sentenced to death, she seized the pen, and said, "yes! with all my heart!" Could such an appeal be made to a woman's heart, think you, without its leaping for joy to be placed in a position in which it could save the life of a fellow-being?

It is said that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth;" and think you not that it affords God the sincerest joy to be able to forgive the wretched sinner, and save him from the doom of hell? He has no pleasure in our death.

It is a grief to him to be obliged to execute his law on sinners; and no doubt it affords him infinitely higher pleasure to forgive us, than it does us to be forgiven. He knows full well, what are the unutterable horrors of hell and damnation. He knows the sinner can not bear it. He says, "Can thine heart endure, and can thine hands be strong in the day that I shall deal with thee? And what wilt thou do when I shall punish thee?" Our advocate knows that to punish the sinner is that in which God has no delight--that He will forgive and sign the pardon with all His heart.

And think you such an appeal to the heart of God, to his merciful disposition, will have no avail? It is said of Christ, our Advocate, that "for the joy set before him, he endured the cross, and despised the shame." So great was the love of our Advocate for us that he regarded it a pleasure and a joy so great to save us from hell, that he counted the shame and agony of the cross as a mere trifle--he despised them.

This, then, is a disclosure of the heart of our Advocate. And how surely may he assume that it will afford God the sincerest joy, eternal joy, to be able honorably to seal to us a pardon.

12. He may urge the glory that will redound to the Son of God, for the part that he has taken in this work.

Will it not be eternally honorable in the Son to have advocated the cause of sinners? to have undertaken at so great expense to himself a cause so desperate? and to have carried it through at the expense of such agony and blood?

Will not the universe of creatures forever wonder and adore, as they see this advocate surrounded with the innumerable throng of souls, for whom his advocacy has prevailed?

13. Our Advocate may plead the gratitude of the redeemed, and the profound thanks and praise of all good beings.

Think you not that the whole family of virtuous beings will forever feel obliged for the intervention of Christ as our Advocate, and for the mercy, forbearance, and love that has saved our race?

REMARKS.

1. You see what it is to become a Christian. It is to employ Christ as your advocate, by committing your cause entirely to him. You cannot be saved by your works, you cannot be saved by your sufferings, by your prayers--in any way except by the intervention of this Advocate. "He ever lives to make intercession for you."

He proposes to undertake your cause; and to be a Christian is to at once surrender your whole cause, your whole life and being to him as your Advocate.

2. He is an Advocate that loses no causes. Every cause committed to him, and continued in his hands, is infallibly gained. His advocacy is all-prevalent. God has appointed him as an advocate; and wherever he appears in behalf of any sinner, who has committed his cause to him, one word of his is sure to prevail. Hence you see,

3. The safety of believers. Christ is always at his post, ever ready to attend to all the concerns of those who have made him their Advocate. He is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him; and abiding in him, you are forever safe.

4. You see the position of unbelievers. You have no advocate. God has appointed an Advocate; but you reject him. You think to get along without. Perhaps some of you think you will be punished for your sins, and not ask forgiveness. Others of you may think you will approach in your own name; and, without any atonement, or without any advocate, you will plead your own cause. But God will not suffer it. He has appointed an Advocate to act in your behalf, and unless you approach through him, God will not hear you.

Out of Christ, he is to you a consuming fire. When the judgment shall set, and you appear in your own name, you will surely appear unsanctified and unsaved. You will not be able to lift up your head; and you will be ashamed to look in the face of the Advocate, who will then sit both as Judge and Advocate.

5. I ask, Have you retained him? Have you by your own consent made him your Advocate?

It is not enough that God should have appointed him to act in this relation.

He cannot act for you in this relation, unless you individually commit yourself and your case to his advocacy.

This is done, as I have said, by confiding, or committing the whole question of your salvation to him.

6. Do any of you say that you are unable to employ him? But remember the fee, which He requires of you, is your heart. You have a heart. It is not money, but your heart that he seeks.

The poor, then, may employ him as well as the rich; the children, who have not a

penny of their own, as well as their rich parents. All may employ him, for all have hearts.

7. He tenders his services gratuitously to all, requiring nothing of them but confidence, gratitude, love, obedience. This the poor and the rich alike must render; this they are alike able to render.

8. Can any of you do without him? Have you ever considered how it will be with you? But the question comes now to this--will you consent to give up your sins, and trust your souls to the advocacy of Christ? to give him the fee that he asks, your heart, your confidence, your grateful love, your obedience?

Shall he be your Advocate, or shall he not? Suppose he stood before you, as I do, and in his hand the book of life with a pen dipped in the very light of heaven, and should ask, "Who of you will now consent to make me your Advocate?" Suppose he should inquire of you, sinner, "Can I be of any service to you? Can I do anything for you, dying sinner? Can I befriend and help you in any wise? Can I speak a good word for you? Can I interpose my blood, my death, my life, my advocacy, to save you from the depths of hell? And will you consent? Shall I take down your name? Shall I write it in the book of life? Shall it today be told in heaven that you are saved? And may I report that you have committed your cause to me, and thus give joy in heaven? Or will you reject me, stand upon your own defense, and attempt to carry your cause through at the solemn judgment?"

Sinner, I warn you in the name of Christ, not now to say me nay.

Consent now and here, and let it be written in heaven.

9. Have any of you made his advocacy sure by committing all to him? If you have, he has attended to your cause, because he has secured your pardon; and the evidence you have in your peace of mind. Has he attended to your cause? Have you the inward sense of reconciliation, the inward witness that you believe that you are forgiven, that you are accepted, that Christ has undertaken for you, and that he has already prevailed and secured for you pardon, and given in your own soul the peace of God that passeth understanding to rule in your heart? It is a striking fact in Christian experience, that whenever we really commit our cause to Jesus, he without delay secures our pardon, and in the inward peace that follows, gives us the assurance of our acceptance, that he has interposed his blood, that his blood is accepted for us, that his advocacy has prevailed, and that

we are saved.

Do not stop short of this; for if your peace is truly made with God, if you are in fact forgiven, the sting of remorse is gone; there is no longer any chafing or any irritation between your spirit and the Spirit of God; the sense of condemnation and remorse has given place to the spirit of gospel liberty, peace, and love.

The stony heart is gone; the heart of flesh has taken its place; the dry sensibility is melted, and peace flows like a river. Have you this? Is this a matter of consciousness with you?

If so, then leave your cause, by a continual committal of it, to the advocacy of Christ; abide in him, and let him abide in you, and you are safe as the surroundings of Almighty arms can make you.

[Back to Top](#)

Living To Please God

Lecture III

January 30, 1861

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 Thes. 4: 1: "Ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God."

In speaking from these words, I enquire,

I. What is it to live and walk so as to please God?

II. Why we should so live and walk as to please God?

III. How to please God.

IV. How can I intend to please God?

I. What is it to live and walk so as to please God?

To this I answer --

1. To make His pleasure our ultimate end of life; that is, to make His pleasure an end, and not a means of promoting our own. It is possible to aim at pleasing God simply as a means of securing our own salvation. But this is not really aiming to please God as our end, but is aiming to please ourselves as an end, and pleasing God only as a means.
2. To make His pleasure our ultimate end, is to aim at pleasing Him for His own sake, and not from some good to ourselves that may result from pleasing Him.
3. His pleasure is an infinite good in itself; that is, it is an infinite good to Him. To make His pleasure therefore our end, is to do that which is becoming in us.
4. To make His pleasure our supreme end, that is, to care more to please Him than to please ourselves, or more to please Him than to please any and all other beings -- to walk so as to please Him, you must lay supreme stress upon His pleasure. To so live and walk as to please God is in all things to aim at meeting His approbation, meeting His wishes, fulfilling all His pleasure; to intend this, to have this in view, and make this the great motive of all our acting.

II. Why we should so live and walk as to please God?

1. God created us for this end, and hence has given us a conscience that universally demands that we should live to please God. He has made this our unalterable law and rule of action. We never fulfil the demands of conscience except as we live to please God.
2. His pleasure is always wise and good. He says, I will do all my pleasure." It would not be right in any other being to say that; but in God it is right, for what else could He do? Nothing pleases Him that is not wise and good. He never desires or wishes anything that is not wise and good.
3. To thus live to please God is true benevolence to Him; it is to will His good, His highest happiness and well-being. This is the real idea of love to God. It is devotion to His good; or in other words, it is devotion to His gratification or pleasure; it is good-willing to God, willing His infinite

happiness and satisfaction. It is aiming to satisfy all His wishes in regard to us; to meet and fulfill all His desires respecting us.

To please Him is to gratify His fatherly heart. To please Him we must meet His views respecting our obligation; we must meet His wishes, we must obey His will, must adjust ourselves to all that He wishes us to be and do.

He is then pleased with us; He is not grieved but gratified. Now to live with this continual aim to be all that God, under the circumstances wants us to be, is to live and walk so as to please God.

4. To please Him is to gain His approbation; and this is not only a good to Him, but it is a good to us. The love of approbation is natural to us, and especially the approbation of the good. And to have the approbation of God is of supreme importance to us.

It is a comfort to Him to be able to approve the life that we live, as it is a comfort to parents to be able to approve the lives of their children. And it is a comfort to us to secure His approbation, as it is a comfort to children to secure the approbation of their parents. Nay, the comfort of receiving the approbation of God is infinitely more sweet, consoling, and joyous, than the approbation of all other beings together.

5. It follows, that to gain His approbation is to secure our own happiness. Hence to live to please Him is the only sure way of pleasing ourselves. We cannot be satisfied with ourselves unless we are conscious of aiming to satisfy God. While we are conscious of not aiming to meet His approbation, we cannot secure our own approbation. To aim at pleasing Him, then, in all we do, is a condition of securing our own happiness; and more than this, this aim will be sure to secure our own highest satisfaction.

6. It is right to aim in all things at pleasing God, because His pleasure is the most worthy end for which we can live. It is not living for an abstraction. Some people have thought that the end proposed was rather an abstraction than a reality.

But do you account it an abstraction to live to please your mother or your father, your wife, or your dearest friend? That is anything but an abstraction. Your wife, or husband, or friend, would account their own pleasure anything but an abstraction.

I have been amazed sometimes, to hear some people talk of the end of being as an abstraction, as if it were a mere idea, and not the profoundest reality in the universe. What! the end of sentient beings, and especially of moral beings, their highest satisfaction and perfect happiness, an abstraction! Verily, I pity the individual who regards the good pleasure of God as an abstraction -- or the good pleasure of any good being.

7. To intend to please God is always safe. It is not safe to make the pleasure of any other being universally our aim. But God is infinitely wise and infinitely good, and we never need to fear to aim at fulfilling all His pleasure.

8. It is of no use to live to please ourselves. We never can please ourselves by making this our aim or end. We please ourselves in fact all the less by how much the more singly we aim to please ourselves. We cannot approve of living to please ourselves, and practically treating our own pleasure as the highest good.

Therefore we always violate the laws of our own nature, the laws of our conscience and higher reason, whenever we live to please ourselves. There is always an inward upbraiding, an inward struggle, a mutiny, a self-condemnation, when we live to please ourselves.

9. It is not right to make the pleasure of any other being than God our supreme end. This is idolatry. To live to please any other being than God, is to make that being our god, is to practice downright idolatry, is to place another in the very throne belonging to Jehovah.

10. It is not safe for us to live to please any other being than God; nor is it safe for them. To make another being our god, is to expose that being to destruction. God is a jealous God, He will not give His glory to another; and if we give another the throne of our hearts, it may prove the destruction of that idol, as well as our own destruction.

11. It is essential to peace with self, to peace with God, that we live, and walk, and aim in all things, to meet His pleasure.

III. How to please God.

1. To please God you must honestly intend to do so. That is, you must

honestly make it your supreme object, and your ultimate object to please God; to please Him from regard to Himself; to lay absolutely supreme stress upon pleasing Him. Only honestly endeavor thus to please Him, and you will be sure to please Him.

2. He always accepts the honest endeavor. "If there be a willing mind," He expressly says, "it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not."

We are so constituted that when we honestly endeavor to please any being, we cannot help assuming that that being ought to accept our endeavor. We have done what we could; nothing more can in justice be required of us. If the endeavor is honest, and the intention right, all is done that the mind can do under the circumstances.

Now, with the honest intention to please God, you cannot commit a single mistake. If the heart is set to please Him, the mind is in an honest state, and will use all the means to obtain light that it can, and will endeavor to the utmost to please Him. Now any mistake that may be made in the state of mind cannot involve sin; for how else could one [aim]? If God will fault us, when we honestly endeavor to please Him, what would He do if we did not honestly endeavor? What else, more or less, should we do, than honestly endeavor to please Him? What else is possible to us? What other obligation can there be than honestly to endeavor to please Him? He must accept honest endeavor, for what else could we do? But do you object, that Paul "verily thought he ought to do so many things contrary to the name of Jesus and Nazareth"? and was not this a sinful mistake?

Paul says he verily thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. But Paul was a Pharisee, a bigot, dishonestly committed against Jesus. He was a persecuting fanatic, and he was just one of those of whom Christ said, "The days shall come when he that killeth you will think that he doeth God service." But does any one suppose that these persecutors were really filled with the love of God; that they were honestly devoted to pleasing a God of love; that they were fair-minded, candid, and really devoted to pleasing the true God? No! their zeal was founded in delusion, and in a delusion in which they were dishonest. They were under a dishonest bias; they assumed that Jesus was a wicked impostor, and that His disciples were deluded fanatics. This they had no right to assume; this

assumption was dishonest. It was founded in prejudice. Its roots were roots of bitterness, and its fruit was death. But it remains a truth, that where a mind is truly and honestly committed to pleasing God, in all its honest endeavors, it is and must be accepted.

And it is impossible to conceive that God should condemn us when we honestly endeavor to please Him. The youngest child knows this. If your young child means to please you and then you find fault with it, it feels that it is wronged. It is grieved and regards you as tyrannical and unjust. Sometimes parents will require something of a child. The child attempts to please, but by mishap, breaks something. It was perhaps hastening with rapid step, to fulfill some command, to meet the wishes of a parent, but he slipped; something happened that he failed to secure the end intended. In such cases it is always cruel to even give a look of disapprobation. The child in every instance feels that it is unjust. The child has a conscience, and it knows that when it honestly endeavors to please, it ought to be accepted. And parents, or guardians, or masters, commit a great error, or a great sin, when they frown upon an honest endeavor, although it may have proved a failure. God never does this. He is never displeased with an honest endeavor. He never upbraids for any mistake that was so incidental as not at all to impair the integrity and honesty of the endeavor. If the intention was right, if the endeavor was honest, if the soul truly designed to meet His whole will, His will is met. There is no possibility in such a case of His being displeased.

3. We can please God without the least real sacrifice of good to ourselves. I mean that it is always more profitable to us to please Him, cost us what it may, than it is to displease Him. It were even better to go to the martyr's stake, and have our flesh burned off from us in the flames, than to refuse to go, should He call us to the sacrifice. Happiness belongs to the mind and not to the body. Happiness might be complete, even were the body consuming in the flames. And which, think you, would be the greatest good or evil to us, to stand in the will of God in the midst of consuming flames, or to rebel against God and suffer our bodies to repose on beds of roses? The bed of roses could not make us happy, if God were displeased with us. Heaven itself could be no pleasure to us. There is always a relish, a peace, a sweetness in walking with singleness of eye to God's good pleasure. But break away from this and aim at pleasing any other, and real happiness is impossible.

IV. Do any of you ask, How can I intend to please Him?

I answer --

1. What is implied in this question? Suppose you should ask, how you should intend to please your mother, your father, or your benefactor. It is easy to see that the question implies that you do not love God; that His goodness to you has not led you to repentance. What! do you really find it difficult to mean to please Him? Then how totally unfit for heaven are you! Why, what would heaven be to you if it is so difficult for you to please God? You have no pleasure in pleasing God, no care to please God, no delight in pleasing God! Then hell must be your home. What would such a spirit do in heaven!

2. Would it really afford you no pleasure to please Him? Do you really care nothing whether you please or displease God? How is this? Suppose you should meet the Lord, and you knew that it was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, and suppose He should ask you if you would do Him a favor, would you decline? Would you consider it no honor, no pleasure to please Him? Suppose the Lord Jesus Christ should write you a letter, and should ask you if you were willing to do a given thing for Him; should remind you of who He is and what He has done for you; and should tell you withal that that letter was written in the blood shed for you on Calvary, and then ask you if you would not deny yourself for His sake, if you would not go and preach His Gospel. Suppose He was to send to you a revelation from heaven to some part of the world, in which He should reveal some great truth essential to their salvation, and should ask you to go and carry that book and revelation, to leave your home and friends and go on such an errand for Him, what would you say? Would you consider it no honor to go? Would you say, no, I cannot afford it, I care not for Thee. What have I to do to please Thee?

When in England, I was struck with the fact that everybody considered it such an honor to have an opportunity in any way to oblige the queen. Now, suppose that you were in London, in Hyde Park, and the queen was riding through the Park, and her postillion should stop, and the queen should call you to her carriage and ask you if you would do her the favor to put a letter in the post-office for her. Now, if you were one of her subjects, would you not consider it a great favor to do this for her? Would you not care to please

her? Would it not almost draw from your eyes tears of joy to be able to do anything which should meet her wishes? Why, her officers and her soldiers can march in the face of death to gain her approbation. They will run any risk, and make any sacrifice, and account it all joy to do so, to please the queen.

Now you are made with a love of approbation. Have you no desire to please the great and the good? If a subject of Victoria can joyfully hazard his life, make any sacrifice to please the queen, and even in the agonies of death, feel that he is rewarded if he has met the queen's approbation, have you no care to please God, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords?

Why, suppose you should meet the Lord Jesus Christ, and He should show you His hands and His feet, should remind you of His bloody sweat, of His shameful death, of all He had done and suffered for you, and then should ask if you had no care to make any grateful returns to Him, no care to please Him, no fear of displeasing Him -- what would you say? Would you ask, How can I care to please Thee? Why, what would be said in heaven to such a state of mind as this? Just let Him signify to the hosts of heaven a wish -- let Him inquire, "Whom shall I send? and who will go for Me?" ten thousand voices are raised at once, "Here am I; send me." And if there be any controversy, it is who shall be allowed to do His will -- which shall be allowed to do the most to please Him. All the ambition there is to lay themselves out to the uttermost, to see which shall do most to meet His blessed will.

What if it should be inquired in heaven, as you inquire, How can I care to please Him? Why, there the anxiety is all the other way -- How can I help caring to please Him? I must please Him; I will please Him; I would rather die than displease Him, is the language of all His real friends.

But is His love in fact to you no prevailing motive to seek His pleasure? Has all that He has done for you fallen so far short of winning your heart that after all you coldly inquire how you can intend and care to please Him? If this is your case, you are in fact far enough from being saved.

REMARKS.

1. From this subject it is easy to see what true religion is. When I was young, I

do not recollect ever to have heard a sermon from which I could gather what true religion was. I used to say, What is it? I used to ponder what Christianity meant by the language they used. I could not understand it. For a long time the impression was on my mind that religion was purely a feeling; that it was something that was to come to us, and no deliberate intention or act of my own. I thought it an unintelligible matter. But here see what it is. It is one of the most intelligible of all things. Just contrast it with sin. Take the case of Adam and Eve. For a time they dressed God's garden, and kept it. They were devoted to pleasing Him. And doubtless the lovely Eve, with her delicate hands, was pruning and cultivating in a most tasteful manner, the shrubbery and flowers in the garden of God. She and her husband took delight in this. As yet they knew no other way than to meet God's pleasure in everything.

When He visited His garden, and commended their diligence, and commended their taste, and expressed a pleasure in the appearance of His garden, it no doubt filled their minds with inexpressible delight. They meant to please Him; they did please Him. Their hearts were set upon meeting His wishes, and when they did they were satisfied. But in an evil hour they fell. The tempter suggested that they could please themselves, though at the expense of displeasing and disobeying God. They consented, and made their own pleasure their supreme end. In this they sinned; they fell. And this has been the sin of man, living to please himself instead of living and walking to please God.

2. Now see what it is to become a Christian. Suppose that when Adam and Eve had fallen, when they heard the voice walking in the garden, instead of hiding among the trees, they had immediately come forward, and Eve had broken down before the Lord, confessed her sins, and begged to be restored, and allowed to keep the garden.

If she and Adam had returned with all their heart, with the simplicity of aim that they had before to please the Lord -- this would have been repentance, this would have been a change of heart. They changed their hearts when they turned away for pleasing God, and set up their own pleasure as their end. In this they changed their hearts from a holy to a sinful heart.

Now had they immediately returned, changed back again, renounced their wrong, and devoted themselves at once to pleasing God again, this would have been conversion to God. In this they would have become truly religious again.

3. You see what is a truly religious life. That is a truly religious life which is a continual offering to God; and where in all our ways we intend to please Him. There are many who think they live a religious life, and after all seem to be doing many things they cannot pretend to be doing for God. You see them in many places, engaged in many employments; and if you should ask them, why are you here? what do you here? they could not tell you that God sent them there -- they could not tell you that they are doing this for God.

They might, as many do ask you, Why, what harm is there in it? Is there any harm in my being here? Is there any harm in my doing this or that? Now, the very asking of such a question, shows that the person is not truly religious. A great many people are living to please themselves, and doing what they do for their own pleasure, and are merely asking, What harm is there in it?

Why, God's commandments are positive and not negative. He commands that whatever we do, "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we do all to the glory of God;" we do all to glorify and please Him. The question is not, therefore, in any given act or course of action, what harm it will do, but, will it do any good? The question is not, Does God forbid it? but, Does He require it?

It is common, I find, among professors of religion, to go hither and thither merely to please themselves, to take journeys, to purchase articles, and in short, to pursue a self-pleasing course of life, and really make their own pleasure their end. And yet they profess to be consecrated to God, they profess to be Christians. Expostulate with them for this or that act or course of action, for this or that expenditure of money, for this or that use of their time, and you will receive for answer immediately, "Why, what harm is there in it? what hurt will it do?" Now this question always indicates a delusion in the mind of the professor of religion who makes it. It shows that he has no positive religion, but only a negative religion. He is contenting himself with doing no harm, as he says. He is using his time, his influence, his possessions, really to please himself, because he cannot see any harm that will result from what he is doing. But this is not the religion of Jesus. The inquiry with a true Christian is, What wilt Thou have me to do? Will this or that course of action please Christ? Will it promote His honor and glory? Will it win a soul? Will it help forward the kingdom of God?

The question is not what harm a thing will do, but what good it will do? The question is not, whether a thing, this or that, is objectively right or wrong, but what is the subjective intention. What do I mean or intend in what I do?

Objectively, it is right to go to meeting; but subjectively, it is wrong, unless I mean to please God thereby.

Objectively, that is, in the letter, many courses of conduct are right; but they are wrong subjectively, that is they are sinful in any case in which the intention is not to please God. According to the letter, it is right to pray; that is, the outward act has no wrong in it. But if I do not mean thereby to please God, it is wrong in me.

So with everything wise. If a man asks me what harm there is in what he is doing, I answer, it is all harm or wrong in you, unless you mean therein to please God. Here is a person who gives himself to the study of music. He asks me, Is it not right to cultivate the fine arts? is it not right to study painting? is it not right to study music? What harm is there in it? what harm will it do? I answer, there may be no harm in it, it may do no hurt, but the question returns, what do you mean by it? what do you intend by it? In you it is all wrong, and all harm, unless you mean thereby to please the Lord and to serve Him; unless you do it because you suppose that He requires it of you.

Many people seem to go no farther than this: they will do what will please themselves, and take it for granted that God does not object to it. They do not suppose that He wants them to do it; they do not do it because it is His pleasure, and because they regard it as His pleasure that they should do it. This they cannot believe. But it is their pleasure to do it; and they do it to please themselves, God not objecting, as they think. They never think of rising any higher than to avoid that which they think will displease God. But, positively, they never think of doing whatever they do because they mean to please Him.

Now in all this negative religion there is not one particle of acceptable service rendered to God. There is nothing in it but self-pleasing after all. It is only a modified form of selfishness. It is just that kind of philosophy that teaches that men are to seek their own interest and their own pleasure as an end; but in so doing, not to interfere with the rights of others. They do not care to please God, but to please themselves. But they hold that in pleasing themselves they should not displease God. But the fact is, they always do displease God unless they positively mean to please Him. His requirements are positive, that we should live and walk so as to please Him; that is designing to please Him, making this our supreme and ultimate end in all that we do.

Now this religion that inquires, what harm will this do, and what harm will that do, instead of inquiring how to please God, and doing it for the purpose of pleasing Him -- I say the religion that seeks to please self and not God, that asks what harm will a thing do, instead of what good will it do, is not the religion of Jesus. It is not supreme love to God and equal love to man. It is the supreme love of self; it is selfishness under a religious type; it is a delusion, and an abomination to God.

But I fear it is after all the religion of the vast majority of professors. Many seem seldom or never to be aggressive in their religion. They are not laying themselves out, sacrificing self to please God; but they are living to please themselves, and as far as is consistent with this supreme regard to self, they avoid displeasing God. But in fact it is all displeasing to God. I say again, the religion of Jesus is positive, is necessarily aggressive. It is not merely the avoiding what there is harm in; but it is a positive labor, and a constant endeavor to please Christ, to do that which will glorify Him and save souls.

The enquiry, therefore, must be made, Wherefore do I do this? A proposition is before me to do this or that. Now the true enquiry universally is, not what harm will it do, but why should I do it? Does Christ want me to do it? Will it please God? Is it His good pleasure that I should do it? I am invited to a party: here the true question is not, What harm it will do for me to go there? but, what good can I do there?

The question is not, will the Lord object to my going; but does He wish me to go? The question is not whether I can barely get His consent; but is it His positive wish that I should go, and will He be pleased with it?

We sometimes see children set their hearts upon going somewhere, and their parents dislike to have them go, and yet they do not like absolutely to refuse. They dislike to say no because other young people are going. The children are very anxious to go to please themselves. The parents do not think it is wise; they would greatly prefer that their children should not go, but upon the whole they reluctantly consent. They do not like to restrain them too much. Now the children go, knowing at the same time that their parents would have preferred that they should not go, that they gain but the reluctant consent of their parents to go. They know their parents would have been much better pleased if they had cheerfully and willingly remained at home.

Now a great many professors of religion treat God just in this way; with this difference, however, that God has not given His consent. They go, in fact, without His consent. They cannot believe that God really wants them to go. They do not go because they think that God desired them to go. The deep impression is on their minds after all, that in going they have not the consent of their heavenly Father. Yet they are set upon pleasing themselves. So they will; and their determination to go is almost always prefaced by the question, Why, what harm is there in it, after all? What can there be wrong about it? What evil will it do? And then they think, why ministers do so -- minister's children do so - - everybody's going, why what harm is there in it? And thus they go with the multitude, to serve themselves.

Now this is nothing but real disobedience to God. There is no religion in any such course of conduct as this in any case whatever. And I am really afraid that after all this is the religion of great multitudes, to avoid doing harm while at the same time they aim at supremely pleasing themselves.

4. Religion greatly simplifies the aims of life. When once the whole being is consecrated to God there is really but one great question to ask -- Will this please God? The question is not whether it will please this one or that one. We are then disentangled from the meshes of worldly influence and the fear of man, and can act with simplicity, with singleness of aim. Instead of continually troubling ourselves with what this one or that one will think, what this or that one wishes us to do, how this or that will please or displease man, we have only one question to ask -- Will it please God? And this question is generally very easily answered. In almost everything the way is so plain that the wayfaring man, though a fool, cannot err therein.

Apply this to various kinds of business. Who, for example, would engage in selling tobacco as a business, intending thereby to please God? Who would engage in dealing in intoxicating drink, intending thereby to please God? Who would get up theatres, intending thereby to please God? Who would attend them, and spend their time and money, intending thereby to please God? Who would buy slaves, intending thereby to please God? Who, in short, would engage in very many branches of business, intending thereby to please God? No one, surely; for everybody knows that God would not call upon any man to engage in such business and to do such things.

5. Many persons profess to consecrate all to God. This they will do at the

communion table; this they will kneel down solemnly and profess to do in the house of God, in their closets, or at the family altar; and then immediately go away, and go right to pleasing themselves, and pursue their own plans of self-gratification just as they did before. Practically, they have made no change whatever in their lives. They go right away and carry out all the schemes of self-pleasing upon which they had settled.

Here is a person who has promised at the communion table to live wholly to please the Lord. The next day I find him starting off on an excursion of pleasure, or in pursuit of some selfish object. I ask him, How is this? have you got the mind and will of God in this? and has He required this at your hands?

He will reply, I had calculated upon this course, had laid my plans for this for some time past; I thought I might as well execute it now as at any future time. I reply: so you did not mean anything yesterday when you swore at the table of the Lord to do all for His glory and to aim in all things at pleasing Him. Practically, then, you have made no change in your self-pleasing arrangements. You purpose still to carry out all your plans for self-gratification. Here you are deliberately pursuing all the plans that you had laid to please yourself, and this is your religion! This is all you intended by your consecration! This is what you meant when you swore with the elements of Christ's broken body and shed blood in your hands, that you would not live to please yourself, but would live wholly to please God! Yesterday was Sabbath -- you swore solemnly to live every day of your future life wholly to please the Lord. But today you are executing your projects of self-pleasing. Tomorrow you have something else planned for pleasing yourself; and the next day, and the next; and so you deceive yourself. Today I meet you here. I ask, Brother, how came you here? Your answer amounts to this, I came here to please myself. But you ask, what harm is there in it? I answer, in you, there is infinite harm in it, for you don't mean to please God. And thus you think you are religious, and go about what you call a religious life; but with the supreme intention of pleasing yourself. After all, how little real, honest, consecration to God there seems to be.

But after all we can well afford to live to please God; for the more singly we aim at pleasing Him, the more truly and surely do we really please ourselves. We do not aim in this to please ourselves; but, notwithstanding, we do gain our own approbation. We aim at pleasing God, and not man. We therefore care comparatively little what man thinks of what we do; if God approve, it is

enough. The soul is quiet under that consideration, is peaceful and calm as a summer-evening sea. It becomes crucified unto the world and the world unto it; it pleases God; it is adjusted to His will; it meets His pleasure. He smiles His approbation, and all is peace.

[Back to Top](#)

Wherefore Do The Wicked Live

Lecture IV

February 13, 1861

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Job 21:7; first clause of the verse: "Wherefore do the wicked live?"

Job's three friends seem to have been of the opinion that this, the present state of the existence, is a state of rewards and punishments; and that therefore a man's character might infallibly be known by God's dealings with him. Hence they interpreted the dealings of God with Job in his affliction as conclusive proof that he was not what he professed to be. They accused him of hypocrisy and exhorted him to repentance. They insisted that God does not afflict men except for their sins; and that their afflictions, or the discipline under which they pass, are to be regarded as punishment, and therefore Job must be a wicked man. Job denied this, and maintained that this is a state of probation. He argued at length that nothing certain could be known of a man's character by the providential dealings of God with him in this state of existence. This chapter is a part of Job's vindication of this doctrine. In this text he asks them to account for the fact that the wicked do live, and grow rich, and are mighty in power. In his argument he insists that they are often prospered in this world, and even pass through less trial and affliction than many of the godly do. How then, he insists, can you maintain the doctrine, that God deals with men according to their characters in this life?

In discoursing upon this subject I propose to enquire,

I. Who are wicked?

II. Why do the wicked live?

I. Who are wicked?

Answer: All who know, but do not do their duty, are wicked.

1. God's law and government are positive, and require supreme love to God and equal love to man, with all the appropriate expressions of this love in all the relations of life. To neglect to render this love and its fruits; in other words, to neglect to do one's duty, is disobedience; it is to refuse to fulfill any obligation to God or man. Nothing is good in God's sight but love and its fruits. To withhold these, is to withhold the whole of duty; it is to violate the whole law; it is to set aside all moral obligation; it is to condemn divine authority; it is to trample on all the divine rights; it is to reject the rights of all those whom we ought to love, and to set up our own will and our own way, and our own pleasure, as supreme.

2. Let it be understood, then, that the true definition of a wicked man is one who knows but does not do his duty. This is the essence of wickedness. And it should be said that neglect to do duty is always a refusal to do it; for it is impossible to know our duty and to be indifferent with respect to it. We cannot remain passive in the presence of revealed obligation. In such a case the will must act. Man is a free agent; but his freedom does not imply that in the presence of obligation, he can remain entirely passive, acting neither one way nor the other. His freedom consists precisely in this, that, in the presence of obligation, he can universally act as a sovereign, the one way or the other, can comply with obligation or refuse to do so. Neglect to obey is therefore always refusal to obey. He therefore who knows but does not do his duty, withholds from God and man their due, and is a wicked man.

II. We come to answer the enquiry, Why do the wicked live?

God is benevolent, He is love, and always has and must have some good and sufficient reasons for all that He does or omits. He is never arbitrary or capricious in anything that He does or declines to do. Therefore there must be benevolent reasons for the existence of the wicked.

In answering this question it will not be expected that all the reasons that actuated the divine mind are known to us, or can be stated in a sermon. There are, however, revealed in various ways, many reasons why the wicked live.

I shall divide these, and remark upon them, under three heads.

1. Notice some reasons that respect God Himself.
2. Some reasons that respect His people.

3. Some reasons that respect the wicked themselves.

1. I am to notice some reasons that respect God.

(1.) He created them for Himself. When I say that He created them for Himself, I do not mean that He created them wicked. Wickedness is always a voluntary act, or state of mind. It is not and cannot be the subject of creation, as bodies and souls are created. It is a sheer absurdity to suppose that a being could be created wicked. This would confound all ideas of wickedness. A being can be created who shall by his own act become wicked; but no being in the universe can make him wicked but himself. Wickedness is always a violation of moral obligation, therefore no one being can be the author of another's wickedness. God therefore did not create men wicked. He created them moral beings; they become wicked by their own voluntary choice.

(2.) God no doubt created the wicked or those who become wicked, because their creation was essential; in His judgment, to the promotion of the highest universal good. Not that their wickedness was essential to the promotion of the highest good, but their existence was essential, and that, too, notwithstanding God foresaw that they would be wicked; since He at the same time foresaw that He could so over-rule their wickedness and make such use of their existence as to promote the highest universal good, that is, the highest good of the whole universe taken together.

(3.) He created the wicked as objects of regard, that He might have them to care for -- even after they became wicked, that He might care for them notwithstanding. He wanted objects of affectionate regard; a family to take care of, to exercise His natural and moral attributes, to busy Himself with their nurture, and with providential arrangements to promote their good. He did not desire to live alone; the infinite overflowings of the riches of His own mind sought objects to nurse and take care of, and make holy and happy. He spares them since He has created them and they have become wicked. They continue to live, not because they deserve to live, but still to exercise His natural and His moral attributes. Notwithstanding that they have become wicked

He loves them still. He has harbored no feelings of resentment or revenge.

He is infinitely generous, and rises above the faults of His creatures, and is infinitely willing to forgive and bless them still; and if He can reclaim the wicked, is infinitely willing and ready to save them. They have become wicked, but He pities them. He knows very well that they cannot endure His displeasure. He is long-suffering, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." He has no pleasure in their death. "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth." He cannot take pleasure in the misery and destruction of any of His creatures. If the wicked persist in wickedness, He will have pleasure in the execution of justice, in the vindication of authority and law; but in the misery of His creature He can have no pleasure.

(4.) It is a trial to Him to destroy them. This must be if He loves them. Parents find it a great trial to banish their children, although they are sometimes obliged to do so. And if it is a trial to us who are evil to banish our children when they become incorrigibly wicked, how much more must it grieve the heart of God.

(5.) He can benevolently suffer them; and as long as He can do this He no doubt will suffer them. He cares for the whole of His creatures, and cannot consistently spare guilty individuals at the expense of the higher public good. It were neither wise nor benevolent in Him to spare the wicked when to do so is no longer consistent with the highest good of the public at large, the society in which they dwell. He must not spare those who deserve to be banished, nor suffer them to live, to be only an injury and a curse to the innocent.

But the fact that God does spare the wicked is evidence that thus far He sees that He can benevolently and wisely let them live; He therefore preserves their lives. But you who are wicked should know that whenever you come into a relation to God and society in which it is no longer benevolent in Him to let you live, in which to spare you longer would be upon the whole an injury to the innocent or virtuous; He will then spare you no longer; He will put you out of their way; He will wipe the nuisance from the face of the earth.

(6.) He preserves the lives of the wicked that He may set a good example to His creatures. He wishes to reveal Himself as a God of love, of compassion, of long suffering, as one "slow to anger, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, for giving iniquity, transgression and sin;" but He will also, in due time, show that He "will by no means clear the guilty."

He wishes to set an example of good-will to enemies; of self-sacrifice for enemies; of pains taking for enemies; of forbearance; patience; long-suffering. He wishes to show His people for their good, and to show the wicked also for their good, what kind of a being He is, what spirit and temper are in Him, how unselfish He is, how slow to anger, how preserving He can be in bestowing favors on those that requite Him with disobedience and opposition.

(7.) He wishes to confer all the good He wisely can on the wicked. He is infinitely rich, an eternally over-flowing fountain of riches and He wishes to make even the wicked the recipients of all the favors that He wisely can. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends His rain on the just and on the unjust. He loves to see the wicked enjoy His favors. "He opens His hand and supplies the wants of every living thing." All creatures, wicked and all, return to Him; and each receives "his portion of meat in due season."

He watches over the wicked when they sleep, and loves to see them calm and quiet in sleep. He wakes them in the morning and feeds them, and Himself enjoys their repast. All the day He fans their heaving lungs, and although they breathe out their breath in opposition to Him, still He follows them from place to place, watches over them to do them good, protects them from harm, and in ten thousand ways repeats His acts of kindness and care, while they regard Him only with contempt.

But all this He does, and will do, because He is love. He can have patience with them and can forbear; can do them good and not evil as long as is consistent with the highest good of His kingdom at large. The fact that in His wisdom He can over-rule your sins thus far, and in some way make good account of your lives, is the reason why you still live.

(8.) The wicked live because God wishes to realize in facts His own

ideal of goodness in His treatment of them.

To the righteous He cannot in fact realize all the refinements of goodness. To treat the righteous and well-deserving with kindness, is good; but to treat the wicked with kindness, to render good for evil, blessing for cursing, is a still more refined form of goodness. In His treatment of the wicked in this world, He has an opportunity to exhibit all men some of the most delicate and exquisite forms of goodness of which we can form any conception. Justice is goodness, treating individuals as they deserve. But to treat them better than they deserve, nay, the opposite of their deserts, is a still more refined form of goodness. To love our friends is well; to love our enemies is better. To deny ourselves, to be at great pains-taking, to incur great expense, to do our enemies good; to hear and forbear, and sacrifice self, and be at great expense and suffering for the sake of doing good to enemies, is to exhibit forms of goodness almost too refined for our gross conceptions.

(9.) God spares the wicked to secure the respect and confidence of the universe. This He does not do selfishly. He knows that the good of the universe depends on their having confidence in Him, and respect and affection for Him. He knows that He cannot save the universe unless they will consent to be governed by Him. His government is moral, and not a government of force; He must therefore secure the admiration, applause, confidence, affection, and obedience of His subjects, or He cannot save them. Now in His treatment of the wicked He knows very well that He shall commend Himself to the admiration, affection, and confidence of all His intelligent subjects, thus strengthening His influence over them, and binding their hearts to His throne and government.

(10.) He spares the wicked to glorify Himself in their destruction, if it comes to that, that He must destroy them.

To execute wholesome law is always just, of course; but justice is all the more honored and glorified when the subject punished has not only violated law but has contemned the law giver, and contemned the offer of mercy. If the rebellious subject has been treated with the greatest kindness and forbearance; if much pains has been taken with him to reclaim and save him; if the government has exhausted all its available

resources to do him good, to conciliate him, to humble and reclaim him, and has failed to do so, then justice is rendered all the more sacred in its execution. When the penalty of the law falls upon such a subject it makes a deep impression; the subjects of the government feel that that is done which was demanded. Justice is glorified, law is honored, authority established, iniquity rebuked, order preserved.

2. I must notice some reasons that respect His people.

(1.) He spares the wicked to provide benevolent employment for His people.

He has stationed the wicked providentially throughout the whole regions and domains of the church. They have in their midst persons unsaved, persons who will not obey God, who are in the way to hell. Now to save these is the very work which the church needs. To sympathize with Christ in taking hold of this work, is one of the ways in which God sanctifies His people, and fits them for heaven.

(2.) He spares the wicked to exercise and develop the graces of His people, to promote their self-denial to try and develop their patience, to lead them in all things to be like the Savior.

(3.) He wishes to prove the sincerity of His people, to prove to themselves and others that they do really love the souls of men, that they are God's sincere friends, that they are the sincere friends of humanity.

(4.) He wishes to prove the insincerity of the self-deceived, or of mere pretenders to religion. Some there are who profess to be God's friends, and the friends of man, who are not really so. By placing these in the midst of the wicked, He demonstrates their insincerity, shows that they are not what they profess to be, the friends of God, but that they sympathize with the world and go with the multitude to do evil. Thus, on the one hand, He wishes, by suffering the wicked to live, to prove to all around that His people will sympathize with Him and not with the wicked; and on the other, that false professors will sympathize with the world and not with Him.

(5.) He spares the wicked as subjects of prayer, that He may multiply

occasions that shall draw His people to commune with Him. He loves His children; He loves to see them deeply affected with the state of the wicked; He loves their sympathy in this respect; He wishes to secure as much communion with His children as He can for their good. He therefore places them in circumstances where the state of the wicked around them shall multiply occasions of their coming to commune with Him and ask favors of Him for the wicked. He loves to grant them favors for the wicked; He loves to see His children interest themselves in the happiness and well-being of sinners, and is well-pleased when they come with their petitions and requests for those who have deserved no favors, and who are yet needy.

(6.) He spares the wicked to excite the compassion of His people, to break up their sensibility, to make their feelings mellow and tender.

(7.) He spares the wicked that their wickedness may be seen by His people, and that they may learn more and more to hate and abhor iniquity. This is in fact the result of their living in the presence of sinners, that their righteous souls are vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked every day. They see more and more the hatefulness of sin, its inexcusableness, its abomination, and thus the very hatefulness of sin, when viewed by His people makes them better.

Thus He spares the wicked to make them and their wickedness useful to His people.

(8.) Many of the wicked are so related to His own people as to be useful to them in many ways. Ungodly men are married to pious women; ungodly parents sometimes have pious children; pious parents sometimes have ungodly children. The wicked and the righteous, in the relations of this life, are so inter-located that it is impossible to destroy all the wicked without doing a great evil to His own people. It is often the case that they are spared that God may win the hearts of generations that shall proceed from them, and thus may gather from their descendants a seed to serve Him. He often spares the wicked to provide the means of temporal support for His own people. The Bible says, "The wealth of the wicked is laid up for the just."

Wicked men often succeed in business, and accumulate a great deal of

wealth, which will eventually be disposed of for the promotion of religion. Now wicked men mean no such thing. They do not accumulate property for the sake of promoting God's cause. They do not support God's children because they are God's children, but because of their particular relations to them. The unconverted husband does not support his pious wife because she is God's child but because she is his wife. Nevertheless God over-rules many things that the wicked do to support His own cause to benefit His own people. He makes them in many ways useful to the church; although they mean no such thing, yet so He uses them, and so He will use them.

(9.) He spares the wicked because His people love them. They love them oftentimes partly because of their relations to those who are His people. Some of them are their husbands, wives, parents, children, neighbors, friends. But they also love them with a love of benevolence, with a sacred regard for their good.

His people therefore dread to see them die in their sins; and because He dislikes to pain His own people by cutting off these wicked persons, He spares them as long as He wisely can.

(10.) He spares them because His people pity and pray for them. He no doubt keeps the wicked alive very often a long time because His people continue to cry to Him not to cut them off, but to spare them a little longer, and a little longer, till they shall dig about them and see if they will not bring forth fruit.

It sometimes happens, no doubt, that the wicked are cut off in answer to the prayer of God's people, but it is not because they pray for their destruction. But when they pray for things that cannot be granted without removing the wicked, God, no doubt, in answer to prayer, removes the wicked out of the way; not because His people prayed for their destruction, but because they prayed for the things that could not be granted without their destruction.

(11.) He dislikes to grieve His people. Indeed He does not willingly grieve or afflict any of the children of men and especially is this true of His own people. He will, therefore, from regard to His own people, spare their unconverted neighbors and friends as long as He wisely

can. Many a Christian, from mere natural affection, clings to his earthly relatives and friends notwithstanding they are wicked; and it would sadly grieve him to see them cut off and sent to hell. God pities His people, and out of regard to their feelings will spare these unconverted ones as long as He can.

(12.) He wishes to spare the ungodly until His people have made so much effort to save them, that they have themselves become convinced that they are incorrigible. He wishes His people to know this, that they may be all the better reconciled to their destruction when He destroys them. He wants to prove even to His own people that the wicked are incorrigible, that their friends may see that to have spared their wicked relatives and wicked neighbors any longer would not have resulted in their conversion.

3. I will now mention some reasons that respect the wicked themselves.

(1.) God wishes to convince them of His sincere regard for them; to make them see and feel that He loves them still, and is trying to save them.

(2.) He wishes to convince them in such a manner as if possible to shame them out of their wickedness, that the exhibition of His goodness may lead them to repentance. He wishes thus, if possible, to constrain them to break off from their sins by righteousness, and to turn to God.

(3.) He wishes to make them realize their obligation. He gives them therefore plenty of time to reflect, to consider; He meets them at every turn with kindness; He bears with them and perseveres in showing them favors, if by any means He may win their confidence, their heart, and their souls to salvation.

(4.) At any rate, He intends to leave them without excuse. He thus tries to remove their prejudices against Himself and against His people; to subdue their unbelief, and constrain them, if possible, to have confidence in Him, and to realize His true regard for them. He wishes to subdue their enmity, to overcome their obstinacy, to soften their

hearts and gain them for their salvation.

I conclude this discourse by a few questions and remarks addressed, first, to Christians; and secondly, to the wicked themselves.

First -- To Christians.

My brethren and sisters, what influence, as a matter of fact, has the preservation of the wicked had upon you?

(1.) Have their lives been useful to you? Is it a fact that residing in their midst, and having them before your faces as objects of benevolent regard has made you better, more watchful, more humble, more holy, more self-denying? Has their living among you made you more prayerful, more self-sacrificing, more patient, more forbearing and long-suffering? Has it made you more pitiful, more charitable; has it led you to love your enemies? Here you live in the midst of those who have not been your true friends, if you are God's friends. But have you loved them notwithstanding? Have you returned blessing for cursing, kind words for railing and accusation? Have you persisted in doing them good with all lowliness of mind, however they have treated you?

(2.) Has their living in the midst of you made you more watchful over your tongue, over your life, over your spirit, and in all your ways?

(3.) Has their living in the midst of you made you more heavenly minded and Christ-like? Has it shown you more and more how little the world can do for men; and more and more the value of religion? Has it led you to hate sin? Has it made you firm and bold in kindly rebuking it?

Now that these effects should result from their living in the midst of you, is plainly the design of God in sparing the wicked; and if you are truly God's friends, these effects must have followed with you.

(4.) Has the presence of the wicked in your midst led you to stand up more thoroughly, and openly, and steadily, for Jesus, and take His part in the midst of a gain-saying world? Have you been faithful to Jesus in the presence of His enemies, and in your treatment of them?

(5.) Have you been faithful to the wicked themselves? and are you ready to

die, and to have them die and to meet them in the judgment? Are you clear of their blood, so that when you meet them before God you shall be able to say, " O lord, I am clear of the blood of all these souls. I did what I could to save them, Thou knowest. I lived before them as much like Jesus as was possible. I prayed for them, I wept over them, I admonished them, I warned and entreated them, I besought them by all that was sacred in heaven and in earth to turn to Thee; but they would not. I give my testimony against them, and consent that they should give their testimony against me. I am clear of their blood."

(6.) Have any of them anything against you? Have you wronged any of them? Have you given them any occasion to think that you have? Have you stumbled any of them? Have you neglected their souls? Have you been selfish in your dealings with them? Have you manifested a bad spirit towards them? Have you spoken against them, unkindly, in an unchristian manner? Have you even published their faults unnecessarily, and in an unchristian spirit? How then can you meet them in the judgment?

Have you neglected to pray for them? Ah! have you gone with them in worldly ways and in a worldly spirit? How then are you prepared either to die yourself, or to have them die?

(7.) Have you set a good example before them, and rightly represented Christ and His religion? Has your life, your temper and spirit, been such as to lead them to understand the true nature of Christ's religion? Have they gotten from you the true idea of what Christianity is; that it is love; that it is love to enemies as well as friends; that it is love universally; that it involves all the beauties of holiness and all the forms of real goodness? In seeing your example, and spirit and temper, and life, do you think that they have been irresistibly, favorably impressed with your religion?

Have they, by your good works, been constrained to glorify Christ? Or, on the other hand, have they been stumbled by you? Have you misrepresented Christ and His religion? Have you led them to loathe and abhor your profession of Christianity? Have you filled their mouth with cavils and objections against Christianity by your inconsistent life? Has your spirit and temper, your daily life and dealings with men repelled them and led them to infer irresistibly either that you are no Christian, or that Christianity is a nuisance? Have you so misrepresented Christ as that the wicked have no

good opinion of Him or His religion?

(8.) Have any of the wicked died in sin through your neglect and fault? Can you remember any that you have stumbled; any in respect to whom you have failed in duty; any for whom you have not prayed, that are dead, gone to their account in their sins? How then will you meet them?

(9.) Have you stumbled any, and are you stumbling any that are now living? In short, are you now guilty, or have you been guilty of anything unchristian, in respect either to the dead or the living? Has the living of the wicked in your midst confirmed you and all around you, in the settled conviction that you are a Christian; that you are a friend of God; that you are truly a representative of Christ on earth?

Has their living in your midst proved your sincerity to God, or has it proved you a hypocrite, a false professor, a worldly professor? Now one of these two things has been accomplished by their living in the midst of you.

Have you seen that their presence was an influence that was working for your sanctification? Have you overcome the world; or has the world overcome you?

Have you drawn them towards Christ; or have they drawn you to the world? Are you today more prayerful, more heavenly-minded, more like Christ, for having lived in the midst of these subjects of prayer, and these objects of Christian compassion and effort? Or have you lived in the midst of God's enemies, in the midst of these subjects of prayer, and never acted, and lived, and prayed like a Christian? Then you are no Christian! Then the lives of the wicked have been the occasion of proving you a self-deceived professor. What think you would be the honest testimony of all your unconverted acquaintances if today they should be summoned with you to the solemn judgment? Would their real testimony be that you are a friend of God; that they believe it; that they have seen that in you which has proved it? Or would it turn out that you had been a stumbling block, a nuisance in the midst of them?

Secondly -- I must ask some questions, and make some remarks to the wicked themselves.

(1.) What has your life done for you thus far? Your life is a fact. You are; you

are here; you have passed thus far on in life. You must die. You are going to the solemn judgment. Your life has been a constant development in one direction or another. You have either been growing better or worse. You have been floating upon life's ocean; and which way have you been drifting? What is your reckoning? Where on this great stormy ocean are you? What is the bearing of this drifting of your soul?

How many years have you lived? and where are you now? and what has life done for you up to this point?

(2.) Is your life likely to be a blessing to you, or a curse? This is a question which you shall yourself decide. You will, you must make your own existence an eternal blessing or an eternal curse, as you take this course or that. But taking account of all that is passing, considering your present age, your surroundings, the drift you have made, taking into account your present position and the bearings of everything around you, what are your prospects? How great are the chances of your eternal salvation, or eternal damnation?

I asked you, How long have you lived? You are aware that the great majority of persons that are ever converted, are converted quite young; especially where persons live under the means of grace, they are converted early or become gospel-hardened. How has it been with you? Comparatively few persons are converted after they are forty years of age. By far the majority of converts are converted under twenty, in all ages of the world. Now how many years have you lived? Have you not already lived out half of your days, so far as all hope of your salvation is concerned? Have not many of you gone even already beyond the point where there is much likelihood that you will ever be converted?

(3.) How long do you expect to live? Some of you may live for years; and some of you may live but a few moments. But can you ask, with any honor or honesty, that you may live and be spared if you continue in your sins? Your sins are a great trial to God; they are a great nuisance in society. God may see cause to spare you notwithstanding your sins; but your sins are nevertheless a great abomination to Him, and a great abomination to His people. Now can you honestly pray to God, and ask Him to spare you that you may continue to mark your way all along with sins and rebellion against Him?

(4.) Will a longer life be a blessing or a curse to you? Judging from the past, have you not reason to fear that the longer you live the worse it will be for you? No doubt you hope to amend, and to break off from your wickedness; but is there really much prospect that you ever will? Is it not highly probable that you never will, but will wax worse and worse?

Now please reflect -- Have you more selfishness now than you had when you were young?

Are you more susceptible of religious impressions, or less susceptible? Have you more prejudice against Christian people than you used to have or have you less? Have you more attachment to the house and worship of God; or have you less? Have you fallen out from association with God's people, and fallen out from His worship, more and more, or less and less? Does the Spirit of God strive with you still, and even more than formerly; or has He almost, if not entirely, ceased to strive with you? Are the moral principles that you were taught in your childhood more potent to influence you now than formerly; or less so? In short, is life to you a hardening process, or is it a subduing and sanctifying process?

(5.) Why are you still neglecting the Savior? And have you not reason to believe that you shall always neglect Him, and that no length of days in this life will make you a Christian?

(6.) Where will you soon be? You cannot live long. Where shall you and I soon meet? We cannot meet here much longer. We must soon depart hence to be here no more; and the places that now know you and me will soon know us no more forever. Where then shall we be? Where will you be? What will be your employment when this life is ended? Can you not see that the answer to that question must turn upon the manner in which you spend this life? "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." If you sow to the wind, you must reap the whirlwind. If you live to minister to your appetites and propensities, when the body is torn down, when the flesh is gone and sensual enjoyments are no more -- what then must you reap? If you have sown to the Spirit of God; if you have lived to please Him; if you have lived in the Spirit, and prayed in the Spirit, and walked in the Spirit, and communed in the Spirit -- then tear the body down and you have life

everlasting. But mark again, I pray you, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." When you understand what life is doing for you, you need not be a prophet to decide what your eternal destiny must be. If you are prepared for heaven, to heaven you will go; if not prepared for heaven, you must have your portion with hypocrites and unbelievers.

(7.) Shall God spare you and love you and try to save you in vain? Will you perversely turn away; will you continue to rebel and be wicked until His forbearance can no longer spare you, and He is obliged to wipe you from the earth as a nuisance? What shall be said of you when you are dead? Shall it truly be said of you that you have lived, and sinned, and died in your sins; and then shall a cloud settle over you; -- shall the darkness of eternal night rest upon you forever?

[Back to Top](#)

Hardness Of Heart - No. 1

Lecture V

Harden Not Your Heart - No. 2

Lecture VI

Tender-Heartedness - No. 3

Lecture VII

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

LECTURE V.

March 13, 1861

HARDNESS OF HEART --No. 1

Text.--Mark 8: 17: "Have ye your heart yet hardened?"

Christ had just wrought the miracle of feeding the four thousand men with seven loaves. In teaching His disciples shortly after, He warned them to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." They did not understand Him, and supposed that He gave them the warning, because they had forgotten to take bread with them.

Perceiving their blindness, He said: -- "Why reason ye because ye have no bread? Perceive ye not yet, neither understand ? Have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes see ye not? and having care hear ye not? and do ye not remember?"

In speaking from these verses I inquire,

I. What is hardness of heart?

II. The effects and manifestations of hardness of heart.

I. What is hardness of heart?

Answer: -- The language is often used to designate an unfeeling state of the sensibility. But this is not the meaning of hardness of heart when it is spoken of as a crime, as a sin against God. When hardness of heart is spoken of as sin, the terms designate the committal of the will to a false position; a stubbornness in regard to the claims of God; an attitude of disobedience and self-will. In this sense we often use such language. When a child is stubborn, stands out against parental authority, we speak of him as hard-hearted, and as hardening his heart against the claims and authority of the parent.

II. Let us notice some of the effects and manifestations of hardness of heart.

1. A want of candor is one of its effects and manifestations. The will is committed in a dishonest attitude; consequently in this state the mind will manifest an uncandid spirit in regard to testimony. Hence it will be very hard to convince. It is difficult to carry conviction home to a mind, where the heart is hard. The will girds itself, and uses the intellect unfairly. It will evade testimony; it will cavil; it will divert attention from the truth; it will resort to various shifts to avoid the conviction of error and wrong.

2. Prejudice is another of its effects and manifestations. Prejudice is pre-judgment. It is one-sided; the mind made up without the full examination of all sides of the question. The mind is ready, in this state, to leap to a conclusion that will in any way favor the false position it has taken. Where the heart is hard, there will be a general manifestation of prejudice on a great many questions. The attitude of the mind is so false, unjust, ungenerous, that it is not careful to weigh evidence, and to be just in its

judgments; but, on the contrary, it will leap to conclusions, however unjust, and indulge various prejudices against persons, doctrines, communities -- and indeed such a mind will reveal itself as a nest of prejudices.

3. Another of its effects and manifestations will be the absence of tender and kindly feeling. Especially will this be so in regard to all persons and things that stand related to the false position that it has taken. Suppose the mind is committed to money-making. One of the effects and manifestations of this position of the will, will be an unfeelingness in dealing with men; a want of tender and kind feelings in regard to the poor and the suffering. If the heart is hard in respect to God, it will manifest a want of appreciation in regard to almost all its relations to Him. It will be unappreciative of the guilt of sin; it will not realize the nature of sin as consisting in the neglect of God, His rights, feelings, authority, well-being. While such a mind may admit that such neglect of God is sin; still the guilt of sin will not be realized, will not be felt. The confession that this neglect is sin, will be cold, heartless, emotionless.

4. When the heart is hard, the mind will manifest an inability to appreciate the necessity of an atonement; to honor God who has been dishonored by sin; and to honor the law that has been degraded by sin. When the heart is hard, the moral feelings are obtuse, and blunt, and often perverted. It cannot feel the dishonor of God and of the law that sin has occasioned; and it inquires coldly and recklessly, what need of a sin-offering to condemn sin and honor the law? The fact is, where the heart is hard, the moral feelings and perceptions are blunted; and consequently the great truths connected with the necessity of an atoning sacrifice are not appreciated.

5. When the heart is hard, the mind is unappreciative of ill-desert. It is slow even to admit that it deserves damnation; and if compelled to admit it as an intellectual judgment, the mind does not feel it, its not clearly and keenly realized. Such a one will say, "I cannot feel that it would be just in God to send me to hell. It seems hard that for the sins committed in this short life, God should punish me forever."

6. When the heart is hard, the mind also is unappreciative of the compassion and forbearance of God. Being in a great degree blind to the nature and guilt of sin, having no appropriate sense and feeling of guilt, the compassion of God in sparing such a soul will not be at all appreciated.

Upon such a mind the forbearance of God makes little impression; it is not seen, realized, felt. The will is so stubborn, the intellect is so unfairly used, and the whole mind is held in such a position by the force of the will, that the feelings are very little affected in view of the compassion and forbearance of God.

7. While the heart is hard, the mind is unappreciative of the love of Christ. To such a mind this love is scarcely felt to be a reality. If it be admitted, it is not felt; it is not realized; the mind is not impressed and subdued by it. The fact is, the soul is in the attitude of rebellion; it is committed against the claims of Christ; it is girded to maintain its position of resistance to Christ and His authority. In this state the love of Christ is not so perceived, is not so realized, as to melt and subdue the soul.

Whenever the heart is hard, there is unbelief; and this unbelief in regard to the love of Christ, this withholding confidence in this love, this refusing to yield the mind up to its influence, prevents this love from overcoming and subduing the mind.

Persons whose hearts are hard, will complain that they are not affected by the love of Christ. They are often not aware that it is their voluntary stubbornness that prevents their being duly affected by it. They seem not to know that they are closing the windows of the soul that the love of Christ may not shine in and melt them.

They seem not to realize that they are holding their emotions all back, not allowing them to flow, not allowing their feelings to be aroused and quickened.

They will even in this case complain of the hardness of their own hearts, meaning by this their unfeelingness in view of the love of Christ; and in this they overlook the fact that they are the voluntary authors of this very unfeelingness, of which they complain.

8. While the heart is hard, the soul will not appreciate the guilt that is involved in neglecting to labor for the souls of others. Now, if a city were on fire, and one that knew it, should fail to give the alarm, and should see the city burn down and hundreds of souls perish, there would be a general outcry against such cruelty; people generally would be shocked, and even

horrified at such wickedness.

But souls may be asleep in their sins, and thousands of them may perish unwarned, unreprieved, unprayed for, uncared for, and yet the guilt of all this neglect be scarcely realized or felt at all.

Now this is owing to the hardness of the heart, and the consequent unbelief and blindness of the soul. You talk to such people about their sins, and they say, "What have I done? Whom have I injured? I have wronged no man; I have paid all my debts; and I have done my duty to my neighbors and friends around me."

Now in all this the hardness of heart prevents the person from understanding really what his duty is. He satisfied himself with not having defrauded, or with not having otherwise positively injured his neighbor.

But the law of God is positive. His duty was to love his neighbor as himself; to make all possible effort to save the soul of his neighbor; to warn, reprove, persuade, and use all possible moral influence to arouse his neighbor to secure the salvation of his soul. All this he has neglected, and perhaps has neglected many around him that are already dead, and have gone down to hell; and yet he does not feel that he has totally neglected his duty. His duty was to love his neighbor positively; to do his neighbor all the good he could; and especially, if possible, to save his soul. All that he can truly say, is, that he has abstained from directly and positively injuring his neighbor by his every-day acts; but to say that he has done his duty to his neighbor is absurd. He has performed no duty to his neighbor. His duty was to love, and to express this love in every way. This he has totally neglected; hence he has performed no duty to his neighbor, and no duty to God. But his heart is so hard that all this he does not feel, this he does not realize; and thus he is acting under a gross delusion, ruinous and damning, because his heart is so hard.

9. The same is true of directly neglecting God. When the heart is hard one of its effects and manifestations will be, God will be neglected; prayer will be neglected; praise will be neglected; obedience will be neglected; love will be withheld; confidence will be withheld; gratitude will be withheld; obedience from the heart will be withheld; and nothing will be present but cold formality and religious affectation, at the most. And yet this neglect

will not be keenly felt as a sin against God; it will not be realized as deserving damnation. Such a soul is so hardened toward God that it cares not for His rights, or for His well-being in any respect. It can see Him dishonored without feeling it; it can hear His name even blasphemed without just and holy indignation; it can see His rights invaded, His authority spurned, His feelings outraged, His law trampled on and despised, and yet not feel it. The feelings are locked up as cold and dead as an Arctic ocean.

In short, when the heart is hard, there will be a general unfeelingness toward God. The thought of God does not melt the sensibility. Talk to such a soul of the justice of God, His abhorrence of sin, His righteous indignation, and you will hardly excite its fears. It girds itself, and scorns to be made afraid. But, turn the subject over, and represent His loving-kindness, slowness to anger, and readiness to forgive, His vast compassion, and spread out before such a soul all the tenderness there is in God's heart, and you will not arouse the feelings. Such a soul will still complain, "I do not feel, I know it- it is all true; but I cannot feel it."

10. Another effect and manifestation of hardness of heart is uncharitableness. Where the will is dishonestly committed against the claims of God, the mind is uncharitable in the sense of lacking confidence in God, and in everybody else.

You will almost always observe when the heart is hard that there is a censorious spirit, a disposition to find fault, to judge God and man censoriously. Such a mind can see little that is good in God or anybody else; it naturally dwells upon the dark side; is keen to discern the faults, real or supposed, of men; and prone to censure in God whatever it cannot understand.

11. Another manifestation of hardness of heart is a self-justifying spirit. If accused of wrong, such a mind will immediately fall to excuse-making. If it cannot deny the fact charged, it will immediately seek either wholly to justify, or to palliate and extenuate the guilt. If it has a controversy with another, it is blind to but one side of the question. And you will observe if two persons, both of whose hearts are hard, have a controversy, you cannot get them to see alike. Each will justify himself and condemn the other; and try as you may, while their hearts are hard, each will think the other most in

fault. Neither can see that he is the guilty party; and consequently the controversy will be perpetuated while their hearts are hard. Soften their hearts, and they will soon come together.

12. Hardness of heart will manifest itself in an unrelenting state of mind, even when convinced that it has injured another. In such cases the conviction will not be allowed to take such possession of the mind as to melt the sensibility and subdue the will. The confession of guilt in such cases will be tearless, feelingless, ungracious.

13. Hardness of heart manifests general spiritual blindness and self-deception. When the will is committed against the claims of God, it will of course admit as little light and conviction into the intelligence as possible. It will not candidly weigh evidence, it will not honestly consider the matter; and consequently, on all subjects relating to God and our relations to Him, a hard heart will produce great spiritual blindness and self-deception.

We sometimes see those whose hearts are so hard that they will tell you they always do right, they do their duty. They think they are getting along very well, and that God has but little cause to find fault with them. Nay, many of this class will profess to be Christians; and they really suppose they are, when it is as manifest to others as possible that they are blind, because of the hardness of their hearts. It is remarkable often to see how deep the delusion of such a mind is.

I have known some to profess to live even without sin, and think themselves in a state of sanctification, who after all were manifestly hardened, feelingless, exhibiting no real love to God or man, none of the tenderness and compassion of Christ, no spirit of concern for souls, nothing that was truly Christ-like or Christian. Their minds seemed to be as dark as the grave, and their hearts as hard as the nether mill-stone.

14. Another effect and manifestation of hardness of heart is a constant tendency to excuse all religious delinquency. If such persons neglect prayer, they have an excuse for it; if they neglect to warn and win souls, they have an excuse for it; if they neglect to do their part in the support of public worship, to sustain missions, to forward religion in any and every way, they have always an excuse for it. You will not see them tender, and manifesting great sorrow that they are deprived of the privilege or opportunity of doing

these things. You cannot avoid discovering, often, that it is the spirit of excuse-making for religious delinquency; and that this spirit is the effect of hardness of heart and of that blindness of mind which we always see consequent upon it.

15. Selfishness in trade is another effect and manifestation of hardness of heart. You will always observe that such men are difficult to get along with. They are close and hard in their dealings, and will be sure to have the best end of a bargain. They have no such tenderness as will not allow them to do as they would not be done by. The golden rule is to them a blank. Their maxims are,

"Take care of number one;"

"Charity begins at home;"

"Let every man look out for himself;"

"My business is to make as good a bargain as I can."

These are the practical rules of trade.

Hence he can take little advantages of the poor; give them short measure, and short weight, and poor articles, and put them off as he may, making what he can out of them. He can see a poor man, or a poor woman, go from his counter or from his shop, with a sense of having been wronged and hardly dealt with, and not feel sorry for it. He can see the poor man go away with a few pennies less than was his due, and yet have no generous outburst of feeling that will call him back and deal generously, or even fairly with him. The fact is, his heart is like an adamant stone; his "tender mercies are cruel." He could even return a fugitive slave to his master for money.

16. Another effect and manifestation of this hardness of heart is, an unwillingness to take pains to oblige anybody; especially a stranger, or some one in whom he has no particular personal interest. He will not be at expense and pains-taking for the good of others. If anybody suffers, what is that to him? He goes not to seek out the poor or the suffering. He will get along as cheaply as he can in regard to all expense or pains-taking for the poor, or for the kingdom of Christ.

It is curious to see how hard-hearted persons will get along in such cases. They will pay their minister, who labors for their souls, as little as possible;

they will cut down the wages of the sexton, who makes the meeting-house comfortable and clean for their use, to the lowest point; if any extra meetings are proposed, they will object on account of the cost, the extra expense that it will make; if anything is to be done for the cause of God, they will get along without doing their full share, if possible.

17. Another effect and manifestation of hardness of heart, is a great tardiness and superficiality in confessing any wrong done, either to God or man.

When confessions are made, they are dry, heartless, superficial, and perhaps mixed up with recrimination and throwing blame upon others. The confessions of such a mind will not be ingenuous, fair, full, free, but the opposite of all these. Such persons will confess as far as they are obliged in all decency to confess; especially so far as their iniquities are known, and cannot be hid. But their confessions are not spontaneous, not generous, not satisfactory either to God or man.

18. Another effect and manifestation of hardness of heart is an aptness to indulge in resentful feelings. If any one has injured them, or neglected them, they resent it. They indulge such feelings that they cannot be cordial or kind to such persons; cannot pray for them; cannot labor for their good. They lay it up against them; and render even themselves unhappy by the hard, unkind, and jealous feelings which they indulge.

19. Another effect and manifestation of hardness of heart is a want of the spirit of prayer. If such persons pray, it is not in the Spirit; there is no unction, no power, no prevalence in their prayers.

Indeed their prayers are not prayers. They are not supplication; they are not intercession and pleading; they are not the language of want, felt and realized. They are theological, philosophical, didactic, polemic -- anything but supplication.

You will hear persons whose hearts are hard, often engage in what they call prayer -- and scarcely a petition in their prayer. It is all talk, preaching, exhortation, perhaps accusation, but little or no real supplication.

You feel agonized to hear it. It does not touch you; it does not help your own spirit to pray; it does not bring out the responsive amen. No; it is anything

but the spirit of prayer. A hard heart cannot pray.

You can hear a hard-hearted man pray, but you cannot feel him. Or rather, I should have said, you can hear him preach, or exhort, or theologize; but you cannot feel him pray, for he has not the spirit of prayer.

20. Another effect and manifestation of hardness of heart is the total absence of a loving and compassionate spirit.

His prayers are not loving and compassionate; if a preacher, his preaching is not loving and compassionate; if not a preacher, in conversation and social intercourse he is not loving and compassionate. He is not compassionate to the poor, to the ignorant, to the oppressed, to the afflicted, to the tried and tempted.

A hard heart will manifest a general want of the loving and compassionate in social and Christian intercourse.

21. The hard-hearted are not watchful against stumbling others. They do not love others; are not careful for their well-being. They are so set upon having their own will and their own way, and securing their own ends, that they are very reckless of their influence, whether they stumble others or not. They will speak against Christians, and against ministers, and in many ways say that which is calculated in the highest degree to prejudice others against religion, against truth, against God., and yet not feel it, not realize what they are doing.

22. When they have stumbled others, the hard-hearted are not willing to take up the stumbling blocks by making full confession and setting all right. They are too proud to do this. They do not care enough about the evil they have done, to hasten with all earnestness to remove the stumbling blocks out of the way.

23. The hard-hearted have no true brotherly love. They do not feel for Christ's people, or feel for Christ's church. They can see the state of religion low, meetings poorly attended, but little of the spirit of prayer in the church, sinners remaining unconverted, and Christ dishonored in the house of His friends; and neither sigh nor cry in view of such a state of things.

They are so taken up with their self-seeking ways as to have little thought of

Christ's dishonor, or the soul's ruin. They live on in an unfeeling, unconcerned manner, while hundreds around them are perishing in sin.

REMARKS.

1. From what has been said, some of you can see why it is that you have so little feeling on religious subjects.

Some of you profess to be in a state of consecration to God, who manifest no feeling for the souls around you.

Now, do you not see that you are deceived, that your hearts are hard? Your will is after all committed to self-pleasing, and not to pleasing God.

2. You see the secret of alienation among brethren. Their hearts are hard. Now they cannot see alike. Being in this hardened state, every one sees everything in the light, or rather in the darkness, of his own selfishness and self-will. Each one has but a poor opinion of the other; each one justifies himself and condemns the other. They have no Christian confidence, for they have really no Christian character.

3. Hardness of heart is often the ruin of families. If members of the same family become stubborn and willful, of course everything is ajar in the family. If the father or mother, or both, become hard-hearted toward each other, it will scatter desolation throughout all the family. Everything will go wrong; tempers wrong, words wrong -- no loving government or influence, but all will be desolate.

4. Hardness of heart is often the curse and ruin of churches. Sometimes a deacon, or some prominent member of the church, has a hard heart. He is self-willed, opinionated; does not care for the church half as much as he cares for himself. Perhaps two of the deacons will become hardened; and then be striving with each other; create division in the church; stand in the way of the influence of the pastor; stir up a party spirit in the church; and all will be moral desolation. Until those deacons have their hearts softened, nothing can be done to counteract their influence. If in such cases the church could kindly and with unanimity set them aside, the difficulty in some measure could be obviated. But if the deacons or leading members become hardened, it is very likely that they will be instrumental in hardening others; and then woe to the minister, woe to the parish, woe to the church! Hardness of heart will be the ruin of all.

5. Many seem really given over to hardness of heart and blindness of mind. This is an awful state to be in. It is awful to the subject of it.

A hard-hearted person is in a most deplorable state; in a most unhappy state; in a most guilty state; in a state fatal to his salvation, if he abides in it.

Again, it is an awful state in respect to all those connected with a hard-hearted person.

What an awful thing it is for a church to have a hard-hearted minister!

He will be blind to the wants of the people, and unloving and unfeeling in his treatment of them. He will inevitably do them infinitely more harm than good.

And it is an evil thing for a minister to have a hard-hearted church, and a hard-hearted congregation. They will probably starve him, neglect him, abuse him, tie his hands and prevent his usefulness, break him down and destroy his influence - or drive him away to seek a people that will receive the gospel.

6. From this subject we see how to account for the astonishing blindness of some persons. It is very striking, sometimes, to see what strange delusions people are laboring under.

They seem to be totally blind to their moral state. You cannot persuade them to look into the matter so thoroughly as to understand themselves. If you examine the matter to the bottom, you will find them committed to some false position; consequently, hardened and blinded. Or rather, their hardness consists in their committal to this false position; and their blindness is its natural result. While the heart is hard, everything, almost, is seen in a false light. The full impression of no truth is received; and much that is admitted is by no means felt or realized. Delusion is the inevitable consequence. In this state persons will justify that which will shock others immeasurably.

7. Fanatics are always hard-hearted. Fanaticism is not to be confounded with enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is over-heated zeal; a zeal amounting sometimes almost to insanity. Yet it may be kind and beautiful, were it not exaggerated. Fanaticism is a state of mind in which the malignant element predominates; in which the malign emotions are fanned into a flame and take the control of the will.

A fanatic is always hard-hearted, severe, censorious, cruel. Paul was in a state of

fanaticism when he persecuted the church of God. They were fanatics of whom Christ said, "The days will come when he that killeth you will think that he doeth God-service." Fanatics are often as sincere as enthusiasts; but their very sincerity is culpable, is wicked.

Persecutors are always fanatics, and they are always hard-hearted. Paul, in his fanaticism and hard-heartedness, "verily thought that he ought to do many things, contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth."

The malign emotions having control of the will, the soul is in a false position, and can think itself doing God service in hunting and betraying the innocent.

Fanatics feel, but not charitably, not kindly. Even in prayer, or conversation, or preaching, or exhortation, the very tones of the voice, the gestures, the looks, manifest the hardness of the heart.

They do not speak tenderly or compassionately. If they have occasion to probe the conscience, to reprove or rebuke, they do not do it benevolently, but malevolently. They seem to take a pleasure in rebuke. They mistake their fanatical unkindness for Christian faithfulness.

8. A hard heart will so manifest itself in speaking, and praying, and doing everything, as to force upon tender minds a spirit of protest. Tender hearts cannot receive it, cannot fellowship it. You will always observe, if in a congregation there are a number of hard hearts, that they will sympathize with anything that is hard-hearted, either in speaking or praying; while, on the contrary, with the tender spirits these remarks and prayers will force a protest and a recoil.

They cannot fellowship them; cannot be interested in them; cannot receive the fanatical and hard-hearted remarks that have been made, or spirit that has been manifested.

9. We see why it is that some persons are always so full of fault-finding. They never seem to be kind, loving, forbearing. They do not yearn over those that are out of the way, and love them back to obedience; but they scold; they find fault; the very language of their speaking and praying but repels those whom they would try to win.

Ministers sometimes become hard-hearted, and by their fault-finding and scolding manner drive the church away rather than win them back to Christ.

They do not, like a good shepherd, go before their sheep and lead them, but undertake to drive them. In this they greatly err; and it is generally owing to the hardness of their hearts. If they get melted down, they will take a different course, and a different result will almost certainly follow.

I knew a minister who had been regarded as a very faithful man, but he had no revival for a long time. He preached from sternness to his church, and as they said, scolded them; but the more fault he found with them the more occasion he had to find fault, for the worse they became. But he came to where there was a revival, became convicted, saw his mistake, went home to his people at the close of the week, and on Sabbath morning went into the pulpit to preach to them. Before he began to preach, he commenced to make confession of his hardness of heart and blindness of mind. He melted down -- they melted down. He saw things in a different light, presented in the compassion and melting of his spirit.

The heart of the church broke down, and that day commenced a glorious revival which gathered in most of the impenitent of the congregation.

Now, please remember that hardness of heart is a voluntary state of mind. It is a state of mind that continually resists the Holy Spirit; it is a self-justifying, cruel state of mind; it grieves, it dishonors God; it ruins the souls of men.

LECTURE VI.

March 27, 1861

HARDEN NOT YOUR HEART --No. 2

Text.--Heb. 3: 7,8: "Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, 'Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.'"

In speaking from these words I inquire,

I. What is it to harden the heart?

II. How men harden their hearts.

III. The guilt involved in hardening the heart against God.

IV. The danger of hardening the heart against God.

I. What is it to harden the heart?

It is to commit the will or mind against the claims of God and of humanity. To harden the heart is to commit the soul in a spirit of disobedience, and self-will, and stubbornness, against God and His government.

II. How men harden their hearts.

1. It is always a voluntary act to harden the heart, and a voluntary state when the hardness of heart is continued.

It is being an act of the mind or of the will, the mind always assigns to itself some reason for taking this position of self-will, and for maintaining this position of stubbornness against God. It is a matter of consciousness that the will has indirectly a great control of the feelings. If the mind commits itself by an act of will to any position, the feelings are brought to adjust themselves to the will's position; not always directly and instantly, but the feelings will soon come to sympathize with the attitude taken by the will. The reason is very obvious, the feelings are influenced by the thoughts, and the thoughts are directed by the will. When the will, then, is committed to a dishonest position, it will always use the intellect dishonestly; and by a dishonest use of the intellect will foster such thoughts as to prevent the feelings. This is common experience, as every one knows who has paid any particular attention to his own state of mind. A voluntary stubbornness always locks up the sensibility, and closes it against that class of emotions that would naturally result from a different attitude of the will. If the mind takes a position against God, it will use the intellect to justify its position, or to excuse it; consequently it will indulge only in thoughts, and arguments, and reflections, that justify its position, and therefore that poison and pervert the feelings and bring them into sympathy with the will. Men harden their hearts, then, by an uncandid and selfish use of the intellect, assigning to themselves such reasons for their conduct as to justify their taking this position.

2. Men harden their hearts by indulging prejudice against God. They commit themselves to a one-sided view of the whole question of God's claims, and government, and works. They are selfish, and therefore not candid. They designedly take a narrow view of all the questions between

themselves and God, and indulge a host of prejudices with intent to justify their rebellious state of mind.

3. They often harden their hearts by indulging prejudices against the church, against the ministry, against the truth. Press them to repent, and you will find in fact that they immediately betake themselves to finding fault with Christians and ministers. You will find their minds a perfect nest of prejudices against God's people; and they evidently resort to these as a reason for their position in regard to religion, to justify themselves in neglecting the claims of God. You cannot go and talk with one of these impenitent men without finding that he will instantly reveal to you a perfect nest of prejudices, which he harbors in his mind against God's people, and ministers, and truth, for the purpose of strengthening himself in his position of disobedience.

I say, these are prejudices -- they are pre-judgments. There may be some foundation in fact for many things which he will say; but upon the whole you will clearly perceive that it is prejudice. He is unfair, uncandid. Much that he says is not true; though he persuades himself that it is true. He has not fairly and charitably examined the subject. He has jumped to a conclusion from a very partial examination of the facts, and is hedging himself in with prejudice. This course of conduct, with those that harden their hearts, is so notorious that you will find it on every side. When this meeting is out, converse with your impenitent neighbors, and you will find them resorting to these prejudices to strengthen themselves against the claims of God.

4. Men harden their hearts through a pride of consistency. They have taken a stand; they have committed themselves in something; they have set themselves against religion and against the claims of God. And it is remarkable to see, if you converse with an impenitent person before others, and especially in the presence of those before whom they have taken a stand and committed themselves against God's claims, how they will instantly gather up their strength, and through pride of consistency maintain their position.

5. Men harden their hearts because they are ashamed to forsake the ranks of the ungodly, and openly confess Christ. They are ashamed of Christ, and ashamed of religion; ashamed to avow themselves the friends of God.

This is truly wonderful, but it is a fact. So true is this that you can scarcely find a sinner, with whom you can converse in the presence of his family or friends, that will not resist, because he is ashamed to manifest any feeling on the subject, or any regard for Christ in their presence. You can scarcely find an impenitent man that will allow you to talk with him in the presence of his wife, without resisting your importunity through his own pride.

You must get him alone, and away from his friends, or he will resist you, because he is ashamed to have them know that he has any feeling on the subject of religion. This is almost a universal fact with sinners. I find if I would do them any good in conversation, I need to see them alone. They have scarcely a friend before whom they will be candid enough to acknowledge the truth as they really believe it. So great is the pride of their hearts, that they are ashamed to have it known, even to those who are most interested in them, that they pay the least regard to the claims of God.

6. Men harden their hearts through an unwillingness to confess and make restitution where they have wronged their neighbors. They are too proud to confess a wrong to a neighbor; and they are too selfish to make restitution where they have taken an advantage of another in trade, or where they have in their possession that which belongs to another. If, therefore, they have any restitution to make, or any confession to make to man, this consideration will lead them to gird themselves, and to resist the claims of duty and of God. They will often keep themselves for years in an attitude of stubbornness, because they know that if they yield to God, they must make confession and restitution. Now, is not this the fact with some of you? Are you not covering some sin that ought to be confessed to man, as well as to God? Are you not refusing to make some restitution where you have wronged some one?

Do you not know that if you ever repent, you must confess and make restitution? And whenever the question of repentance comes before you, do you not gird and strengthen yourself in your impenitence? Do you not harden your heart, because you know that if you repent, you must make confession and restitution? Do you not often resort to cavils and subterfuges, to strengthen yourself in the attitude you hold towards God?

7. Men harden their hearts by yielding to their temper. If you press them with the claims of God, they become angry; and giving way to temper, they

take a stronger stand than ever, and gird themselves to the uttermost to resist the claims of duty and of God.

They will sometimes go so far as to affirm, and even to swear, that they will never become Christians; they will not yield to the claims of God, do what He may. Have not some of you, when pressed by the claims of God, given way to anger, strengthened yourself in your position, and resolved that you would have nothing to do with the claims of God?

8. Sinners often harden their hearts by indulging appetite. For example: they are accustomed to the use of tobacco, or intoxicating drinks; or they are accustomed to indulge in the use of various luxuries. Now if the claims of God are presented to them, those claims come directly into competition with appetite. For example: I heard of a man, who, through the use of intoxicating drinks, was likely to lose his eye-sight. His physician told him that he must abandon the use of intoxicating drinks, or entirely lose the use of his eyes. Upon this information he girded himself instantly, and said, "Then fare you well, old eyes." Thus he settled the question, hardened his heart, and probably lost his soul.

9. Men harden their hearts through the "fear of man that bringeth a snare." You often see cases in which persons are called to the performance of duty, and resist the claims of duty through the fear of man. If in meeting, those who are anxious are invited to come forward and take a certain seat, or to go into another room for instruction, if they are aware that certain persons are present, though greatly pressed with the claims of God, they will harden their hearts and refuse to go.

10. Men harden their heart in obedience to public sentiment. If the claims of God come into collision with the views and practices of men on a large scale, so that public sentiment is strongly adverse to the claims of God, many men will bow right down before public sentiment and harden their hearts against God. They are afraid to take a stand against men, when in their wickedness they will take a stand against God. With most men public sentiment is omnipotent, and has far more power with them practically than all the claims of God. And whenever they are called to resist public sentiment and to sympathize with the claims of God, they gird themselves and resist God's claims.

11. Men harden their hearts by indulging erroneous views of God and His government. In this they are uncandid; but nevertheless they persist in charging certain things upon God, in stumbling at certain things in God's providence, or government, or dealings. They hedge themselves round about with lies, and hide themselves under falsehood, and thus strengthen themselves in their opposition to God.

12. The same is true of religion generally. It is striking, and awful sometimes, to see what views men will persist in entertaining of religion. Their perverseness in this respect is sometimes appalling. Hear them talk, and it would seem they must have been assisted by Satan himself to conjure up so much that is false, ridiculous, absurd, and often wicked, and charge it to religion.

13. Men often harden their hearts through a proud determination to receive nothing incomprehensible. They will not believe, they say, what they cannot understand. But this they apply only to religion and the claims of God. They cannot comprehend their own existence; and there is nothing in all nature around them that is not full of mystery, as absolutely beyond their comprehension as any mystery in religion. They can swallow an ocean of mystery on any other subject. But come to religion, the claims of God, the high policy of His eternal government, the mode of His own existence, and those great and wonderful things too high for us, where mystery is to be expected of course -- there, the sinner will stumble; there he proudly entrenches himself, and says, "I will not believe what I cannot understand" - - meaning, that unless he can understand the philosophy and the how, he will not believe the facts.

14. Men harden their hearts by withholding confidence in God. Unbelief is their great crime. If God takes never so much pains to gain their confidence, they proudly and persistently withhold it, and thus harden their hearts against God.

15. Men often harden their hearts by withholding confidence in man. They seem to throw away their confidence in everybody; and with the psalmist in his haste, they say, "All men are liars." Now, whenever you find a man who has lost confidence in everybody, you may know that he himself is a wicked man. This is exactly the opposite of the good man's state of mind. "Charity hopeth all things, and believeth all things." The truly good man may be too

confiding. He is himself truthful, and not ready to suspect others of being false. He is himself honest and simple-hearted, and not in a state easily to suspect others of double-dealing and dishonesty. He loves everybody, and therefore wishes to think well of everybody. He is disposed to do so, and it is very easy and natural for him to do so. His error will naturally be in the excess of confidence. He will confide, sometimes, where he has not reason to confide. He has more confidence in man than man is entitled to; and this from the very nature of his simple-heartedness, of his own conscious honesty.

Whenever, therefore, you see a man that has no confidence in anybody, you may know that he deserves the confidence of nobody; he is a wicked man. "Charity thinketh no evil;" is not pre-disposed to think evil of others, but the contrary. It is a wicked man who hardens himself by casting away his confidence in man. You go to some men with the claims of God -- they immediately resist everything you say, because everybody who professes religion, is a hypocrite.

16. Some men harden their hearts through a habit of self-will. They have never been governed by their parents; they have never really submitted themselves to anybody's government; consequently they are in the habit of having their own way. To government of any kind, they will not submit. Persuade them, especially in the sense of flattering them, you sometimes may, to some extent; but the moment the idea of authority is presented to them, even if it be the authority of God, they resist it, because the claim comes in that shape. Their will is always girded; it is up, and strong, the moment anything comes before them as an obligation -- something to which they ought to submit. To moral obligation they have never yielded; and the moment it comes before them in the shape of an "ought," they resist it.

17. Many harden their hearts through a habit of delay. They have long put off the claims of God; they have indulged in this from their earliest childhood; and it has become a thing of course. They have heard sermon after sermon, have had the claims of duty presented so often and so long, and have been so uniform in their habit of delay, that now it is a thing of course. You press them never so hard, and they will say, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."

Is this not a fact with some of you? Have you not so long accustomed yourselves to put off God's claims that it has become with you a thing of course? When you came to meeting today, you expected to hear the claims of God: but did you expect to comply with them, to yield to these claims? Did you not as much expect to set the church on fire today, as you expected to become a Christian, and yield to the claims of God today? Did you not as much expect to reject these claims, as you expected to hear them presented? You did expect to be presented with them: but did you not as much expect to delay obedience as you expected to live? Such has been your habit of delay, that when God's claims are urged, you instantly repeat what you have so often done; you gird yourself and go your way, resisting these claims.

18. Many resist the claims of God through spiritual indolence. They are too spiritually indolent to make any effort for their own salvation, or to comply with the claims of God. These claims come home upon them, and press them to instant action and decision; but it is easier to resist them, as they have been in the habit of doing so long, than to comply. They have only to gird themselves up, to remain in disobedience. But to rule out every objection, and break down before God, will cause them more effort than they are disposed to make; hence they draw themselves up in the attitude of resistance, and growl out their "Nay," to the claims of God.

19. Men often harden their hearts on account of the real or supposed sins of professors of religion. These sins may be real, or they may be only supposed; nevertheless, they are made the occasion of caviling, and of resistance to God's claims. Such a man has wronged them, or wronged somebody else; such a professor has done so and so. He betakes himself to these by way of strengthening himself in his position. He "eats up the sins of God's people as he eats bread, and will not call on the name of the Lord." Sometimes in dealing with them he has supposed them to be selfish.

Perhaps they have been so; perhaps they have manifested an unchristian spirit and temper. If they have been wrong; if they have wronged God and dishonored Him; strange to tell, sinners will gird themselves, justify their position to God, and will harden their hearts, because God's professed people have dishonored Him.

20. Men will often harden their hearts on account of the censoriousness of professors of religion. They have heard professors of religion find fault with

other professors of religion, speaking censoriously of them, and thus prejudicing them against professors of religion in general. I have often been struck with the fact that the children of censorious parents are seldom converted.

Especially if the parents are professors of religion, and if they are in the habit of speaking freely of the faults of others, real or supposed, before their children, and particularly if they speak of the faults of professors of religion and complain of ministers, their children will always harden their hearts. If you approach them on the subject of religion, they have been poisoned to death by their censorious parents. Father, or mother, or both, have said so and so about their minister, about such a one, and such a one; and this is made by them an occasion of strengthening themselves and hardening their hearts against God. I know a family where censoriousness, I am sorry to say, seems to be the whole of their conversation. The mother, especially, thinks almost all professors of religion hypocrites; particularly those in the place where she lives.

Her mouth is full of complainings of the members of the church to which she belongs; or at least of the church in the neighborhood in which she resides. Her children, consequently, are entirely opposed to religion. They have no confidence in it; they laugh, and even scoff at it; and although the mother herself is a professor of religion, by her censoriousness she has taught them to despise it. This is awful; but so it is. Parents cannot do their children a greater injury than by allowing themselves to be censorious.

They really do them a greater mischief than Satan can do them. They are in fact more the enemies of the souls of their children than the devil himself is. They have something to say against almost every professor of religion. The deacons of course are all wrong; the minister neglects them, they say; and as for the business men of the church, they are all defrauders or defaulters; and as for the women, they are all out of the way. Nobody is right; the church are all hypocrites; and this their children are taught to believe. Now how could the devil do worse than this? You may almost as well go into a nest of serpents to try to make an impression on them with truth, as into a family where they are censorious. You will find the household, from the oldest to the youngest, hardening their hearts; and the moment you approach them, they begin to pour forth their prejudices and their complaints against others.

21. Sinners still more frequently harden their hearts by yielding to their own censorious tendencies. They have a bitter, sour spirit themselves. They are selfish, and suspect everybody else of being selfish.

Judging others by themselves, they have little confidence in anybody, and are strongly disposed to attribute the worst motives to almost everybody. This is the tendency of some minds; and they often harden their hearts by indulging this spirit. They grieve and resist the Spirit of God by the free manner in which they let their tongues loose and slander their neighbors.

22. Men harden their hearts by holding fast their schemes of ambition. They mark out for themselves certain courses of life, and propose to accomplish certain ends. These ends are selfish; nevertheless, they commit themselves to realize them. The moment you bring before them the claims of God, and they are seen to conflict with the carrying out of their ambitious schemes, they immediately resist.

For a time, I did so myself. Success in my profession was a thing to which I had committed myself; and I was aware that if I became a Christian, I might be called to preach the Gospel. At any rate, I thought I could not, for conscience's sake, successfully carry out my ambitious projects in my profession. This, for a time, was conclusive against my yielding to the claims of God. I girded myself, and hardened my heart, and resisted these claims for a season, that I might carry out and realize my ambitious projects.

23. Men often harden their hearts through fear of being ridiculed, or persecuted, if they become religious.

Sometimes they have friends to whom they are strongly attached, and to whom they stand committed not to become religious. I have known cases of this kind, where persons were found to be committed to their irreligious, and perhaps skeptical friends; and they would withstand the claims of God, and harden their hearts like an adamant stone, because of these committals to their ungodly friends.

24. Sometimes through strong attachments, and entanglements in love affairs, men will harden their hearts against God. Lovers are very apt to withstand the claims of God, unless the parties can mutually agree to become Christians. Sometimes husbands and wives will each withstand the

claims of God, because the other party is not a Christian. I have known cases repeatedly, where the wife would resist the claims of God, because her husband was not a Christian; and the husband would resist the claims of God, because his wife was not a Christian. Indeed, in some instances, I have known them to affirm that they would rather go to hell with an unconverted companion, than to be saved without them.

A lady of decided standing in society once told me that she was not going to become a Christian; that it would destroy all family happiness; and she would sooner go to hell with her unconverted husband, than give up her sympathy with him in his impenitence and become a Christian.

Sometimes they fear persecution from the other party, or from friends, or from enemies; and will, therefore, harden their hearts whenever the claims of God are presented.

25. Sometimes sinners harden their hearts through the insane assumption that Christians will triumph over them, if they submit to the claims of God. I know a young lady, who, when pressed with the claims of God, after weighing the matter for a time, decided against these claims and hardened her heart, because she said that a certain Christian lady who had talked often with her, and prayed much with her, would triumph over her if now she became a Christian.

"I will not submit," says she, "for mother so and so," naming her, "will shout, 'victory, victory through the blood of the Lamb,' I will not have Christians triumph over me, that I have at last submitted."

26. Sinners often harden their hearts, because it does not suit their present convenience to repent and become Christians. They are determined to make no sacrifice, and to be at no pains to become Christians at present. They have some objections; therefore, they treat the claims of God contemptuously, and intend to harden their hearts against Him, until it is in all respects convenient for them to yield to His claims.

27. Sinners often harden their hearts through a spirit of presumption. As the Bible says, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore, the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." This fully setting the heart is the same as hardening the heart. They think there is

time enough; they presume that God will wait upon them; that they shall live long, or at any rate, shall not die speedily. They, therefore, resolve upon putting it off, presuming that there will be time enough before they die; and thus they trifle with the claims of God, commit the horrible sin of presumption, and often bring upon themselves swift destruction.

III. I will briefly consider the guilt involved in hardening the heart against God.

1. Observe that it is a voluntary act, and an act of direct resistance against God's most righteous claims. It is a direct refusal to obey and acknowledge duty to the blessed God; and is, therefore, as dishonest and wicked as possible. It is saying to God, "I know the claim is just, but I cannot pay it."

And, then, to aggravate the guilt of this hardening of the heart, resort is had to reasons the most ridiculous, unreasonable, and blasphemous. Just consider all the reasons to which I have alluded, for a man's hardening himself against the claims of God. In every case the reason assigned for resisting God's claims is but adding an insult to an injury. First to refuse to obey God, and then to assign such reasons for disobedience, is a direct and horrible insult to the blessed God.

2. It is a direct resistance to His earnest and honest offers of mercy. The sinner is not satisfied with refusing to obey God; he is not satisfied to trample on His authority and His law, and to harden himself against every commandment of God; he also directly resists and pours contempt upon His offers of mercy. And he not only resists the commands, but the importunities and entreaties of God.

God commands, expostulates, entreats, beseeches, urges by every moving consideration; pours His love and mercy as an ocean around him; but he hardens himself against them all, contemns alike justice and mercy. Present to him the commands and threatenings of God, and he hardens himself, and says, he is not going to be moved by threatenings, he is not going to submit to authority. Present to him the compassion, the urgent mercy of God, and then he will cavil, that he does not deserve the punishment supposed in the offer of mercy; or, Christians have done something wrong. Thus he will resort to every miserable and provoking shift conceivable, to justify himself in rejecting mercy.

3. It is setting the worst possible example; and example is the highest moral influence that can be exerted. Actions speak more emphatically than words.

If a man resists the claims of God, he virtually invites all others, over whom he has influence, to resist these claims also. He need not say in words, "Come, let us resist the claims of God;" to persist in resisting them himself, is the loudest call on others to resist them, of which he is capable. No thanks to the sinner if God has a virtuous subject in His kingdom. The man that hardens his heart against God, does the utmost he can to lead all others to do so.

4. But what is the real guilt involved in this course? Wherein does the guilt of this dishonesty consist? I answer, it consists in its being a violation of our obligation to love God and our neighbor; that is, to exercise good-will to God and our neighbor.

Now, how great is our obligation to love God and our neighbor? I answer, it is as great as God's desire of our love; it is as great as His righteous claim upon our obedience; it is as great as the intrinsic value of the good of Himself and His universe which He requires us to will. The fundamental reason why we would will the good of God and His universe, is the intrinsic value of this good to God and His universe. This is the fundamental reason that imposes the obligation on us. It is the intrinsic value of this good, in view of which God commands us to will it. Now, if this is the reason we should will it, if this reason imposes the obligation, the obligation is as great and broad as the reason that imposes it.

Now the reason that imposes the obligation, or the consideration in view of which the mind affirms the obligation, is the intrinsic value of the good of God and the universe. This good we necessarily affirm to be of infinite value; the obligation, therefore, is infinitely broad; and we ourselves cannot but affirm that there is no limit to our obligation to love God, to obey Him and confide in Him. The guilt, then, of refusing to comply with this obligation must be as great as the obligation; and the obligation must be equal to the reason that imposes it.

But the considerations that impose the obligation are absolutely infinite; there can, therefore, be no bounds to the guilt of hardening the heart against the claims of God.

IV. I will notice briefly the danger of hardening the heart against God.

1. It is dangerous, because, if you continue it, you will never be converted.
2. The fact is, the course you are pursuing, sinner, is an insane war upon your own soul.
3. The same is true if you are a backslider; if you harden your heart and continue to do so, it will surely be fatal to you. There is no power in the universe that can save you, if you will persist in hardening your heart against God.
4. It is dangerous, because you have already contracted the habit of hardening yourself; and it is of course more natural for you to do it now, than it was at first. Indeed it has become highly probable, that with respect to many of you, you never will do otherwise than to continue to harden your heart till you find yourselves in hell.
5. You are in great danger of being given up of God. If you read the verses in connection with the text you will see that this is the use the apostle makes of the conduct of the Jews. They continued to harden their hearts against God, during their journey in the wilderness. They would murmur through unbelief, and strengthen themselves in their unreasonable prejudices and opposition. God bore with their manners for a long time; and finally brought them up to the borders of the promised land, and commanded them to go up and take possession. They had frequently hardened their hearts before; but now, doubtless, they thought God had borne with them so long that they might tempt Him once more; and they hardened their hearts against Him once more. They sent up spies, and these came back and reported that they were unable to go up and possess the land. This produced a murmur and a hardening of heart throughout the whole camp of Israel. The time had arrived for God to make this generation an example. He swore in His wrath that they never should enter into His rest; He turned them back and wasted their carcasses in the wilderness.

Hear again, then, what He says, "He limited a certain day; as the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart."

Some of you have often hardened your hearts against the claims of the mercy of God. If you do it today again, it may seal your doom. If you go from this

house hardening your heart today, it may be the Lord will lift up His hand and swear that you shall never enter into His rest. I beseech you, therefore, I conjure you by the mercies of God, that today you hear His voice, and harden not your heart.

REMARKS.

1. In the light of this subject we can see why so many persons have little or no religious feeling. The fact is, their will is committed in the attitude of disobedience and self-seeking; consequently they divert their thoughts from all that class of truths that would make them feel.

2. Please remember that men are the authors of their own hardness of heart. Sinners often complain of their hardness of heart, as if it was not of their own creation. They speak of it as if it were not their own persistent act. In such cases, they mean by hardness of heart simply the apathy of their sensibility, their want of feeling. But this is only a result, a natural consequence of the hardness of their hearts. It is the stubbornness of their will, their willfulness, that constitutes the hardness of their hearts; and, as we have seen, this want of feeling is a result. To be sure, they cannot feel while their will remains girded and embraced in its opposition to God. Or, if they do feel, their feelings will be those of remorse, and regret, and agony; the tender emotions cannot be brought into exercise while they harden themselves, and make their wills obstinate in resistance to God.

3. We see many persons trying to feel by making efforts to feel; trying to excite emotions of sorrow, and love, and gratitude, while the controversy is not yielded, so far as the attitude of their will is concerned. They have not submitted themselves to God, have not adjusted themselves in His will, have not yielded the controversy; and yet they are endeavoring to feel as if they had yielded the controversy. Their voluntary stubbornness remains, and they are vainly endeavoring to feel.

This, I, fear, is the case with many of you. You complain that you do not feel; you spend your time in trying to feel. You would feel sorrow for your sins, while you persist in holding fast to them. You would force the tender emotions towards God into exercise, while your will cruelly braces itself against Him. In this you labor in vain, and spend your strength for naught.

4. By what innumerable shifts men harden their hearts and secure their own

damnation. I might as well preach a month as an hour, in enumerating the innumerable ways in which men manage to harden their hearts against God. Men manifest a kind of infernal sagacity and cunning in resorting to every possible excuse that shall justify their stubbornness towards their heavenly Father. They make constant resistance to His claims and offers of mercy.

5. Sinners use their free agency, even the whole strength of it, to resist their own salvation. This is the only reason why men are lost. Christ has died for all men, and offers salvation to all.

The fact that men have sinned, is no sufficient reason that they should be lost; but if they will harden their hearts against the claims and mercies of God, it is impossible for Him to save them.

It is forever impossible, in the nature of the case, that a man should be forced to submit to the claims of God. God cannot by any possibility force him to heaven. Forced action is not moral action. Where force begins, moral action ends.

No moral change, or change involving moral character, can possibly take place in man without his own free consent; and every change implies the power of resisting any possible amount of motive that can be presented. Let no man suppose that God will ever, or can, by any possibility, force his will, in making him a Christian.

And now, sinner, I conjure you to remember, that if you persist in hardening your heart, you render your salvation impossible, even to God Himself.

If you harden your heart as you have done, if you persist in this course but a little longer, your judgment which now of a long time lingereth not, and your damnation that slumbereth not, will overtake you. O, will you remember this? will you lay it to heart? will you be wise, and this day hear His voice, and no longer harden your hearts?

6. How astonishing is the long-suffering of God? How many ways have you hardened your hearts against Him! How many times have you betaken yourselves to the most absurd, unreasonable, provoking reasons for girding yourself and resisting the claims of God! And God's forbearance is still lengthened out, even to this long-suffering! Will it not suffice you thus far to have resisted the mercy and compassion of God? I beseech you, now let the controversy cease. Lay down your weapons; accept God's claims; humble

yourself under His mighty hand; lay down your sins, and accept the offer of eternal life.

But let me ask, if today you refuse to hear His voice, and again harden your heart, will you have any reason to complain if God gives you up to a reprobate mind, and lifts up His hand and swears that you shall never enter into His rest? Will you have any claim upon God, if now today, after so long a time, you harden your heart? Can you object if His Spirit is withdrawn, and the offer of mercy is made no more!

Take care what you do! Act in view of the solemn judgment! Remember what the text speaks to you, "Today, after so long a time, saith the Holy Ghost, as it is said, Today, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart."

LECTURE VII.

April 10, 1861

TENDER-HEARTEDNESS --No. 3

Text.--Eph. 4: 32: "Be ye tender-hearted."

In speaking from these words I inquire,

I. What it is to be tender-hearted.

II. The effects and manifestations of tender-heartedness.

I. What it is to be tender-hearted.

In my last I said that hard-heartedness was stubbornness; that it consisted in the committed state of the will against the claims of God; was a selfish, unsubdued will.

Tender-heartedness is the opposite of this. It is the will committed to the claims of God, in the attitude of obedience to God, of submission to Him. It is, in short, benevolence; a state of mind adjusted in the will of God; a state that accepts His whole will, and commits the whole mind to obedience.

II. I notice the effects and manifestations of this tender-heartedness.

1. Candor is an effect and a manifestation of this state of the will.

A tender heart will always use the intellect in a candid manner; it will weigh evidence, and be careful to do nobody any injustice in judgment; it will weigh the claims of God, and the claims of a neighbor. Hence,

2. It will be easily convinced of error, if error there be. Being candid and open to conviction, and in a yielding state of mind to all truth and duty, if any error is indulged, the mind is very open to conviction.

3. Another effect and manifestation of tender-heartedness is great readiness to retract any error of practice or opinion.

The mind, yielding as air, is easily convinced of error; and when convinced, spontaneously retracts. The opposite of this is true in hardness of heart. The mind is uncandid, hard to be convinced, and not ready to retract even then.

4. Another effect and manifestation of tenderness of heart is a fear of prejudice, or pre-judgment. A mind in this state will be on its guard against a hasty opinion, and especially a hasty judgment against any person. In this state everybody is loved; consequently the mind is disposed to think favorable of all the objects of its regard.

It is disposed to judge charitably, and to avoid all prejudice. It regards prejudice as a great injustice; and if prejudices have been entertained, this state of mind will instantly yield them, and yield them joyfully, as soon as evidence can be obtained to show that there is prejudice.

5. Another effect and manifestation of tenderness of heart is charitableness in judgment.

As I have just said, the state of heart of which we are speaking, is that of love to God and man; consequently the mind in this state will judge kindly and hopefully of everybody so far as it honestly can.

6. A sixth manifestation of this state of mind is tenderness of conscience.

When the heart is tender, the conscience is very susceptible, easily excited to activity, and readily makes its impression on the sensibility. You will find persons in this state exceedingly sensitive of the presence of any sin. Its perceptions of moral distinctions are very delicate; and its decisions are very

emphatic, and often tremendously severe. I have known persons to have so much tenderness of heart as to receive impressions that were almost unendurable.

7. A tender heart will be appreciative of the nature of sin.

Sin consists in a state of mind that does not care for God or man; but cares really only for self and for those that are regarded as parts of self.

It is a state that refuses to will the good of God and of being in general; and does not really concern itself for any interests but its own. Now a tender heart can appreciate the great wickedness of this contempt of the interests of others; this reckless disregard of God and man.

To have neglected God appears to a tender heart to be a great and awful sin.

To have cared nothing for His rights, or interests, or glory, appears to a tender heart to be a sin well-worthy of damnation.

8. A tender heart will manifest a great sensibility in regard to the intrinsic ill-desert of sin. It will readily concede that it deserves eternal banishment from God. It is not blind to the ill-desert of sin, as hardness of heart is; but it can assign no bounds to the guilt of sin.

To have wronged God is an inexpressibly terrible thing to a tender heart.

9. A tender heart will manifest, at times, deep sorrow for sin. Not only can it appreciate intellectually the guilt of sin; but the sensibility is easily and deeply broken up by this sense of the guilt of sin.

A tender heart is a loving heart. A loving heart throws the sensibility open to be deeply moved by a sense of the intrinsic guilt of sin against God. The fountains of the great deep of the sensibility are easily broken up, and sorrows easily gush and flow where the will has yielded the whole controversy and taken its proper attitude. If the will has given scope to the feelings, and has let in upon the sensibility the real facts as they are in all their freshness, the sorrows will gush like a fountain.

10. A tender heart is highly appreciative of the love and compassion of God. It will not only admit the great love and compassion of God, but it will feel it.

It throws the sensibility open to be affected by a sense of this love and compassion. It throws open the windows of the mind to let in the light of God's compassion, its warmth and its influence. In this state the soul will not complain that it cannot realize the love and compassion of God.

11. A tender heart is greatly humbled by a sense of the love and compassion of Christ, and deeply moved in view of what He has done to atone for sin.

This looks dreamy to a hard heart; but to a tender heart it is reality. The love of Christ in dying for the soul, is an overwhelming consideration to a tender heart.

I can conceive that a daughter might become so hardened toward her mother, so disobedient and unsubdued, as to do that which would cost her mother her life; and yet be unable either to appreciate her own sin, or the great love of her mother in giving up her life for her daughter.

But on the other hand, I can conceive a daughter so subdued, that, if she had done that which had cost her mother her life, she would feel as if she never could forgive herself; never could think of it without a flood of tears; never could speak of it without breaking down with sorrow.

If her heart were tender, the very thought of what she had done, and what love and compassion the suffering mother had for her, would carry her away in a flood of weeping. Thus it is in respect to Christ. When the heart is tender, the whole mind is easily affected, greatly subdued, and humbled unspeakably low, in view of those sins that crucified Christ, that love that bore our sins in His own body on the tree.

12. A tender heart will always manifest great religious sensibility on all questions connected with the kingdom of Christ. You will find that such a mind is easily excited, and more easily excited on religious subjects than any other. There is a general tenderness of feelings, and a great susceptibility of emotion, especially of the tender emotions.

13. A tender heart will always manifest great fear of grieving Christ. It will have supreme regard to Christ's feelings. It cannot bear to grieve, cannot bear to offend Him. It will often seem to such a mind that it had rather die than to grieve the Savior. It will not only say with Joseph, "How can I commit this great wickedness and sin against God," but it will

spontaneously exclaim in the presence of temptation, "I cannot, will not do that which will grieve the Savior that died for me."

14. A tender heart will manifest great fear of stumbling others, of misleading them, of creating prejudice in their minds against Christ or His religion. It will manifest great fear of saying or doing anything that may in anywise mislead them to their injury, or to the injury of the kingdom of Christ. If at any time it has done anything to stumble others, the recollection of it will be too painful for endurance; and the soul will hasten to remove the stumbling block, and will not rest until it is done.

15. A tender heart will manifest great reluctance to grieve any one. If, in faithfulness to the souls of any, it finds itself obliged to be severe, to reprove and rebuke with any degree of sternness, it will be done with reluctance and with grief; and the tender-hearted will often find that in probing others he inflicts a deep wound on his own sensibility; that while he uses the sword of the Spirit unsparingly, the foundations of his own compassion are stirred to their bottom. He will be obliged to gird himself with the whole strength of his will to perform the duty, and strengthen himself to the utmost to avoid breaking down in the effort.

16. Tenderness of heart will manifest great readiness to repent and confess, if in anything it finds itself to have been in the wrong. The repentance will be spontaneous, and the confession thorough.

To such a mind it is no trial to confess, but rather a luxury. Confession will not be guarded and half-hearted; but such a soul will make a clean breast of it, and confess the whole, and will not stop short of finding full relief.

17. A tender heart will manifest great tenderness in justifying self. It is apt to be suspicious of self; and is afraid of a self-justifying spirit.

It will not, as a general thing assert at once its own consciousness of innocence; but, if there be any doubt, will take the matter into consideration, look narrowly into all the motives, weigh every circumstance with great candor, and will after all often come to the conclusion that Paul did when he said, "I will not judge mine own self."

Or at any rate, if it cannot see its wrong, it will say, "I leave it to the judgment of God. I may be wrong, though I am not conscious of it. Still, I

will not be too positive; God may see that I am in the wrong."

But again,

18. A tender heart is very apt to manifest a self-accusing spirit.

It is curious to see that where brethren in the hardness of their hearts have each held the other to be in the wrong; as soon as their hearts become tender, each one insists that he is almost, if not altogether, in the wrong. He thinks himself greatly more to blame than his brother; and often so much so, that he frequently thinks that his brother would not have been in the blame at all if it had not been for his own wrong. I have seen many instances of this -- that as soon as the hearts of the people become tender, every one could see his own wrong much more plainly than he could his brother's.

And a self-accusing spirit, rather than a self-justifying spirit, is manifest throughout the whole circle of the tender-hearted.

19. A tender heart manifests a spirit of self-loathing. It cannot endure its former selfishness and folly. When it thinks of its former self-seeking and wicked state of mind, it cannot express the loathing that it has of self. Such a mind seems to itself to have been the most hateful of all beings -- perhaps the most worthy of damnation, or least worthy of notice; and often feels surprised that anybody should treat it otherwise than with utter neglect and contempt.

In speaking the other day to a sister in the church, whose heart has recently become tender, I said to her that I was trying to get time to call upon her. She replied, tearfully, "How can you think of calling upon me? I am not worthy that anybody should take any notice of me." As I was speaking to a brother but a few days since, he made this remark: "I am not worthy to be on the face of the earth -- I am not fit to live in human society -- I am a loathing to myself -- I have no right to live, I have been so vile."

And yet neither of these persons have been guilty, to my knowledge, of any conduct that in the sight of men would have been regarded as disgraceful. But this is the natural tendency of a tender heart when fully convinced by the Spirit of God.

In another case, a sister said to me, "I never saw myself as I have today. I am

so hateful, I do not think it would be right in God to forgive me. Really, I do not want to be forgiven -- I feel as if God's honor so demanded that I should be punished." And this she said with many tears, and in a tone and with a manner so subdued as to be very touching. How opposite all this to hardness of heart!

20. A tender heart will manifest much concern lest it should be more highly thought of than is just and reasonable. It will manifest a desire to confess over and over again, to make confession and restitution full and complete; and if it discovers any want of fullness in the confession or restitution, it will not rest without repeating it and making such additions as shall fully meet the convictions of this deeply impressed spirit.

21. A tender heart will manifest a great unwillingness to blame others. It "hopeth all things;" it "believeth all things." It is ready to "cover a multitude of sins;" and especially will this be so in regard to sins committed against itself. If it has been wronged in anywise, it does not heap the blame upon the offending party. It does not delight in this, in criminating and making out the strongest case against the offender, but exactly the opposite. It will judge him as charitably as possible; it will make for him all reasonable apologies. It does not like to bear down upon him, and dwell upon his fault; but is easily pacified, ready to overlook, spontaneous in forgiveness. It will forgive willingly and thoroughly; will make a clean breast of forgiveness, laying up nothing, holding on to no shade of resentful feeling.

22. A tender heart is slow to believe evil of others. It loves every one, and therefore is disposed to think well of every one. This is the natural result of love. We do not easily believe evil of those whom we greatly love, but on the contrary are slow to believe evil of them.

The tender-hearted are slow to believe evil of any one, either friends or foes.

Indeed, a tender-hearted soul has no foes, in the sense of his having any enmity toward any one. It loves all; it can pray for all; it is disposed to think well of all; and it is always grieved when compelled to believe evil of any one.

Hard-heartedness is the opposite of this. It manifests a readiness to believe evil, to judge harshly and censoriously; it is ready to retain resentful feelings;

it forgives ungraciously and superficially, and after all, retains resentful feelings. But not so with tender-heartedness.

Tender-heartedness is grieved to be obliged to think evil of others; and dismisses all such thoughts, and all such judgments, and all such things, from the mind as soon as possible.

23. Kindness of manner is always an effect and manifestation of tenderness of heart. It cannot be unkind in manner; but is loving, compassionate, forbearing.

In manner, and tone of voice, and gesture, and look, it will be kind, compassionate, benevolent.

24. Another effect of tenderness of heart is generosity. It is generous to the poor, generous in trade, generous in social intercourse. Largeness of heart and beneficence will always manifest themselves when the heart is tender.

25. A self-sacrificing spirit for the good of others will always be manifested when the heart is tender. It is striking to see how much pains the tender-hearted will take to promote the good of others.

This Jesus did; this His followers do; this is natural as its breath to a tender-hearted mind. It does not come hard for the tender-hearted to deny themselves, to make sacrifices for the good of others. In them it is spontaneous; it is an outburst of a state of mind; it is the natural development of a Christian spirit within them.

You will find that such persons are always willing to do all they can for God and souls; and indeed, they are greatly desirous of doing a great deal more good than they can. Their hearts are often too large for their means. When they have done all they can, it seems to them that they have done little; and their grief is that they cannot do more. They will cry out within, "O, for an ocean of means to meet the necessities of all the children of want!"

26. A tender heart never indulges hard or resentful feelings at all. If in any way disobliged, it lays up nothing; if in anywise wronged, it spontaneously forgives; and can earnestly pray that God would bring the wrong-doer to repentance, and forgive him.

27. The tender-hearted will not resent reproof; but are always thankful for it. The more thoroughly and honestly you call the attention of such a one to anything that has been wrong in himself, he is all the more your friend. He really thanks you for the suggestion or the reproof; and will be sure to profit by it. He realizes that they are his best friends who deal most faithfully with him. He sincerely wishes to be rid of everything that can hinder his usefulness, or in anywise do harm. He sincerely wishes to set everything right with God and man; and most thankful is he to any one that will kindly help him to understand himself.

28. Of course the tender-hearted have no enemies, in the sense that they have any quarrel with anybody.

They are not easily offended; they are not jealous, and critical, and ready to make another an offender for a word. They are ready to make apologies for those who in anywise appear either to neglect them or to encroach upon their rights.

29. The tender-hearted will manifest a realizing sense of the reality of religious truth. The Bible deeply impresses them; preaching, and all religious truth, makes them deeply solemn. It greatly searches them; it takes hold upon their whole being; and to them it is a solemn matter to have God speak to them. In this state of mind they are easily and savingly influenced by the truth of God. Every sermon will take effect upon them.

30. The tender-hearted manifest great depth and sincerity of feeling.

In them there is nothing of affectation; for they feel so deeply that no affectation is necessary, and there is no temptation to any such thing. There is no cant about them, no effort to get up an appearance of feeling; but it requires a great deal more effort to suppress the too audible manifestation of it. There is everything in religious truth to make the soul feel, to excite it in the very highest degree. When the heart is hard this is not realized, the truth is not seen; but when the eye is single, the whole body is full of light. When the heart is tender, then truth has a tremendous bearing on the sensibility. It moves it in all its depths and manifestations; and it sometimes requires not a little effort to suppress even the boisterous manifestations of feeling. I have often, myself, when my heart was thoroughly subdued, felt it difficult to avoid screaming in view of the state of sinners, or shouting in view of the

love of God. In this state of mind the will is yielded up to truth; and consequently the feelings, having full scope, are very liable to boil over.

But of course there is a good deal of difference in different temperaments, in respect to the extent to which the feelings will be excited when the heart is tender. But as all men have sensibility, all men can feel when the appropriate conditions are fulfilled; and when the heart is tender, there is generally a very great susceptibility to feeling in every mind.

Men are very apt to apologize for the want of feeling, by saying, that they are of such a temperament that they cannot expect to feel. I have heard much of this; and often have I seen these same persons, when thoroughly subdued to God, as full of feeling as they could hold.

31. A tender heart will manifest much prayerfulness for the salvation of souls. When the heart is tender, compassion is strongly excited, the danger of souls is clearly apprehended, so that crying to God in their behalf is an inevitable result.

Persons in this state of mind will not go over with a cold statement of their own wants, and confine their prayers to themselves and a few friends; but the yearnings of such a mind will pour themselves out in mighty prayer for those that are perishing.

32. A tender heart will manifest much watchfulness, and will walk softly before God. When the heart is tender, there is a solemn awe vesting upon the mind; a fearfulness of offending in word, or thought, or deed; a watchfulness over the tongue and over the life; and a walking carefully and softly, lest the Holy Spirit should be grieved.

33. A man of tender heart will manifest much concern for backsliders. He will be pitiful and earnest; and in endeavors to reclaim them will try to restore them in the spirit of meekness, considering himself lest he also should be tempted.

REMARKS.

1. How differently does everything appear in this state from what it does in a state of hardness of heart. Religion, the world, our neighbors, our sins, the conduct of everybody else -- all, all appear so changed as soon as the heart is

softened.

The change is indeed wonderful, in passing from a state of hardness to a state of tenderness of heart. It seems almost as if we had changed worlds. Everything is seen in so different a light; everything makes so different an impression upon us! Life is altogether a different affair -- and so is death.

2. When the heart is softened there is a great readiness to correct any mistakes that were made while the heart was hard. Even bargains that were made in hardness of heart, and without any misgiving, at the time, as to their being truly honest, will be seen, often, when the heart is tender, to have been oppressive and selfish; and the mind will not willingly let them rest without proposing to set the matter right.

A hard-hearted man buys a poor man's cow. The poor man needs to sell her, and he buys her for a little less than what she is worth. When his heart becomes tender and he thinks of the poor man's cow, he will be very apt not to rest till he pays the full value of her. I have known many striking instances like this.

3. A tender heart always brings great peace to the soul.

While the heart is hard, the mind is restive under the government of God; and in human society the will is too stiff. The hard-hearted man elbows his way in human society, and chafes under the government of God. But as soon as his heart is tender and subdued, he quiets himself like a weaned child under the government of God. He bows himself to the providence of God; he feels his way carefully and kindly among mankind; he walks in peace with God, and so far as in him lies with all men.

4. It is easy to deal with tender hearted people. They are fair-minded, honorable, and will take no advantage. In dealing with them you need not stand upon your guard lest they should devour you; for they spontaneously give you that which is your own.

They are not grasping, and trying to get the lion's share; but would do by their neighbors as they would do by themselves.

It is easy to get along with tender-hearted people, in all the concerns of life. They are candid, unselfish, good neighbors, kind friends, generous and loving in all the relation of life.

5. There is something very beautiful in tender-heartedness.

Indeed, it is often very affecting to see the beauty of a tender-hearted mind.

To see its simplicity, its unaffected sincerity, its self-sacrifice, its pains-taking for the food of others, its care not to injure others, its fear of prejudice -- and indeed all the manifestations of such a mind are so symmetrical, so beautiful, so Christ-like -- it is a luxury to live and move in the midst of such minds.

6. How beautiful will heaven be, where all hearts are tender; and God's heart the most tender of all.

There is no hard place in God's heart; no hard heart in heaven; no blind, selfish mind; no censorious, cruel, unfeeling soul there; but all is perfect tenderness, and on God's part infinite tenderness.

7. It often requires great nerve to probe and search a tender heart. It sometimes happens that a mind that has become tender-hearted, has forgotten some past wrong. Its attention needs to be called to something it has not considered. In this state the soul will be aware that there is something that binds here and there; and that the mind, though tender, has not yet full liberty. The spirit of prayer does not flow spontaneously; there is something that binds the feelings, something that checks the power of faith.

In such cases the heart needs searching; the wedges that bind, need to be sought out; the error detected. But to do this, as I said, requires nerve, and is often a painful operation to the one who is called to this duty.

I must say, that in my own experience, I have often undergone exquisite suffering from having such a work to do.

It has been sometimes with the utmost difficulty that I could make up my mind to use the probe thoroughly; and when I could see what needed to be said, it seemed as if I could scarcely say it. But yet such a labor always pays. When the work is done, the mind is healed; and you will surely say that the pain could be well-afforded.

8. Tenderness of heart is always essential to peace of mind and joy in God. And where the heart is really tender, and it has been thoroughly searched and emptied, its peace will be like a river, and its joy purely spontaneous.

Lastly. Let no one stop short of a thoroughly tender heart. When the members of a church are tender-hearted, it is easy to settle all difficulties.

The brethren are then disposed, each one, to blame himself; and to go as far as he ought in justifying others.

All are ready to forgive; and there is no difficulty that cannot be well and easily settled. I have often seen brethren in a state of controversy in which I could see that the whole difficulty with them was the hardness of their hearts. They were blind, and for the time being each thought the other to be the most in fault. But as soon as their hearts are tender, this state of things is reversed. Each one is ready to blame himself, and difficulties will soon be adjusted. Brethren in such cases will not rest nor sleep, if they can avoid it, till they have confessed to each other, and prayed with each other, and restored each other to confidence.

Neighborhood broils will cease, family broils will cease, church broils will cease, as soon as the hearts of the parties are tender. Church-members will cease to oppose their ministers, and ministers cease to think hard of their people, when there is mutual tenderness of heart. Then there will be no controversy which shall be greatest; but members will vie with each other to get the lowest seat, each one feeling, the lowest seat belongs to me.

[Back to Top](#)

The Kingdom of God In Consciousness

Lecture VIII

April 24, 1861

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 14:17: "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

In speaking from these words, I inquire --

I. What is the kingdom of God?

II. Three particulars which constitute this kingdom of God.

I. What is the kingdom of God?

Answer:

1. It is not an outward organization; it is not the visible church, or any ecclesiastical establishment whatever.
2. It is not any material or worldly good.
3. But it is the reign of Christ, the King, in the soul of man.

II. I notice the three particulars which are here said to constitute this kingdom of God, "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

1. What is righteousness?

Answer:

(1.) Righteousness is moral uprightness. This is that love to God and man which the Bible requires. Righteousness does not belong strictly to muscular action, but to the state of the heart. And righteousness is really the spirit of the moral law existing and established in the heart. Christ promised that at a certain time he would "write his law upon the hearts of his people, and engrave it in their inward parts, and they should all know the Lord from the least of them unto the greatest of them." The spirit of this law, that which the law really requires in its meaning and intent, is supreme, perfect, disinterested love to God, and equal love to man.

It requires that God should be loved for his own sake, and supremely, because He is supremely and infinitely great and good; that man should be loved as we love ourselves; and that this love to God and man should be expressed in all appropriate ways in all the relations of life. This love, with all its appropriate expressions in the temper, and life, and spirit, is righteousness. It is a voluntary love; and therefore must reveal itself in uprightness of life in every relation in which we exist.

(2.) Righteousness is the opposite of unrighteousness. Unrighteousness

is a withholding from God and man their due; a spirit of don't-care for God or man; that contemns the rights, and feelings, and authority of God, and the rights of our neighbor. It is a want of conformity to the moral law, a voluntary withholding of obedience to it. Righteousness is the opposite of this. It is love positively exercised, with all its positive fruits.

It is real active devotion to the whole mind of God, and also devotion to the interests and well being of man.

(3.) Righteousness is a state of mind in which there is a continual offering of self in a confiding love-service to God. God is served diligently and with all the powers, with respect to him and not for pay. It is a cheerful and willing service; not because we must, but from a supreme interest in him.

It always implies diligence, and industry, and study, to please God; it always implies the avoiding of everything that can displease him; and in short, it consists in the heart's being fully committed to do and suffer all the will of God, and that readily, and joyfully for his own sake.

(4.) Righteousness also involves sincere devotion to the interests of man; a willingness to deny self when by so doing we can promote the greater good of others, and that from real regard to our fellow-man as to a brother. It is in fact the spirit of universal brotherhood practically carried out.

This, then, is the righteousness which constitutes the great element or peculiarity of the kingdom of God in the soul.

It is Christ's righteousness imparted to the soul of man. It is Christ's law or will taking effect in the soul of man, and begetting his own righteousness in us; and thus we come to be partakers of the righteousness of God, not merely by imputation, but by actual experience, and active love and service. I pray you, let no one overlook the true end of righteousness. Do not forget that true righteousness is the very love in kind that is in Christ's own heart, and that led him to do all he had done for mankind.

This love, it should be understood, must necessarily express itself in the

life, because the connection between this love and outward action is a connection of necessity. This love consists in the will's devotion to God and to the good of man. It is consecration; it is making common cause with God and man, and unifying ourselves with God's state of mind.

2. The second element of the kingdom of God in the soul of man is said to be "peace."

(1.) Peace of mind is not apathy; a state of indifference to God, his claims, or service. Peace is the opposite of war, or strife, or friction, under the government of God. I say, it is the opposite of this; it is a state of cordiality, and of conscious cordiality, existing between the soul and God.

(2.) It does not consist merely in the soul's being reconciled to God, but also includes the fact that God is reconciled to man, and that this is revealed to us in consciousness. In this state of mind we are aware that God has accepted us, and forgiven us, that our peace is made with him.

(3.) Peace is a state of universal satisfaction of mind with God's will as expressed in creation and providence, his law and gospel. I say satisfaction with his will, for if in anything we are not satisfied with God, we are restive, like an ungoverned child. If we profess to submit, we do it ungraciously, and not really. There cannot be peace between us and God as long as a particle of dissatisfaction with God's ways and will remains in the heart.

(4.) This peace is a state of mind in which there is a conscious yielding of everything that God claims. The mind is settled to do so; to make this the universal law of our activity; to accept all God's requirements, and yield, not merely of necessity, but willingly and cordially to all that He requires of us.

This state of mind is like the calm, deep flow of a river. It is a calm, deep flow of feeling in conscious harmony with God's state of mind. It is remarkable that in this state of mind we are conscious, not of the mind's lying still, and being in a quiescent state, but the sensibility seems to be flowing, a deep current of the mind. And it all flows in one direction. Like a river, there is no conflicting of different currents, some flowing in

one direction, and some in another.

There may be ripples in the current -- there may be obstructions so that the waters in one place may dam up and boil over the obstructions, but there are no counter currents forcing their way upward and conflicting with the general stream, with the little eddies here and there, and the obstructions, and boilings up, and flowings around the obstructing objects here and there. Upon the whole, the whole movement of the mind, the intellect, the sensibility, the will, all come flowing in one direction, and the flow is harmony; the flow is peace, the flow is a deep, broad river of life and love.

This peace is like the subdued, settled, satisfied state of a weaned child. As the Psalmist says, "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of its mother; my soul is even as a weaned child."

Every one knows that an unsubdued child, unsettled in obedience, is continually chafing under parental authority; and there can be no real peace between the parent and the child unless the child be actually and thoroughly subdued, so that it will accept the will of the parent as its law of life. And when the child is really and thoroughly subdued, so that it is cheerful and satisfied with its state of subjection; when this state becomes its chosen adopted state, and this subjection is preferred to following its own counsels and its own will, then there is peace between the parent and the child. Then the child itself has peace of mind; then the child itself can be happy. It is not restive, and keeping up a constant friction with parental authority. Just so is it in the government of God. While the king is striving to set up his kingdom in the heart, and the sinner is resisting, there is conviction, remorse, dissatisfaction, struggling, evading, stubbornness, chafing, cavilling; and all the elements of disorder, of sin, of turmoil, are in the soul. In this state there can be no peace. This heart cannot be saved; it cannot, by any possibility, go to heaven. This mind can never have peace until it is completely, and joyfully, and universally subject to the will of God.

Now the peace of the gospel consists in this perfectly subdued, settled, confiding, joyful, quiescent state of mind, in respect to God, his

government, character, requirements, and dealings.

(5.) This peace always implies and includes a state of mind the opposite of condemnation and remorse.

I say, the opposite of these; in other words, we are conscious, as I have already intimated, of our being accepted; not only of our being at peace with God, but of his being at peace with us. A state of forgiveness, of being restored to favor, of being on good terms with God through his abounding grace, is always involved in this peace.

(6.) This peace is the opposite of all unbelieving carefulness, and anxiety that could corrode, fret, or distress the mind.

When the kingdom of God is set up in the soul, not only is it true that God's whole will is accepted; but the soul has such confidence in God, has such spirituality in regard to perceiving God in his universal providence, that recognizing God in all the movements of his providence, that unbelieving carefulness and corroding anxiety that so much disturbs the world, is shut out from the mind where the kingdom of God is set in.

3. I notice the third element which is involved in this kingdom of God, viz; "joy in the Holy Ghost."

(1.) This is not a mere joy arising out of the supposition that we are safe. Although this consideration is a matter of joy, still this is not the joy here mentioned. It is joy in the Holy Ghost. From union of spirit with God's Spirit, God's joy is really re-produced in us. Christ said to his disciples, "These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

(2.) Joy, or rejoicing in God, is always an element of this kingdom of God in the soul. In this kingdom, God's joy, and righteousness, and peace, are so imparted to us by the Holy Ghost, that we are really conscious, not only of being partakers of his holiness and of his divine nature, but also of drinking of the river of his own pleasures or joys. Where righteousness and peace are, there religious joy, or joy in God will be.

(3.) This joy is a rejoicing in God himself. It is not rejoicing in

ourselves, either that we are good, or that we are saved, or that we are going to heaven. God is the direct object in which we rejoice. The contemplation of God, communion with God, fills the soul with joy unspeakable; and there is in the soul of the Christian a joy deep, abiding, perennial, even amidst the trials of this life. We have always in God the same reason for rejoicing in him; He is always the same glorious, loving, infinite object of joy. The mind that is in harmony with his will, cannot but enjoy his peace, and rejoice in him. Such a mind cannot be poor; such a mind cannot want the grounds and all the elements of rejoicing. Indeed, religious joy always will be where religion is. Religion being supreme love to God and equal love to man, religion consisting in a cordial embracing of God's whole character, and will, and way, it cannot be that there shall not always be joy. And even in the midst of sorrows there will be a deep religious joy; in the midst of the trials of life, in the midst of temptations, in the midst of persecutions, and even in the article of death, there is joy, joy in God.

(4.) The mind that is devoted to God cannot be deprived of religious joy. Religious joy necessarily springs up in the very exercise of love, and faith, and gratitude. It is the natural and certain result of a truly religious state of mind. Nay, it is an element of this state of mind; it essentially belongs to a truly devout state of mind.

REMARKS.

1. This, then, must be a matter of consciousness. A religion of which we could not be conscious, could not be of much importance to us, at any rate. If we did not know whether we had it or not, surely it could not be worth having, so far as we are concerned.

But the fact is, if we can be conscious of anything, we can be, and must be, conscious of the kingdom of God existing within us.

Just think! the kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; and yet, I can remember the time when it was thought a very dark and suspicious circumstance if a person expressed great confidence that he was a Christian. It was gravely suspected by even grave divines, that such a one was not acquainted with his heart; but to express great doubts with respect to one's own conversion, was regarded as an evidence of profound humility. And we

would frequently hear the very excellent Mr. So and So, and Dr. Such a One, spoken of as having so many doubts as to whether they were Christians. Now we might earnestly and prayerfully ask, where did such views of religion come from?

2. It must also be a matter of observation, in the sense, as I have said, that the kingdom of God within a man must reveal itself in his outward life, temper, and spirit; in his business transactions; in his social and domestic relations; in his public relations; and indeed, in every relation of life.

If the kingdom of God is within him, he is an upright man; he is a benevolent man; he is a man devoted to the service of God, and to the interests of man. In business he is equitable, in politics he is honest and honorable, in every relation he is a Christian.

3. How very different is this account of the religion of Jesus, from the experience narrated in the seventh chapter of Romans, which is plainly a legal experience, in which the kingdom of God is not set up, but is striving to get possession of the heart. The eighth chapter of Romans portrays an experience in which the kingdom of God is set up in the heart; in which "the righteousness of God is fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit."

But the seventh of Romans is an experience the opposite of the eighth. Here it is all bondage, resolution, purpose, and failing. Here, instead of righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, the soul is bound fast in the cords of its own sins; floundering in a pit of mire and clay, and having neither righteousness, nor peace, nor joy in the Holy Ghost. And yet, strange to tell, this seventh of Romans has been regarded as Christian experience by a great portion of the church for centuries. There is reason to fear that millions of souls have stopped in the seventh of Romans, taking it for granted that they were converted, having mistaken conviction for conversion, and have gone down to hell.

4. How different is this account of the kingdom of God in consciousness, from the peaceless religion of a great many professors. They have no peace of mind. They are restless, restive, chafing, complaining, murmuring, resisting, and are in a constant state of turmoil and agitation in regard to their relations to God. Indeed, they know that they have no peace of mind; they know that God's whole will is not cordially accepted by them; they know that they are living in the neglect of known duty; they know that they are shunning the cross daily; they know that they are not universally devoted to God; they know that they are not

devoted to the interests of men. Of course peace is impossible to them, and they are aware that they have not this peace of mind, and this state of cordiality between themselves and God. And yet they think themselves Christians! But the kingdom of God is not within them, for Christ does not reign in their hearts, and they are in no sense prepared for heaven. Now if the kingdom of God is not within them, why should they call themselves Christians?

It is very common for persons in this state to fall back, and say, they have no dependence except upon Christ; but they depend on Christ. But surely, this is a mistake. They do not truly depend on Christ, unless Christ has really set up his throne within their hearts. If they have true faith in Christ, they have true peace, they have true righteousness, they have true joy in the Holy Ghost; but wanting these, it is a sheer delusion to say that they depend on Christ.

But they say, I do not depend on anything within myself. I do not depend on my prayers, on my own righteousness, on my peace of mind, on my joy, or upon any experience I have. No, I answer, you should not depend on any of these as the ground of your acceptance with God. But as the condition of your going to heaven, as being that without which you cannot go to heaven you must depend on this righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. This state of mind is that without which you can never go to heaven.

However perfect it may be, it is not that for which, on the ground of justice, you could be admitted to heaven, but it is that without which heaven is a natural impossibility to you.

Do not, therefore, I pray you, say, O, I am to be saved by grace, therefore I lay no stress upon my own holiness. But I ask you, my dear sir, what is salvation? Is not an element of salvation personal holiness, or righteousness? True, if saved at all, you are saved by grace. But mark! to be saved by grace is to be made holy by grace, to be made righteous by grace. It is to have by grace, the very state of mind which the text describes, righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Let no one then pretend to fall back upon Christ who does not suffer Christ to reign in his heart. The religion of many is sheer Antinomianism. They really suppose that they are going to be saved by an imputed without an imparted righteousness.

They know that they are living in the daily indulgence of sin; that they do shun

the cross, and always have done so; that they never have made a clean breast of confession, or washed their hands by restitution; in short, they have never become personally upright, honest, holy, and yet they think they are going to saved by Christ! They say, we have believed, and therefore we are forgiven and accepted. They think that by one act of faith they come into a state of perpetual justification.

But this is naked Antinomianism. If this be true, then the law must indeed be repealed and abolished; for if the moral law remains in force, the soul must be condemned if it indulges in sin.

5. How different is the religion of this text from the joyless religion of multitudes of professors. Indeed, it is mournfully common to see professors of religion who seldom or never profess any religious joy. It is no wonder they do not, for they themselves will admit that they are living in the constant indulgence of known sin. In this state, true religious joy is entirely out of the question.

If in this state they have any joy, it will be rejoicing in themselves; in their own supposed safety, and not in God. A joyless religion is a very repulsive religion.

6. To have this kingdom of God in consciousness is indispensable to our rightly teaching religion. I say teaching religion. We may warn others of their danger; we may prove to them their guilt; we may hold forth the threatenings, and even the promises; we may teach them the doctrines, but this is not teaching them religion, it is not presenting to them religion. It is teaching them certain things about religion, or rather, saying certain things of religion. But religion is a state of mind, a voluntary state, a state of love, with which joy and peace are necessarily connected. Now unless we have this joy and peace, it is impossible that we should convey a correct idea of what religion is.

If we do not ourselves love, if we have not ourselves peace and joy, if we attempt to preach religion we shall continually betray ourselves, and show that we are preaching but a hearsay gospel, and trying to teach a religion which we do not experimentally understand.

The fact is, experience always has a language of its own, and this language can never be supplied by any theory. Truly to preach peace and good will, they must be a matter of personal experience and consciousness; truly to preach joy, the heart must be flowing with it.

7. The experience of this kingdom in consciousness, is essential to rightly living it before the world. It cannot be really counterfeited. A man may be very sanctimonious in his outward life and in his looks, in his words and tones; but after all there will be cant in it, there will be something unnatural, it will be a manifest affection. To be lived, Christianity must be experienced. If it be in the heart, it will be looked, it will be acted, it will be spoken; it will be made manifest in the very tones of the voice, in an obliging manner, in pains-taking to honor God and to do good to men. It will be unselfish, honest, generous, cheerful, joyful. But these things cannot be so counterfeited as to set well upon a man.

8. Where this consciousness really exists it will produce conviction. It cannot conceal itself; it will be noticeable in any relation of life.

A husband will notice it in his wife; he will be struck with it; it will produce conviction. A wife will be struck with it in her husband; parents in children, and children in parents; and in every relation of life, it will produce conviction.

Religion is a thing so diverse from the spirit of this world, the kingdom of God is so opposite to the kingdoms of this world, and to the kingdom of Satan, that where it is really set up in any heart it must so express itself in the life, and temper and spirit, as to force conviction wherever it has an opportunity really to manifest itself.

9. If the human soul has not this consciousness, it will of course seek worldly good. To seek for happiness, satisfaction, enjoyment, is natural to man; and he will either seek his own selfishly, or he will seek the general good unselfishly. If the kingdom of God is established in him, he is an unselfish devotee to the glory of God and the good of man. In this he will find his enjoyment, here he will find the truest enjoyment, and the highest kind of enjoyment.

In this state of mind he does not seek his own enjoyment as an end; but he inevitably finds it. In this state of mind, he does not seek his own peace, nor his own joy, these are not the objects of his search, nor the end at which he aims; yet he inevitably finds them while he does not seek, and all the more surely because he does not seek them. But if a man has not this enjoyment, if he has not happiness in God, he will seek it in the world. It is in vain to shut him up to a truly religious life, unless this kingdom be established in his heart. If converts stop short of this consciousness, they will surely turn back.

10. If the soul has this satisfaction in God, it will not go lusting after worldly good, It has found a joy too sublime, too high, too spiritual, too all-pervading, to leave the mind restless and craving after worldly good. It will not lust for worldly pleasure and worldly ways; it will not plead for merely worldly amusements, and pastimes, and social intercourse. No! it has found the society of God; it has entered into communion with him; it resides in the same palace with the King of Kings. It has an altar, and a worship, and a sanctuary, within itself; it is at home when engaged in the worship and service of God. But deprive the soul of this satisfaction in God, and you cannot keep it; it will go abroad, inquiring, "Who will show us any good?"

11. True converts will soon learn to watch unto prayer, that they may pray in the Holy Ghost, and thus keep themselves in the love of God. At first, converts are not aware how easily they can mar their own peace; how easily they can throw themselves out of sympathy with God; how easily they can bring a cloud over their souls and wound their own spirits. But if they are really converted, have the kingdom of God in consciousness, they will soon learn what wounds, what brings darkness, what mars their union with God, what disturbs their peace, what separates them from that clear and heavenly union without which they cannot live. They will soon learn the necessity of watchfulness, of much prayerfulness, of engaging as little as is consistent with duty in promiscuous conversation. They will learn to guard against idle words, vain conversation, worldly associations, a mis-spending of their time, a misuse of their money, a misuse of their tongue -- in short they will learn to gird themselves up, and to walk softly with God. They will find this indispensable to their peace, indispensable to their joy, indispensable to their maintaining their righteousness. They will soon learn that they must either part with God, or part with sin; that they must gird up their loins, and live wholly a religious, devoted life, or they can never have religious joy and righteousness and peace at all.

12. Spurious conversions may generally be known by their not realizing the necessity of watchfulness and prayer, and constant communion with God.

It shows that they have not tasted of the grace of God; that they have not had communion with God; that they have not known what it is to be born of God, and to have the kingdom of God set up within them.

By watching the tendency of professed converts, we may generally tell whether true religion is really a matter of experience with them. If we find them loose in

the use of their tongues, unwatchful, running hither and thither to please themselves, not caring to spend much time in prayer, not disposed to search their Bibles, not tender and easily wounded by any slip or sin into which they may fall -- we may know they are not truly converted; the King has not set up his throne in their hearts; holiness to the Lord is not written there; they know not what it is to walk and commune with God.

13. Sinners know that this which I have described must be true religion, and must be what they themselves need.

In preaching at a certain place I was discoursing upon religion as an experience; upon the love of God, the peace and joy of the salvation of Christ. As I came out of the pulpit, I was met at the foot of the pulpit stairs by a prominent lawyer, a stranger to me, who wished to be introduced to me. He said to me: "Mr. Finney, after tea, I wish you would make a religious call with me, I wish to introduce you to a friend of mine." I replied, "I suppose it is for a religious purpose." He answered yes. I told him I should be happy to accompany him. He called on me after tea, and took me to the house of his friend, and introduced me to an aged lady, who immediately expressed great joy to see me, and began to tell me what the Lord had done for her soul.

She poured out a sweet religious experience in a conversation of half an hour. Her joy was overflowing. She said the very atmosphere she breathed seemed to be love.

This lawyer sat where I could look him in the face without appearing to do so. I had learned that he was not a religious man. I saw the muscles of his face quiver; that it was with difficulty that he could suppress his emotions while the old lady was pouring off from her full heart this flood of religious experience.

After hearing what she had to say, we rose up and took our leave. As we stepped out into the street, he stepped before me and said, "See there! what do you think of that? I know that that is the Christian religion; I know that that is what I need, and I never was so determined not to rest short of it as I am now."

Thus I have found it common, when preaching religion as a matter of experience and consciousness, to find it carrying conviction to the minds even of the most skeptical. I have often heard of their saying -- "There, I understand that now; I see that is and must be true religion; this is what we all need, or certainly we

cannot go to heaven."

14. Without this experience, we cannot enjoy what we call religious duties. If we attempt to perform them without this experience, we shall do it only as a task, as a matter of habit, or something that must not be neglected; yet as something in which we have no true satisfaction. But with this experience, prayer is a real luxury, and we will love to multiply occasions of prayer. So great is the enjoyment of communion with God, so sacred, so calm, so divinely serene and satisfying, that the soul is never, in this world, so deeply satisfied as when in the deepest communion with God.

Religious conversation with truly spiritual persons is a feast of the soul in which the kingdom of God is set up.

15. Labor, pains-taking, and even self-denial, for the salvation of souls and the glory of God, is spontaneous; is the natural outburst of an inward flame of love, an inward spring of joy and peace where the kingdom of God is set up.

But where this kingdom is not, much prayer is a great burden; persons are shy of religious conversations, they have no heart to it; and labor for souls and with souls is what they can hardly bring themselves to do. It is a real cross to go and labor personally with souls, a real trial, a matter of fearfulness and timidity, where the kingdom of God is not truly set up in the soul. Men are ashamed and afraid to go and labor earnestly with their neighbors for the salvation of their souls, while they themselves are in bondage, and have no real experience of what they teach. Even ministers are ashamed to labor directly and personally with souls, if they have not this kingdom of God burning within them.

16. Without peace and joy we cannot earnestly and honestly recommend religion. If our religion is a bondage, void of peace and joy in God, we may warn others of their danger and their guilt; we can commend religion to them as a matter of personal prudence, as a thing not to be neglected, lest they should lose their souls; but we cannot recommend it in such a sense as to draw people out of the world into a present embracing of it. The fact is, man wants enjoyment for the present; he wants something now to interest him; he wants something that he can now feel, now realize, now interest himself in; and now find some satisfaction in. But if we have not this peace and joy, all our representations will naturally repel rather than attract the mind.

They will admit -- "O it is something we must attend to, but not now. Your religion is a necessity, we admit, some time before we die. We intend to become religious; but it is religion to die by, and not to live by. It is something to be associated with death-beds, and funerals, and mournful occasions; and not something in which we can find a present interest, enjoyment, and unction.

17. This is the true and only antidote to worldly-mindedness.

With this kingdom of God set up in his heart, a man is crucified to the world, and can well afford that the world should be crucified to him. With this love, peace, and joy in experience, he will naturally turn away and hide himself in God, rather than mix up unnecessarily with the bustle, the strife, the bitterness, the slang, and egotism, and insanity of this world.

There are many that stop short of this experience in consciousness; and of course if they are professors of religion, they make up the masses who are pleading for worldly enjoyment, for social intercourse, for the cultivation of worldly taste. They run after amusements, they journey, they do everything to find enjoyment. They must see sights, they must hear music, they must frequent musical entertainments, they must get up worldly pastimes and parties; these things they will seek because they have nothing better in experience.

If we ask why is it that the great mass of professors of religion are so worldly-minded, the answer is at hand -- they have not the kingdom of God in consciousness.

Not being rooted and grounded in love; not having the peace of God ruling in their hearts, not having the joy of God a perpetual fountain welling up within them, how can it be expected that they will not do as they do?

But the most surprising thing is, that these worldly professors still hold on to the idea that they are truly religious. If they would be consistent, and say, "why we have no religion; we have no consciousness of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost; we have no joy in God, and do you expect to deprive ourselves of all enjoyment? We have no satisfaction in our religious experience; and do you expect to deprive us of seeking satisfaction elsewhere? We know not God, and therefore we must have the world." Now if they would say this, and be consistent, they would cease to be stumbling blocks; people would understand them. The world would not hide behind them; they would not then be a standing

contradiction of religion, and a shocking dishonor to Christ; for in that case they would avow their unreligious character.

But as it is, strange to tell, they will maintain their religious profession. They think themselves really religious. But they are not religious. They seek the world, and lust after it, simply because they have no religion in consciousness.

18. It is easy, therefore, for us to discriminate between those who love God and those who love him not.

They in whose heart the kingdom of God is established, follow on to know the Lord more and more perfectly. They are under the influence of a divine charm or enchantment; the love of Christ is constraining them. They have tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious; why should they turn back and lust after the flesh-pots of Egypt? Why should they gad about to seek love? They have found the home of their hearts in Christ. They have found their resting place, their joyful habitation, their all-satisfying portion. They cannot exchange these spiritual joys for the gross pleasures of earth; they cannot exchange these sacred moments of communion with God for communion with this world; they cannot afford to abandon God's heavenly ways for the insane ways of a wicked world.

19. But lastly, do any of you ask, how shall I come to have this experience of the kingdom of God in my soul?

The answer is plain and scriptural: Receive Christ, open your heart. He says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Give him the key of the whole habitation, of every room and every closet, and let him cleanse the whole -- cleanse every apartment; and write "Holiness to the Lord," upon every wall, and every ceiling, and every door, and everything within. Open your heart, and commit yourself to him for this very purpose, that he may write his law and establish his throne forever within you. Do it now, submit to this now. Invite him in; lay all upon his altar, and ask him to baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

[Back to Top](#)

Looking To Jesus

Lecture IX

June 5, 1861

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Heb. 12:1-2: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

In this text, an allusion is plainly made to the foot races that were run as an exercise to develop strength. At the time of the writing of this epistle, and for a long time previous, it had been the custom of the Government of the East to celebrate certain athletic games; of which the foot race was one.

In those days, armies fought hand to hand; and therefore the prowess and power of an army depended not merely upon its courage, but also upon its real physical strength. Hence, it was the policy of Government in every way to develop to the utmost the physical strength of their subjects.

They established at certain periods, the celebration of games, with great pomp, ceremony, and expense; and these games brought out the exhibition of muscular strength. The apostle, in his writings, makes frequent allusions to these games, for the purpose of illustrating certain great truths of the Christian religion; and it is with reference to these games that he so frequently speaks of the Christian life as a race, and as a battle. In these races, the race-grounds were often prepared with great expense. Seats were built along the course from the beginning to the end; and these seats rose one above another in such a manner that those that sat upon the back seats could see the runners as well as those that sat in front. Upon these seats were piled vast multitudes -- often scores of thousands of people; the seats rising one above another till they appeared like a great cloud, such masses of human beings were present as spectators.

Between these rows of seats lay the race grounds. As they proceeded in the race, they were cheered on by the shouts and enthusiasm of the crowds on either side that were seated to witness the race.

At the end of the race course sat the judge; whose business it was to observe accurately how they came out, and to award the prize to the one that first reached the end of the course.

In the eleventh chapter, the apostle had been giving us a great number of examples of the nature and power of faith. Beginning with Abel, he quotes numerous examples all through the patriarchal age, and many instances of eminent faith among the prophets and holy men of the Jewish nation.

Of these he speaks as witnesses of the Christian race of those to whom he is addressing his epistle. He here assumes that the saints who have passed from this world are greatly interested in the Christian career and the progress of those left behind. Hence he addresses as he does those to whom he is writing, in the first verse of this twelfth chapter: "Wherefore," says he, "seeing we also are compassed with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." And then in the second verse: "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

The race here spoken of is plainly the Christian race; the cloud of witnesses are the saints of God; the judge who awards the crown is the Lord Jesus Christ.

In speaking further from these words, I inquire,

I. What it is to look to Jesus in the sense that is here intended.

II. Things that are implied in this looking to Jesus.

III. What we are to look to Jesus for.

IV. Several mistakes into which many fall upon this subject.

I. What it is to look to Jesus in the sense that is here intended.

1. The connection in which we find these words plainly shows that the

primary idea in the apostle's mind, was the contemplation of Jesus as our example. "Looking," he says, "to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." The primary idea, then, in the apostle's mind, of looking in this sense, is to consider and contemplate His character, how He endured under all the trials through which He passed.

Every Christian is aware that he often renews his strength by means of divine contemplation; giving his mind up to consider the character, the sufferings, the works, the perfections, the fullness of Christ. He finds himself strengthened in His patience, in His power of endurance, and in all the graces of a Christian by divine contemplation.

The original word implies, to see clearly, to apprehend distinctly, or so to consider as clearly to understand a thing.

2. But there is another sense in which we are to look to Jesus. It is here said that He is "the author and finisher of our faith," and as such we are to look to Him.

This, then, implies looking in the sense of depending on Him as the author and finisher of our faith. That is, He is the author of the system of truth which faith embraces; He is the great object of faith.

But in the sense also of begetting or inducing faith in us, we are exhorted to look to Him. By revealing Himself to us by the Holy Ghost, He induces faith in us.

The exercise is one of our own mind; but it is induced or brought into exercise by the inward revelation of Christ to the soul.

But in order to have this divine revelation to us, we are not to act as machines, but voluntarily to consider, to dwell upon, to think upon, to give ourselves up to contemplate all that the Bible says of Christ; and in this act of contemplation we find Him revealing Himself to us so as to beget and sustain our faith.

3. We are to look to Him in the sense of imploring His grace. We can all understand what is to give an imploring look.

It should be understood that it is always the mind that really looks. The mind looks through the eye; but it is the mind, and not the fleshly organ, the eye, that sees or looks. The mind sees physical objects by means of the eye; and the state of the mind often reveals itself in the use that it makes of the bodily organ, the eye.

See that sick child. It is unable to speak; but its mother passes through the room, and it wants something. It cannot speak, or perhaps so much as raise its hand; but it turns its eye -- the mother sees its look -- she understands it at once. It wants something; the imploring state of the mind instantly reveals itself in the look of the eye. Its eye is directed first to the mother, and then to the object -- perhaps some water, or something that the child needs. The mother understands it. The child cannot speak, but it can look unutterable things.

So the soul can give Jesus an imploring look. It looks to Him for the supply of its wants.

But not only can the soul look to Him in the sense of giving Him an imploring look, but also in the sense of giving Him a confiding look, or in the sense of relying on Him.

A father sends a son to college; the son says, "father, I look to you to pay my bills." That is, he expects it of him; he has no other dependence, no other reliance. He confidently expects his father, who has sent him to college, to meet his wants.

Whenever his term bills or board bills become due, he looks to his father to pay them; that is, he depends on his father in the sense of expecting it from him.

II. I must consider some things that are implied in this looking to Jesus.

1. This looking is an active, and not a passive looking. It is not that sitting still that we sometimes see in people who profess to depend on Christ.

The connection in which this text stands is very suggestive. The games, to which allusion is here made, were anything but a state of apathy or inaction. On the contrary, they were a state of the utmost exertion.

2. But looking to Jesus, in the sense of this text, implies the looking away from everything else; shutting out the consideration of other objects of thought, and making Him the great object of thought and attention.

3. It implies looking earnestly, fixing the full and earnest attention of the mind upon Him.

4. It implies depending upon Him, while we put forth the utmost endeavors, just as in those races. Suppose a man were so situated that he was obliged to swim a river; while he might perhaps know that his own strength would not be sufficient to carry him across. Now, if he must cross, he might cast himself in and make an earnest effort to swim over; at the same time expecting divine aid in the endeavor, throwing himself upon God for support to renew and sustain his strength till he should reach the opposite shore. Here the looking to God would not be a passive looking, to be carried across without any effort of his own; but it would be a depending on Him, while we ourselves make earnest endeavor and use all our powers to the best advantage.

Now it is very plain that we are thus exhorted to look to Jesus, while we earnestly endeavor to do all our duty. But looking in the sense of this text, that is, a right looking to Jesus, implies also,

5. The renunciation of the spirit of disobedience, and the committing of ourselves to full obedience; expecting from Him all the aid of every kind, and in every degree, that we need in order that we may come up to the full measure of entire obedience.

6. This looking to Him implies that we make Him the great object of study, reflection, and contemplation; that thus beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we may be changed into the same image from glory to glory.

7. Looking to Jesus in the sense of the text implies, beyond doubt, the committing of the soul to Him, as the Bible elsewhere expresses it, "in well-doing as unto a faithful Creator;" committing ourselves to full obedience; to take up every cross, to break off from all ungodliness, and deny every worldly lust; and to live wholly to God, making this the great object of our life, and looking to Him continually for support in securing this result.

III. I will inquire a little more particularly what we are to look to Jesus for.

1. We are to look to Him as an atoning priest; as offering such a sacrifice for our sin that we may expect forgiveness for His sake and in His name. The Bible abundantly teaches that as sinners we have no way of approach to God except through the great sin-offering, which Christ has offered as our high priest.
2. We are to look to Him as our advocate, to plead our cause before the throne of grace.
3. We are to look to Him for sympathy. Having been in all points tempted like as we are, He knows how to succor them that are tempted. He has been made perfect through suffering, that He might be a merciful and faithful high-priest. Having been in the flesh tempted in all points as we are, tried in every way, He knows how to sympathize with us; and we are to look to Him in the sense of believing and realizing that He does sympathize with us.
4. We are to look to Him for spiritual strength to overcome all the practical difficulties that lie in the way of our Christian life. We are to expect Him to work in us to will and to do.
5. We are to look to Him as our physician for spiritual healing.
6. In short, we may look to Him for all that we lack in ourselves. We lack wisdom, He is our wisdom, and we may look to Him for all the wisdom that we need. We lack righteousness, and in ourselves are nothing but a mass of corruption; but He is righteous, and He is our righteousness; and surely we may say, "The Lord, our righteousness."
7. We may look to Him for sanctification; for He is made of God unto us, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.
8. We may look to Him for redemption from all iniquity; not only from the guilt of sin, but for deliverance from the further commission of sin. Whatever is wanting in us, we may expect of Him, and are exhorted to look to Him for. Let us understand this.

IV. Lastly, I must consider several mistakes into which many fall upon this subject.

1. They do not look to Jesus in the sense of earnestly contemplating Him. They do not make Him the object of study. They study almost everything else, read about everything else and everybody else, and make almost anything an object of deep consideration rather than Christ. They do not consider, in the sense of contemplating, His love, its nature; that it is good-will or a disposition to do them all the good He can. They do not consider its extent, that it is really infinite. They do not consider the unchangeableness -- that it is not an emotion that effervesces and then subsides; but an unchangeable, infinite, intense disposition to do them all the good that they are capable of receiving.

Again, they do not contemplate His ability, that it is absolutely infinite; and that whatever He has promised to do He has well considered, and knows Himself to be able to do.

Many persons seem intent on limiting the ability of Jesus. They think, how can He do this? and how can He do that? and He cannot do so and so, unless I do so and so; and after all they seem to suppose that unless they originate some goodness in themselves, and thus recommend themselves to Him by some self-originated goodness, they cannot expect favors of Him. It is very common to hear people talk about the ability of God: that He cannot do this and cannot do that, instead of assuming at once that nothing is too hard for Him. We hear a great deal about natural laws; that if a person sins He must bear the penalty of course; that the natural consequences come, and cannot be averted; hence, that God cannot heal our diseases, either of body or mind; that He cannot sanctify us unless we consent, as if our consent were not the very thing that He has engaged to secure.

Many people seem intent upon reasoning themselves out of their faith by queries about what Jesus is able to do. But many who admit His ability, after all do not contemplate and thoroughly recognize His willingness to do exceeding abundantly for us above all that we ask or think. We need to consider the history of Christ, the promises of Jesus, the whole character of Jesus, in order to be fully satisfied of His willingness to give us grace equal to our day.

Again, many do not consider His readiness. They in some sense admit His ability, and they think, upon the whole, that He is willing, that is, that He will be willing at some time; but they do not consider that He is now willing, that

He is ready, and that now is the accepted time with Him and now the day of salvation.

We cannot over-estimate the importance of making Jesus the object of intense study. We need to take the Bible and search it, and see what we may expect of Him; consider His promises, their nature, and their extent; consider His veracity and all His attributes, and thus arm ourselves against the suggestions of the tempter. It is a great mistake to contemplate other things so much, and to look at other things so much, and so little at Jesus.

I have found even my theological studies a snare to me, sometimes, when I have kept my mind too much occupied with the philosophy of doctrine, and the philosophy of religion, and have not made the personal Christ the object of contemplation and study.

The great thing we need is to understand Him, to know Him, to know Him personally, to know all we can about Him. We get peace of mind only as we acquaint ourselves with Him; we get divine strength only as we acquaint ourselves with Jesus. I wish I were able sufficiently to impress this thought, the indispensable necessity of studying Jesus.

2. Many make the mistake of not looking to Him in the sense of expecting from Him the things that He has permitted.

Suppose a son did not expect his father to provide for him. Suppose he knew that his father was abundantly able; but he had not such confidence in his willingness as actually to expect that his father would fulfill to him his promises. Now I fear that a great many persons do not really expect Jesus to fulfill to them His promises.

We often use the term "look" in this sense. A son, in speaking to his father of his dependence on him, and of his expectation that he would meet his wants and pay his college bills, would naturally say, "Father, I look to you for support." That is, I depend on you; my mind is directed to you as the source whence these things come.

Now we should always remember that we are to look to Jesus in the sense of expecting from Him the fulfillment of all His promises.

We are to expect forgiveness or justification by and through Him. In short,

we are to expect Him to be to us all that is implied in the relation which He sustains to us. We are to expect this with confidence; we should rest in the assurance that thus He will do, and thus He will be to us; and just so far as we fall short of this confidence, this rest and expectation, we fall short of looking to Him for these things.

If a child should ask his father for a farm, not expecting his father to grant it, he could not properly be said to look to his father for it.

He may look to his father with a sense of want -- he may know that he can get the farm nowhere else -- he may realize his dependence on his father -- he may entreat his father to give him the thing that he needs; but he cannot be properly said to look to him for it, unless he has the expectation of receiving the thing from his father. So it is with Jesus. The soul may feel its wants, and may know that these wants might be supplied by Jesus, and cannot be supplied by any one else; and yet it may lack the faith, the expectation upon which its receiving those blessings is conditioned.

3. Another mistake into which many fall is, they do not assume the sincerity of all His professions, and the reality of all His relations. I say assume. When we walk upon the solid earth, we assume without hesitation that the earth is strong enough to bear us. We do not wait to prove it, we assume it.

Business men assume the reality and integrity of all the laws of nature; mechanics assume the reality, integrity, and stability of all the laws of mechanics; the farmer assumes the reality, integrity, and stability of all the laws of the vegetable kingdom.

Now in these cases men assume the reality, integrity, validity, and stability of the laws, without being aware of the assumption. Yet their confidence in them is implicit, and they act accordingly.

Again, a child assumes the reality and strength of a parent's love. It also assumes the ability, the willingness, and the truthfulness of the parent. Hence the little child is not uneasy whether it shall be provided for. It goes and comes with the parent, hither and thither without questioning, feeling secure because it assumes the love, the integrity, the ability, the faithfulness of the parent.

This assumption underlies the individual acts of looking for this favor and

that favor. The child making this assumption, and continuing thus to assume the love of the parent, the sincerity, the ability and willingness of the parent, is enabled by reason of this assumption to look for the individual things it wants from day to day. This assumption is the condition of its trusting in the individual promises of the parent, and of its trusting the parent for all the details of blessings that it needs.

But for this assumption, the child would be in a continual worry lest it should be neglected, forgotten, and should suffer. Without this assumption it could not confidently expect of the parent the daily blessings that it knows itself to need.

Now here is a great fault of many professed Christians. They do not assume that Jesus loves them; they do not take it for granted, as a settled fact, never to be questioned. They seem somehow or other to think, that after all, His love for them depends on their first loving Him; and do not seem to understand as a practical fact that He has loved them with an everlasting love; and that He loved them before they loved Him; and if they ever have loved Him, it is because He first loved them, and drew them with loving-kindness.

Unless we really assume, and take for granted as a settled fact, the love of Christ -- the sincerity of all His professions -- that the things professed are realities, and that all His professions are true, that all His promises were made in good faith, and designed to be fulfilled, and made for our use -- unless they are settled in the sense of being fixed assumptions in which the mind rests, we shall find ourselves unable to trust His individual promises.

One reason why some people neglect the promises, is because they have no confidence in them; and the reason that they have no confidence in them, is because they have no confidence in the love, the veracity, the sincerity, the faithfulness of Jesus in making and keeping them. Thus they fail to look to Jesus for the things He has promised them, because they have no expectation of receiving them if they do.

4. Many persons do not look to be saved from the commission of sin. They expect to live on in sin, but hope that Christ will forgive them in the end. They seem to look to Him as an atoning Savior, a justifying Savior; but what they expect from Him seems to be something in the future -- that He

will at last forgive and justify them; but they fail to look to Him for present redemption from iniquity. They seem to overlook the fact that this is His present great business with us, to save us from our sins; that this is the very point of His mission with us in this world.

5. Many persons do look to Him in the sense of expecting in some measure to be saved from sin in this life. They expect to be saved from great, disgraceful, and outbreking sins; but they fail to look to Him for full redemption.

They trust that Christ will not suffer them greatly to dishonor Him, by any grievous departure from a Christian life; that He will not suffer them to fall into those forms of sin that will expose them to excommunication, and to universal contempt; but they do not look to Him for redemption from all and every sin, from evil tempers, from idle words, from pride, and all the workings of iniquity in their minds; they do not expect Him to deliver them from them all.

I have recently been reading the life of Miss Adelaide Newton, a young English lady, whose memoir has been published in this country. I have been struck in reading it with the fact that it seems never to have occurred to her to look to Jesus for present redemption from all sin. Like many other memoirs, her diary and her published letters abound with complaints about her sins and with expressions of joy that ultimately she should be delivered from sin.

But after all, her history was rather a history of bondage than of Christian liberty, of hope and expectation of escape from sin after death. Such had been her teaching, that she regarded her whole nature as a mass of sin, everywhere confounding temptation with sin; and although she lived an earnest life, yet so far as deliverance from sin was concerned, it was a desponding life.

The dear child suffered a great deal from her false instruction in regard to the present power and willingness of Christ to save her from sin.

Some passages in her published letters indicate that she had at times almost got hold of Christ as her sanctification, in the sense of being her present Savior from sin; but then she immediately gets the idea of Christ as her sanctification, in the sense of an imputed sanctification.

She seems not to have known Christ as a power in her soul, or present redemption from iniquity.

This book is in many respects a good one; but poor Adelaide's experience stops right where so many experiences do -- they go no farther than to a hope for the future, without realizing any present rest of soul in redemption from sin.

6. Many make a mistake in looking for peace and pardon, before repentance and faith. They are making peace and pardon the great subject of endeavor. Now peace will come without asking for; and pardon is extended of course, the moment we repent and believe. The act of pardon, or of amnesty, is already passed. God has decreed that whoever repents and believes in Jesus is forgiven; we avail ourselves of the provisions of this act or decree, whenever we repent.

Peace and pardon are things of course, that always come whenever the indispensable conditions are fulfilled. We cannot too fully understand this; the thing that we need to consider is, Christ our righteousness, Christ our life, Christ our wisdom; that all these we have in Christ; that He is our peace; that He is our pardon, our justification; that in Him we have it all; and that to acquaint ourselves with Him in these relations, is to obtain the peace and the pardon that we seek.

7. Many make the mistake of not looking to Jesus in the sense of looking away from themselves.

As I said in the beginning of this discourse, the word look in the original, implies the looking to Him solely; or looking away from other things and other objects, and looking to Him in the sense of expecting from Him alone the things that we need. It is a curious fact that there seems to be a constant tendency in the mind of man to look to self. For instance, you will find men trying to make out their own innocence; and even Christian men will often try to make out their innocence, either in a general way or in some particular matter. If they can make out that they are innocent, and do not transgress willfully they feel encouraged; and a great many seem to rely more upon the fact that they do not deserve to be punished, do not deserve to be sent to hell, than they do upon Christ. They seem bent upon establishing, in some way, either their entire innocence, or their comparative innocence. How many

persons we find, who, though they think they trust in Christ, yet are most manifestly building their hope upon the fact that they have not been very ill-deserving. Indeed, many professors of religion seem to be looking in this direction for rest and repose. They dwell upon their general honesty, integrity, and sincerity, their general faithfulness in duty, perhaps their usefulness; and then again, they look at their sins, and think of them in cases where they cannot but know that they have greatly sinned; and thus dwelling on their duties or their sins, they are either greatly encouraged or discouraged. If they cannot excuse themselves, you find them dejected or cast down; but if they can satisfy themselves that their intentions were right, then they are encouraged; and after all, it would seem as if they were considering their own righteousness, at least their own innocence, rather than Jesus as their wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

It is often curious to see professors of religion, and even professors of years' standing, making the sad mistake of looking to their duties, their faithfulness, or their unfaithfulness, their usefulness or their uselessness, their sins or their innocence -- contemplating these things, and encouraging or discouraging themselves accordingly. The human heart seems exceedingly slow to abandon every form of self-dependence.

8. Many fail to look to Jesus with a look of appreciation and appropriation. They do not appreciate His fullness. It does not seem to them that His fullness is infinite. They do not appreciate His fullness. They dwell upon their sins, and upon their wants, until they come practically to doubt whether there is sufficient grace in Christ to meet all their wants for time and eternity.

9. Many fall into the mistake of dwelling upon their dependence on Christ, while they fail really to depend on Him, to lean and cast themselves upon Him.

There is a great difference between feeling our dependence, and really depending. A child may feel his dependence upon his father for support; but he could only really depend on him in the sense of expecting him to support him.

He may refuse to depend on him. He may be so wicked, and have such a sense of unworthiness in regard to his treatment of his father, as to despair of

help from him. He may know that he needs the help, and that his father is able and willing to help him, and that he can get help nowhere else, but his pride or his unbelief may prevent his really depending on his father, for the things he is able to give, and perhaps has promised.

10. But I said that many fail to look to Jesus in the sense of looking away from other dependencies. Many persons seem to be looking to the prayers of others; to the prayers of their parents, or husbands, or wives, or friends. They seem to be looking this way, and that way, and every way rather than directly to Jesus. This is a great mistake. Until we look directly to Jesus, He will not help us. We must be cut off from other expectations; we must cease to look to our own duties, our own prayers or the prayers of others, we must cease to look in any other direction save towards Jesus. All looking in any other direction but delays the coming blessing.

11. Many look at their own weakness and infirmities rather than at Christ's strength. Many persons are given up to lamenting their own weaknesses, and infirmities, and sins; and they make them a subject of almost incessant thought. They look at themselves, -- they think of themselves, -- they take most discouraging views of themselves. They think it their duty to examine themselves; but in examining themselves in this way, they fail to look to Jesus.

They seem to lose sight of the fact that the fullness of Jesus is, in the gospel, set face to face, over against our infirmities, and sins, and weakness, and emptiness; that wherever there is a want in us, there is a supply and a sufficiency in Him. His fullness is set face to face to our emptiness; and we are expected to look to this fullness to fill our emptiness. Many persons seem to forget this. They keep their thoughts upon themselves, and their own wants; and although this fullness of Christ stands right over against their wants, waiting to be appropriated, urging its fullness upon our consideration, many are so taken up with the consideration of their own emptiness that they never look to this infinite fullness.

12. Many make the mistake of looking to Jesus in the sense of passively thinking of Him.

They think about Him; they read about Him; they hear about Him; they talk about Him, but remain inactive. They do not look in the sense of

appropriating whatever they see in Him that they need. They do not take hold of the truths as fast as they see them, and make them their own. They are like a man who sees provisions before him, yet does not put forth his hand to partake of them. He may see and contemplate this fullness of provision, and yet never partake of it.

But it should be understood, that the looking to which we are exhorted in the text, is an active looking; and a looking in the sense of an earnest expectation and endeavor.

13. Many make the mistake of looking to Jesus in the sense that really involves the idea of expecting a miracle from Him.

As an illustration, let me state a fact. A Christian brother told me he had had a very bad temper, and that he was often angry. He was told to look to Jesus to subdue this temper. He was greatly grieved with it at times, and often stumbled others; and accordingly he set himself to look to Jesus to subdue it. He expected that Jesus would subdue it by some operation on him. He did not resolutely make up his mind to set the whole force of his will against it. He did not make up his mind, in the strength of the Lord that he would not be angry again. He left it to Jesus to subdue his temper, expecting Him to come and subdue it by some operation upon him, and still he grew worse and no better. Finally, he asked himself, "Why should I wait in this way? I will not wait for anything -- I will not be angry again." He came thus at last to make up his mind not to wait for Jesus to perform a miracle, but to make an honest and an earnest endeavor to resist, depending on Jesus as the occasions might arise; and then he found that he had the victory. Jesus no doubt enabled him thus to make up his mind; but mark, he never prevailed over his temper till his mind was fully settled to set the whole force of his will against it, and not to yield to the temptation to be angry.

14. Many do not look to Jesus in the sense of considering His varied relations; and hence they do not find in Him what they need in all the circumstances of life. The Bible presents Him in a great variety of relations, suited to all our necessities and all our circumstances. It presents Him as our brother, our Savior, our king, our prophet, our wisdom, our righteousness, sanctification, redemption. Do we need an advocate? He is our advocate. Do we need a mediator? He is our mediator. Do we need one to sympathize with us? He is a merciful and faithful high priest, and able to

succor us when we are tempted.

Indeed, Christians need to contemplate the official relations of Christ intensely; to apprehend and appreciate them thoroughly as realities, and the fullness there is in these relations; and to settle these things as matters of conviction and persuasion of mind, till the mind rests and settles down in them, and has the fullest assurance that they are all indeed true, and that in Christ they are complete. But too many fail to appreciate their completeness in Christ; and are constantly endeavoring to be complete in themselves -- to mix up something of their own with what they have in Christ -- to patch up His righteousness; and are constantly endeavoring to save themselves by their own goodness. All these are great mistakes.

The fact is, we do not expect enough of Christ. The more we expect from Him the better, if we can but enlarge our faith, we shall be sure to obtain of Him all that we need. Believe as much as we will, consider as much as we will, anticipate as much as we will -- when we have done all, we may be assured that He is able to do, and willing to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.

[Back to Top](#)

Profit and Loss; Or The Worth of The Soul- No.'s 1 & 2

Lectures X & XI

June 19, 1861

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Mark 8:36: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

Text.--Luke 9:25: "For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?"

LECTURE X.

In speaking from these words, I first call attention to --

I. Several facts of consciousness and experience.

II. Show that the question suggested by the text is one of profit and loss.

III. What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his soul?

IV. But how much would he lose, if he should gain the whole world and lose his soul?

V. Reverse the question in the text. What will it profit to lose the world and save your soul?

I. I first call attention to several facts of consciousness and experience.

1. That the human soul is immortal, seems to be one of the primitive beliefs of mankind. Certainly this belief has been well-nigh universal among men. We know by our own experience that men are hard to believe that to be true which they fear, or of which they have a dread.

All men are conscious of being sinners; and all men know themselves to deserve punishment. All men are aware that they are not dealt with as severely as they deserve to be in this life, hence the belief seems to be well-nigh, if not quite universal, that there is a future state of rewards and punishments. When we realize that men are guilty and know themselves deserving of punishment, we see at once that a future state of rewards and punishments must be to them a terrible idea. They would not believe in it were not the conviction forced upon them by their own nature; and hence it would seem from the fact of this universal conviction of the immortality of the soul, that such is the very nature of the soul as to force this belief upon the race of mankind.

2. Such a state is evidently demanded by the justice of God.

We irresistibly affirm that God is just. We cannot conceive of an unjust being as God; and the human soul revolts at, and indignantly rejects the idea that God is not just. A future state of rewards and punishments is an irresistible inference from the two facts, that men are not punished as they deserve to be in this world, and that God is a just moral governor.

If God is just, there must be a future state of rewards and punishments where men shall be dealt with according to their true characters.

3. The Bible affirms this irresistible conviction, or primitive belief of mankind; and abundantly teaches that the soul is immortal, that there is a state of future rewards and punishments.

4. I assume, therefore, the soul's immortality. Men seem to believe this truth, even if they deny it. Men that call it in question are after all afraid to meet God, afraid to die, afraid of the consequences of their sins in a future state. There is probably not a human being on the face of the earth, having a sound, well-balanced mind, who does not, at the bottom of his mind, assume and believe in a future state of rewards and punishments.

I say, I assume the soul's immortality: I do it because I cannot help assuming it; and I do it because everybody does assume it. Indeed, it is just because the nature of the soul forces this assumption upon mankind, that the Bible everywhere, in the Old Testament especially, assumes that men are aware of this, just as it assumes that God exists. The Bible does not begin by asserting the existence of God; it assumes it. So the moral government of God everywhere assumes that men know that they are under moral government; that the soul will exist in a future state; and that there is a future state of rewards and punishments.

I say, the Bible does not frequently, especially in the Old Testament, affirm this; but always and everywhere assumes it, because of its being an irresistible belief of mankind.

5. The soul must be happy or miserable as it is holy or sinful. The conscience affirms intuitively that misery ought to be the consequence of sin, and that happiness ought to be connected with holiness. Again, we have enough of experience in this life to indicate clearly that a sinful soul cannot be happy, and that a holy soul cannot be truly miserable. The reason is plainly this; the soul was made to be holy; sin is a violation of its own laws, inconsistent with the nature of the soul. It turns the soul upon itself, and produces inward discord; throws it out of harmony with itself, and with the universe in which it dwells. It is a violation of conscience, and must necessarily make the soul miserable. Holiness, on the other hand, is the soul's harmony with itself and with the universe in which it lives, --

especially with God and all holy beings. Hence the soul is out of harmony, and miserable, if it is sinful, and in harmony and happy, if it is holy.

6. Cut off from the pleasures of sense, happiness or misery will naturally be as is the moral state of the soul. In the present state of existence there is much pleasure or pain connected with sense; but in the future state, there is no reason to believe that the pleasures and pains of sense will be at all as they now are, for the material organs will be removed.

Sinners take pleasure in some forms of sin, and have much in this life that they call happiness; but take them away from the brief pleasures of sense, and what can be the source of their enjoyment! Here they enjoy a degree of pleasure in spite of their sinfulness. But remove them from their friends, their business, their worldly pleasures, their associations in this life, -- and what then can make them happy? All the sources from which they received any enjoyment are cut off. They must then derive happiness or misery from the moral state of their souls, and the society in which they dwell. If holy, they will naturally be at peace; they will have the society of the holy, and will therefore be happy. If sinful, peace to them will be impossible; they will be surrounded with those of their own character, and must be miserable.

7. Progress is the law of finite existences; progress both in knowledge, and in sin and holiness. All finite creatures begin to be. They have their first thought, their first feeling; their faculties are gradually developed; and progress is the unalterable law of their existence. Having new thoughts and new experiences, and passing from one to another, and another forever, -- thus they accumulate new knowledge as long as they exist. Holiness is conformity to truth; sin is disconformity to truth. If the soul conforms itself to truth as fast as it is received, it is holy and grows in holiness. If on the contrary, it fails to conform to truth, and conforms itself to error, and is under the influence of lies, it violates its own nature and is miserable; and as knowledge increases, sin or holiness must increase as long as the soul exists. Again, as holiness or sin increases, so must happiness or misery increase. As sin is a violation of the laws of the soul's nature, therefore as sin increases, misery must increase. As holiness is conformity to the soul's nature, and conformity to truth, therefore as knowledge increases, and holiness increases, happiness must increase.

These are truths which most men will readily admit. They are so self-evident

as not to need proof; they are in fact assumed by mankind in general.

Having premised these things, I proceed,

II. To show that the question suggested by the text is one of profit and loss.

"What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

The question of profit and loss is one that is much agitated in this world; and it behooves us to apply this to the great question of the soul. Christ puts the question in all solemnity. Now the real question is, at which would we look in the first place? What is each worth to us? that is, what is the world's value to us, and what is the soul's value?

First, what is the real value of this world to us?

It is said that the richest man in the nation to which he belonged, was once complimented by a friend for his great wealth. This friend expressed the thought that he must be very happy in the enjoyment of his great wealth. He replied; "What will you ask to take the charge of all my business, and have all the care and concern of it, and relieve me of any concern about it?"

His friend replied, "I do not know." "But," said the rich man, "will you do it for your food and clothing? if you can be well fed, and well clothed, -- have just as much as you can eat, and drink, and wear?"

"O no!" said his friend, "I could not do it for that." "Well," responded the rich man, "this is all that I get."

Yes, this is all that we get for all our labor, and toil, and responsibility. So far as we are concerned, all that we can get from this world is our food and clothing, and drink.

It is also said of this same man, that near the close of life he was asked by another friend, what, upon the whole, he thought of his whole life. As he had been very successful in business, had accumulated great wealth, and had seemed to secure all that was desirable in this life, -- how his life appeared to him.

His answer was, "My life is a failure." What an answer!

But take the case of Solomon. Solomon set himself, it appears, purposely to see what could be gotten from this world, and what it was really worth. He had all the means of testing it that could be conceived of. He had greater wealth than any other man living. He tried what science could do; he surrounded himself with singing men and singing women; he made beautiful gardens; in short, he exhausted all the resources of wealth and all the pleasures of this life. He tried what could be obtained from every source of worldly enjoyment that we can conceive. He tells us, that he deliberately intended to test every source of worldly enjoyment, and to see what could be realized from it. He tried it to his heart's content, and then came to this mournful conclusion -- that "all is vanity and vexation of spirit. Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." This, then, is the best testimony that can be given of the value of the world to us. All that we can obtain from it is merely the gratification of sense.

Secondly, The worth of the soul.

We can answer the question proposed in the text only as we estimate first, the real value of the world, and secondly the real value of the immortal soul.

But how shall we estimate this? An immortal soul, ever increasing in sin or holiness, and consequently, in happiness or misery! The thought is overwhelming.

To get a glimpse of the truth on this subject, I observe that to lose the soul is,

1. To lose, or fail of, eternal happiness.

- (1.) Eternal happiness is an ever-growing quantity. However small the beginning, and however gradual the development and the increase, -- still there is no end to the development of the soul, and to the increase of happiness if the soul is holy.

- (2.) Consequently, each soul must arrive, in the progress of its existence, at a point where he can truly say, taking the whole of his past existence, that he has enjoyed more happiness than all the creatures of God, comprising the whole universe of created beings, had enjoyed previous to his existence. The last one that arrives in heaven from this world, will surely arrive at a point in the progress of his existence, in which he can truly say that he has enjoyed more of

heaven -- that the amount of his enjoyment in the aggregate far exceeds all that had been enjoyed by all its inhabitants before he arrived there.

(3.) It is true that each soul will be able to say, in the progress of his existence, that he has enjoyed millions of times more happiness than all creatures had enjoyed before he began to be.

The aggregate of their enjoyment together did not amount to so much as the aggregate of his single enjoyment since he began to be. And this will be true of the whole of the holy universe; such will be their progress in an ever-growing holiness and happiness.

(4.) Not only will they be able to say that they have enjoyed millions of times more, but inconceivably more than all creatures had enjoyed before they began to be. That is, each soul will, in the progress of his existence, be able to say, that the amount of his happiness will be inconceivably greater than that enjoyed by all creatures before he began to be.

(5.) And this is only the beginning. For remember, the soul is immortal; and when it has been increasing in holiness and happiness for millions of ages, for cycles which the arithmetic of angels cannot compute, it has not a moment less to grow in knowledge, holiness, and happiness.

When the amount of this happiness has swelled to be so great as to overwhelm all thought, -- so far as calculating or apprehending this amount is concerned -- this is but the vestibule of enjoyment, the beginning of happiness which shall have no end.

(6.) But again, I remark, that this is true whether happiness in the future state accumulates slowly or rapidly. In this respect it makes no real difference.

If the accumulation of knowledge, and holiness, and happiness, be very slow, but a little gain in even a cycle of ages, it would only take longer; but the result must be the same. As the soul is immortal, there is no end to its progress. Yet there is reason to believe that knowledge, holiness, and happiness will increase more rapidly in the future state. But whether

this is true or not, all that I have said before of the amount of its real enjoyment, must be true.

(7.) But it is true, also whatever be the cause of this happiness, -- whether the reward be purely natural, or whether it be governmental; whether the cause be partly physical and partly moral, -- or whatever be the immediate cause, it must be true, that as the quantity is ever-growing there can be no bound ever set to the increasing happiness of the holy soul. It can only fall short of absolute infinity.

2. To lose the soul is to exist in endless sin and misery.

(1.) It has been said that sin is necessarily connected with misery. Now to lose the soul, in the Bible sense of the phrase is, manifestly, not annihilation. It is to lose all that is valuable to the soul; to fail of the great end of its existence, and to incur all the miseries of an endlessly perverted existence.

(2.) As I said of happiness, so I say of misery, that each soul must, in the progress of its existence, arrive at a point at which it can truly say that it has suffered more than the entire universe had known of suffering before it began to suffer.

However great the sufferings of the whole universe of creatures may have been, take the aggregate of all the sufferings of hell and earth, and all that creatures have known in any part, and every part, of God's dominions, each soul may arrive at a point where it will be true of it. That the amount of its sufferings, taken as a whole, is greater than the aggregate of all the sufferings that had been endured in the universe before its sufferings commenced. What a dreadful thought! an ever-growing quantity of suffering!

(3.) As I said of happiness, so I say of misery, that each soul will arrive at a point where it must say that it has suffered millions of times more in its own experience than all creatures had experienced before it began to suffer.

(4.) Yes, inconceivably more than all the creatures of God had known,

or even conceived of, previous to its beginning to suffer.

(5.) But, this is only the beginning. As I said of happiness, so I say of misery, that when the lost soul has suffered millions of ages, cycles which no arithmetic in heaven or earth can compute, this is but the vestibule of its sufferings; it is but the beginning. An eternal ocean of misery rolls its waves ahead; its progress is onward and downward, and onward and downward forever and ever.

(6.) Again, this is true, whether the amount of misery accumulates slowly or rapidly. If the accumulation be very slow, it will only take a longer period; but the misery at last must be the same. If the accumulation be rapid, the misery at last must be the same. The amount of misery endured by the lost soul can only fall short of the absolutely infinite.

(7.) Evidently the same is true whatever be the law or cause of this suffering, -- whether the suffering be a natural consequence of sin, or a governmental consequence of sin.

Whether it be caused by fire or any physical cause whatever, or whether these altogether comprise the cause or causes of this misery, it matters not. The fact remains that, whatever is the cause, whether it be fire or sin, or both, whether it be a natural or governmental consequence, or both -- the fact remains, the soul's enduring an ever increasing amount of misery.

An old writer has attempted to illustrate, what in fact cannot be adequately illustrated from its very nature, by the following supposition.

Suppose a bird were commissioned to remove this globe of earth by the slow process of taking a single grain of sand, and carrying it to such a distance that it would take a thousand years for the bird to go and return. She takes a single grain of sand, and goes her long journey of five hundred years out, and deposits it; and then she spends five hundred years more in her return; making in all a thousand years consumed in conveying away but a single grain and returning for another.

Now suppose she was obliged to remove the entire globe of earth in this way, what an amazing period it would take! It seems to swallow up all thought and conception.

But I add to this supposition -- suppose the old bird were commissioned to remove the entire universe in this way -- myriads of systems that are now known to exist in the material universe, for it is now known that this world is but a mere speck in the material creation. Now suppose that this old bird were to continue her labor until she had removed the entire physical universe, at the rate of one grain of sand for a thousand years. And now let me add to this, that suppose there were hundreds of thousands of such universes as this, and her commission extended to removing them all; -- this would not be eternity. It would be only time, and not eternity. When the whole of this universe should be removed at this rate, there would be not one moment less than at first. And suppose a sinful soul had suffered all this time -- all the time that the bird was coming and going, removing a grain of sand once in a thousand years; -- first, this globe -- and then the other planets -- and then the vast sun, and then the myriads of systems which compose the universe, with all their innumerable planets and suns -- and suppose that of such universes there were more in number than the angels could compute, and she continued to remove them all, -- when that bird had continued her labors until she has removed this vast and inconceivable amount of matter at the rate of one grain in a thousand years, this vast period cannot for one moment be compared to eternity. The suffering soul has only begun to suffer. To be sure the amount which it has already suffered is inconceivably great.

Yet this is but the vestibule of its sufferings; the beginning of that which has no end. It is an ever-increasing quantity. How the soul shudders at this, and faints, and withers!

Yet such is the destiny of the immortal soul.

LECTURE XI.

July 3, 1861

PROFIT AND LOSS; OR THE WORTH OF THE SOUL--No. 2

Text.--Mark 8:36: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

Text.--Luke 9:25: "For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world,

and lose himself, or be cast away?"

III. Answer of the question, What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his soul?

The answer itself is, nothing.

The question itself is an emphatic negative.

This is a common form of expressing the strongest denial.

IV. But how much would he lose, if he should gain the whole world and lose his soul?

I answer --

1. The two things cannot be compared. We have already seen that the loss of the soul is the loss of endless happiness, and that it incurs endless misery.

Whatever is endless is boundless in that direction; and whatever is bounded can never be compared with that which is boundless. In this case the law of contrast, and not that of comparison, applies. The loss and the gain can be contrasted, but never compared.

It is true that the loss of the soul is not an infinite evil, in an absolute sense. Neither the happiness nor the misery of finite creatures, can ever become in amount absolutely infinite.

Yet as the quantity is ever growing -- although at every period of the future it will fall short of being absolutely infinite -- still, as it has no bounds, it is to all purposes of comparison, infinite; because it is an ever growing quantity, having no bounds beyond which it does not pass.

The worth of the world is a finite quantity, and can therefore be easily measured and estimated. But the worth of the soul is an ever-growing, and in this sense a boundless, or infinite quantity, and can, therefore, never be estimated. The world is estimable; the soul is literally inestimable. No arithmetic can compute it; no finite mind grasp it. Indeed, God Himself must see that that which is an ever-growing quantity can never be compared with that the amount of which can be estimated, and expressed in numbers. The value of the world, then, is as nothing against infinity.

2. To gain the whole world would be to gain, after all, but little. And in fact, for a human being to possess the world, would be to him really no good at all; it would only load him with an ocean of cares, and anxieties, and perplexities, from which he could reap really no solid benefit. It would prove to him only what it did to Solomon; and Solomon, be it remembered, possessed as much of it as he knew what to do with. Like Solomon, he would find it vanity of vanities, and vexation of spirit.

It would really be worse for a man, as far as his own happiness was concerned, than the most abject poverty.

But the loss of the soul is really a boundless evil. It is as immeasurable as infinity. No finite mind can grasp it; the contemplation of it is overwhelming. No contemplation can reach the amount of loss that would be incurred by losing the soul; nor could it in the least approach it.

You cannot, by calculation, approach a limit, where there is none. This is so simple a statement that even a child can understand it. Let any schoolboy in this assembly attempt to exhaust the number five, by dividing it by three, and he will find that he may divide it by three forever without exhausting it, or in the least degree approaching a termination. This is a curious, but a well-known fact. Even in so simple a case as this, you cannot exhaust five by dividing it by three, should you continue the process to all eternity.

I make this remark for the sake of illustration. To lose the soul is to incur an ever-growing quantity of misery, and to lose an ever-growing quantity of happiness.

Neither of these, happiness or misery, can have any bound in the case supposed. There is no line in that direction. In degree there is limit, both in the case of happiness and misery; but in duration, there is no limit in either case. Therefore comparison is out of the question. All that can be said is, the gain is really nothing in case you gain the world. The more a man has of the world beyond a certain amount, the worse it is for him. It becomes to him a real trouble and a burden; and beyond a certain amount, he can neither enjoy nor dispose of it.

Possessing too much of the world, is like a man's eating too much for his dinner. A certain amount is useful to him; but let him go beyond that, and all

that he eats is an injury to him, and he may easily proceed to surfeiting and death in that direction.

That man is as really mad, who attempts to get more of the world than is good for him, as that man is who eats enormously, and much more than he can digest, for the sake of gratifying his appetite.

Mr. Law has said, that a man is as poorly employed in attempting to lay up a hundred thousand pounds sterling, as he would be in providing for himself a hundred thousand pairs of boots and shoes.

Let it be understood, then, that whenever a man possesses more of the world than he can usefully use and appropriate for the good of mankind and for the glory of God, he is contributing to his own misery, and not to his own happiness. He is loading himself down with cares and anxieties, that will crush and ruin him.

V. Let us, for a moment, reverse the question in the text. What will it profit to lose the world and save your soul?

1. Suppose you do not gain this world's goods; suppose you barely possess the necessities of life; nay, suppose you live in the most abject poverty for the few days you have to remain in this world, and save your soul.

In a few days you will rest from all your poverty, and enter upon the possession of eternal riches, and heir of God and a joint heir with Christ, surrounded with all the wealth, and glories, and blessedness of heaven, and that to all eternity.

2. How much, then, do you gain, over and above the loss sustained by not having the world?

The answer is plainly that there is no comparison in the case. Only it may be said, that you have gained infinite riches, and have really lost nothing that was of any importance. You have all the necessities of life; and if at any time you were straitened in circumstances and had not food enough to eat, this very poverty was made useful to you, and was upon the whole a benefit rather than a loss.

3. Talk of material wealth! Why you gain more thus, if you lose the world

and save your soul, than the whole material universe is worth -- really, infinitely more. The loss is as nothing; the gain, infinite.

REMARKS.

1. You have only to neglect your soul, and its loss is inevitable. The apostle asks, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

This question also is an emphatic one, as if the Apostle had said, It is impossible to escape if we neglect so great salvation.

The fact is, the soul of every unconverted sinner is in a lost state. Without faith in Christ, it is condemned already, under the law, and exposed to eternal destruction. A man need not go about to commit this, and that, and the other heinous sin. He is already a sinner; he is condemned, awaiting his execution; and he has only to remain in this impenitent, unbelieving state, and the loss of his soul is as certain as his existence. Sinner, now remember that if you neglect your soul, and neglect the gospel, your damnation is as certain and as inevitable as if you had already been in hell for a thousand years.

Do not forget this; for a great many persons talk as if -- why, they do not do anything very bad. They do not know, they say, if they should die in their present state, whether God could justly send them to hell. They seem to think it a doubtful question whether they should lose their souls, if they should die in their present situation. Now this is an awful infatuation.

The soul is already in a lost condition, already condemned, already under sentence of eternal death. Sinner, you need only to die instantly, to wake up in hell. Hence you are expected to escape, to lay hold of eternal life, to give all diligence to repent and believe the gospel, and what you do, to do quickly. How, then, can you escape, if you neglect to attend, and that effectually, to the salvation of your soul!

2. It is wise for every sinner to inquire, What are my prospects? Am I likely to be saved; or much more likely to be lost? How is it with me thus far? Have I done anything effectually for the salvation of my soul? Or have I been trying to gain the world while I have neglected my soul? Business men inquire into their business prospects. They calculate the chances for and against them; they look the matter over, examine their books, look into their business relations, and look at their debts and credits, and see how their matters stand.

Now, Sinner, have you ever done this in regard to your soul? You look over your matters in a worldly point of view, to see how much you are gaining or losing; but have you ever looked over your spiritual concerns, to see what they are? Have you cared for your soul? or are you only caring for your body? Are you laying up treasures for eternity or only for time?

3. The folly of neglecting the soul is infinite. I know of no other word than infinite that can express it. There can be no limit to the absolute madness of neglecting the soul.

To save the soul is the great errand of life, the infinitely important concern, the one thing needful, the great business and errand upon which God has sent us into this world. If we attend to the soul, eternity is secure; if we neglect the soul, eternity is lost. And to think of a soul's being ushered into this life, and commanded to prepare for an eternal state; and then to neglect it, to die in sin, and be obliged at last to say, "I have been an infinite fool, I have lost my soul!"

4. It is time to take a stand against the spirit of delay in this matter.

We sometimes see men, in worldly matters, act as if they were in a kind of infatuation. There is some important matter to which they ought to attend; but somehow or other the spirit of delay takes possession of them, and they keep putting it off, and putting it off. Some persons seem to have this infirmity in regard to almost everything of a worldly nature.

They delay, and delay; and delay becomes with them a habit, so that you can really depend on them for nothing. This habit of delay in worldly matters, is sure to bring ruin in its train. No person will ever prosper in worldly matters who contracts this habit of delay in worldly business. Persons are peculiarly in danger of contracting this habit in respect to things which are not congenial to their feelings, things to which they dread to attend.

Now in regard to spiritual things -- the carnal mind being enmity against God, spiritual religion is repulsive to the feelings of the unconverted soul. The mind is set upon worldly gratifications, and to deny these and enter into sympathy with Christ, is that to which the sinner has no heart. Hence the infinite danger of contracting the habit of delay.

Indeed, this is the great sin that ruins the millions -- it is simply this habit of delay.

When very young, they think there is time enough, of course; and as they grow older, they contract the habit of delay more and more firmly, flattering themselves that there is time enough. They always expect, at some future time to attend to their souls. They do not mean always to neglect it; but as it is not congenial to their feelings, they put it off for the present.

Now for this there is no remedy, but for men to set reason to work, as we say, and take a decided stand against the spirit of delay. I say, this spirit of delay; for it seems as if there was a spirit in it, an evil spirit. It is a strange infatuation, a moral insanity that seems to take possession of the soul.

There seems to be no end to this delay, delay, delay.

You talk with a Sabbath School child, and he will put it off; you talk with him when he is a young man, and he will still delay. You talk with him in middle age, and exhort him in an earnest manner -- there is still time enough. Talk with him in the decline of life, and his habit of delay has become so strong, that he will finally put it off till his death-bed. And when he can put it off no longer for years, he will adjourn the question from day to day, and then from hour to hour, till at last he will sink down to hell under this horrible infatuation of delay.

5. Every man should act in regard to the salvation of his soul, as prudent men do in worldly matters.

Prudent business men do not allow things to be put off where they run a great risk.

Should one of you learn tonight that your whole estate was liable to be lost through some fraud or some defect in your title, and should you understand that if now attended to thoroughly, all might be secure, but that every hour's delay exposed you to the loss of all you have, would you sleep till you had made all secure, if possible? If you would, you are not a prudent man.

Would you allow things to run on in this loose way from day to day? No, indeed! you would not give sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids, till you had satisfied yourself that all was secure. Now this is prudence in worldly matters. Great interests are at stake; and it is remarkable that a man should be prudent, and wise, and energetic in attending to such matters in such circumstances.

But what is the reason that you are not acting thus in regard to your spiritual

concerns? Are you neglecting your soul? Then you know that this is infinite imprudence.

If you should lose your worldly estate, you might, by industry, and economy, and greater prudence, recover yourself; and obtain at least a competency for this life. The loss might not be irreparable; it might not plunge you into endless poverty. But remember that if you lose your soul, the loss is eternal; it is irreparable; there is no remedy for it; there is no recovering yourself; you have lost all that is valuable, and that to all eternity; you have incurred all that is dreadful and horrible, and that to all eternity.

6. What change would a realizing belief in this fundamental truth necessarily secure!

While men profess to believe in the truths of religion, in the worth of the soul, they in fact do not believe it. That is, they do not believe it in such a sense that they realize its truth. They admit it; but they do not truly believe it. It is by them in a certain sense admitted -- in a misty, unrealizing sense; but as soon as this truth is believed in the sense of its becoming to the mind a fact, a reality, it arouses all the energies of the soul. Just think how differently men would conduct themselves, did they believe that every moment's delay exposes them to the loss of the soul.

How serious, how earnest, how devout, how feeling, how tender, how truthful, how honest, would men become! Indeed, it would greatly change all the business operations of the world; and human society would become another affair. Instead of the vast scramble after the world, the lusting after earthly pleasures, the incessant cry for more, and more, and more of earthly good, the world would lose its hold upon mankind in a great measure.

The whole world would take on a type of behavior, of spirit, and life, so fundamentally different from what we now see, that we should hardly recognize this as the same world. Even the Church, did she but steadily realize this great truth, would become so changed as hardly to be known as the same people.

7. But it is maintained by some, that the souls of the wicked will be annihilated at death; or if not at death, that still they will not be immortal, and will not suffer forever. Now suppose this to be true -- which surely, if reason or Revelation are to be trusted, it cannot be -- but suppose that it is true, what then would a man

gain if he should gain the whole world, and be annihilated?

Suppose he did not incur eternal death -- as in this case he would not -- still he would lose eternal happiness, eternal glory, eternal holiness and communion with God. He would lose, at least, an infinite amount of good -- and what would he gain? Nothing, of any real value to him.

There would be, in this case, no computing the loss, no possibility of any finite conception of it.

He has lost his existence; it is blotted out; he has no more life, no more consciousness, no more good. Instead of an eternal existence of ever-growing enjoyment, he is cut short; and, like the beast that perisheth, he is lost in annihilation.

8. But let me ask one more question. What are the chances, either in your favor or against you, in this case? How old are you? How many years have you lived in sin? How much privilege, and how much light have you enjoyed? How many times have you resisted your conscience, and the strivings of the Holy Spirit?

How many prayers have been offered for you? and how much has God done that you have resisted and condemned?

Are you aware how great a proportion of mankind that are ever converted, are converted when they are young? Are you not, many of you, at least, past the age that leaves you much room for a rational expectation that you will ever be converted? Have you not already hardened your heart, resisted the Spirit, and gone so far in sin as that the habit of delay has become so fixed, that you stand but a very slight chance of ever being converted?

Now, so far as we see the grace of God taking effect among men, by far the majority of men live and die in sin. Again, of those that are converted, by far the majority of them are converted under twenty years of age. Comparatively few are converted that live on in sin to be forty years of age; and only now and then one in old age is converted. How many chances, then, to one, do you think some of you stand of losing your soul?

Can you rationally expect to be saved any farther than as a mere peradventure, a possibility that you may be? You know that if you make sure of the present moment, you may be saved. But hitherto you have put it off; and are you not

likely to put it off?

Some of you may have quenched the Spirit already, may have extinguished His light; you may already be reprobate because the Lord has rejected you for your spirit of delay. But suppose you are not already given up of God, is there much reason to believe you will ever effectually attend to your salvation?

When will you do so?

9. Are not worldly men mad? They call Christians crazy; they say that we are insane. But they know better. They know that if any men have any claim to rationality, it is those who seriously attend to the salvation of their souls.

But I ask the question, are not worldly men insane? Should they treat their worldly interests as they do their spiritual interests, would not any court in Christendom, upon proof, pronounce them insane?

Yes, indeed. Go in to any court, having jurisdiction in the case, and prove that any man treats his worldly interests as sinners treat their spiritual and eternal interests, and the court would pronounce them insane, and grant them a commission of lunacy to prevent them from ruining themselves in a worldly point of view. O that a commission of lunacy could be sued out in the high Court of Chancery above, and men compelled to attend to the salvation of their souls! But this is a question that can never be taken out of their hands. In worldly matters, the earthly courts can take the possessions of a mad man and dispose of them in such a way that he cannot squander them. But in spiritual things, the madness is moral; it is culpable; it is the madness of a moral agent. God will not issue a commission of lunacy to compel him to attend to the salvation of his soul. He will warn him, and urge him, and strive with him; but after all He must leave him free to act for himself, and take the consequences.

O Sinner! take care what you do! and let this question in the text ring in your ears, and murmur in your deepest soul -- "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

And this other question -- "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

[Back to Top](#)

Sinners Not Willing To Be Christians- No.'s 1 & 2

Lectures XII & XIII

July 17, 1861

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--John 5:40: "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life."

LECTURE XII.

In speaking from these words, I remark,

1. That sinners think themselves willing to become Christians. I know I thought so myself at one time before I was converted; and this is a very common mistake with impenitent men.
2. Many professors of religion admit and assume the willingness of sinners to become Christians; and hence they can hardly blame them for not being Christians.
3. Because professors of religion think that sinners are willing to come to Christ but cannot; they therefore maintain the natural, proper inability of the sinner to come to Christ, in other words, to be a Christian. Many professors of religion talk to sinners, and pray for them as if they thought them all right so far as their willing is concerned. They represent them as being perfectly willing to be Christians, but as being unable.
4. This text affirms an opposite doctrine, and teaches that sinners are unwilling to come to Christ.

The text was addressed to the Jews to whom Christ was speaking, but is no doubt designed to affirm a universal truth of impenitent sinners. To come to Christ is to become a Christian, and this text plainly teaches that sinners are not willing to be Christians.

But to make this plain, I will inquire,

I. What is this life of which Christ speaks?

II. What is implied in coming to Christ for life?

III. Sinners will not come.

IV. Why you will not come.

V. Wherein lies your mistake?

I. What is this life of which Christ speaks?

There are two senses in which we have life in Christ.

1. In the sense of exemption from the death penalty, under which men are by reason of sin. In other words, we are indebted to Christ for pardon, and for an escape from eternal death.
2. Sinners are indebted to Christ for that spiritual and eternal life which God has given us in Christ.

Rom. 6:23 -- "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

1 John 5:11-12 -- "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son of God hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

These, and many other texts, speak of the eternal life which we have in Christ Jesus. This spiritual life consists substantially in a moral union and fellowship with God's will and with God's feelings -- with God's whole state of mind.

When a sinner turns to Christ, he thereby, and in the very act of turning to him, comes into sympathy with his will and with his state of mind. This is the beginning of eternal life; it is the beginning of moral union and fellowship with God; as John says, "Surely, our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

Let no one think that the eternal life which we have in Christ Jesus is a mere continuance of existence; for existence without moral sympathy with God would be to me a curse, and not a blessing. Eternal life implies continued existence, but consists in that state of mind in which God is.

II. To bring out clearly the truth affirmed in the text, I must enquire what is implied in coming to Christ for life?

1. Coming to Christ does not imply a change of place. It is not a going any whither; but it is a change of mind.

2. Coming to Christ is not a change of mind in the sense of a change of opinion; not in the sense of a mere change of intellectual views, nor in the sense of a mere change of feelings. These are all involuntary changes. Change of views, change of opinion, and change of feelings, are involuntary states of mind, and do not constitute any change of moral character; nor do they necessarily imply it. Nor does a change of views, opinions, or feelings, imply any coming, or properly any mental act of which we are the authors. Coming to Christ is a thing required of us; it is a thing also to which we are invited. Coming to Christ, then is something for us to do; it involves our moral activity, and must consist in a moral act.

3. But it must consist in a mental act, an act of the mind, and not a bodily or outward act. Mental action is not motive, like an outward act.

It is nevertheless an act, and an act which will produce changes in the acts of the body. But coming to Christ is a mental act, or an act of the mind as distinct from an act of the body.

4. Again, coming to Christ is an intelligent act of the mind; that is, the mind acts for reasons. It knows why and wherefore it acts, and therefore acts intelligently.

5. Coming to Christ is a voluntary act; that is, it is an act of the will. Coming to any person in the sense of a mere outward coming, always implies an inward coming, an act of will. But the coming to Christ does not necessarily imply any change of place at all, but is simply an act of the will.

6. Coming to Christ is a mental act, like coming to any one else for a favor. If I come to one of you for some favor, the coming in this case may imply a change of place in me. I may come from my place where I stand to the place where you sit. But observe, this outward coming implies an inward act of the will that has set my body in motion. The moral act is the inward willing. My mind decides upon it; I choose. I have a reason for coming in view of which I make up my mind, and put forth the act of will which

constitutes the inward coming.

7. Coming to Christ for this life implies an intelligent closing of the will with Christ's offer; a taking him at his word, a committing of ourselves to him for this end, that is, for this life spoken of in the text.

8. Coming to Christ for life in the double sense of which I have spoken, must involve,

(1.) A cordial consent to the justice of the death-penalty. If we do not recognize the fact that we deserve the death-penalty, how should we come to Christ for pardon? "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."

If a sinner does not recognize himself as condemned and under sentence of death, of course he is not willing to come to Christ for exemption from the execution of this death-penalty.

(2.) Again. If he admits that he is under sentence of eternal death, but does not consent to the justice of the penalty, he cannot cordially come to Christ for exemption from execution; for while he contends against the justice of the sentence, he is making an issue with justice, instead of cordially accepting mercy. It is a contradiction to say that he is willing to be indebted to Christ for a pardon, while he rebels against the justice of his sentence.

Coming, then, for pardon, or exemption from the execution of the death-penalty, implies a consent to the justice of God in passing the sentence of eternal death upon him.

(3.) It implies the acceptance of the sentence of death under which the sinner is. Let no one think, therefore, that he is willing to come to Christ for a pardon, while he does not heartily accept the justice of his sentence. But this is a common mistake. Sinners think that they are willing to be Christians, while they resolutely deny their desert of endless death.

Let me illustrate this point. Suppose a man should receive a letter from the executive department of the state; and upon opening it should find

that it contained the pardon for a crime of which he never has been guilty.

Could he cordially receive this pardon? No. He would say, either that it was some mistake; or else, that he was grossly insulted.

But again: suppose he had committed a crime for which he deserved punishment in the state-prison for three years; and suppose the pardon should purport to be a pardon for the crime of murder, and thus exempt him from the death-penalty, could he cordially accept this? No. He would say as before, either that this was a mistake; or else, that he was grossly insulted. But again, suppose that the pardon should profess to pardon him for a crime for which he was sentenced twenty years to the state-prison,-- could he cordially consent to this? Would not this imply that he had committed a greater crime than he had? Would not this also imply that greater favor and grace was shown him than he really needed? Could he regard it as a fair and generous transaction, and worthy of a government?

Would he not, after all, consider himself as injured by the implication that he had committed a greater crime than he had? To be sure he would. A condition of his cordially accepting it must be, that it shall cover no more time than that for which he deserved to be punished.

(4.) Now Christ is presented to us as offering us eternal life as a mere gift, no part of which is due to us in justice. "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life." The very fact that the whole of the eternal life is a gift, implies that the forfeiture incurred by sin is eternal death.

9. Coming to Christ implies the coming to him for pardon and the expecting of pardon from him. That is, it is looking to him for pardon with the expectation -- the applying to him for it, in the expectation that he will grant it.

10. Coming to Christ for spiritual and eternal life must involve,

(1.) Repentance, or the renunciation of sin. Observe, this spiritual life consists in moral union with God's state of mind, fellowship with God. Of course the very act of coming for this life involves the renunciation of sin.

(2.) Implies and involves the yielding of the will and of the whole being to him and to his will.

(3.) Coming to him for spiritual life is the voluntary yielding up of the mind to the divine attraction,--to the teachings, and drawings, and persuasions of his loving spirit.

It is a cordial trusting in him,--a cordial submission of the will to his will,--a cordial embracing of his promises and offers of mercy. The act is an act of will.

True, such is the will's relation to the feelings, that the act of will draws with it the feelings into sympathy with God's feelings; yet the responsible act of coming is a responsible, free choice or act of the will--an intelligent decision, yielding, committal of the whole mind to Christ in the relations in which the gospel presents him.

This cordial yielding of the will influences the sensibility, and brings the whole mind into fellowship with God.

III. Sinners will not come.

1. By sinners of course I mean impenitent sinners--sinners who do not come--who are not in fact Christians.

2. We have just seen that willing is coming--that to come is to will, or be willing. Willing, in the sense in which I have explained it, is the very act of coming.

3. Therefore there can be no other reason why a sinner does not come than that he will not. If he is willing, he has come already. If he wills as he ought to will, there is no power in the universe that can prevent his coming, for in fact he does come.

4. If he were willing and could not, he would not be to blame for not coming. Whatever one cannot do by willing, he cannot do at all. And if he were truly willing to come, and was really unable, it would be impossible to blame him for not coming. And in fact, while the sinner thinks himself willing to come, he cannot blame himself for not coming. He may regret his inability in a certain sense; but he cannot recognize his desert of damnation

for not coming, while he regards himself as willing to come but unable.

5. But if you could not come in the sense of a proper inability, you would not be commanded to come. Do you believe that an infinitely good God would command you, on pain of eternal death, to come, if you could not?

I have asked this question to hundred's of sinners, I think I may safely say, when they have plead their inability and professed their willingness to come. I have asked them--"Do you believe that God would command you on pain of eternal death, to come to Christ, if he believed that you could not come? In other words, do you believe that God would command you to perform an impossibility, on pain of eternal death?" I do not recollect ever to have found a person who would affirm, that he believed that God would command him to do what he knew he was unable to do.

But again, if you could not come, you would not be invited to come. Do you believe that God would invite you seriously to come to him when he knew that you could not come? If he knew that you were well-disposed enough, and really were willing to come but could not,--do you believe that he would invite you to come?

6. But perhaps you will say, Is it not taught in John 6:46, that no man can come to Christ except the Father draw him?

I answer, Yes, but what is this drawing? Christ immediately adds, "They shall all be taught of God;" which he quotes from the Old Testament. Here then we learn that this drawing is teaching.

Now remember that this text in the sixth chapter of John, does not contradict the text upon which I am preaching. Christ does not contradict himself when he says, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life;" and when he says, "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me, draw him." He means to affirm in the text upon which I am speaking, that sinners are unwilling to come to him; and in John, 6:44, he means to teach that no man can be willing until he is informed about Christ. It is expressly affirmed that this drawing is teaching--"They shall all be taught of God." This drawing, then, is not a physical, but a moral drawing,--a teaching; a persuasion.

This text, then, does not teach any natural inability of a sinner to come to

Christ who is taught by the Lord who Christ is, and what Christ's relations to men are. This drawing is only intended to secure our cordial consent, that is, our cordial willing, or coming to Christ. Observe, this text which you bring forward as teaching that you are unable to come, implies that you are unwilling to come. The drawing is designed to influence the will. If you were willing, as you suppose, you would not need the drawing.

7. But as coming is an act of the will, it cannot be impossible to one whose will is free, and who is instructed by the word and Spirit of God in regard to who Christ is.

Freedom of will consists in proper ability to will either way in every case of moral obligation or duty. The will is not free in the sense that it can act where there is no motive whatever for action, or no object of choice presented. A heathen who has never heard of Christ, is not free to come to Christ, because he knows nothing of him.

But one who is instructed, and who has been drawn in the sense of having been taught who and what Christ is, must be free to come; that is, he must have natural power to come; and his not coming is simply an unwillingness--an unwillingness for which he is entirely responsible--an unwillingness which he is under infinite obligation to overcome. If he knows who and what Christ is, and what Christ's requirements and offers are, he must be able to come; and hence the great guilt of his unwillingness.

8. If you do not come, it is a plain fact that you will not; therefore you are deceived in supposing yourself to be willing to come.

IV. Why you will not come.

1. Because of what is implied or involved in coming. For example: you are too proud, and blind, and self-righteous, to accept the justice of the sentence which has been passed upon you. You may say, perhaps, that it is just; but you are not cordial in accepting the propriety and equity of the sentence which God has passed upon you; consequently you are not willing to come to Christ for pardon.

2. You do not cordially embrace the atonement. Christ's death has been substituted for yours; but being unwilling to accept with cordiality the justice of the sentence against yourself, you are unwilling cordially to

embrace the atonement of Christ as offered for you. You do not cordially recognize its fitness, and propriety, and necessity. Virtually denying your own desert of death, you do not cordially accept the substitute that has been offered. You will not embrace, and make the atonement offered by Christ your own offering, as needed to honor and sustain the government of God in the forgiveness of your sins. You do not realize yourself to be a sinner deserving so great a curse and so dire a damnation as that such an atonement is a needed expression of God's abhorrence of your sins.

3. Another reason why you are not willing to come to Christ is, you are unwilling to give up a life of sin, and now to enter upon a life of holiness. But this, as we have seen, is implied in coming to Christ. Truly coming to Christ for pardon, implies repentance, or the giving up of sin. Truly coming to Christ for the eternal life here spoken of, implies the giving up of sin and entering into sympathy with God's holiness. This you are unwilling to do. Indeed, as we have seen, to will this is to do it.

4. You will not come to Christ, for the same reason that a drunken, debased wretch would not come into sympathy with a holy family, though he had the offer of adoption by that family, and of being made a joint heir with the children of the family. If such a debased wretch had the offer of adoption, and of heirship, you can understand why he would not come into sympathy with their state of mind, and become holy like them. Now this is the same reason why you are unwilling to come to Christ for this life.

To come to Christ for this life is to become like Christ,--is to come into sympathy with Christ,--is to yield yourself to obey Christ. But all this you are unwilling to do. The very fact that you do not do it, shows that you are unwilling; for to be really and truly willing were to do it.

The difficulty, then, is solely in your unwillingness; and you are unwilling as I have said, because of what is implied or involved in coming to Christ.

LECTURE XIII.

July 31, 1861

SINNERS NOT WILLING TO BE CHRISTIANS--No. 2

Text.--John 5:40: "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life."

V. Wherein lies your mistake?

1. You mistake wish for will. A drunkard might wish that he was a sober man, and that he was rid of his habit of intemperance; the most debased sinner in the world might wish that he was a better man; the vilest harlot might wish that she was a chaste woman. But in these cases wishing is not willing. While the drunkard wishes that he was a sober man, still he is not willing; and does not make up his mind forever to renounce drinking. He wishes he were a sober man, but he is not willing, and does not at once will to forsake his cups. He does not rule the appetite down, and make up his mind to drink no more.

Now this is precisely so with you. When you consider the error of your ways, your guilt and your danger, you wish that you were a Christian, but this is not being a Christian. You do not resign your will to Christ; you do not come to him; you do not at once settle it, now and forever, that obedience is to be the rule of your life forever--that trust, and confidence, and love shall be your state of mind forever.

2. You mistake a desire to be safe and happy for a willingness to come to Christ.

When sinners realize their guilt and danger, I know that they are very willing to be safe. They desire and are even willing to be safe and happy--indeed, they are greatly anxious to be safe and happy. But this is not the same thing as to will obedience to Christ. It is not the same thing as to trust in Christ; it is not by any means the same thing as to enter into sympathy with him, and to receive him in all the relations that he sustains to the soul.

3. You mistake a willingness to do other things for a willingness to come to Christ. You are willing perhaps, to perform external duties; you may be willing to pray, in your way, to read your Bible, and to use the means of grace, as you express it; but this is not the same thing as to be willing to take Christ's yoke upon you; willing to obey him; willing to become his follower; willing to take up your cross and follow him, which is implied in a willingness to come to him.

4. You stop short in the means. In immediate connection with the text Christ

says to the Jews, "Ye do search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me."

The English translation needs amending in this case. It reads, "Search the Scriptures," as if it were imperative; whereas it is indicative; "Ye do search the Scriptures." It is not a command to search them; but an assertion that they do search them. They stopped short in the Scriptures. They read the Scriptures a great deal, and they laid great stress on this; but after all they were not willing to do what they might have learned from the Scriptures. And sinners are now making precisely the same mistake in this respect which Christ charged upon the Jews. The Jews were set upon doing certain duties which the law required of them; by doing which duties they expected to be saved. They read the Scriptures, not for the sake of understanding about Christ, that they might come to him, but they read the Scriptures as a duty--they read the Scriptures as a task. They searched the Scriptures, and made a great deal of reading and searching the Scriptures; and they rested in that duty without trusting in him whom the Scriptures taught.

Now there are a great many persons who are willing to pray in their way; but when they have done their duty they stop and wait for God to answer their prayer. They pray that they may come to Christ; but they do not come. They pray that they may repent, and then stop for God to give them repentance. They pray for faith, and then wait for faith to come, instead of at once exercising faith. They pray that they may be willing to come to Christ; but instead of putting forth the act of will, they do not get beyond their prayer. They use the means, and then console themselves that they have done their duty. They go to meeting and hear about Jesus; but they do not come to him. In short, they are self-righteously using and stopping short in the means. These means were designed to lead them quite to Christ; but instead of seeing in these means how to come to Christ, and instead of coming to him, they pray, and read the Bible, and attend meeting, and there they stop, content with that.

Now are you not making precisely this mistake. You go to meeting--many of you profess to pray--you think you are anxious to be Christians--many of you profess, probably, to be willing to be Christians; and yet you do not put forth the act of will that would constitute you a Christian.

You do not trust; you do not submit; you do not embrace his will, or his

atonement; you do not accept him in the relations in which he presents himself to you. Do not then, deceive yourselves, and suppose yourselves to be willing while your own unwillingness is your only difficulty.

REMARKS.

1. From what has been said you can see why you need, and the sense in which you need, the Holy Spirit to make you Christians. You do not need the Holy Spirit in the sense that you are unable, but because you are unwilling to come to Christ.

You need his agency to make you Christians for the same reason that a drunkard might need the most powerful persuasive influences to be brought to bear upon him to make him a temperance man. Strictly speaking, his will being free, he is able to resist all temptation; and he does not need this powerful persuasion to make him able to will to give up his cups, but to secure him in temperance--to secure the consent of his will in fact.

He may need some powerful persuasive influences to be brought to bear upon him to really secure the consent of his will.

He needs to have his unwillingness overcome, which can only be done by persuasion; and in order to save him he may need to have a great moral influence brought to bear upon him to make him willing. It is not a physical influence that the drunkard needs, but a moral influence.

His will is not moved by an influence like a steel spring, by a physical force acting directly upon it; but it is moved by argument and persuasion, and by reasons addressed to his reason, his conscience, and his feelings. He is able to resist temptation in such a sense as that the temptation is no excuse for his sin. But still, such is the committal of his will to the gratification of his appetite, that as a matter of fact he will not give up his cups without this powerful moral influence brought to bear upon him.

Now just so it is with you, sinner, in respect to becoming a Christian. You need the Holy Spirit, not to make you able to come to Christ, but to make you willing.

2. We see also the nature of his agency--that his influence is not exerted physically upon the will; but it is a persuasive influence; it is by teaching, convincing, reproving, drawing; it is by a divine showing, an inward

enlightening, that he makes the sinner willing.

3. You are not to wait to be converted before you come; but to come at once. To be converted is to be made willing to come. Or more strictly, to be converted is to be drawn to Christ, to turn to Christ. Now suppose you were trying to persuade your son to do something which you desired of him, and were presenting to him the reasons, and urging, and entreating, and using all moral means to secure a willingness in him; and suppose you should find that he was waiting for you to make him willing, to convert him to your views and requirements. You are using the appropriate means, and the only appropriate means, to make him willing; but instead of yielding to these means, instead of suffering himself thus immediately to be persuaded, to be influenced, he hardens himself and waits for you to make him willing.

This would be just as you are doing in regard to Christ--you are waiting to be converted, or waiting to be made willing. Perhaps you think that conversion and being willing are very different things; therefore, that you must be converted first--must have some physical change wrought in you to enable you to be willing. Now the truth is, that you are to yield at once to the considerations presented to you, and thus become willing. You are to become willing; to put forth the act of will at once, under the persuasions that press upon you.

4. Persistence in maintaining that you are willing to be Christians, will be fatal to you. While you insist upon it that you are willing, you are never likely to become so; for in fact you are thus, justifying yourself, and throwing the responsibility upon God.

For you might very reasonably ask, if you are willing and yet unable, "Wherefore doth he yet find fault?" But if the difficulty is that of unwillingness, then the responsibility is altogether upon you.

I was once laboring in a revival where the most prominent man in the congregation, in several respects, became greatly disturbed about his soul. But he would maintain that he was willing to be a Christian.

His wife was a Christian woman, and prayed much for him; and he professed a willingness to be a Christian, and insisted upon it that he was unable to become one.

He became very restive, and even angry under the preaching; as my object was

from time to time to show him, with all other sinners in the congregation, that they were not willing to be Christians, and that this was their only difficulty.

One night the truth pressed him so hard that he was very angry, and he used some very improper language, even before he left the house of God. But he spent a very uneasy night; and early in the morning he arose and wandered off from his house, away to a grove of wood in the distance. There he knelt down and attempted to pray.

He told me afterwards, that he felt as if he must get alone, where he could pray and use his voice without restraint.

When he had knelt to pray he found his mouth closed and that his heart would not pray. He felt a rebellious spirit within him; and he found himself even unwilling to ask for the grace and mercy of God with any heart in his prayer. Finding no prayer in his heart, it occurred to him that he would repeat the Lord's Prayer.

He began--"Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." He said he felt condemned, and as if this were hypocritical in him to call God his Father when he had never treated him as a Father--he had never obeyed him as a Father--he had never honored him as a Father.

And then the petition, "Hallowed be thy name,"--he said he did not care for the sacredness of the name of God. He was a man that was sometimes profane, and had often used the name of God profanely;--and now that he should say, "Hallowed be thy name!"

And then the next petition, "Thy kingdom come:"--he said he could hardly say it. He knew that he had no sympathy with the kingdom of God; and that he was not honest and earnest when he asked God that his kingdom might come. He felt an inward reluctance to express such a sentiment as "thy kingdom come."

But at the next petition he found himself brought to a stand:--"Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." He said that he could not say it. He found that his will rose up against God's will. What! shall I pray that God's will may be done? Am I willing that it may be done in respect to me? Am I willing to do it myself.

Am I truly willing to do the will of God as they do the will of God in heaven?

He said his mouth was shut, He saw at once that the difficulty was his unwillingness.

There he stood on his knees, confounded. Now the appalling fact was out before him, so that he could no longer resist it, that he was unwilling to do or suffer the will of God; hence that he was unwilling to be a Christian; that he always had been unwilling; and there on his knees a suppliant before God, he saw that he was in rebellion against the will of God.

But what should he do? I think he said he sweat with agony. It seemed as if his sins would crush him. He saw where the difficulty lay; the whole difficulty lay in his unwillingness; and a load of guilt was pressing him down to death.

But just here it occurred to him, "why should I not be willing? Why should not God's will be done? Ought not his will to be done? Is not his will perfect? Should not all his creatures submit to his will? Whose will should govern? Is it not right, is it not safe, is it not altogether best that I, and that all beings, should do the will of God?"

Such considerations flashed over his mind; and he said that he gathered up all his soul, and at the top of his voice he cried--"Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven."

He said that with his words he put forth the whole strength of his will, and yielded all up to the will of God. In a moment a great calm came over him,--he breathed easily and sweetly. He rose from his knees and walked back to his house in peace; and from that moment he was a man of God. So he lived and so he died.

See now! he did not wait to be made willing; but when he saw what the difficulty was, he instantly, as he said, gathered up all his energies and became willing. He gave his consent--he yielded the point. He was not passive in waiting, but active in willing. This is the way to do, sinner--to gather up your energies, and be willing. Consent as you would consent to do anything else; and throw yourself upon his sovereign mercy.

5. But perhaps you will say--"I do not feel enough; and I do not feel right: I must feel right before I can come."

But remember that coming is not a feeling but a consenting.

Does it not appear reasonable that you should consent to all the will of Christ? Does it not appear to you to be reasonable that you should trust him? that you should consent that you deserve to be sent to hell for your sins? Does it not appear to you reasonable that you should give up your sins? that you should turn away from sin, and give all up to Christ? Do you not regard this as reasonable? Then why do you not at once consent to what you know to be reasonable? If you acknowledge it to be reasonable that you ought at once to give all up to Christ, why then do you not consent to what you see to be right and reasonable? Heartily consenting to this, is coming to Christ.

As I said, do not wait passively for anything to be done to you, as if some physical influence were to be brought to bear upon you, like an electric shock, to make you willing.

Yield to the persuasions of his truth and of his Spirit. Yield to your convictions. Yielding to your convictions is coming to Christ.

You are convinced that you ought to come, that you may come, that now is the time to come;--now yield to your convictions. Do not suppose it is possible for you ever to be converted while you do not yield to your convictions; for yielding to your convictions is conversion.

6. There is a great deal of false instruction given on this point to sinners.

I was much astonished to hear the celebrated Mr. Spurgeon, of London, affirm, in preaching, a doctrine the direct opposite of that which this text presents. He insisted upon it that sinners were willing to come to Christ--that this was not their difficulty at all. He said of himself, that he was willing to be a Christian long before he became so.

Now in his teaching there was such an utter want of discrimination as to quite agonize me. I must say, that he spoke as if in experience he had never really known what it was to be willing or unwilling--really to come to Christ. By this I do not mean to express a doubt that he was ever converted. But certainly he had never justly discriminated, he had never analyzed the subject so as to perceive exactly what is implied in coming to Christ. This was quite evident in his instructions. He completely mystified the subject.

Now false instruction upon this point is often fatal to the sinner. While he really thinks himself willing to be a Christian he cannot rationally and truly blame

himself for not being a Christian. It is therefore of the greatest importance that on this point right instruction should be given:--that the sinner should be made to understand right where his difficulty lies, and to see that it consists in his pertinacious obstinacy, his utter unwillingness to embrace the will of Christ.

I can hardly suppose that Mr. Spurgeon himself, if questioned upon the subject--and I must say, that I greatly desired to question him--I say, I can hardly suppose that he himself would fail to acknowledge that if the sinner cordially accepted the will of Christ--that this is coming to Christ.

I suppose also that he would admit, if questioned, that if the sinner did not cordially accept the will of Christ--that this is an unwillingness to come to Christ.

Indeed, it is plain that the false instruction so often given upon this point, is owing to a want of discrimination in regard to what is really implied in a willingness to come to Christ.

7. There is a great deal of unintelligent praying for sinners on this subject, and even in their presence. I have often heard persons pray for sinners substantially in this way: They would say to the Lord--"These sinners are seeking thee sorrowing; they are seeking thy love to know." Indeed, in some instances I have heard it plainly expressed in prayer, that these sinners were willing; and the suppliant plainly imagined that the sinner was all right so far as his will was concerned, and would say in prayer that which implied it. Now this must be most offensive to God, and a great stumbling block to the sinner. It is really taking the sinner's part against God. The sinner should be made to know and feel that his only difficulty is stubbornness, hardness of heart; or, which is the same thing, unwillingness to accept the will of Christ, and to receive Christ just as he is presented in the Bible. Any praying for the sinner that does not imply this, is an offence to God and a stumbling block to the sinner.

Such praying in the presence of the sinner begets only pity, and not repentance. The sinner says, "Yes, I am seeking his love to know--I am seeking him sorrowing--I wonder he does not hear me. I am entirely willing to do his will--I am entirely willing to be, and to do, and to suffer everything that he desires."

Now of every impenitent sinner this is all false. And for a Christian, or a Christian minister, to pray, or to say, that so far as his will is concerned he is all

right, must be an abomination to God; and if the sinner believes it, it must be a ruin to the sinner.

8. The truth is that sinners are universally stubborn and unbelieving; and it is just this that constitutes them sinners.

The will does not bow; it does not embrace the will of God; it does not accept the atonement, the authority, and the will of Christ.

This is the exact point of controversy between God and every impenitent sinner. He is unwilling that God should govern; he does not cordially consent to receive God as his king, his ruler, or Christ in the relations in which he is presented to him.

9. We should aim to draw the sinner to Christ, that he may come to him for the life here presented. We should try to make the sinner understand exactly what he is to receive from Christ, what he is to come to Christ for, why he is to come to Christ, when he is to come to Christ, and to strip him of every refuge of lies and of all his mistakes and self-righteousness.

Urge him at once to give up his sins, to put away his unbelief, to trust in Christ, and to embrace his whole will.

10. Lastly, all sinners may come. The Bible says, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "The Spirit and the bride say, come, and let him that heareth say, come, and let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." "Look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth."

Now do any of you say, ah! may I come? Yes, you may: however great your sins, you may come. Perhaps some of you are thinking--"Well, the time was when I might have come. But oh, I have wandered so far, I have been in sin so long I fear I am a castaway. There is no hope for me. I have done so much to disoblige Christ, and have so often grieved and quenched his Spirit that I greatly fear that now the invitation does not extend to me."

Sinner, remember the language still is, "whosoever will, let him take the water of

life freely."

"Let him that is athirst come" "Let all the ends of the earth come." This is the unalterable language of the Bible. Do not fail, then, through unbelief.

Do not, now, sin against your own mercies. You may come--you may come now. You may have this life. You may enter into it at once.

And now, will you come? Come, dying sinner, and let it not be said another hour that you will not come. Oh, let it no longer be true of you, that you will not come to Christ that you might have life. Come, dear soul! Come now--consent now. Cast away your objections, your unbelief, and your sins. Come, for all things are now ready. Will you come?

[Back to Top](#)

Holding The Truth in Unrighteousness- No.'s 1 & 2

Lectures XIV & XV

August 14, 1861

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 1:18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness."

LECTURE XIV.

In speaking from these words I inquire,

I. What is ungodliness?

II. What is unrighteousness in the sense here used?

III. What is it to hold the truth in unrighteousness?

IV. What are we to understand by the wrath of God in this text?

V. Against whom is this wrath of God revealed from heaven?

VI. Why is the wrath of God thus revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men?

I. What is ungodliness?

The original word means, primarily, to neglect God. It is the omission of duty to God; the withholding from him of worship, love, confidence, obedience. It is the withholding from God that which is his due.

II. What is unrighteousness in the sense here used?

1. The original word properly means, neglect of duty to man, as ungodliness implies neglect of duty to God.
2. It is an omission of duty, a withholding from man his due.
3. Unrighteousness, as the term is evidently here used in distinction from ungodliness, means the withholding of that equal love to man which is his due--that regard for his interest, and feelings, and character, and whatever is to him a good.

Withholding this from man is unrighteousness, as withholding it from God is ungodliness. Unrighteousness, in the broader sense, consists in withholding either from God or man, whatever is their due from us.

4. But as the terms ungodliness and unrighteousness are here both used, we are undoubtedly to understand unrighteousness here as having reference particularly to the omission of duty to our fellow men. Every thing then, is unrighteousness, which is short of doing our whole duty to our fellow men; and every thing is ungodliness which is short of doing our whole duty to God.

III. I inquire in the third place, What is it to hold the truth in unrighteousness?

1. The word rendered hold in this case, means to restrain, to hold down, to hold back. To hold the truth in unrighteousness, is, for selfish reasons, to refuse to obey the truth.
2. When duty is once known or seen, indifference is impossible. Truth is the

natural stimulus of the mind, and especially truth that reveals moral obligation.

When moral obligation is perceived, the mind cannot remain inactive. The perception of moral obligation forces the mind into a state of activity. The freedom of the Will does not imply, that in such circumstances the mind can remain inactive altogether.

But the freedom of the Will implies, that in every case of perceived moral obligation we have power to act one way or the other, to comply or refuse compliance with moral obligation.

When, therefore, moral obligation is perceived, passivity becomes impossible. The mind must act; it must either comply with the obligation; or it must refuse.

This should always be remembered--that indifference, or a state of non-activity, becomes impossible in the presence of perceived obligation. In such circumstances truth must be embraced or rejected; obligation must be accepted or rejected; duty must be performed or neglected.

To hold the truth in unrighteousness, then, is to withhold the heart, and life from obeying it; it is to persist in neglect of duty when convinced, and when obligation is seen.

3. To hold the truth in unrighteousness, is to refuse to perform duty when it is known. Neglect in these circumstances, is real refusal. There cannot be neglect in the sense of no action at all. The mind must act in opposition, must gird itself and refuse, in order to neglect when obligation is seen.

To hold the truth in unrighteousness, then, is precisely this: when obligation to our fellow men is perceived and admitted, to selfishly refuse to meet the obligation.

4. To hold the truth in unrighteousness is to unjustly neglect or refuse to perform our duty to God or man. Ungodliness, or withholding from God, is injustice or unrighteousness toward God.

All, then, who neglect to perform their duty either to God or man, are guilty of holding the truth in unrighteousness in the sense of this text.

IV. What are we to understand by the wrath of God in this text?

I reply, not a selfish anger such as selfish men exercise; but a benevolent, holy indignation, such in kind as a benevolent father or ruler might exercise toward injustice, selfishness, and madness in an undutiful child or subject. The term is a strong one, and is rendered wrath, by which we mean something more than mere anger in a low degree; it implies an intense indignation.

V. I inquire, against whom is this wrath of God revealed from heaven?

I answer,

1. Against all persons who do not act upon, and up to their conviction in respect to their duty either to God or man. It is a very common thing to find persons admitting that such and such things they ought to do, and there they stop. They seem to make a virtue of admitting their obligation in words, while they deny it in action.

You press them with their obligation, and they will say--"O yes, I know that I ought--but what then?" There they stop and do not lift a finger to perform their duty.

Now against all such persons whether they be professors of religion or non-professors, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven.

2. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all who allow themselves in short-comings. I say allow themselves in short-coming, in respect, either to God or man. It is not an uncommon thing for persons, in looking back, to accuse themselves of short-comings, when after all they are not aware of having deliberately and knowingly, at the time, fallen short of their duty.

But observe, I say that the wrath of God is revealed against all who allow themselves in short-comings--who are aware of their duty and really indulge themselves in neglect and short-comings; as if a man owed a debt to a neighbor, and knowingly and deliberately neglected to pay him; or when an individual admits his obligation to love, to confide in, to worship and obey God, and indulges himself in disobedience, or allows himself to neglect to perform his duty to God; against all such, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven.

3. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all who stop short of living up to their privileges, as well as their duty.

It is really a mans duty to live up to his privilege; and a man cannot allow himself to live below his privilege, without at the same time allowing himself to live below his duty. It is certainly a man's duty to avail himself of all the means within his reach of promoting his own holiness and usefulness in the highest degree; and to stop short of this, for selfish reasons, is a great crime against God; and therefore the wrath of God is revealed against all such as do this.

4. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all who rest, and stop short of full sanctification, full obedience to God as they understand their duty. I say, rest short; by which I mean that they knowingly quiet themselves in this state of short-coming.

There are a great man professors of religion who seem to have very little anxiety about being entirely sanctified, and fully obeying God. If they can believe themselves safe, they seem very well satisfied; although they know they are indulging in more or less sin from day to day.

It is not with them a matter of intense struggle and effort, to render to God full obedience. It is enough for them that they think themselves justified; the question of sanctification they are very willing to postpone.

They say they do not believe in sanctification in this life. They seem to throw up the reins and live on loosely, talk about continually sinning and repenting; while it is evident enough that they do not care to render to God a full and continued obedience. They care but little for sin if they can be forgiven.

They care but little about sanctification if they can ensure justification. Now it is perfectly plain that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all such persons who are living on in known and allowed short-comings in regard to sanctification--sinning and sinning and caring little about it--being anxious only to know that they are safe.

The fact is, such persons are not safe. You should understand this at once, that you are as far as possible from being safe.

You are under the wrath of God which is revealed from heaven against you.

You are knowingly and carelessly withholding from God his due; you are allowing yourself in sin, caring more for your justification than for your sanctification.

What is sanctification but full obedience to God? And can you make God believe that you are a sincere Christian, while you are careless about rendering to him, in all things, a full obedience?

5. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all whose religion is of the negative rather than of the positive kind.

The law of God is positive. It requires supreme love to God and equal love to man. It requires action toward God and man, intense action, energetic devotion to God and man. Now there are many who seem to suppose that this is the doing nothing bad, as they say.

They run hither and thither, and indulge themselves, and live in most things like the world around them. Their way of spending their time, of spending their money, of using their influence, is such that you enquire, why they do this, and why they do that. "Why!" they reply, "what harm is there in it?"

With them the question is, what harm is there in this or that course of life and not what good will this do? If they live without committing flagrant sin they think they do well. It does not seem so much as to enter into their designs to do all they can for the promotion of God's glory, but only to avoid doing such things as will be an open disgrace to religion. Their religion is a mere negation, if it may be called religion; which, indeed it cannot properly be, for all true religion is love, confidence, worship, obedience. Let all such, then, as are satisfying themselves with this negative form of what they call religion, remember that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against them.

Indeed, there are some whose history seems to be one of omission. They are continually neglecting many forms of duty; and they know it. Perhaps some of you here are admitting from day to day that this, and that, and the other thing is your duty; and yet you never address yourselves seriously to the performance of it.

Some of you are perhaps neglecting secret prayer--are neglecting your Bible--are neglecting to pay your debts--are neglecting in the outward life a great multitude of things, but in regard to God and man, and in your inward state

you cannot but know that you are really neglecting to render to God all the love and confidence that are his due, and that you are neglecting to love your neighbor as yourself. Your history is one of omission. You seem to overlook the fact, that omission is the very thing against which this text is arrayed; that this ungodliness and unrighteousness are omissions of duty to God and man.

Again, you seem also to forget that omission is a real withholding, a real refusal; that it is not a state of inaction, but of contrary action--a girding yourself to resist the claims of God and the claims of duty.

Your omission is not a mere passive state, but a state of selfish activity; the omitting to perform your duty to God and man for the sake of gratifying yourself.

Now can you not, some of you, right here, accuse yourself of living a life of omission? Is not this the history of your religion?

Are you not acknowledging from day to day in your conscience that you owe this, and that, and the other duty to God and man; while you are neglecting to perform these duties? Now remember, if this is so, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against you. If you are neglecting any heart duty, or any outward duty--and if you allow yourselves in this neglect or continue to indulge in this omission, you are as far as possible from being safe. I pray you, lay it to heart.

6. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all sinners who neglect repentance and faith; in other words, who neglect to become Christians.

(1.) The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all sinners who neglect God, who neglect prayer, and who neglect to perform all the duties enjoined upon every son and daughter of Adam.

(2.) The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all procrastinators, whether in or out of the church. By procrastinators, I mean, those who have it in their mind at some future time to perform their duty; and who for some reason put it off for the present. This is the great sin of many persons. They know their duty--they know that now is the accepted time and now is the day of salvation; but for unrighteous reasons they continue to procrastinate, to put God off.

(3.) The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all sinners who neglect to do and be what God requires Christians to do and be. All men to whom the Gospel is preached are bound to be Christians immediately.

A great many sinners are constantly watching Christians and accusing them, but they seem not to understand that God requires of them what He requires of Christians, and that in condemning Christians they only condemn themselves; in pointing out the short-comings of Christians they only point out their own. Now sinners, what you suppose God requires of Christians, you are bound to perform yourselves. For you seem to know what the Christian's duty is; you continue to judge the Christian, and therefore you show that you know what he ought to do and what he ought to be. But if you neglect to do and to be what you require of him, then you fall short of your known duty, and the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against you for not doing what you exact of Christians.

(4.) The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all who know better than they habitually do. Now all sinners are in this state; and this is what constitutes them sinners. They know better than they do; they know their duty but they do it not. And this is that for which the wrath of God is revealed against them.

Impenitent sinners are very apt to think of their sins only as commissions of something outbreaking in the outward life; but they seldom think much of their neglects of duty either to God or man. But it should be understood that all sin resolves itself into either neglect or refusal to render to God and man their due. Indeed, there are many, both professors and non-professors, who allow themselves to live habitually in opposition to their convictions of duty. Now let it be understood that this is the very essence of sin; and against all such persons the wrath of God is revealed from heaven.

VI. Why is the wrath of God thus revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men?

1. Neglect of duty implies a knowledge of duty. A man cannot be said to neglect a duty of which he has no knowledge.

2. Neglect of duty implies ability to perform it. A man cannot be truly said to neglect that which he has no power to perform.

3. Neglect of duty, as I have already said, implies a refusal to do duty. Indeed it involves it. A state of passivity in the presence of perceived obligation being impossible, neglect of duty must involve deliberate and persistent disobedience to God.

4. Neglect of known duty to God or man, involves a rejection of God's authority, as not a sufficient reason for action.

It is virtually saying, "What if God does require of me such and such a thing? That is no good reason why I should do it. Who is God that I should obey Him, or what profit should I have if I should pray to Him?"

It involves a most insolent and contemptuous rejection of God's command as being a sufficient reason for action in that direction.

5. Holding the truth in unrighteousness involves a deliberate rejection of moral obligation as constituting an influential reason for action.

Observe, in this case the sinner knows his duty, he admits the obligation in words but rejects it in practice.

Now what is this but saying, "What do I care for moral obligation? To be sure, I admit that there is a moral obligation; but what do I care? Do you suppose I am going to be influenced by moral obligation? If you do, you do not know me. I hope you do not think that I am so weak as to yield to a mere moral obligation--to a mere command of God--to a mere sense of duty. Not I."

6. Holding the truth in unrighteousness involves a contempt for the idea of duty as being of no real practical account.

"Duty?" says the sinner--"do you think I care for duty? What! my duty to God, and my duty to my neighbor? Talk not to me of duty. What do I care for duty?"

This holding the truth in unrighteousness is a real contempt for duty. It is virtually saying--"You never need expect me to be influenced by that consideration. You never need to tell me of my duty, for I care not for it. I

will pursue my inclination, duty in any wise to the contrary notwithstanding. Why do you come to me whining about the idea of duty, and tell me it is my duty to do thus, and thus, and thus? Away with your cant! I will have nothing to do with duty."

7. This holding the truth in unrighteousness, involves a real ruling down of all moral considerations. The consideration of duty to God--the consideration of God's authority--the consideration of God's rights, of man's rights, and of all rights--it is just ruling them down; putting the foot upon them; trampling them under the feet; and saying--"These considerations shall never influence me!"

8. This course of conduct in holding the truth in unrighteousness, in holding the mind back from obedience, is of course decisive of the moral attitude. It is taking a deliberate stand against God. It is taking a deliberate open stand before all his subjects, and pouring contempt upon his authority, upon his moral government, and upon all the moral considerations with which he attempts to enforce obedience. It is then taking the attitude of an open rebel, an open enemy, a persistent opponent of God.

LECTURE XV.

August 28, 1861

HOLDING THE TRUTH IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS--No. 2

Text.--Rom. 1:18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness."

9. Holding the truth in unrighteousness is decisive of moral character. It is a state of total depravity, of total dishonesty in regard both to God and men. While the debt is admitted in words, and the obligation both to God and man in words is admitted, yet practically it is a denial of the obligation. The sinner virtually says--"I know I ought to obey God, but I will not. I know I ought to love my neighbor as myself, but I will not. I know I am indebted to God, but I will not pay him. I know I am indebted to man, but I care not for it--I will not pay him."

This, then, is making an open issue with God before the entire universe. It is

a deliberate, known, practical, persistent rejection of his authority. Again, it is setting the worst possible example before God's subjects. Suppose a subject of any government to stand forth in the presence of all the subjects, and deliberately refuse to obey the laws; not merely to obey some one law, but to obey the laws in general and universally. Suppose the subject to admit the obligation, to admit the wisdom and justice, and equity, and necessity of the laws, but to obey the laws in general and universally. Suppose the subject to admit the obligation, to admit the wisdom and justice, and equity, and necessity of the laws, but for unrighteous reasons to refuse to obey them; to take a course directly opposed to them; to persist in that course, and to hold fast his persistent resistance to the authority of the government--should not the wrath of the government be revealed against such a character as that?

10. But again, holding the truth in unrighteousness, is the deliberate refusal to pay an acknowledged debt to God.

Suppose that some one is indebted to you. You greatly need your pay, and you go to him and demand it. He acknowledges the debt in terms, and you request him to pay it. He has the money; but he prefers to use it in some other way, to promote his own interest. You urge his obligation upon him--you tell him he ought to pay it, and he laughs you in the face, and says, "What do I care for that? Do you suppose I will be influenced by such a consideration as that? Oughtness! shall that influence me? Never!" But you remind him of the authority of God, and of his command to pay his debts. He laughs again, and says--"And who is God? And what do I care for God's commandments? Do you suppose I am to be influenced by such a consideration as that? Never!"

Now you would feel, in such a case as this, that such a deliberate refusal, and such a contempt of obligation, was a dreadful sin against you.

But just see that negligent professor of religion, see that impenitent sinner, deliberately refusing to pay an acknowledged debt to God; virtually saying to God, "What do I care for your authority? What do I care for my obligations to thee? I will not be influenced by an obligation to pay my debts either to God or man."

But again, suppose a child should take such a stand, and deliberately, and habitually, and universally neglect obedience, refuse, omit all obedience--

what would you say of such a child? Should not the parent be angry? Should not he reveal his indignation against that child?

And what would you say of your debtor, in case he should treat you in such a way? Would you not feel yourself called upon to put him in a way to pay you, if he deliberately contemned all obligation for selfish reasons, and deliberately refused to pay an acknowledged debt?

Suppose in this case you should go and sue him, and bring him before a court, and he should say, "Why, you appear to be displeased, you appear to feel indignant that I do not pay you." Would you not reply, "I have reason to be indignant. You are a scoundrel; you are a dishonest man; you condemn all moral obligation, and I will see what I can do by enforcing legal obligation."

"You treat all moral obligation with contempt; and what is left to me but to compel you to pay your debt?"

So in the case of holding the truth in unrighteousness: obligation to God is treated with contempt; God himself is treated with contempt; his authority is treated as a mere trifle; his feelings are outraged and contemned, and is it not appropriate that God should be "angry with the wicked every day," that He should have a benevolent indignation toward those who thus condemn their obligation? And is it not appropriate in Him to express or reveal this indignation, this wrath from heaven against such conduct as this? What would you think of a human ruler, who should let such conduct pass without manifesting the least displeasure at it? Or a parent, who should let such conduct pass without manifesting any displeasure at it?

The fact is, God has infinitely good reasons for being highly displeased. His wrath must be enkindled against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.

Now what will be said of Him if He does not manifest this wrath? What will his subjects think of Him? Can they maintain their confidence in Him? Will He not forfeit their confidence? Will He not inevitably lose the confidence of all his faithful subjects, if He neglects to manifest or reveal his wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness?

REMARKS.

1. From this standpoint we can see the awful elusion of mere moralist.

There are many men who totally neglect God, and are, therefore, in the sense of this text, emphatically ungodly. They withhold from God the love, confidence, obedience, and worship which is his due, and still imagine that they are doing nothing very wrong. You speak of their danger of being lost--they are ready to say, "Why, what have I done that is bad? Whom have I wronged?" Now the answer is plain, in the light of this text; you have wronged God out of his whole duty; you have never performed your duty to him in any sense or degree. What if you should refuse to pay your debts to men?

Suppose you were indebted to many persons, and never paid them the first cent--habitually and universally neglected to meet their just demands; and then you should set up for a moral man--should ask, "What evil have I done?"

Suppose these creditors of yours should often demand their pay, and you should as often acknowledge in words that the debts were just, and you ought to pay them, but still you should neglect and refuse to pay them, and never pay them at all; and then suppose they should complain of you, and you should say, "Why, what have I done?"--would not this be ridiculous?

But this is the manner in which you treat God; and you make little or no account of your neglect to pay what you owe to God. You would feel intensely if anybody owed you, and they should treat their obligation as you treat your obligation to God.

But just think! you are perfectly ungodly, and yet laying the flattering unction to your soul that you have done nothing very bad.

But again, you have neglected your whole duty to man as well as to God. The law of God and the law of your own conscience, requires you to love your neighbor as yourself; to regard and treat his interests as your own; to be careful of his reputation as of your own, of his feelings as of your own, of his interests as of your own. Now, have you done this? You satisfy yourself by saying you have not wronged him.

Wronged him! Have you not withheld from him that which is his due? Have you not refused to love him? refused to be interested in his welfare? Have you cared for his soul? Have you done anything to save him?

Suppose you had seen him asleep in his house, and the house on fire, and you had suffered it to burn down and consume him, and had given him no warning; and then you should say, "Wherein have I wronged him?"

The fact is, you have wronged both God and man. You have withheld from both their due, and you have no more right to claim to be a moral man than Satan has to claim to be moral. For, a mere moralist, an unconverted man, a man that neglects his duty to God and his fellow-men, as all unconverted sinners do, is void of all moral honesty; and must be, of course.

Why, how ridiculous it is for you to pretend to be morally honest, when you refuse, universally, to pay your debts. You do not hesitate to treat the claims of God, which you admit to be just, with utter contempt in your practice. You withhold from him all that is really valuable to him. For if you do not love him, if you do not regard his interests, your outward life, if it appear to be an honest and moral life, is a mere hypocrisy. Your kind treatment of your fellow men is not, and cannot be, because you love them; for if you are a mere moralist, an unconverted man, you do not love your neighbor as yourself--you must, therefore, have some other reason than love to your neighbor for treating him kindly; it must be some other reason than real honesty of heart, and uprightness before God and man, that leads you to any appearance of honesty.

But suppose some individual owed you, and was under every possible obligation to you and yet should contemn and despise the whole, and never perform his duty, or pay you a debt, or discharge any obligation, could you believe him an honest man? No, you could not believe that he had one particle of moral honesty in him.

But suppose you should see a son who treated his own parents as you treat God--would you believe that son an honest man, however much he might boast of honesty? Would you not be convinced irresistibly that any man that could treat honorable and upright parents with the contempt with which you treat God, could not be an honest man? Would you not regard him as void of all moral honesty? Would you not say irresistibly, a man that can do that can have no honesty in his soul? I beseech you to lay aside the claim of honesty and morality, and take home to yourself the charge that you are a totally dishonest and base man, one who has no real claim to be regarded as anything other than as a wicked, unprincipled, selfish being.

2. The same must be said of many professors of religion. What an awful delusion they are under! Supposing themselves to have been converted, they live on in habitual and known transgression. Many things which they acknowledge to be their duty, they never pretend to perform.

They allow themselves all the time to live in the neglect of what every body knows, and they themselves acknowledge to be their duty; and yet they think they are justified--think they are penitent. But what idea can they have on repentance? Is not repentance the renunciation of sin?

But what is sin but withholding from God and man their due? Here then is a professor of religion that habitually withholds from God and man their due, living on in known omissions; and confessing his omission, and will continue to confess them without end, and never address himself to the performance of these duties. Now what a delusion is this! Why, on the very face of it, it is hypocrisy and a fatal delusion.

3. This text does not agree with the doctrine of inability, about which we hear so much.

There are many who are continually ready to acknowledge their short-comings, and acknowledge in words their crime; but they plead their inability to obey. Inability! and does this text teach or imply any such doctrine as that? Why, this text assumes the very opposite of the doctrine of inability. It takes the ground that men, so far from being unable to obey the commands of God, are positively resisting them. And this is in fact true.

I have already said that truth, and especially the truth of moral obligation, is the natural stimulus of the mind. It wakes it up, and compels it to act in one way or the other. Moral obligation will at once enlist and engage the energies of the soul; and unless they be actively and positively withheld, unless the truth is held back, restrained in unrighteousness, the mind will surely obey it. Here then, instead of being unable to obey, the individual is obliged to gird himself to resist, in order to prevent obedience. Truth is a mighty impulse to draw him into conformity with itself; but, for self reasons, he girds himself and holds it back, restrains it in unrighteousness.

This then, is your inability, sinner, and professor of religion.

Truth, if you did not restrain it, would at once quicken you into activity, and into

obedience. But you harden your heart, and you stiffen your neck, you resist the claims of truth and of God.

This is plainly the doctrine of this text, as it is of the Bible universally when it is properly understood.

4. Men feel that neglect is sin, when self is the object of this neglect. Parents feel that the neglect of their children is sin; husbands and wives feel that the neglect of the other party is sin; men in business feel that it is sin in their debtors to neglect to pay them, especially where this neglect is owing, not to inability, but to selfishness, or carelessness of the rights of others. Selfish men are loud in their complaints of others who neglect to pay their debts to them; but it would surely be more consistent for them to cease complaining of anybody's neglecting them, while they are neglecting to pay their debt to God. Thou that complainest that others neglect to pay their debts to you--dost thou neglect to pay thy debts to God?

5. How little stress is laid upon the neglect of duty as a sin. Now it should always be remembered that the law of God is positive. God is never satisfied with a man's doing nothing; He requires him to act, and that with all his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. And now when God is totally neglected, when men are ungodly and unrighteous, neglecting their duty both to God and man, how strange it is that this neglect should be so little regarded as a great and abominable sin against God, and as indeed the essence of all sin.

6. Church discipline is often a great stumbling block on this account. Men are allowed to live in fellowship with the churches, and neglect their duty habitually and notoriously; men who neglect their duties to the church and their duty to God, and live cold and formal lives, and do not hesitate in words to confess it, while they do not reform.

How strange it is that persons are allowed to remain in the church as accepted members, who so neglect their duty both to God and man.

7. Sinners are greatly misled by the church in this respect. Children in Christian families see that their parents are living in constant neglect of duty; and if they attend meetings, they hear Christians confessing that they are constantly neglecting duty, and they know very well that they expect to continue to neglect their duty. Yet very little stress is laid upon this by the church or by the ministry.

Now this fatally misleads many sinners. They come to think but very little of omission of duty. The example of the church on this subject is the greatest stumbling block to them. They hear their parents say that they neglect God, and they neglect duty. Very well how little, then, do they think of neglecting their duty!

It has come to this, that the example of the Church in this respect has completely stumbled the world; so that sinners are living for scores of years in the neglect of all their duty to God, and yet do not consider themselves as very bad sinners. They say they have done nothing very bad. Now how came they to this idea? The fact is, they have learned it from the church. They have been in the habit of hearing the church members speak of the omission and neglect of duty as a thing almost of course.

8. Orthodox neglectors of duty are the greatest sinners in the world. I have said that neglect of duty implies a knowledge of duty. Now the more orthodox in sentiment men are, and the more enlightened men are, the greater, surely, is their obligation. Those, therefore, who are truly orthodox in sentiment, but heterodox in practice, living in the neglect of their known duty, are the greatest sinners in the world.

9. From this stand-point we can also see the actual difference between real saints and sinners.

I have just spoken of professors of religion who live in the habitual neglect of duty; and of the church, which is so largely composed of mere nominal professors, as being a stumbling block to the world. Remember, then, that I am now about to speak, not of nominal professors, of negligent souls, but of real saints and sinners. But I also wish to be understood as meaning by enemies all who live in the habitual neglect of known duty. Saints are converted persons; sinners are unconverted. Saints are penitent souls; sinners are impenitent. Saints are obedient; sinners are disobedient. Both know their duty; saints do their duty; but sinners omit theirs.

With the true saint, God's will being known, is reason enough; he wants no further reason to influence his conduct. It is just this state of mind that constituted him a saint. He has given up his spirit of disobedience; he has ceased to hold truth in unrighteousness; he has yielded his mind to the influence of truth; God's will has been accepted by him; he has laid aside his rebellion and

become an obedient subject of Christ.

Now mark! he wants no better or higher reason for any course of conduct than to know that such is the will of Christ.

But with the sinner, the opposite is true. He knows his duty, but this is no influential reason with him at all. He has not accepted the will of God as his rule of life. He affirms it to be his duty to do so; but he does not do it. And it is this which constitutes him an impenitent sinner.

The revealed will of God is with him no sufficient reason at all to induce obedience. He knows his duty, perhaps as well as the saint does; but he does not do it. He holds the truth in unrighteousness. Again, with the true saint, the omission of any duty is a dreadful thing. What! to disobey a command of God!

To know that God requires of him a certain course of action, and for him to refuse! Why, it is a dreadful thing! a thing not to be thought of! But with the impenitent sinner, the omission of duty is a mere trifle, a thing scarcely worth considering. He goes forward omitting all his duty, and all with as little consideration, or fear, or regret, as he would have in view of any trifle that you can name.

10. This text is more frequently suggested by facts around us than almost any other in the Bible. It is so very, very common to find persons neglecting what they know and even confess to be their duty, and it is utterly amazing when we consider that so many of these confessors are really professors. They confess themselves to be in the habitual neglect of some duties, and perhaps of many, and yet they profess to be the children of God; they profess to be converted, to be God's saints, his holy ones. Now who can live with such surroundings without being constantly reminded of this text--"The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness."

11. The announcement of this text ought to shock such persons like a thunder bolt. See these dreamers! this multitude of souls that are crying peace, peace, when there is no peace! neglecting their duty to God and to their fellow-men! Hark! hear the thunder of this text, and let your nerves tremble!

12. Ministers have reason to tremble for their hearers. How perfectly common it is for ministers to preach and hold out the claims of God, while their people will

confess that it is truth, and that so they ought to do, but do they do so? Let such a minister watch his people. He holds out to them on the Sabbath the claims of God, and they go away, perhaps eulogizing the preaching, at any rate, they confess that they have been instructed in regard to their duty--but does he find them the next day, and every subsequent day, addressing themselves to this duty? Does he expect them to do it? Does he even expect his own church to do it? I should like to ask ministers, how many members of their church they have reason to believe, from acquaintance with them, will do their duty as soon as they are instructed in regard to it.

And I should like to ask them if it is not true that in a great multitude of instances, they have no expectation at all that the members of their church will wake up and be influenced by the truth, and will do what they know to be their duty. After preaching on the Sabbath and holding out to the church the claims of God, would they not be surprised on Monday to see the church all astir, and full of energy and vigor in carrying out the instructions of the Sabbath? How common it is for ministers to hold out the claims of God, to pour the truth upon their hearers; and then to see, right before their faces, that they hold the truth in unrighteousness. They know and acknowledge their duty, but they do not do it.

13. Let us reflect that it is the wrath of God that is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness. It is the wrath of God, and therefore it cannot be resisted. It is the wrath of God, and therefore it cannot be endured. "Can thine heart endure, can thine hand be strong in the day that I shall deal with thee, saith the Lord? What then wilt thou do in the day when I shall punish thee?" Sinner and negligent professor, have you really considered what it is to have the wrath of an Omnipresent and Almighty Being revealed from heaven against you? Revealed from heaven! See, the holy mount is covered with dark clouds, the batteries are charged, the match is lighted and the Almighty is there!

Are you not afraid to pursue your course of neglect of duty, holding truth in unrighteousness? In just such a time as you think not, and when you are crying peace and safety, these batteries of Omnipotence will open upon you--the discharge will wither you in a moment--and you will sink down, down, down in the blackness of darkness forever!

What then shall you do? I answer, immediately discard this spirit of delay--lay hold upon eternal life--let your heart go to Christ--no longer hold the truth in

unrighteousness. Arise, and what you do, do quickly. Lay hold upon eternal life; for "now is the accepted time, now is the day of Salvation."

[Back to Top](#)

Any One Form of Sin Persisted In Is Fatal To The Soul

Lecture XVI

September 11, 1861

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--James 2:10: "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all."

Text.--Luke 16:10: "He that is unjust in the least, is also unjust in much."

In speaking from these words, I inquire,

I. What is it to persist in sin?

II. Any one form of sin persisted in, is fatal to the soul.

I. What is it to persist in sin?

1. To persist in sin is, not to abandon it. If a person should only occasionally, under the force of temptation, fall into a sin, any form of sin, and should repent and abandon it for a time, and should only occasionally be overcome by a temptation to commit that form of sin, it would not be proper to say that he persisted in it. For, according to this supposition, he is not wilful, or obstinate, or habitual in the commission of this sin; but it is rather accidental in the sense that the temptation sometimes overtakes and overcomes him notwithstanding his habitual abandonment of it and resistance to it. But if the commission be habitual, a thing allowed, a thing indulged in habitually--such a sin is persisted in.

2. A sin is persisted in, although it may not be outwardly repeated, if it be not duly confessed. An individual may be guilty of a great sin, which he may not repeat in the act; nevertheless, while he neglects or refuses to confess it, it is still on his conscience unrepented of, and in that sense, is still persisted in. If the sin has been committed to the injury of some person or persons, and be not duly confessed to the parties injured, it is still

persisted in.

If any of you had slandered his neighbor to his great injury, it would not do for you to merely abstain from repeating that offense. The sin is not abandoned until it is confessed, and reparation made, so far as confession can make it. If not confessed, the injury is allowed to work; and therefore the sin is virtually repeated, and therefore persisted in. Again,

3. A sin is persisted in when due reparation has not been made. If you have wronged a person and it is in your power to make him restitution and satisfaction, then, so long as you persist in neglecting or refusing to do so, you do not forsake the sin, but persist in it. Suppose one who had stolen your property, resolved never to repeat the act, and never to commit the like again; and yet he refuses to make restitution and restore the stolen property as far as is in his power; of course he still persists in that sin, and the wrong is permitted to remain.

I once had a conversation with a young man to this effect: He had been in the habit of stealing. He was connected with a business in which it was possible for him to steal money in small sums; which he had repeatedly done. He afterwards professed to become a Christian, but he made no restitution. He found in the Bible this text--"Let him that stole steal no more." He resolved not to steal any more, and there let the matter rest. Of course he had no evidence of acceptance with God, for he could not have been accepted. However he flattered himself that he was a Christian for a long time, until he heard a sermon on confession and restitution, which woke him up. He then came to me for the conversation of which I have spoken.

He was told that, if it was in his power, he must make restitution and give back the stolen money, or he could not be forgiven. But observe his perversion of Scripture. To be sure it is the duty of those who have stolen property to steal no more; but this is not all. He is bound to restore that which he has stolen, as well as to steal no more. This is a plain doctrine of Scripture, as well as of reason and conscience.

II. I now come to the main doctrine of our texts--that any one form of sin persisted in, is fatal to the soul.

That is, it is impossible for a person to be saved, who continues to commit any

form of known sin.

1. It is fatal to the soul because any one form of sin, persisted in, is a violation of the spirit of the whole law. The text in James settles that: "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all." The law requires supreme love to God, and equal love to our fellow men.

Now sin is selfishness; and always requires the preference of self-interest and self-gratification to obedience to God, or to our duty to our fellowmen.

Whosoever, therefore, habitually prefers himself to God, or is selfish in regard to his fellow men, can surely not be a Christian. If in any one thing he violates the law of love, he breaks the spirit of the whole law, and is living in sin.

2. Persistence in any form of sin cannot consist with supreme love to God or equal love to our fellow men. If we love God more than ourselves, we cannot disoblige Him for the sake of obliging ourselves. We cannot displease Him, knowingly and habitually, for the sake of pleasing ourselves.

For we supremely love whom we supremely desire to please. If we supremely desire to please ourselves, we love ourselves supremely. If we love God supremely, we desire supremely to please Him; and cannot, consistently with the existence of this love in the soul, consent to displease Him.

Under the force of a powerful temptation that diverts and partially distracts the mind, one who loves God may be induced to commit an occasional sin, and occasionally to displease God.

But if he loves God supremely, he will consent to displease Him only under the pressure of a present and powerful temptation that diverts attention and partially distracts the mind. So that his sin cannot be habitual; and no form of sin can habitually have dominion over him if he is truly a Christian.

3. The text in James affirms the impossibility of real obedience in one thing, and of persistent disobedience in another, at the same time. It seems to be an error too common, into which many fall, that persons can really obey God in the spirit of obedience in some things, while at the same time there

are certain other things in which they withhold obedience; in other words, that they can obey one commandment and disobey another at the same time--that they can perform one duty acceptably, and at the same time refuse to perform other duties.

Now the text in James is designed flatly to contradict this view of the subject. It asserts as plainly as possible, that disobedience in any one point is wholly inconsistent with true obedience for the time being in any other respect; that the neglect of one duty renders it impossible for the time being to perform any other duty with acceptance; in other words, no one can obey in one thing and disobey in another at the same time. But,

4. Real obedience to God involves and implies supreme regard for His authority.

Now if anyone has a supreme regard for God's authority in any one thing, he will yield to His authority in everything.

But if he can consent to act against the authority of God in any one thing for the time being, he cannot be accepted in anything; for it must be that, while in one thing he rejects the authority of God, he does not properly accept it in any other. Hence, if obedience to God be real in anything, it extends for the time being, and must extend, to everything known to be the will of God. Again,

5. One sin, persisted in, is fatal to the soul, because it is a real rejection of God's whole authority. If a man violates knowingly any one of God's commandments as such, he rejects the authority of God; and if in this he rejects the authority of God, he rejects His whole authority for the time being, on every subject. So that if he appears to obey in other things while in one thing he sets aside and contemns God's authority, it is only the appearance of obedience, and not real obedience. He acts from a wrong motive in the case in which he appears to obey. He certainly does not act out of supreme respect to God's authority; and therefore he does not truly obey Him. But surely one who rejects the whole authority of God cannot be saved.

I fear it is very common for persons to make a fatal mistake here; and really to suppose that they are accepted in their obedience in general, although in

some things or thing they habitually neglect or refuse to do their duty.

They live, and know that they live, in the omission of some duty habitually, or in the violation of their own conscience on some point habitually; and yet they keep up so much of the form of religion, and do so many things that they call duties, that they seem to think that these will compensate for the sin in which they persist. Or rather, so many duties are performed, and so much of religion is kept up, as will show, they think, that upon the whole they are Christians; will afford them ground for hope, and give them reasons to think that they are accepted while they are indulging, and know that they are, in some known sin.

They say--To be sure I know that I neglect that duty; I know that I violate my conscience in that thing; but I do so many other things that are my duty, that I have good reason to believe that I am a Christian.

Now this is a fatal delusion. Such persons are totally deceived in supposing that they really obey God in anything. "He that is unjust in the least, is really unjust also in much;" and "whosoever will keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all." Again,

6. Any form of sin persisted in is fatal to the soul, because it is inconsistent with true repentance. Sin, however great, will be forgiven if repented of. But what is repentance? Repentance is not mere sorrow for sin, but it is the heart-renunciation of sin; it is the giving up of sin from the heart, and of all sin as sin; it is the rejection of it because it is that abominable thing which God hates; it is the turning of the heart from self-seeking to supreme love to God and equal love to our fellow men; it is heart-reformation; it is heart-rejection of sin; it is heart-turning to God. Now, while any one sin is persisted in and not given up, there can be no true repentance; for after all, this form of sin is preferred to the will of God--the indulgence of sense in this particular is preferred to pleasing God. There can, therefore, be no true repentance unless all known sin be for the time utterly abandoned.

7. Persistence in any form of sin is fatal to the soul, because it is utterly inconsistent with saving faith. That faith is saving which actually does save from sin; and no other faith is saving, or can be. That faith is justifying which is sanctifying. True faith works by love; it purifies the heart; it overcomes the world. These are expressly affirmed to be the characteristics

of saving faith. Let no one suppose that his faith is justifying when in fact it does not save him from the commission of sin; for he cannot be justified while he persists in the commission of any known sin. If his faith does not purify his heart, if it does not overcome the world and overcome his sins, it can never save him. Again,

8. Persistence in any one form of sin is fatal to the soul, because it withstands the power of the Gospel. The Gospel does not save whom it does not sanctify. If sin in any form withstand the saving power of the Gospel; if sin does not yield under the influence of the Gospel; if it be persisted in, in spite of all the power of the Gospel on the soul, of course the Gospel does not, cannot save that soul. Such sin is fatal. But again,

9. Persistence in any one form of sin is fatal to the soul, because the grace of the Gospel cannot pardon what it cannot eradicate.

As I have already said, a sin cannot be pardoned while it is persisted in. Some persons seem to suppose that, although they persist in many forms of sin, yet the grace of God will pardon sins that it has not power to eradicate and subdue. But this is a great mistake. The Bible everywhere expressly teaches this: that if the Gospel fails to eradicate sin, it can never save the soul from the consequences of that sin. But again,

10. If the Gospel should pardon sin which it did not eradicate, this would not save the soul.

Suppose God should not punish sin; still, if the soul be left to the self-condemnation of sin, its salvation is naturally impossible. It were of no use to the sinner to be pardoned, if left under this self-condemnation. This is plain. Let no one, therefore, think that if his sins are not subdued by the grace of the Gospel he can be saved.

11. But again, and lastly, sin is a unit in its spirit and root. It consists in preferring self to God.

Hence, if any form of preferring self to God be persisted in, no sin has been truly abandoned; God is not supremely loved; and the soul cannot, by any possibility, in such a case, be saved.

REMARKS.

1. What a delusion the self-righteous are under. There is no man that is not aware that he has sinned at some time, and that he is a sinner. But there are many who think that, upon the whole, they perform so many good deeds, that they are safe. They are aware that they are habitually neglecting God, and neglecting duty, that they neither love God supremely nor their neighbor as themselves; yet they are constantly prone to give themselves credit for a great deal of goodness. Now let them understand that there is no particle of righteousness in them, nor of true goodness, while they live in neglect of any known duty to man--while they are constantly prone to give themselves credit for a great deal of goodness. But they seem to think that they have a balance of good deeds.

2. How many persons indulge in little sins, as they call them; but they are too honest, they think to indulge in great crimes. Now both these texts really contradict this view. "He that is unjust in that which is least, is unjust also in much." If a man yields to a slight temptation to commit what he calls a small sin, it cannot be a regard for God that keeps him from committing great sins. He may abstain from committing great sins through fear of disgrace or of punishment, but not because he loves God. If he does not love God well enough to keep from yielding to slight temptations to commit small sins, surely he does not love Him well enough to keep from yielding to great temptations to commit great sins. Again,

3. We see the delusion of those who are guilty of habitual dishonesties, tricks of the trade for example, and yet profess to be Christians.

How many there are who are continually allowing themselves to practice little dishonesties, little deceptions, and to tell little lies in trade; and yet think themselves Christians. Now this delusion is awful; it is fatal. Let all such be on their guard, and understand it. But again,

4. We see the delusion of those professors of religion who allow themselves habitually to neglect some known duty, and yet think themselves Christians. They shun some cross; there is something that they know they ought to do which they do not; and this is habitual with them. Perhaps all their Christian lives they have shunned some cross, or neglected the performance of some duty; and yet they think themselves Christians. Now let them know assuredly that they are self-deceived.

5. Many, I am sorry to say, preach a Gospel that is a dishonor to Christ. They

really maintain--at least they make this impression, though they may not teach it in words and form--that Christ really justifies men while they are living in the indulgence habitually of known sin.

Many preachers seem not to be aware of the impression which they really leave upon their people. Probably, if they were asked whether they hold and preach that any sin is forgiven which is not repented of, whether men are really justified while they persist in known sin, they would say, No. But, after all, in their preaching they leave a very different impression. For example, how common it is to find ministers who are in this position; --You ask them how many members they have in their church. Perhaps they will tell you, five hundred. How many do you think are living up to the best light which they have? How many of them are living from day to day with a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man, and are not indulging in any known sin either of omission or commission? Who are living and aiming to discharge punctually and fully every duty of heart to God and to all their fellow men? Push the inquiry, and ask, How many of your church can you honestly say, before God, you think are endeavoring to live without sin? That do not indulge themselves in any form of transgression or omission?

They will tell you, perhaps, that they do not know a member of their church, or at least they know but very few, of whom they can say this. Now ask them further--How many of your church do you suppose to be in a state of justification? And you will find that they have the impression that the great mass of their church are in a state of justification with God; in a state of acceptance with Him; in a state in which they are prepared to die; and if they should die just in this state by any sudden stroke of Providence, and they should be called upon to preach their funeral sermon, they would assume that they had gone to heaven.

While they will tell you that they know of but very few of their church of whom they can conscientiously say--I do not believe he indulges himself in any known sin; yet let one of that great majority, of whom he cannot say this, suddenly die, and this pastor be called to attend his funeral, would he not comfort the mourners by holding out the conviction that he was a Christian, and had gone to heaven? Now this shows that the pastor himself, whatever be his theoretical views of being justified while indulging in any known sin, is yet after all, practically an Antinomian; and practically holds, believes, and teaches, that Christ justifies people while they are living in the neglect of known duty; while

they are knowingly shunning some cross; while they persist in known sin. Ministers, indeed, often leave this impression upon their churches, (and I fear Calvinistic ministers quite generally,) that if they are converted, or ever were, they are justified although they may be living habitually and always in the indulgence of more or less known sin; living in the habitual neglect of known duty; indulging various forms of selfishness. And yet they are regarded as justified Christians; and get the impression, even from the preaching of their ministers, that all is well with them; that they really believe the Gospel and are saved by Christ.

Now this is really Antinomianism. It is a faith without law; it is a Savior that saves in and not from sin. It is presenting Christ as really setting aside the moral law, and introducing another rule of life; as forgiving sin while it is persisted in, instead of saving from sin.

6. Many profess to be Christians, and are indulging the hope of eternal life, who know that they never have forsaken all forms of sin; that in some things they have always fallen short of complying with the demands of their own consciences. They have indulged in what they call little sins; they have allowed themselves in practices, and in forms of self-indulgence, that they cannot justify; they have never reformed all their bad habits; and have never lived up to what they have regarded as their whole duty. They have never really intended to do this; have never resolutely set themselves, in the strength of Christ, to give up every form of sin, both of omission and commission; but, on the contrary, they know that they have always indulged themselves in what they condemn. And yet they call themselves Christians! But this is as contrary to the teaching of the Bible as possible. The Bible teaches, not only that men are condemned by God if they indulge themselves in what they condemn; but also that God condemns them if they indulge in that the lawfulness of which they so much as doubt. If they indulge in any one thing the lawfulness of which is in their own estimation doubtful, God condemns them. This is the express teaching of the Bible. But how different is this from the common ideas that many professors of religion have!

7. Especially is this true of those who habitually indulge in the neglect of known duty, and who habitually shun the cross of Christ. Many persons there are who neglect family prayer, and yet admit that they ought to perform it. How many families are there who will even stay away from the female prayer-meeting to

avoid performing the duty of taking a part of those meetings. How many there are who indulge the hope that they are saved, are real Christians; while they know that they are neglecting, and always have neglected some things. and even many things, that they admit to be their duty. They continue to live on in those omissions; but they think that they are Christians because they do not engage in anything that is openly disgraceful, or, as they suppose, very bad.

Now there are many that entirely overlook the real nature of sin. The law of God is positive. It commands us to consecrate all our powers to His service and glory; to love Him with all our heart and our neighbor as ourself. Now to neglect to do this is sin; it is positive transgression; it is an omission which always involves a refusal to do what God requires us to do. In other words, sin is the neglect to fulfill our obligations. If one neglects to pay you what he owes you, do you not call that sin, especially if the neglect involved necessarily the refusal to pay when he has the means of payment?

Sin really consists in withholding from God and man that love and service which we owe them--a withholding from God and man their due.

Now, where anyone withholds from God or man that which is their due, is this honest? Is this Christian? And while this withholding is persisted in, can an individual be in a justified state? No, indeed!

The Bible teaches that sin is forgiven when it is repented of, but never while it is persisted in. The Bible teaches that the grace of God can save us from sin--from the commission of sin, or can pardon when we repent, and put away sin; but it never teaches that sin can be forgiven while it is persisted in.

Let me ask you who are here present, do you think you are Christians? Do you think, if you should die in your present state, that you are prepared to go to heaven? That you are already justified in Christ?

Well now, let me further ask, are you so much as seriously and solemnly intending to perform to Christ, from day to day, your whole duty; and to omit nothing that you regard as your duty either to God or man? Are you not habitually shunning some cross? Omitting something because it is a trial to perform that duty? Are you not avoiding the performance of disagreeable duties, and things that are trying to flesh and blood? Are you not neglecting those around you? Are you not failing to love your neighbor as yourself? Are you not

neglecting something that you yourself confess to be your duty? And is not this habitual with you?

And now, do you suppose that you are really to be saved while guilty of these neglects habitually and persistently? I beg of you, be not deceived.

8. The impression of many seems to be, that grace will pardon what it cannot prevent; in other words that if the grace of the Gospel fails to save people from the commission of sin in this life; it will nevertheless pardon them and save them in sin, if it cannot save them from sin.

Now, really, I understand the Gospel as teaching that men are saved from sin first, and as a consequence, from hell; and not that they are saved from hell while they are not saved from sin. Christ sanctifies when He saves. And this is the very first element or idea of salvation, saving from sin. "Thou shalt call His name Jesus," said the angel, "for He shall save His people from their sins." "Having raised up His Son Jesus," says the apostle, "He hath sent Him to bless you in turning every one of you from his iniquities."

Let no one expect to be saved from hell, unless the grace of the Gospel saves him first from sin. Again,

9. There are many who think that they truly obey God in most things, while they know that they habitually disobey Him in some things. They seem to suppose that they render acceptable obedience to most of the commandments of God, while they are aware that some of the commandments they habitually disregard. Now the texts upon which I am speaking expressly deny this position, and plainly teach that if in any one thing obedience is refused, if any one commandment is disobeyed, no other commandment is acceptably obeyed, or can be for the time being.

Do let me ask you who are here present, is not this impression in your minds that, upon the whole, you have evidence that you are Christians?

You perform so many duties and avoid so many out-breaking sins, you think that there is so great a balance to your favor, that you obey so many more commands than you disobey, that you call yourselves Christians, although you are aware that some of the commandments you never seriously intended to comply with, and that in some things you have always allowed yourself to fall short of known duty. Now, if this impression is in your minds, remember that it is not authorized

at all by the texts upon which I am speaking, nor by any part of the Bible. You are really disobeying the spirit of the whole law. You do not truly embrace the Gospel; your faith does not purify your hearts and overcome the world; it does not work by love, and therefore it is a spurious faith, and you are yet in your sins. Will you consider this? Will you take home this truth to your inmost soul?

10. There are many who are deceiving themselves by indulging the belief that they are forgiven, while they have not made that confession and restitution which is demanded by the Gospel. In other words, they have not truly repented; they have not given up their sin. They do not outwardly repeat it; neither do they in heart forsake it.

They have not made restitution; and therefore they hold on to their sin, supposing it will do if they do not repeat it; that Christ will forgive them while they make no satisfaction, even while satisfaction is in their power. This is a great delusion, and is an idea that is greatly dishonoring to Christ. As if Christ would disgrace Himself by forgiving you while you persist in doing your neighbor wrong.

This He cannot do; this He will not, must not do. He loves your neighbor as really as He loves you. He is infinitely willing to forgive, provided you repent and make the restitution in your power; but until then, He cannot, will not.

I must remark again,

11. That from the teachings of these texts it is evident that no one truly obeys in any one thing, while he allows himself to disobey in any other thing. To truly obey God in anything, we must settle the question of universal obedience; else all our pretended obedience is vain. If we do not yield the whole to God, if we do not go the whole length of seriously giving up all, and renouncing in heart every form of sin, and make up our minds to obey Him in everything, we do not truly obey Him in anything. Again,

12. From this subject we can see why there are so many professors of religion that get no peace, and have no evidence of their acceptance. They are full of doubts and fears. They have no religious enjoyment, but are groping on in darkness and doubt; are perhaps praying for evidence and trying to get peace of mind, but fall utterly short of doing so.

Now, in such cases you will often find that some known sin is indulged; some

known duty continually neglected; some known cross shunned; some thing avoided which they know to be their duty, because it is trying to them to fulfil their obligation. It is amazing to see to what an extent this is true.

Sometime since an aged gentleman visited me, who came from a distance as an inquirer. He had been a preacher, and indeed was then a minister of the Gospel; but he had given up preaching because of the many doubts that he had of his acceptance with Christ. He was in great darkness and trouble of mind; had been seeking religion, as he said, a great part of his life; and had done everything, as he supposed, in his power, to obtain evidence of his acceptance.

When I came to converse with him, I found that there were sins on his conscience that had been there for many years; plain cases of known transgression, of known neglect of duty indulged all this while. Here he was, striving to get peace, striving to get evidence, and even abandoning preaching because he could not get evidence; while all the time these sins lay upon his conscience. Amazing! amazing! Again,

13. I remark, that total abstinence from all known sin, is the only practicable rule of life. To sin in one thing and obey in another at the same time, is utterly impossible. We must give up, in heart and purpose, all sin, or we in reality give up none. It is utterly impossible for a man to be truly religious at all, unless in the purpose of his heart he is wholly so, and universally so. He cannot be a Christian at home and a sinner abroad; or a sinner at home and a Christian abroad.

He cannot be a Christian on the Sabbath, and a selfish man in his business or during the week. A man must be one or the other; he must yield everything to God, or in fact he yields nothing to God.

He cannot serve God and mammon. Many are trying to do so, but it is impossible. They cannot love both God and the world; they cannot serve two masters; they cannot please God and the world. It is the greatest, and yet the most common, I fear, of all mistakes, that men can be truly, but knowingly, only partially religious; that in some things they can truly yield to God, while in other things they refuse to obey Him. How common is this mistake! If it is not, what shall we make of the state of the churches? How are we to understand the great mass of professors? How are we to understand the great body of religious teachers, if they do not leave the impression, after all, on the churches, that they

can be accepted of God while their habitual obedience is only very partial; while, in fact, they pick and choose among the commandments of God, professing to obey some, while they allow themselves in known disobedience of others. Now, if in this respect the church has not a false standard; if the mass of religious instruction is not making a false impression on the churches and on the world in this respect, I am mistaken. I am sorry to be obliged to entertain this opinion, and to express it; but what else can I think? How else can the state of the churches be accounted for? How else is it that ministers have no hope that the great mass of their churches are in a safe state? How else is it that the great mass of professors of religion can have any hope of eternal life in them, if this is not the principle practically adopted by them, that they are justified while only rendering habitually but a very partial obedience to God; that they are really forgiven and justified while they only pick and choose among the commandments, obeying those, as they think, obedience to which costs them little, and is not disagreeable, and is not unpopular; while they do not hesitate habitually to disobey where obedience would subject them to any inconvenience, require any self-denial, or expose them to any persecution. Again,

14. From what has been said, it will be seen that partial reformation is no evidence of real conversion. Many are deceiving themselves on this point. Now we should never allow ourselves to believe that a person is converted if we perceive that his reformation extends to certain things only, while in certain other things he is not reformed; especially when in the case of those things in which he is not reformed he admits that he ought to perform those duties, or to relinquish those practices. If we find him still persisting in what he himself admits to be wrong, we are bound to assume and take it for granted that his conversion is not real. Again,

15. Inquirers can see what they must do. They must abandon all sin. They must give up all to Christ; they must turn with their whole heart and soul to Him; and must make up their minds to yield a full and hearty obedience as long as they live. They must settle this in their minds; and must cast themselves upon Christ for forgiveness for all the past, and grace to help in every time of need for the future. Only let it be settled in your mind fully that you will submit yourself to the whole will of God; and then you may expect, and are bound to expect Him to forgive all the past, however great your sins may have been.

You can see, Inquirer, why you have not already obtained peace. You have

prayed for pardon; you have prayed for peace; you have endeavored to get peace, while in fact you have not given up all; you have kept something back. It is a perfectly common thing to find that the inquirer has not given up all. And if you do not find peace, it is because you have not given up all.

Some idol is still retained; some sin persisted in--perhaps some neglect--perhaps some confession is not made that ought to have been made, or some act of restitution. You have not renounced the world, and do not in fact renounce it and renounce everything, and flee to Christ.

[Back to Top](#)

Revival- No.'s 1 - 3

Lectures XVII - XIX

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

LECTURE XVII.

Oct. 9, 1861

REVIVAL--No. 1

Text.--Psa. 85:6: "Wilt Thou not receive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?"

In speaking from these words, I remark,

I. That a religious revival implies a previous religious declension.

II. Show when a revival of religion is needed in any church or place.

III. Some of the characteristics of a true revival of religion.

IV. A few of the indications of a revival approaching, or already commenced.

V. Some of the conditions upon which a revival may be expected to become general in a community.

VII. Some objections that are sometimes urged to revivals of religion.

I. A religious revival implies a previous religious declension.

1. A religious revival consists in the renewing of the love and grace of God's people, and a consequent conversion of sinners to Christ.
2. All Christians know what it is to have seasons, at least, of comparative declension and revival in their own experience. When a great many Christians are at the same time quickened and revived in their graces, this is what is called a revival of religion in the church, or among the professed people of God.
3. Such a state of things, perhaps universally, is instrumental in promoting a greater or less inquiry among the impenitent, and the conversion of many of them to Christ.

II. I will endeavor to show when a revival of religion is needed in any church or place.

1. It is needed when Christians have left their first love; have lost their loving zeal for Christ, and are no longer mellow and earnest, loving and zealous, as real wakeful and quickened Christians always are.
2. When Christians have become worldly-minded; are minding the things of this world, and have become engrossed with them.

Their conversation is worldly. They talk about politics; they talk about business and the news of the day; and are engrossed with other than the immediate work to which Christ has called them, the sanctification of their own souls, and the conversion of the world to Christ. There is sometimes a state of things in a church in which little is said among them about the conversions of souls, or about spiritual religion. They have little to say of their own experience; they have little to say to each other about Christ; in short, they have lost their interest in spiritual religion, and have become excited about, and interested in, the affairs of this world to such an extent that they may be said to be conformed to this world.

3. A revival of religion is needed when Christians are in reproach in consequence of their worldly-mindedness. When professed Christians

become worldly-minded, lose their zeal for Christ and become zealous about worldly matters -- enter with zeal into politics, and business, and amusements, and have little to say about Christ and His religion, it is always noticed by the worldly.

They always feel this inconsistency on the part of Christians, and are prone to speak about it. In their estimation, Christians are disgraced. They are despised for their inconsistency; and it will come to be a common thing for the impenitent to speak reproachfully of the church in such circumstances. They will not unfrequently ridicule their pretensions to piety, brand them as hypocrites, and speak of them in a manner that indicates they have no respect for their profession of godliness. When such a state of things as this exists, there is great need of a revival of religion.

4. When a church has fallen into a state of formality in their religious services, there is need of a revival of religion. It sometimes happens that churches become very formal and dull. Their meetings are thinly attended, and all their professed worship and prayers are exceedingly formal and lifeless. They seem to be in a state in which they are not moved to religious services by any inward impulse, or fire of love within them; but they resort to a formal round of what they call duty, and everybody can see that they have no heart in it. In such circumstances, a revival of religion is greatly needed.

5. A revival is greatly needed when Christians become slothful servants in religious duty. They are very neglectful of their duty to Christ, of their duty to each other, and of their duty to the impenitent. They make little or no effort to secure the great end for which the church is living, or ought to live. They are possessed with the spirit of religious indolence and laziness. They have no energy, or life, or power of godliness in them. They do everything lazily, indolently. I mean, they perform all religious duties in a slothful manner, and do not even attempt the performance of many things that they know to be their duty. They are literally slothful servants, idling away Christ's time, and seeming not even to aim at bringing anything of importance to pass in the kingdom of Christ.

6. A revival of religion is needed when Christians have lost their spirit of compassion for the unconverted.

When Christians are in the exercise of the Christian graces, they are compassionate; they feel for the impenitent, and they manifest this feeling. They realize their guilt and their danger, and are greatly exercised concerning them. This compassion they manifest in many ways; which manifestations greatly impress the ungodly.

But when Christians have left their first love, they lose their compassionate zeal for souls; and they manifest very little compassion even for their own children and friends. This inconsistency is noticed by the ungodly; and if professing parents or friends manifest no compassion for their unconverted children and relatives, these unconverted ones are not stirred up to feel for themselves. They sleep on in spiritual death, because no one around them manifests any care for their souls. In such a state of things a revival of religion is imperatively demanded.

7. A revival of religion is needed when there is little or no earnest prayer for the conversion of souls.

When the church gets into the state of which I have been speaking, you will hear very little prayer among them for the conversion of the ungodly. If they pray, you will observe that they pray only for themselves, and scarcely at all for the impenitent; and when they do pray for them, they offer but a few short requests, perhaps, that are heartless, meaningless, without fervor, without confession, without earnestness.

It is surprising to see, sometimes, how unnatural it is for professors of religion in their prayer meetings to pray for the impenitent. The fact is, you ask one, and another, and another to pray, and they will scarcely remember to pray for the impenitent at all. You can see that they pray around, and around, for themselves, and in a way that shows that they are purely selfish, in a way that shows that they care very little even for their own souls; and you can scarcely get them to pray for the ungodly, for in fact they are in such an ungodly state themselves that they cannot pray for them. Now, in such a state of things as this, a revival is greatly needed, of course.

8. A revival of religion is greatly needed when secret and family prayer are neglected; when prayer-meetings are neglected; when the members really dread to attend prayer-meetings, lest they should be obliged to take a part, and be called upon to lead in prayer; when they have so far backslidden that

to be called upon to pray, is a trial to them. They have no heart to pray; their prayers are cold and forced; and they stay away from meetings, either because they do not like to be called upon to pray themselves, or perhaps they do not like to listen to the cold and formal prayers of their brethren.

9. A revival of religion is greatly needed when sectarian prejudices prevail among Christians, so far as to prevent their taking an interest in each other's experience and progress. Party walls are built up and strengthened, and great stress is laid upon the peculiarities that distinguish them as sectarians. They exalt these peculiarities into matters of such great importance, that they lose their interest in, and charity for, their brethren of other denominations. In this state they cannot pray and prevail for themselves or others; and the ungodly see it, and are shocked and stumbled by it.

10. A revival of religion is needed when brotherly love is so low, and so nearly extinct, that it is not natural for Christians to call each other brethren; when, in fact, it seems to them silly, and to sound like cant, to call a Christian brother, Brother. In this state they take very little interest in Christians, as such; they have very little special regard for those that are Christians because they are Christians. They do not feel for them as belonging to the same family; they do not take that fraternal interest in them that really belongs to the Christian religion.

11. A revival of religion is greatly needed when Christians have so far lost their brotherly love that they can speak against their brethren; speak of their faults before others; when they become censorious, instead of being tender of the reputation of their brethren, and of the cause of Christ which they represent; publish their faults endlessly to the world, speak reproachfully of them, censure them, and seem disposed to judge uncharitably of them in almost every respect. Thus they help forward the devil's work, by shaking the confidence of the ungodly in Christians. Sometimes professors of religion do more to injure the church and the cause of Christ, to shake the confidence of the world in Christianity -- far more than it is in the power of ungodly men to do.

When professors of religion get away from God, they almost always become censorious. They speak against the church; they speak against Christians, publishing their real faults and imputing to them faults of which they are perhaps not guilty; and thus they take the most direct way to bring religion

into contempt. In this state of things a revival of religion is always greatly needed.

12. A revival of religion is needed when professors of religion are self-indulgent.

Selfishness consists in a disposition to indulge self -- to indulge the appetites, desires, and propensities. We sometimes see professors of religion giving themselves up, like the world, to indulge themselves in a great many ways. They are pleasure-seekers; they run hither and thither just to please themselves. They will run and spend Christ's money for this object and that; they will run to this concert and that amusement; they will make this journey and that; purchase this article and that; and in a great variety of ways they will manifest a self-indulgent spirit -- in eating and drinking; in short in most of the ways in which ungodly men indulge themselves. They seem to lose sight of the fact that selfishness and self-indulgence is sin. They no longer deny themselves, and take up their cross daily and follow Christ. They have ceased to deny themselves; they have ceased to bear Christ's cross; and self-indulgence has come to be the habit of their lives. Instead of being devoted to Christ and doing all things for Him, they do everything directly or indirectly to please themselves. You see them engaging in a multitude of things which it is impossible to suppose they were doing to please Christ. It must be that they were doing these things to please themselves. It cannot be that they were running hither and thither, running to this concert and that amusement -- they cannot do this to please Christ; it must be that this is a self-pleasing spirit, the very opposite of the Christian religion. In this state of things you will often see, with all their self-indulgence, that they attend meeting on the Sabbath, and in various ways keep up the form of godliness while they deny its power. The ungodly are astonished at them, and they inquire, "Wherein do they differ from us? They seem as fond of pleasure; they seem as self-indulgent; they seem as little in earnest about religion, and as much in earnest about the world as we are." They spend their time, they spend their money, to please themselves.

Now, in such a dreadful state as this, a revival of religion is greatly needed. The church, in this state, is neglecting Christ's work, and seeking their own pleasure and their own profit.

All religious efforts in such a state as this, drag heavily. If money is needed

for a Sabbath School library, for missionary purposes, or for any religious object, it is not easily obtained. The brethren do not feel like taking hold of such objects, and everything in that direction is discouraging.

13. A revival of religion is needed, when, as a consequence of their declension, Christians are involved in doubt in regard to their religious state.

Of course, when such is the case, they have lost the witness of the Spirit. They are aware that they have no present religious enjoyment or power. They have many doubts and misgivings whether they are really in a safe condition; and will often express these doubts, to the stumbling of the ungodly.

It is amazing to see, that sometimes professors of religion get into such a state as to think such doubts are inevitable; and that all professors of religion have them, or ought to have them.

And even ministers so far backslide, as to have such doubts habitually themselves, and preach in such a way as to encourage others in having them. Now it is always true that when religious doubts come to be the order of the day in any church, a revival of religion is greatly needed.

14. When Christians fall into condemnation and religious bondage, all their religious duties are up-hill and a burden to them. There is no spontaneous love service rendered by them, but everything is constrained by their consciences; and such language as this is natural to them:

"Reason I hear, her counsels weigh,
And all her words approve;
But still I find it hard t' obey,
And harder still to love."

It is natural for them to sing backsliders' hymns, such as --

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is that soul-reviving view

Of Jesus and His word?"

Sometimes professors of religion get into a state in which the hymns that they naturally sing, show that they are backsliders; indicate a low, groveling, earthly state of mind; show that they are not growing in grace, but are backslidden, and are still backsliding from God. Their prayers show that they are under condemnation; their whole Christian life is one of bondage; and their religion is an up-hill affair. In such a state as this, a revival of religion is much, very much needed.

15. A revival of religion is very much needed, when, as a consequence of the backsliding of the church, the preaching of the word of God is powerless. There is little or no prayer for its success; and perhaps the minister himself feels the drag and weight of his cold church hanging upon him. He goes into the pulpit in a discouraged state of mind; feels as if he were living among icebergs; and he languidly, perhaps, holds forth the word of life, but in an atmosphere so void of the Spirit of God, that the word is powerless and falls to the ground. Sinners are careless; and either stay away from meeting or attend carelessly, and perhaps sleep during the exercises. If they do not sleep, they are carelessly gazing about, very little interested in what is said, or if they are interested, it is perhaps a worldly interest which they take in the sermon, as an intellectual treat, peradventure, or a literary essay, or some other interest than a spiritual interest in what they hear.

Thus sinners are stumbled; do not know what to think of religion; and strongly doubt whether there is anything in it. They are watching professors of religion, and often musing upon their state, and endeavoring to interpret their worldly conduct in such a way as to justify themselves in their neglect of religion. They are beginning to feel a contempt for a profession of religion; and often feel irritated in their dealings with professors of religion who are in a worldly state. They thus become greatly prejudiced against religion and against the church. They have lost confidence in the sincerity of those who belong to the church, and are disposed to regard them as hypocrites. They perceive that there are alienations and dissensions among professors of religion; and such are their surroundings, and such is the conduct of professors of religion, that the ungodly generally are exceedingly careless, and hardened, and skeptical. The youth are not interested in religion; and they seldom attend the prayer-meetings, because there is

nothing in the prayer-meetings to interest them. They do not feel that they need to be prayed for themselves; and if they did, they have very little confidence in the church, and would not feel that it was of any importance to say to them, "Pray for us." And thus the great mass of the young people are negligent about religion, and are given up to their frivolous, gay pursuits; the ways of Zion do mourn, and from one communion to another very few if any are coming to her solemn feasts. There are very few additions to the church; and those that do occasionally unite, perhaps unite by letter from other churches, or are doubtful cases of hopeful conversion. Now there is great need of a revival of religion in all such cases.

III. I will next notice some of the characteristics of a true revival of religion.

1. I said that a religious revival implies a previous religious declension. Of course, then, one of the characteristics of a true revival of religion will be, a great conviction of sin among professors of religion. They are in a very wicked state; and one of the first things that will be observed in a true revival of religion, will be a conviction of the great sin of their departure from God.

A sense of condemnation or remorse will take hold upon these backsliders; their mouths are shut, and they feel so condemned they can scarcely look up. They feel as if their sins were vastly greater from the fact that they are professors of religion. They look upon their backslidings as almost unpardonable; and oftentimes their conviction, in these circumstances, will be vastly deeper than when they were first converted.

2. Great humiliation will be another characteristic of a revival of religion. By humiliation I mean a getting down low before God; and disposition to confess much to God, and to their brethren; to confess in secret, to confess in public; a spontaneous getting down and humbling themselves before God and before the world. They feel as if they had been stumbling-blocks; and they wish to take the stumbling-blocks up. They feel as if they had dishonored Christianity; and they wish all men to know that they are ashamed of it, that they are sorry for it. They wish to take away the reproach, as far as possible, that they have brought upon the cause of Christ.

3. Another characteristic of a true revival, in such circumstances, will be, not merely confession but restitution. If in their worldly state they have

been hard and oppressive in their dealings; if they have taken too high interest for money; if they have been guilty of any extortion or over-reaching in any way; if they have in any wise injured anyone, they will not rest till they have made restitution. If they are truly revived, they have now become benevolent; they now love their neighbors as themselves. They will not keep their ill-gotten gains, for they love all men now as their brethren; and they will spontaneously make restitution to them where they have done them wrong. If they have created prejudices against anyone by slander, or by censorious speeches, they will be sure to go and take up the stumbling-block. They will try to set everything right as far as they can, and undo the heavy burdens which they have put upon others.

4. Another characteristic of a true revival will be the giving up of false hopes on the part of those who have been deceived.

Perhaps in every church there are some who are self-deceived, supposing themselves to be Christians when they are not; and a revival of religion among those that have been really converted, tends naturally to arouse those that have been self-deceived, and to make them see and understand their delusion. In a revival of religion, there are always great searchings of heart. The Spirit of God is poured out, and all classes of persons in the church are greatly searched, and their old hopes tried. Christ comes with His fan in His hand to thoroughly purge His floor; and even sound hopes will be greatly tried; and false hopes, often in multitudes, will be swept away.

5. Another characteristic of a true revival will be the adjustment of difficulties.

When churches are backslidden in heart, one of the results will always be, that difficulties will arise among brethren in their business transactions; and in the various relations of life there will arise difficulties of greater or less consequence among many of the members of the church.

Difficulties also will arise between the members of the church and the world outside of the church. There will be heart-burnings and alienations, more or less, and sometimes of long standing and of great extent; but a true revival of religion is sure to bring these matters to an issue, and so far as it prevails, to lead to an adjustment of all such difficulties. The hearts of the brethren become softened, and they come to see things in a different light. They are

now willing to come together and make mutual confessions; they are now willing to set everything right; they are now anxious to have all these things put away, and to wash their hands of wrong.

6. Another characteristic of a true revival is a disposition on the part of the church to take up the stumbling-blocks that they have laid in the way of the ungodly.

They are aware that they have stumbled the ungodly in every way -- by their worldly-mindedness, their pleasure-seeking and their money-loving ways. But now they are anxious for the conversion of sinners; and therefore they wish to remove from before them all the occasion of stumbling which they have laid in their way. Now if they are really revived, they are sure to bestir themselves in taking up these stumbling-blocks. You must not believe that any one is really revived who is not willing to take up the stumbling-blocks out of the way of sinners. You must never have any confidence in a church, or in any members of a church, that they are truly revived in religion, while they are too proud or too negligent to take the stumbling-blocks out of the way of the impenitent.

7. Another characteristic of a true revival will be, the anointing of the ministry, as the chief instruments in the hand of God to carry on the work. It will be seen that there is a freshness and an unction poured upon those who are the instruments of the work.

Indeed, the characteristics of a true revival are such as will reverse the state of things that existed before, as far as the revival prevails. It will be seen that a state of things the opposite of religious declension exists both in and out of the church. Sinners will become interested and excited, will repent, will make restitution -- will, in short, become Christians.

LECTURE XVIII.

Oct. 23, 1861

REVIVAL--No. 2

Text.--Psa. 85:6: "Wilt Thou not receive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?"

IV. I will mention a few of the indications of a revival approaching, or already commenced.

1. A conviction and feeling of the necessity of a revival on the part of the church, is an indication that the work as already begun in the church.

It often happens that a backsliding church have no real sense of their state. They have no such conviction as to produce action. They have no such feeling of its existence as really to make any effort to bring about a different state of things.

2. But when a revival is approaching, and in fact is really begun in some hearts, this conviction ripens into action. There is a prevailing sense of the necessity of a revival; and Christians begin to talk and to pray about it, and to bestir themselves to bring about a different state of things. They will call meetings for that purpose; inquire what shall be done, and take up the subject and act upon it. A spirit of prayer will be seen to prevail for a revival of religion. Christians begin to confess their sins, and to be in earnest about it -- the prayer meetings begin to fill up -- and a spirit of humiliation appears, and brethren do not spend their time in cold praying; they break down, and confess, and a new spirit is seen to be taking possession of them.

The expectation that a revival is coming, and the feeling that it has commenced, manifests itself; and a new order of things is manifestly about to be inaugurated. It is found that professors of religion are greatly searched; and are perhaps going to their minister and to each other to make inquires, and to request to be prayed for. Christians request the prayers of each other in their meetings or in private, and sinners are beginning to inquire what they shall do to be saved.

A solemnity prevails in the congregation and in the community. Professors of religion can more easily attend weekly prayer meetings, and are more ready for every good word and work. In short, it is seen that the subject of religion is beginning to take hold of the public mind -- that people are becoming interested and excited. The congregations on the Sabbath are more solemn; prayer meetings take on a different type; secret prayer begins to be more generally practiced, and in a different spirit; the general tone of morals is elevated; there is less running after pleasure, less censoriousness, less self-

indulgence and extravagance. The church are beginning to put on strength, and the ungodly are beginning to notice it. These and such like things, are indications of a revival already commenced.

V. I will now notice some of the conditions upon which a revival may be expected to become general in a community.

1. It must be remembered that a revival -- what we call a revival of religion -- is commonly the revival of a great number of persons at the same time. It is an individual matter, and there can be a general revival only as the number of individuals is multiplied that are revived. Christians must first make it an individual matter to be revived individually, for there can be a revival no further than it is made an individual concern, each one securing a revival in his own soul.

2. This being the case, the hearts of the people must be laid open to the searching of the Spirit, and the searching of the word of God.

While people are afraid of being searched, afraid of having their hopes tried, afraid of laying their hearts open to the truth, they will never be revived.

3. Another condition of a revival's becoming general is, everything must be arranged in subordination to the progress of the work -- everything must be made to bend to this. I have sometimes seen that churches had prearranged a number of things to be attended to that were really of a worldly nature.

They had their machinery all in motion. They had their sewing meetings, their church social meetings, and a multitude of things that interfered greatly with holding religious meetings for prayer and effort. Now when the Holy Ghost is poured out, everything should be made to yield to His influences; everything should be given up. For if only the same meetings are to be held, and the same course is to be pursued that has been pursued while the church was cold and formal, there is no hope of a general revival of religion. Every change must be made that is necessary to accommodate yourselves to the movements of the Holy Ghost.

Your sociables must be given up; your sewing societies and all these things that stand in the way of your giving an earnest and thorough attention to the work of revival, must be laid aside. It is often grievous to see that leading professors of religion in churches, who do not want to be revived, will try, if

possible, to keep up all their pre-arrangements. And even ministers sometimes have so little sense of what are the real conditions of a general revival, that they will favor the keeping and carrying out of all their pre-arrangements, that were arranged when the church was cold, and dead, and worldly. I have often seen such obstacles as this thrown in the way, and kept in the way of a revival of religion.

I could state things that have come under my own observation that were greatly distressing. The first I would know, I would find that something was right in the way of the progress of the work. The time had come for some festival, for some Sabbath School concert -- some church frolic. The female members could not attend the female prayer meeting because they had a sewing society, and in short their stiff arrangements, made and pre-arranged when the church was cold and dead, must all be carried out; no innovation must be allowed. And yet they profess to want a revival of religion.

I myself labored in one field, where the ministers invited me, and professed to want a revival of religion, and pledged themselves to take hold of the work. But I soon found that they had pre-arranged a multitude of things that were totally incompatible with the progress of the work; and these they must carry out. One thing that they had arranged was a pleasure excursion among themselves. The first I knew, they were all off on a pleasure excursion, and I was left to promote the revival. In short, I soon found that they had no idea of making anything and everything to bend to the promotion of the work. With the exception of my meetings, they were to have everything else go on as they had pre-arranged it; and my meetings must take care of themselves, while the church and minister were just going on attending to those things which they had pre-arranged when the churches were not in a revival state.

Now it is plain that if the church is ever to repent really, and wake up, means must be used, and if the means are to be used, other things must give way. The revival meetings must be attended, and must be attended by the mass of the church. The church must give themselves to the work, not only of attending themselves, but they must interest themselves to get others, the ungodly, to attend. They must make efforts to interest each other, and to interest the whole community in the work, if the work is expected to be general. They should canvass the town, as politicians would canvass a town to see every voter. The whole community should be visited.

It is sometimes absurdly said, that if the work is a work of God; it will go on; it will not be interfered with by this and that and the other meeting. But the fact is, the Holy Spirit converts and sanctifies men by means of the truth. Now if such is to be the result, the truth must be attended to, it must be listened to; people must give their individual attention till their convictions are deepened, and their hearts are broken.

A multitude of things must be so arranged as that the attention of the people can be given, and shall be given, to the meetings and to the means that shall be used by the Holy Spirit. Arrangements in the families should be of such a nature as to give the female members, and all classes, as much time as possible for directing their whole attention to the salvation of their own souls and the souls of those around them. Social parties and gatherings should be suspended, and laid aside; and the time of the people should be occupied with religious meetings, religious conversation and efforts. It is absurd to say, if it is the work of God it will go on in a sovereign manner, whatever course people may take in respect to giving their attention to it.

It cannot go on unless the attention of the people can be secured, and the attention of the people cannot be secured unless they make it a point to lay aside everything that would interfere with giving their full attention to the presence of the Holy Spirit, and to the truths which He presents.

The people must yield themselves up to His influences, to His teachings; they must be diligent and persevering in the use of all the means to promote their own spiritual interests, and the spiritual interests of those around them. They must give themselves to much prayer; and they must plan nothing, execute nothing, carry out no purpose that will draw people off from prayer-meetings, from preaching meetings, from their closets, and from the use of every means of grace. Let necessary business be done; for that which is strictly necessary will not ordinarily much interfere with a revival movement. But let there be no pleasure excursions; no parties of pleasure; no neighborhood, or city, or church gossip; no running hither and thither to concerts, to lectures on various subjects -- or anything of the kind. It has come to be customary in many cities and towns, as winter approaches, the season when the evenings are long and meetings can be held to advantage, to secure lecturers to deliver lectures -- popular men that will interest and please the people, and perhaps introduce a great many light, unnecessary, and

foolish things.

It is doubtless the policy of Satan to absorb the public mind with these lectures; and he often gets members of the church to purchase season tickets for such a course of lectures. I have sometimes found when I entered a field of labor, that many of the members of the church were pre-engaged to attend a course of lectures. They had bought their tickets, and therefore they must attend. There is surely nothing unlawful or improper in it, they would say, by way of excuse; it will do no harm.

Now if it does no other harm than to direct attention from the work of God, that will be harm enough. And the more popular the lecturer, the more fascinating, and if you please, the more important his lectures, provided they do not fall in with the work of the Holy Spirit in converting souls, they are all the more dangerous, and should be avoided with all the more care.

Salvation is the supreme concern of life; and when the Holy Ghost descends to work among the people in order to secure their salvation, He expects their attention. He has a right to expect it; and He cannot work unless He can secure their attention. But in attempting to secure their attention He will not violate the law of liberty of will. They must consent to be influenced, to listen, to attend to the means; and they must avoid whatever will divert attention. There is no other way; and if they will not do this, they cannot have a revival; if they will not do this they cannot be saved.

The reckless manner in which people often interfere with the work of the Holy Spirit; the manner in which they slight His presence among them; the thoughtlessness with which many persons under such circumstances will plan and execute things that are calculated in the highest degree to divert attention, is really shocking and monstrous. The first you know, someone has, perhaps, a picnic, a party, a ride, a lecture, a discussion -- a something to engage the attention of the people, and forthwith the people are drawn, like silly sheep, right into it. I say again and again, a condition, and an unalterable condition of a general revival of religion, is this: the people must give their attention to it; they must listen to the voice of God; they must avoid, as they would avoid damnation, whatever will turn them away from listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit in applying the word of God.

The minister must avoid, and resist everything that would divert attention;

the church must make up their mind to introduce nothing, to countenance nothing, to allow nothing that will divert attention and draw the people off from attending to the salvation of their souls.

I was once called to labor in a revival of religion, and after our meetings had begun, I observed that a leading elder of the church was not present at one of our important meetings. I afterwards learned that he had planned a party, a large party at his house, in which they introduced dancing as a recreation; thus forsaking the meeting himself, and drawing off as many members of the church and of the congregation as he could get to attend his party. This movement immediately brought a blight upon his own soul, and was a great stumbling-block to the church. It introduced a state of bad feeling, and greatly hindered the general progress of the revival. The elder himself did not get into the work; and it was amazing to see what a blight there was upon him during the whole course of the revival. He was really well worthy of church censure, if not of excommunication. But he was a man of so much influence that they let it pass without church action; and this all the more grieved the Holy Spirit.

I can hardly lay too much stress upon this point, I have so often found when I have been called to labor in a place for the promotion of a revival of religion -- when I arrived on the ground and gave out the programme of my meetings that I wished to hold, I would find that for days, and weeks, and even months, there were certain evenings pre-occupied. Some had arranged to have a party; others had arranged to attend secular lectures. Then they had their Sunday School concerts, or other concerts for what they call charitable purposes; they had their Sewing Societies, and perhaps some pleasure excursion or something equivalent to that. The young people had arranged to have picnics; and then, perhaps, there was two or three times a week, a singing school; and besides these, perhaps one or two of what they call donation parties; and altogether they had an arrangement entirely incompatible with any hope of a successful revival effort. If, when they came to attend the meetings, they willingly relinquished all these arrangements; if they made up their mind to give themselves up to the teachings and guidance of the Holy Spirit; if, in short, they treated God's presence, when it came to be manifested among them with the respect and awe, and attention that they ought; if they had made up their minds to make everything yield to the great movements of the Holy Ghost -- if such was the course which they adopted

and pursued, they were sure to have a general revival of religion.

But if they did not take this course, but persisted in acting according to their previous plans in spite of the influences of the Holy Spirit, the revival would be curtailed just in proportion as they refused to give the Holy Ghost their whole attention.

There is a strange infatuation, it would seem, resting in many minds, on the subject of revivals, which is this: they assume that a revival of religion is altogether a miraculous affair.

It has been for a long time very common to see in the newspapers, revivals of religion reported, and great stress laid upon the fact that it came upon them without the use of means; that it came they know not how, in a sovereign manner, like a shower. And it would seem that this assumption is in the mind of the writer -- that just in proportion as it appeared to be disconnected with the use of any appropriate means, there was evidence of its being of God. Hence pains would be taken to show that it was disconnected with any appropriate means; and then it was supposed that it was surely the work of God.

But now let me say that this assumption is directly opposed to the Bible-teaching, and to the nature of things. God works by means, and through love, always observing in His works the laws of His own ordaining. In all the kingdom of nature, He uses means to accomplish His ends; and so also, in all the kingdom of grace, He uses means to accomplish His ends.

Now He converts the world by means of truth, by means of preaching the gospel, by means of religious meetings, and books, and tracts. Now who does not know this? And if this is the law of His operations, then it might be expected that a real work of God could be seen to be connected with the use of the appropriate means. This is the order in which God does everything, so far as we can see.

To assume, therefore, that if it be the work of God it will be disconnected with means, is an assumption directly opposite to the truth. If it is a work of God it may be expected that it will be by means of religious effort, as it was in the days of the apostles, by external preaching of the gospel, by the multiplying of religious efforts and means -- prayer, and every means that

can arouse and fix the attention. This has surely always been, under the old dispensation and under the new, the history of God's dealings and of God's workings, both among His people and among the impenitent. The few cases of interposition, such as the conversion of Paul, without the employment of any human instrumentality, are only exceptional -- they are but exceptions to God's mode of dealing in all time. We are therefore no more to expect that God will work without means in the kingdom of grace, than in the kingdom of nature. And as long as this assumption is in the mind of the church, that just in proportion as a thing is apart, is separated from appropriate means, there is evidence that it is the work of God -- I say just as long as this assumption is in the minds of men, they will listlessly neglect the use of appropriate means, while scores of thousands of souls go down to hell. The assumption also, that the sovereignty of God will carry on the work whatever men do to divert attention from it, is as mischievous an assumption as possible. Nothing is farther from the truth, nothing bears on its face more the impress of the teachings of the devil than teachings that represent the sovereignty of God as of such a nature that He will carry on a revival of religion whether people give their attention to Him or not.

And here I wish to make a special remark. A certain class of theologians, both in this country and in Europe, have spoken of the recent great revival as being surely the work of God, because, as they say, it was not introduced and carried forward by any human getting up, through the use of means.

Now the first remark I would make here is, that it is not true in a great many places, that the appropriate means were not used to arouse public attention, and to fix it, and to save the people.

Yet I suppose it is true that in many instances the people have become excited, and there has been a great movement where very little pains were taken to use the appropriate means. But observe, it is yet to be demonstrated that such a state of things has resulted, and is to result in a permanently healthful state of religion. I have myself been watching this movement, with its results, with the greatest interest. I have known how many persons have felt, and how a certain school of theologians have talked and written, claiming this to be peculiarly a work of God, on account, they say, of the sovereign manner in which it had been introduced and carried on. Now I could say much to show, that in most places there had been a great effort, and

a great deal of prayer, and a great many looking with expectation for a revival; that this recent work had been introduced through the labors of evangelists, and pastors, and things have been culminating to that point, and there has been a general expectation among the most praying people that there was to be a great and general outpouring of the Holy Ghost; so that it is a great mistake for that class of theologians to maintain that their revival came without the use of any appropriate means. But this I admit, that when it did so increase as to be carried, to human appearance, beyond the reach of human effort, and spread beyond ministerial influence, and beyond church influence, that then it took on a peculiar type; and it was that state of things that led these certain theologians to triumph as if this was really a work of God because it was carried by such manifest sovereignty. Now by this time some judgment can be formed of the comparative results of this revival and of those revivals that have manifestly been brought about by human instrumentality and by the use of appropriate means.

And now I appeal to those who have seen both kinds of revivals, the ministers and churches throughout this country. Which revivals have produced the most intelligent and stable converts, this last great movement that has been carried on so much apart from ministerial and church influence, or those revivals of religion that you have formerly had, in which every way was taken to promote an intelligent, thorough, deep work of grace among you?

Take the converts that you have received to your churches. Compare in your own minds the converts of this last wide-spread revival, with the converts of those revivals which you have had on former occasions, in which the greatest pains have been taken to instruct the people, to guard against deception, and to promote a revival of religion. Will not the ministers and churches throughout this country look at this? Will they not make up their minds whether there is any more evidence that this last revival is the work of God, than that those former revivals were the work of God?

At least in our field where there has been a great movement of this latter kind, a member of one of the churches told me, a few months since, that the results could not be seen. But I have no doubt that a great many have been converted, thousands and hundreds of thousands; and a great many, also, have been deceived. But the inquiry that I wish to put is this: looking at the

converts of former revivals which were brought about by the diligent and persevering use of means, and at the converts of this last revival so far as it was brought about without any such use of means, which class of converts give the highest evidence of being truly the children of God? Of being useful, intelligent, and stable Christians? I think it of great importance that the church should raise this inquiry, should settle this question; for I greatly fear that many ministers and many churches are in danger of passing into the delusion that revivals will come whether they use the means or not; and that a revival is more desirable when it comes without pains being taken, special pains to instruct and enlighten the people, than when such pains are taken. I beg the churches to look at this, and the ministers to look at this. I know it is not fully time yet for them to come to an enlightened decision in regard to the results in many cases, yet will the churches keep this before their minds; for in the course of a very few years it will be made manifest to observers what has been the result of this great general movement, compared with those movements that have covered less extent of territory, but have been the immediate results of efforts designed to promote revivals.

But here let us say again, lest I should be misunderstood, it is not true that this late great revival was in its beginnings disconnected with means, so that it came upon the country like a shower of rain, nobody expecting it and nobody having any agency in promoting it.

I know full well that human agency was concerned, on a very large scale, in introducing the great movement and in promoting it; and up to a certain point it was confined to those localities where such exertions were made. Such prayer was offered as seemed to rend the heavens; and such a crying out for a general revival as perhaps this country never saw, prevailed in connection with powerful revivals of religion, for some two years before the revival broke out in the cities of New York, and Philadelphia, and Boston, and other places throughout the country.

But there was a point where an influence was manifestly shed forth upon the land far and wide, that rolled over the land like the waves of the sea; and that no doubt converted, as I have said, hundreds of thousands, and in some cases, at least, with comparatively little human effort being expended to promote it. But just in proportion as this revival was in fact disconnected with the intelligent use of appropriate means, I fear it will be found to have

been disastrous in its results. I beg that this may be examined into, and the question fairly dealt with. I know myself that many good ministers stood confounded for a time. They did not know what to say. The movement seemed to be very much beyond the reach of their influence, and very much beyond the influence of the most pious members of the church -- at least this was the case in many localities.

Now the question that I ask is: what are the results, so far as it took on that type? What are the results of the movement in those cases where so much stress was laid upon its being the result of the sovereignty of God? Will the ministers and churches where the revival was of that character, that great stress was laid upon it as being the sovereign work of God without the interposition of man -- will you say, as in view of the solemn judgment, what has been the result of that type of this movement? I mean, what are the results, compared with the results of those revivals that have so long blessed this land; and that were conducted on gospel principles, through the instrumentality of preaching, prayer meetings, and the diligent use of all the means of grace?

Which form of revival appears to be most desirable from the results? This is a fair question, and I hope the church may be able intelligently to answer it.

4. Too much stress cannot be laid upon prayer in the promotion of revivals of religion. There has been a great deal of prayer connected with the recent movement; and there has always been a great deal of prayer connected with those revivals that have been promoted by the diligent use of the means of grace.

Prayer has been the watchword. There has been a great deal of secret prayer, a great deal of social prayer, a great deal of public prayer. In short, men and women have given themselves to prayer, and in many instances they have prayed all night in their closets; and sometimes in social circles their minds have been exceedingly filled with prayer, and they have cried mightily to God.

But nevertheless, if the church has been thoroughly refreshed and revived, they have got a blessing that they will not lose. It will work out permanent results and reformation among them.

(1.) It will be seen, after days and years, that they know more of God; are more holy and more useful. In many cases, I have known ministers to say, "My church is a new church. They are a very different people from what they used to be -- more ready to every good word and work, more watchful, more prayerful, more humble, more united, more self-denying, more ready to use means for a revival of religion than at any other time; in short, they are altogether a different and a better people."

(2.) The same will be true of the world. That is, if the work becomes general, it will be seen that there is a great reformation in the community.,

Those who live through it and harden themselves, and remain unconverted, will wax worse and worse; and perhaps behave worse afterwards than before. But if the revival has been general, a large number have been converted; and it will be seen that it has produced its effect upon the whole community. Sabbath desecration, drunkenness, and every form of vice have been made in a measure to hide their head. The public sentiment has been formed; the public conscience has been aroused; the fear of God has pervaded the community; and for a generation the influence of that revival will be seen in that community.

Many more things I might say under this head, but I must pause here for the present.

LECTURE XIX.

Nov. 6, 1861

REVIVAL--No. 3

Text.--Psa. 85:6: "Wilt Thou not receive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?"

VII. I will now notice some objections that are sometimes urged to revivals of religion.

1. It is objected to them that there is a great deal of excitement connected with them.

To this I reply,

(1.) Is there not a good reason for excitement? What is excitement but a quickened activity of the Intelligence, of the Sensibility, and of the Will? Now is there not everything in religion that is calculated to excite the mind? Can it avoid being excited if it has any realizing apprehension of the great truths of religion? Men may be excited on any and every other subject; and why not be excited on the subject of religion?

Indeed, politicians, business men, all classes of men, if they wish to secure public action on any subject, try to excite the people, to interest them, to get their attention. to arouse them to excited action and feeling. Now this is all philosophical; it is common sense, as every one knows. Now why should not this be done on the subject of religion? Is there not the best of all reasons for being excited on this subject?

(2.) I would ask those who make this objection, if they really expect an individual case of sound conversion to occur without any excitement. Suppose a professed convert were to come and make application for admission into the church. You ask him, as usual, to tell his religious experience, his reason for thinking himself a Christian. Now suppose in his narrative there should be no appearance of his having any peculiar interest in religion. You find that he has not been excited at all; there has been nothing unusual occurring in his mind so far as its excited state on religious questions is concerned.

Would you believe him a true convert? Would you not tell him, No Sir; the fountain of the great deep in your heart has not been broken up. You have not been truly convicted of sin; you have not truly come to Christ with all your heart.

But suppose, on the contrary, you found that he had been strongly but intelligently excited; that he had had true conviction of sin; that the fountain of the great deep had been broken up in his soul; and suppose he should tell you an experience which showed that the whole power of his being had been drawn into action in his religious experience -- who is there among you who would not prefer this form of experience in an individual case? Very well? now what is a revival but the occurrence of

many such cases at the same time? Where masses are convicted, the great mass of professors greatly stirred up and interested in the salvation of souls, and individual cases of conviction and conversion are multiplied till it moves the community. This is the case in a general revival of religion. Here then is a general excitement -- but is there not good reason for it? What objection is there to all this? What otherwise could be expected?

What otherwise could be desired? It is the very thing that is needed. It is the very manner in which God has always wrought. Why, then, is excitement objected to as connected with revivals of religion? The objection is manifestly absurd. Could you be made, in short, to believe that that was a true revival of religion where there should be no excitement manifested by the church or the world? No; you could not believe that it was. In every age of the world when the Spirit of God has been poured out, men have been convicted of sin and the truth of God has been made plain by the Holy Ghost. It has aroused the community; it has moved individual minds; and even the masses have been moved as the trees of the forest are moved in a tempest. And what is the objection to all this? There is no valid objection to it.

2. Danger of delusion.

Many persons have the impression that converts are much likely to be deceived, or to obtain a false hope, in a revival of religion, than when they are more calm, and when there are no external circumstances of excitement, and no revival. But why should this be so?

(1.) In the first place, if a revival is judiciously managed; if the preaching be thorough, and searching, and practical; if it be to the point; if it strip away the sinner's refuges; if it shut him up to Christ, and real revival preaching always does -- why should there be more danger of delusion under such circumstances, though many are attending to it at the same time? The reason that has been assigned for this danger is this: they say that many are affected by sympathy. They see others affected, and they become affected by sympathy. Now, what is intended by this? Is it supposed that the Holy Ghost never works through the principle of sympathy in human beings? Is this assumed? If it is, the assumption is as false as possible. Why set human beings to

persuade human beings? Why set friends to labor with friends? The fact is, that through what we call sympathy, the Holy Ghost works largely, and always did. The very tears the minister sheds when preaching to the ungodly -- these tears preach, as well as the words. The look of anguish, the look of affection, the earnestness of manner and voice -- why these all preach; these all communicate truth; these all serve to impress the mind, and give to the audience a higher appreciation of the truths of the Gospel. Just so the tears that accompany the pleadings of young converts; their earnest appeals; the concern which they manifest for souls; the love which they manifest for Christ; all this, to be sure, is calculated to excite sympathy, but also to beget attention, to make the truth appear to be truth, and everything of this kind.

All the earnestness of the community, all the earnestness of converts, all the earnestness of convicted sinners -- all the whole movement in a revival, is preaching. It is the loudest, most effectual appeal to the conscience and the heart of all around. It serves to make truth real and to wake up an interest in the masses; and it seems as if it were next to impossible that persons should be deceived. So many instrumentalities are used, and there is so much on every side to make truth real, that if ever we might expect persons truly to embrace the truth, truly to understand the truth, truly to be subdued by it, these are the very circumstances under which we should expect such results.

(2.) But, an examination has been made on a large scale for the very purpose of testing this question, and deciding it.

A pamphlet was given to me a few years ago, containing statistics that had been gathered upon this subject by great painstaking. There had been in one of our large cities, and throughout a large district of country surrounding it, a very general revival of religion. It had been conducted mostly by a man who had been accused of being loose in his instructions, and of using a good deal of art in arresting attention and making an impression. When I heard of the manner in which those revivals were conducted, my own fears were excited. I must confess that I strongly doubted the result of such a method of conducting revivals; and indeed I do not now believe that this was a proper method of conducting revivals

of religion.

After those revivals had passed some two or three years, those that opposed them began to cry out that the converts had all fallen away. Several ministers were deceived by this cry, and united in it. Those revivals were greatly stigmatized; and I had myself the impression, from what I had heard, that they had turned out disastrously.

But a good man, who lived in the region where the revival occurred, instituted an inquiry in every church to which that revival had extended. He requested the pastors to examine the church books, and see how many converts, received as the fruits of these revivals, had backslidden, had been dealt with, or censured, or deserved censure by the church. He wished to know the proportion of the whole number received that had fallen away; and he desired the pastor to compare this with the number that had fallen away, who had been received into the church when there was no revival, and not as the fruit of a revival. The pastors made the returns to him in writing. I cannot now recollect the exact proportion; but of those that had been received as the fruit of those revivals, the number of backsliders was proportionately much smaller than was the number of backsliders among those who had been received as converted when there was no revival of religion.

This report was made four years after the revival had passed by.

Again, after four years more, making in the whole eight years, he made the same inquiry, and received substantially the same answer; that the backslidings of those who had been received as fruits of all those revivals were much less than of the same number of persons received into the church as converted when there were no revivals. These reports included a great number of churches, and a great number of converts. The result was published, as I have said; and one of the pamphlets was handed to me, which I have mislaid, or I should quote from its pages. This was highly satisfactory to me, because I had had more fears of the result than of almost any of which I have heard in this country. The examination was most fair, and the result most gratifying to the friends of revivals. But indeed, this is as might be expected. When everything favors the conversion of souls, we might expect, if ever, that they would be truly converted.

(3.) But, very much depends on the instruction given and the course pursued.

In the case to which I have referred, the pastors in that region of country were sound in doctrine; and no doubt, so far as their influence went, they gave sound instruction. The evangelist to whom reference has been made, is doubtless a good man, and gave correct instruction; and the means he used to make an impression, over and above the direct preaching of the gospel, although to some extent, perhaps, injurious, still did not so vary the result as to render the effect abortive, by any means.

I cannot recollect the exact proportion of backsliders as stated in the pamphlet. The impression on my mind is that it was much larger, however, than I have been in the habit of witnessing in revivals that have come under my own observation.

But still, as I have said, the proportion of those that fell away was very much less than the fallings in the same number of those that had been received when there was no revival. So that delusions under revivals conducted in that manner were not so common by any means as delusions that occur when there is no revival at all.

(4.) But again, why should this not be so? When everything surrounds men that is calculated to impress them with the truth, as is the case in a revival of religion, why should they not be more likely to understand and embrace it aright, than when everything around them has a different tendency, as is the case when there is no revival of religion and the church is in a comparatively worldly state.

But, as I said, very much will depend on the course of instruction pursued, and upon the whole manner in which the thing is conducted from beginning to end. If the conduct of the work, so far as human instrumentality is concerned, be scriptural; if the preaching of the gospel be plain, and pungent, and adapted to secure sound conversion; if there is much prayer and labor on the part of God's people; if the convicted are not properly encouraged to entertain hope; if too much stress is not laid upon emotion, but the Will is thoroughly carried by the truth -- there is indeed very little danger of delusion under such circumstances, as I can

testify from an experience of many years of this kind of work.

To be sure, converts will sometimes wax comparatively indifferent; but so far as my experience is concerned, they almost universally hold out better than the old members of the church that were converted when there was no revival.

I have often heard pastors testify to this, when I have inquired how the converts held out that were converted in those seasons when I had been present. The reply has been in substance, that they were the most efficient members of the church; that they held on their way a great deal better than the old members that had been received, not as the fruit of a revival, but as the fruit of ordinary ministrations in ordinary times.

Indeed, converts of powerful revivals of religion have more light, more love, more power, more consistency, greater usefulness by far than those who have joined the church when there was no revival of religion. This I believe will be the testimony of all the pastors and ministers in this country who have been acquainted with revival work. If this is not so, when this sermon comes to them let them speak out and bear opposite testimony, if an opposite testimony is the true one.

3. Third objection -- Re-action.

It is complained, in many case, that after a great excitement and religious revival, there is apt to be a great re-action; that the meeting will not be as well attended, that the church waxes cold and worldly, and that a discouraging state of things often succeeds a revival of religion.

To this I reply --

(1.) What is intended by re-action? It is true that there may not be as much excitement when the great mass of the community, or of the congregation, is converted. There may not be the same manifestation of feeling on the part of the church for the ungodly, or the same manifestation of fervor and overwhelming feeling that were exhibited by the converts on their first conversion; but surely this is not necessarily a re-action, in the sense that there is really less piety in the church when the circumstances are so changed as that the manifestations would naturally be changed.

(2.) But, if the meetings should be less fully attended, and much less interest manifested than there was in the revival, the question should be asked, Is there less interest manifested than there was before the revival? I doubt whether any such case as that has occurred. To be sure, there may be a real decline after a real revival; but does the decline carry the state of things back even behind where it was before the revival? I doubt whether such a case has ever occurred, where there has been a real revival of religion.

But, so far as my own experience is concerned, I have never seen any reaction or falling away equal to that of which the apostles themselves complained in their day. It would seem from the writings of Paul, that a great re-action, or decline, or whatever you please to call it, occurred after the revivals that passed over the Roman empire under his ministry, and the ministry of the other apostles and evangelists. This is as might be expected, even were those revivals as pure as could be expected under the circumstances. The people whom the apostles taught were heathen. They had no written Bibles, or very few; they had none of the means to render converts stable that we now have. The ignorance of those idolaters that were converted to Christianity, their habits, and the state of society and their general surroundings should lead us to expect great backslidings. Nothing less than a constant miracle could have sustained them in their first love.

But we in this country are under very different circumstances. We abound in the means of instruction; and of course on every side, as might be expected, converts are, as a general thing, much more stable. There are much fewer fallings away, much fewer cases of positive and gross backsliding, than in the days of the apostles, if we are to gather the facts from their own writings.

Indeed, I doubt if the world has ever witnessed revivals more pure, more powerful, more lasting and desirable in their results than those that have occurred in this country during the last forty or fifty years. If my health will allow, I hope to write some account of the revivals that have occurred under my own observation, and since I have been in the ministry, for the purpose, if possible, of disabusing the minds of those who have been prejudiced against those revivals by false reports.

4. "Is there not a better way?"

I answer to this,

(1.) If there is, it is hoped that someone will show it. The history of the church in all time has proven, that this has been God's way hitherto of sustaining and promoting in religion the world. If He knows of a better way, He will doubtless introduce it. As circumstances have been, and as results have been, we are bound to infer that this has hitherto been the best way -- the best way with which He is acquainted, and that could be pursued consistently with the moral freedom of the race.

(2.) I answer, without revivals of religion, facts demonstrate that in all countries religion has become formal. I have been struck with this everywhere -- wherever there is opposition to revivals of religion, I find formality the leading feature of their Christianity. But should this not be so? Every Christian knows that in his history he has been subject to elevations and depressions, to comparative listlessness and then to great fervor; that he has alternated between comparative backsliding in heart, and real zeal and energy in religion; and that his seasons of comparative coldness have sometimes continued for a series of weeks or months until he has been distressed, convicted, and revived, and his religion has taken on again a fervent type.

Now this is the history, if I mistake not, of the Christian religion as it exists in individual minds.

Now suppose that it comes to pass that these elevations and depressions occur, not merely in an individual mind, but in the minds of a church, a community, a cluster or collection of churches throughout a region of country; then here we have revivals and declensions.

The declensions cannot be denied; and is it not a great pity to have the declensions continue, and no revival?

I have been astonished and grieved to hear professors of religion oppose revivals, who themselves need reviving, if ever anybody does. They will say -- "I believe that Christians ought always to be awake, ought always to be revived." Yes, I say, but are you revived? Are you awake?

They hold that Christians ought to be revived and so do I. But what shall we do in case they are not what they ought to be?

It is well for cold professors of a cold church to say, "We believe that Christians ought always to be awake. We do not believe in spasmodic religion; we believe that we should always be in a revival state."

Yes, I reply; and so do I. But are you in it? Are you always awake? Are you now in a revived state? If not, whatever your theory may be, you need a revival; and you must be revived, or you will lose your soul.

REMARKS.

1. And now I inquire, first, do you need a revival in your own soul, in your church, in your congregation? I say, do you need one? In view of what has been said, are not the circumstances such, as to prove that you greatly need a revival here?

2. Do you want one? You may need it, yet not be disposed to have it. Are you willing to be revived? Or, rather, do you desire it? For if you truly will it, you are revived already.

Do you feel its necessity? Are you ready to make the sacrifices essential to promote it? Are you ready to lay aside every weight and every other concern, and enter heart and soul into the promotion of a revival of religion in this place? Are you ready to fulfill all the conditions upon which a revival can be had?

3. What a responsibility rests upon you! "Thy Master has come, and calleth for thee," might be said to you.

For is not the Spirit already beginning to work and to be manifest as the Spirit of Christ among you? Now will you throw your hearts open to be searched? Will you consent yourselves to be individually revived at any cost? Will you make confession and restitution, and remove the stumbling-blocks out of the way? Will you lay aside a worldly fastidiousness, and be willing to be dealt with, in the pulpit and out of the pulpit, as the circumstances demand?

Will you lay aside prejudice, and be willing to be instructed? And lastly, will you give yourselves individually to the work? And will you heartily co-operate in the use of the means for the salvation of those around you?

Now will you decide this at once? And may God help you , in view of the solemn Judgment, to decide as you will wish you had when you stand before Him!

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any

mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

End of the 1861 Collection.

"The Oberlin Evangelist"
Publication of Oberlin College
Sermons and Lectures given in 1862
by
Charles G. Finney
President of Oberlin College
Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

IMPORTANT!

To avoid broken links, due to file length, please wait for the page to
load completely
before selecting **ANY** link below.
Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Lectures I. & II. [Great Peace- No.'s 1 & 2](#)

Lectures II. & III. [Moral Depravity- No.'s 1 & 2](#)

[GLOSSARY](#)

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

[Back to Top](#)

Great Peace- No.'s 1 & 2

Lectures I & II

February 12, 1862

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Psa. 119:165: "Great peace have they who love thy law, and nothing shall
offend them."

LECTURE I.

In speaking from this text, the first enquiry is --

I. What is intended by the term "law"?

II. What is it to love the law of God?

III. What is the peace here spoken of?

IV. The text asserts two facts.

I. What is intended by the term "law"?

1. The term is used in the Bible in a variety of senses. Sometimes it means properly the ten commandments. At other times it manifestly includes the ceremonial law. Sometimes it means the entire Old Testament, as being then the whole revealed will of God. When the law is contrasted with the gospel, it evidently means the Old Testament scriptures as distinct from the New.
2. As used here, the term manifestly means the whole revealed will of God, considered as a rule of duty, whether made known to us through Moses, or any other prophet of the Lord.
3. The term law here manifestly includes both precept and penalty; every precept revealing God's will as to our duty, and also the penalty of violating it. Let no one think that to love the precept, and yet reject the penalty as unjust and cruel, is loving the law of God in the sense here intended.

II. The next enquiry is what is it to love the law of God?

1. I answer, It is more than approbation. The conscience of every moral agent, whether he be holy or sinful, approves the law of God. The wickedest of men are sometimes very conscious of strongly approving the great law of right, that is, the revealed will of God, as the rule of universal duty. Approbation belongs to the conscience. It is an intellectual state, and does not imply virtue or true religion. I think I can say myself that I as thoroughly approved the law of God before I was converted as after, so far as my conscience is concerned. This is no doubt a common experience of unconverted men.

2. To love the law of God is more than admiration of it. Admiration is more than an intellectual state; it is the decided approval of the conscience, together with a corresponding state of the sensibility. It includes a real feeling.

3. To love the law of God is more than delight in it. In Rom. 7, Paul, representing a legal experience, says -- "I delight in the law of God after the inner man." The state of mind here expressed doubtless includes approbation, admiration, and a very conscious delight or pleasure in the purity and moral beauty of God's law. Delight, by itself, is commonly intended to express a feeling of pleasure or satisfaction in a thing. It does not by any means always imply that this delight has the sympathy of the will -- the executive faculty of the soul. I think it is a common experience for persons to be pleased and very much affected in view of moral beauty, and of moral fitness and rightness in any thing. I know it was so with me before I was converted. I recollect that at one time, I wept with delight in view of an act of great moral beauty. I was conscious at the time, that I should not myself have done the thing that affected and delighted me so much. I seemed to be aware at the time, that such acts were not like me, and that my heart would not prompt me to them. Many persons seem to think that if they have a feeling of pleasure in hearing a sermon, or in reading of a good and noble act, or in the contemplation of a godly character, that this is evidence that they love goodness in the sense in which this text speaks of loving God's law. But this is a hasty conclusion. The prophet Isaiah represents the people of Israel as "seeking God daily," and delighting to know his ways as a nation that did righteousness; he even said "they take delight in approaching to God;" when in fact they were in a very apostate and rebellious state. The Lord said to Ezekiel -- "They come before thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a very pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words, but they do them not." Indeed I believe it is a common experience for the sensibility to sympathize, to a considerable extent, with the decisions of the conscience, and to take an intense feeling of pleasure in view of the purity of Christ's life, the excellence of his teachings, the spiritual beauty of the law of God,

and the spiritual beauty of holy character in general. When the soul does not feel particularly pressed with a sense of personal obligation, it may and often does, feel a sense of satisfaction and delight in the contemplation of the law of God.

But let no one think that this feeling is true religion. It may and must exist where true religion is; but it may exist where true religion is not.

4. To love the law of God in the sense of the text, is to embrace it as the rule of our own lives. It is a cordial acceptance of it by the will, a cordial submission to its requirements, a cordial yielding of one's self to be governed by this universal and beautiful rule of duty. There is certainly in human experience a complacency of conscience, also a complacency of the sensibility, and a complacency of the will. We are all at times conscious of this distinction.

Complacency of the conscience is a purely intellectual state, and has no moral character. It is simply the intense approval, by the conscience, of that which is right.

Complacency of the will is in itself moral rightness. It is the will cordially and intensely unifying itself with the law of right. It seems to me that people often misconceive what choice really is, and think of it as a mere dry decision, involving no fervor, no cordiality, nothing but a cold dry decision. Whereas the complacency of the will or choice is a deep preference. It involves an earnest cordiality, and intense embracing, a warm, ardent sympathizing with that which is right; for these words -- embracing, cordiality, sympathy, may be applied to the will as well as to the sensibility or to the intellect.

5. To love the law of God in the sense of this text, involves confidence in the Law-Giver, and sympathy with his views, aim, and state of mind. It is the union of our will with God's will, as expressed in his law, and requirements. It involves the devotion to God, which the law requires. It is nothing else indeed, but that love of God and man, which the law in its spirit requires. It is that state of mind which truly prays, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." It is a state which accepts and conforms itself to the whole will of God, so far as that is known. It does this by a most cordial yielding and embracing; with a cordiality that really implies true enjoyment

in doing and suffering the whole will of God.

III. The next enquiry is: What is the peace here spoken of?

1. It is not apathy of the soul -- is not a state of listlessness -- a lack of all interest in God or in divine things. Sometimes apathy that results from a seared conscience, is mistaken for peace.

2. The "peace" of our text is the opposite of strife. Often persons experience a great struggle of soul between the dictates of conscience under the striving and light of God's Spirit, and the will or the feelings of the soul. The soul sees duty, but is unwilling to do it. It sees the right, but cleaves to the wrong. This produces a great struggle such as that represented in Rom. 7. Now it is the opposite of this state of mind that is intended by peace.

3. Peace is the opposite of remorse. Remorse is a feeling of guilt and condemnation in view of our sins. Unless the conscience becomes seared, there will always be more or less remorse, so long as there is persistent neglect of any duty, or perseverance in any wrong. This state of mind is always inconsistent with peace, and (as we shall soon see) peace is an opposite state of mind to this.

4. It is a state opposite to a sense of condemnation. Remorse is a sense of guilt. A sense of condemnation, is a feeling of being condemned -- of being under the displeasure of God, not only of deserving condemnation, but of being actually under it. Not only is peace of mind inconsistent with this, but as we shall soon see, it is the opposite of this.

5. This peace is a state of mind that involves the inward harmony of the soul with itself, and also the harmony of the soul with the will and providence of God. It is a state in which the mind has the consciousness of intense satisfaction with God's will. The intellect approves it; the feelings are satisfied with it; the will embraces it.

Here there is harmony between the whole soul and God's will. It involves satisfaction with God's will, and a deep repose of soul in its perfect wisdom and goodness. The whole mind seems to be satisfied in respect to God and his will, character, and dealings. It has nothing left to desire more.

6. This peace also implies that the soul has a sense of cordiality between

itself and God. There is a sense of acceptance, of forgiveness, and of union with God's will, that constitutes a deep quiet, not in the sense of apathy, but rather in the sense of a deep flowing, for this peace is sometimes said to be as a river. The soul is conscious of not being apathetic but of being excited, yet the excitement has in it no conflict, and there is no jar between the soul and God, or any of his ways or doings. This peace has the elements of deep, quiet joy.

7. I said it was the opposite of a state of condemnation. There is in this peace a sense of being accepted, and in this sense, justified. I said it was the opposite of remorse. Although sin is remembered, still it is without the pang of remorse. The mind remembers the sin, perhaps with the gushings of sorrow, but not with the dry stings of remorse. There may be an ingenuous, loving sorrow, but it has in it nothing of the feeling of remorse or condemnation.

8. I said it is the opposite of strife. In this state of mind, all struggling against God, in any respect, has ceased, and the mind instead of struggling against God, cleaves to him with an intense cleaving of cordiality and affection. Instead of resisting his requirements, instead of any reluctance in obeying them, there is a cordiality, an embracing, a loving of his commandments, and a real satisfaction with them and in obeying them that distils [sic.] perpetual joy upon the soul, and it feels that in obedience and in this consciousness of cordial acquiescence in the whole will of God, there is a real life. It is a state of intense and loving quiet, and repose in God.

IV. The text asserts two facts.

1. First, that all who love the law of God have great peace. Now that this is a fact is evident.

(1.) From what has been already said. If they love the law of God, they certainly have peace within themselves. Their own powers all act harmoniously; the conscience, the will, and the sensibility, are all as one. They experience therefore, no internal friction, no jar; conscience does not condemn them. The will resists neither the dictates of conscience, nor the authority of God; the sensibility is drawn into sympathy with both the conscience and the will. Hence there is no inward warfare. There may be a struggle against temptation, but there

is no struggle against conscience by the will, and no condemnation of the will by the conscience. Hence if there is pain or any kind of struggle by the sensibility, it is not properly a conflict with self. The man is at peace with himself while he loves the law of God. So long as he is conscious of loving the law of God, in the sense explained, he does not condemn his present state of mind, that is, he has no sense of remorse or self-condemnation in view of his present state. Hence thus far he has peace and must have.

(2.) While he thus loves the law of God, God must be at peace with him, that is, with his present state of mind. This state of mind which I have described as constituting this love to the law of God, is really obedience to this law. It complies with all present known obligation, both outward and inward. With this state of mind, while it lasts, God must be at peace. While we have this love, there can be no friction between God's Spirit and our souls. Remember, we accept God's whole will, so far as known; therefore between us and God, there is a state of profound, present peace. The will has ceased to reject his commands. It cordially accepts them all.

It cordially accepts the will of God as revealed in providence. Therefore the peace of the soul in this state is great. It is not only peace, but great peace; profound, deep, flowing, conscious peace.

(3.) To one in this state of mind, God reveals a sense of pardon. Indeed the very peace itself involves a sense of being accepted by God, else a sense of controversy will still continue. Although we had no controversy with God, still if He really had a controversy with us, we could not have peace. There would be conscious condemnation. We should realize that God is displeased with us, even though we are pleased with him, unless he reveals it to us that he is pacified and propitiated, and does not frown but smiles upon our soul. It is a curious fact that when the love of God's law possesses the soul, we are pardoned before we are aware of it, and the sense of peace filling the soul gives us the mind of God in relation to us, and suggests to us the fact of pardon and acceptance. I think that in every marked case of conversion, thoughtful, self-reflecting minds observe this -- they have a sense of God's being no longer angry or displeased with them. Their

former sense of remorse, their struggle and agony, their fearful forebodings, are gone; and in their place is a state of mind that spontaneously cries -- My Father, my reconciled God and Father! I know thou are reconciled; I know thou dost forgive me; I know thy sweet smile rests on my soul, for all is great peace within.

Oftentimes this sense of acceptance comes in connection with some passage of Scripture, which suggests that God has accepted or does accept us; but in every case, this sense of acceptance involved in this great peace is no doubt the inward witness of the Spirit. By this I mean, it is God himself revealing to us his own state of mind towards us. We become in some way inwardly aware that God is pacified and at peace with us, and the spirit of adoption, by which we cry Father, Father, is often a matter of intense consciousness.

(4.) This love of the law of God inevitably results in a state, the opposite of conflict, remorse, self-condemnation. To my mind the fact that we are justified by faith, becomes a simple matter of consciousness. Whoever has true faith, has this love of God's law. And now he finds in fact that he is justified in the sense of being at peace with God and God at peace with him. This is just what the Bible teaches. It is an all-important fact, that whenever we put the truth of the Bible to the test of experience and consciousness, we find it verified. That our text is true, every real Christian can testify from his own consciousness. It is equally true of hundreds and thousands of texts in the Bible. Whenever we put God's word to the test, by complying with the conditions on which he gives us promises, we realize in our experience that his promises are true. By this means Christians know that the Bible is true. It is not with them a matter of speculation; it is not a fact that needs support from historical evidence or from any other merely outward evidence; its truth has become to them a matter of consciousness.

(5.) This peace is the opposite of dissatisfaction with God in any respect. So long as we are dissatisfied with any thing God says or does, we cannot have peace. So long, there will be friction and collision between us and him.

But suppose that all manifest resistance should cease, and we should fall

into apathy and not think of God at all. Suppose his providence should move in such channels as not to disturb us, and we should remain without feeling or any thought of God:-- this would not be peace. Peace is not the mere absence of dissatisfaction and opposition to God. It is positive acquiescence, a cordial embracing of his will. It implies, as already shown, complacency in God's whole will and in all his ways.

(6.) This state of mind would have peace in hell, provided hell did not imply a sense of God's present displeasure. Provided there were no conflict between God's mind and ours -- that we have no friction against his will and he no displeasure to manifest against us -- then no degree of pain on our part would forbid this peace of soul. Therefore, if the pains of the second death could be inflicted on us while in this state of loving the law of God, it could not destroy our peace. I do not suppose the thing is possible, but I wish to make the impression that nothing can disturb the repose of the soul while this peace remains.

LECTURE II.

February 26, 1862

GREAT PEACE--No. 2

Text.--Psa. 119:165: "Great peace have they who love thy law, and nothing shall offend them."

2. It remains now to notice the second fact affirmed in the text, respecting those who love God's law, viz:

That "nothing shall offend them."

The word "offend" means -- to stumble, to cause to fall. The thing affirmed therefore is -- that while this love of God's law continues in the heart, nothing shall offend them.

(1.) Thus, for example, the commandments of God will not offend them, for this love of God's law is really nothing else but an acceptance and a cordial embracing of all the commandments of God, and yielding them a willing obedience. Such a mind is not like a child, who is very pleasant so long as he is not required to do anything; but is

rather as a child altogether loving, subdued, cordial, and accepting joyfully every commandment of his father.

(2.) God's threatenings cannot stumble such a mind. He does not rebel when God threatens transgressors with punishment. He does not object to the justice and propriety of these threatenings; but with entire cordiality accepts their reasonableness and propriety.

(3.) Neither is he stumbled by the execution of God's threatenings. This execution of God's law on the wicked, does indeed cut them off and send them to hell; but this, so far from causing the loving soul to stumble and rebel, leads him rather to exclaim -- "Just and righteous are thy ways, thou King of saints!" Yes, while the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever, the loving soul will cry, Hallelujah!

(4.) To a soul in this loving state, the doctrines of the Bible will not be a stumbling block. You will not find them cavilling at the revealed doctrines of the Bible. They have only to know that God has revealed them, and such is their confidence in God that they embrace them thankfully, even though too deep to be fully comprehended yet, as many Bible doctrines certainly are in some of their relations. Yet, as facts revealed, they can be so far understood, and are accepted without rebellion or stumbling.

(5.) Nor will he stumble at the mysteries involved in the doctrines of the Bible. Proud and selfish souls are always ready to contend with the mysteries in revealed religion -- as if no mysteries were found anywhere else.

Now a mystery is not as absurdity. As absurdity involves a perceived contradiction -- points intuitively seen to be either self-contradictory or contradictory to some evident truth. It is that which is plainly contradictory to reason; but a mystery is something above reason. It is something we cannot account for, and which, perhaps, we cannot so analyze as to grasp or comprehend; but still it does not plainly contradict reason -- it only lies beyond its grasp.

Now a loving, confiding heart approaches all such revealed truths with

awe. He accepts them as declared facts or truths, and exclaims with the Psalmist -- "My heart is not haughty, neither are mine eyes lofty; nor do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of its mother; my soul is even as a weaned child."

This truth is high, so high I cannot attain to a perfect comprehension of it. It is deep: I cannot explain it. It is too broad for me to compass it. I accept the fact, for I am but small; I am but as a little one: it is enough that my Father says so, and here my soul shall rest.

(6.) A loving soul is not stumbled by the providence of God. Often God's providences are to us quite a profound mystery. He sees not as we see. His ways are wonderful, a great deep, to us unfathomable. But the loving soul is not disposed to catechize his Maker, or insist on knowing all his reasons for his dealings.

It is not unfrequently the case that the providences of God seem to us at the time, unreasonable -- perhaps, even cruel, or unjust, or contrary to his character as revealed in the Bible.

It may seem so on the face of it. It is true that a more thorough consideration of the whole subject will show that the God of Providence and the God of the Bible are one. Still events will often occur that greatly stumble ungodly souls. It is amazing to see the amount of strife against God's providence that is manifest in this world. Men seem not aware of the fault they are continually finding with God.

To avoid the conviction that they are contending with God in providence, they either deny or overlook the fact that God is concerned in the events against which they contend. Really the world is full of complaint and dissatisfaction with God, because of his providence.

But it is not so with any who love God's law all such accept every event as occurring under God's providence, and they consequently exclaim -- These are but parts of thy ways: they are mysterious; I cannot explain them, yet I cordially accept them. I do not ask God to explain to me his reasons for them prematurely. I know there must be good and sufficient reasons for them. In due time I shall know what these reasons are. At

present I do not care to know. I prefer to trust. I want room left for faith. I would feel myself, and would have God see that I can trust him, however mysterious his present providences may be.

(7.) He that loves the law of God will not be stumbled with the sins of good men. Those who do not love are greatly stumbled if a good man is overcome with temptation. They are ready to think there is no truth in religion. They seem to be glad that professedly good men sin, that they may have an excuse for their unbelief.

But one who loves God's law will be greatly grieved with the sins of good men, yet it will not cause him to fall, but will rather make him cry out -- Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall. It will inspire him with awe and fear, and cause him to cling more closely to the cross.

(8.) Nor will such men be stumbled by the arguments of skeptics, though they cannot answer them. They know the truth of religion by an experience of its power and a consciousness of the love of God, which no arguments against religion can ever shake. Skeptics may baffle and confound him with their sophistry, but he is just as sure that religion is true and is from God as he was before.

(9.) Neither will trials stumble one who loves God's law. He may meet with great opposition, or even persecution; he may have the trial of great outward prosperity, or on the other hand, of great outward adversity; still he exclaims -- These are but parts of his ways. These are parts of my earthly discipline and of the education I need. They reveal my Father's will; I accept all with meekness.

REMARKS.

1. This 119th Psalm has always appeared to me to reveal true Christian experience in a striking manner. The state of mind expressed in every verse of this psalm, is just what Christians are experiencing as they move along in their pilgrimage. It would seem as if the Psalmist had copied from a diary of his own exercises. If thoughtful, intelligent Christians were in the habit of recording in a diary their daily exercises, they might after a few years, copy from their own diary all the essential points found here. Hence I think this psalm must have been

an inspired diary. The saint who wrote it was a poet, and inspired of God to select such passages from his own experience as are here recorded. It is a Bible experience, perfectly replete with the Bible. At every verse the love of God's word and law boils up, and shows clearly the state of mind which every Christian is conscious of passing through.

2. How opposite is this experience to the Antinomian experience of many who profess to be Christians. Antinomians talk about loving the law of God, but they do not wish to hear about duty. They want to hear about "doctrine," -- by which they mean justification in sin, and by a faith that does not sanctify. By "doctrine" they mean that by one act of faith, men are brought into such a state of perpetual justification, that however they may live afterwards they are still saved. Justification by an unjustifying faith, is their doctrine. You do not hear them exclaiming -- "Oh how love I they law!" How I love duty! How I love all God's commandments! How I love the obligation of every requirement of God! Ah! preaching duty to them is not edifying: it is legal to them; it is not comforting; it is not gospel. They want to be told that they are justified by their one act of faith while they are living in sin.

But just read from this 119th psalm, and see if you find any antinomianism here.

3. The state of mind of which I have been speaking finds the deepest satisfaction in the preceptive parts of God's word. It is so well satisfied with God's requiring such things, it perceives so much divine fitness, propriety, and beauty in these requirements, that its own highest ideal of what God should require is fully met. It would be dissatisfied if God required less. Such a soul loves to yield implicit obedience to God. This is its life and joy. It finds the very oil of its joy and life in the obedience it so cordially renders to God.

4. To hear duty preached is always very agreeable and edifying to those who love God's law. Herein a minister will soon find on whom he can depend as true Christians. Let him bring forth the preceptive parts of the Bible, and he will find at once who love the law of God. There are many who will appear to be greatly edified if you preach to them simply justification by faith, leaving out of view the requirements of God. While you only hold up Christ as a justifying Savior, they seem to be greatly delighted, and say -- how precious he is! But when you urge upon them his most express requirements, they are not pleased. They think this is legal. It is not gospel!

5. From what has been said, it is easy to see how God's revealed will often detects false hopes. His will revealed in providence will often detect professors of religion in being the enemies, not the friends, of God. They seem to be his friends while every thing goes to suit them; but if God's providence or will runs across their path and interferes with their selfish schemes, he touches them; they rebel; they stumble; they are too much tried; they begin to complain, and you see that they do not love the law of God.

6. We can see why it is that many professors of religion have been stumbled, and have even become skeptics by the conformity and sins of the church of God. Since the anti-slavery agitation has commenced, we have had in this country many mournful examples of this. The conservatism of ministers and their want of sympathy with the slave, have caused some to renounce religion, and to lose all confidence, not only in the piety of those conservative professors, but in the reality of religion itself.

Now, so far as my observation extends, it is a remarkable fact that this class of persons, who have become skeptics under such circumstances, never manifested a loving zeal in religion. Their religion never seemed to be love. Their zeal was rather legal than loving and of the gospel. So far as I have known it, their religion was rather of the head than of the heart. They have stumbled; but there is no good reason to think that they loved the law of God, for if they had, their experience and consciousness would have put it out of the question for them to give up religion itself, the Bible, prayer, and communion with God. Not even if tens of thousands should stumble all around them, yet with their experience of the truth of religion, and of the love of God and of his law, it would seem that they could never give up the Bible as God's word and the religion of Jesus as from heaven.

7. A sense of condemnation in the soul reveals the fact of non-acceptance of God's whole will. I often find persons who are manifestly under conviction. They are in trouble and under a sense of condemnation, yet they often think they accept God's whole will. But in this they are manifestly mistaken.

God knows there is some point not yet yielded. As soon as his whole will is accepted, all is quiet. This conscious quietness and peace, beget hope and remove a sense of condemnation.

8. This union with God's will is the end of strife and the beginning of heaven in

the soul. No man knows or can know real happiness until his strife against God ceases. He is forever annoyed by the revelations of God's will in providence, and in all its other ways of manifestation. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." There is no end in time and no bound in space to the disturbing elements that disquiet the soul of one who is striving with his Maker. An omnipotent influence struggles against him. That Holy Ghost and conscience within him, and the providence of God without, forbid his having rest of soul.

But let him yield his whole being to the law or will of God, and then nothing can stumble him. He lives and moves and has his being in God, and if at peace with God and with himself, though the surface of his sensibilities might be filled with pain, yet in the depths of his soul, he has rest deeper than words can express. It is often surprising to see how much pain there may be in the sensibility and yet peace at the bottom of the mind.

In crossing the Atlantic some years since, we were overtaken by a gale of wind. Upon the deck the roar and confusion was terrific. The sea boiled like a pot. The spray from the crests of the waves blew upon the face with almost force enough to blister it. While I stood upon deck, the noise of the waves howling and roaring and foaming was almost deafening.

But when I stepped into the engine room, every thing was quiet. The mighty engine was moving with a quietness and stillness in striking contrast with the roar without. It reminded me of the peace that can reign at the bottom of the soul, while storms and tempests are howling without.

So it is often with the mind. Oftentimes the outward circumstances are trying; the nerves are in a state of intense excitement and bodily pain, but in the realm of conscience, all is peace. There is harmony between the conscience and the will, and between the soul and God. Within there is great peace.

[Back to Top](#)

Moral Depravity- No.'s 1 & 2

Lectures III & IV

March 12, 1862

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 8:7: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be."

LECTURE III.

The first inquiry is--

I. What is moral depravity?

II. The attributes or qualities of moral depravity.

III. What is the "carnal mind"?

IV. The "carnal mind" is a state of enmity against God.

V. The carnal mind is a state of mortal enmity against God.

VI. The carnal mind is a state of supreme opposition to God.

I. What is moral depravity?

1. The words "moral depravity" means, literally, crooked manners, from *mos*, manners, and *pravus*, crooked. The *de* is intensive. Hence, moral depravity means manners wholly crooked.

2. By manners is intended not merely the outward life, for the outward life has not in itself any morality or immorality. All that is strictly or properly moral, all that has moral character, belongs to the mind. Moral manners, therefore, are the manners of the inner will, the moral agent, the mind itself. The outward or bodily manners are only expressions of the inward or real manners of the subject.

3. When we speak of manners as crooked, we of necessity refer to something strait with which the manners are compared. A thing may have a natural crookedness, or a physical crookedness, or a moral crookedness. Moral crookedness is a deviation from the strait rule of action prescribed by the moral law. It is crooked when compared with the moral straitness of the

law of God.

Again, moral depravity lies entirely back of individual actions and volitions, and is the source from which these actions and volitions spring.

II. It behoves us to enquire into the attributes or qualities of moral depravity.

1. As already intimated, unlawfulness is a quality or attribute of moral depravity. This depravity must be a thing prohibited by the moral law. If it were not, it would not be morally crooked. Whatever has moral character, must be either in accordance with moral law or in violation of it.
2. Another attribute of moral depravity is sinfulness. Dr. Woods defines moral depravity as being "sinfulness." By this is meant that this state of mind called moral depravity, which is contrary to God's law, is sinful. This is the term by which we express its moral turpitude.
3. Another attribute of moral depravity, is blame-worthiness. It is not only contrary to God's law and sinful; but it is worthy of blame and of punishment, and justly brings the subject of it under the penalty of moral law.
4. Moral depravity is a violation of moral obligation. It is a state of mind the opposite of that which we are bound to be in. We ought not to be morally depraved. If it were not a violation of moral obligation, it would be neither unlawful or blame-worthy.
5. It is a state of mind that ought to be instantly abandoned. Of course, if it is sinful, if it is blame-worthy, if it is a violation of moral obligation, it ought to be instantly renounced.
6. Moral depravity is a state that can be instantly abandoned. It ought to be, and therefore it can be. To say that it ought to be abandoned, that we are under moral obligation to abandon it instantly, and yet to deny the possibility of abandoning it instantly, involves a gross contradiction.
7. I have said that moral depravity must be a state of mind. It cannot be a state of body. Depravity of body is physical depravity, not moral. It is simply disease.

8. You will observe that moral depravity consists in moral manners, that is, in mental action, and is no part or quality of soul or body. Whatever belongs to the essence or substance of either soul or body, must of necessity be in its nature physical; and if depraved, therefore, its depravity must be physical and not moral. It is plain that whatever is strictly constitutional in the sense of being an attribute, quality or part of soul or body, cannot have the distinctive characteristics of moral depravity. For example, it cannot be unlawful or contrary to the law of God, for the law legislates over man's mental activities, and not over the essential qualities of either body or mind.

Again, that which is a part or attribute of either soul or body, cannot be a violation of moral obligation. Nor can any attribute of body or mind be a violation of conscience. It cannot be a violation of duty; it cannot be instantly abandoned; it cannot be blame-worthy.

9. Again, moral depravity cannot consist in things created or transmitted, such as the appetites, passions, propensities. These have none of the attributes of moral depravity. They are not contrary to moral law. It is only their unreasonable indulgence that is contrary to moral law, and not the appetites or propensities themselves. They are not blame-worthy. They cannot be immediately abandoned so as to exist no longer. Their existence is no violation of moral obligation. Consequently, the existence in the constitution of these appetites and propensities is not moral depravity, is not bad manners.

10. Moral depravity should not be confounded with temptation, or excited feelings or propensities. I have just said that the existence of these sensibilities in the soul is not in itself sinful. Nor is an excited state of the propensities necessarily in itself sinful. If they are indulged unreasonably, this is sin; but no merely excited state of feeling, that does not secure the consent of the will, can be a violation of moral obligation.

11. From its very attributes, moral depravity must certainly be a voluntary state of mind. For whatever is involuntary, has none of the attributes of moral depravity.

12. Moral depravity is the state of mind called in the Scriptures--the wicked heart. It is that in us to which moral character belongs. I speak of it as a state of mind, to distinguish it from mere volitions, or mere executive acts

of mind. It is that state of mind from which wicked words, and acts naturally proceed. Words and acts are means to an end. They proceed from a choice of an end, and have moral character only as they partake of the moral qualities of the choice that gives them existence.

Moral depravity must consist in a settled ultimate choice, the choice of an end. It must consist in the voluntary devotion of the mind to self--self-interest and self-gratification. Human activity is rational and responsible. Men are moral agents--that is, they act under the responsibilities of moral obligation, are subjects of moral law and of moral government. Moral law requires of all moral agents sincere, perfect, universal devotion to God and to the interests of his kingdom. In other words, it requires perfect, universal, perpetual, unselfish benevolence.

Moral depravity is the opposite of what this law requires; or, more strictly, it is want of conformity to this law. It is primarily a withholding--a refusal to be devoted to God and to the interests of his kingdom. It sets up self above God. It deliberately prefers self-interests and self-will to God's interest and God's will. It practically makes self of supreme importance. In one word, it is selfishness. It is the mind's committed to self as the great supreme good of life.

Moral depravity is a standing choice as distinct from a volition. It is a choice of the supreme end to which the mind shall devote itself. It is the choice of an ultimate end, that is, self-gratification is chosen for its own sake. We know from consciousness, that when the mind is made up and has decided upon the end to be secured, its whole activities will be directed to the accomplishment of that end. Volition, as distinguished from the choice of an end is the minds' effort to secure the end. When we speak of individual sins, we speak of volition and consequent action. When we speak of moral depravity as distinct from individual sinful acts, we mean that abiding and wrong, selfish choice from which these volitions proceed. Please observe the distinction I make between sinful acts and moral depravity. Moral depravity is originally a choice and therefore a mental act. It is the choice of an end, and therefore an abiding, standing choice. Volitions are individual efforts to secure the end chosen. Sinful acts are found in the life. Moral depravity lies back of the outward life, and back of volition, in a standing preference of self-interest over God's interests and all other interests.

III. What is the "carnal mind"?

1. It is not the substance of either soul or body. It has been common to speak of the "carnal mind" as being identical with the mind itself. I recollect that Dr. Griffin, in his Park Street Lectures, confounds the "carnal mind" with the substance of the soul; and hence, since the Bible affirms the carnal mind to be enmity against God, he insists that the more clearly God is revealed to the mind, the more it will hate him; and also that there is nothing in the Gospel at all adapted to win the mind, but that the character of God as there presented, is adapted only to repel the soul. He maintains this on the ground that the soul of the sinner is, in its very substance, enmity against God. But this must be a great mistake.

2. The carnal mind must be a voluntary state. If you have Bibles with marginal references and readings, you will observe that in the margin it is written, "the minding of the flesh." The carnal mind is the fleshly mind, or the mind in a state of committal to the indulgence of the appetites, passions and propensities.

3. It is that state of mind into which Adam fell. It appears that, for a time, Adam preferred the will of God to his own, the pleasure of God to his own, and the interests of God to his own. But a temptation of peculiar nature was presented to him through Eve. The wily serpent addressed Eve--"Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" She answered--"We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know, that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened; and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat."

Here two constitutional propensities, innocent in themselves, were strongly excited by this appeal of the tempter. The desire of knowledge is constitutional; the appetite for food is constitutional. These appetites are not wrong in themselves, nor is it morally wrong that they should be in an excited state. But the question as put by the tempter, amounted to a proposal

to Eve and to Adam to gratify their appetites, although it involved disobedience to God. This question was really fundamental to their moral character. They could not yield to this temptation without preferring their own self-gratification to the will of God, and their own pleasure to God's pleasure. To yield to this temptation would be to revolt from the government of God. It would break off their allegiance to him. In the very act they must decide to seek their own pleasure in their own way as their supreme good. This would really be a change of the supreme ultimate end of life. Instead of loving God supremely, they now love themselves supremely. They reject God's authority, God's rights, God's happiness and his glory, as all subordinate to their own gratification. You will observe that the temptation was not merely to put forth a single volition to secure some good, without any reference to the ultimate end in view. It was nothing else than a proposal from the tempter to set aside God as the great end for which they should live, and set up self-gratification as the supreme object of life. Yielding to this temptation, plunged them into a state of choice--a settled state of voluntary preference of self-interest above all other interests, and of self-gratification above all other good.

A voluntary state as distinguished from a voluntary act, is a matter familiar to us all. We all know what is meant by choosing a partner for life, and abiding in that choice; and we know that when that choice is settled and abiding, the volitions and the outward life flow from it. The choice, abiding, gives direction to all the subsequent life.

Just so of this choice made by Adam. It became a fixed state of mind. He lapsed into a state of supreme selfishness, which is nothing else than a strong committal of the will, and consequently of the whole being, to self-gratification.

4. This carnal mind, or state of minding the flesh, reveals itself in fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. As is said in Ephesians 2:1-3, "And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

The mind being settled in its great ultimate aim and end, the supreme choice being to gratify the deepest desires and propensities, it will of course reveal itself in all the myriad ways of self-indulgence in which unconverted sinners actually live.

5. The carnal mind has all the attributes of moral depravity. It is directly contrary to moral law; it is utterly sinful; it deserves punishment; it ought to be instantly abandoned; it can be instantly abandoned; to abandon it would be a change of heart.

IV. The "carnal mind" is a state of enmity against God. I say a state, that is, an abiding choice.

It is enmity against God,

1. Because it is the exact opposite of what his law requires. His law requires us to love Him supremely and to make his glory, pleasure, will and interests, the supreme object of our lives. But this minding of the flesh is making self-indulgence the supreme object of our lives. This is not only a refusal to obey his law, but a state of mind the direct opposite of it.

2. This minding of the flesh is directly opposite to the whole character of God.

3. It is a state of voluntary alienation from God, and of intense committal against him. It is the wicked heart. It is so treated in the Bible itself. It is spoken of in the chapter of our text as being "in the flesh," and a state of mind in which it is impossible to please God. Furthermore, in this same chapter it is affirmed to be a state of death in sin. "To be carnally minded is death." Also in Ephesians 2:1-3, this carnal mind is represented as a state of spiritual death, of bondage to the flesh, of enmity against God.

4. I observe again that this carnal mind is a state of total moral depravity. As is said in verse 8: "So then they that are in the flesh cannot see God."

5. This carnal mind reveals itself in the neglect of God. This is the reason why sinners neglect worship, prayer, and communion with God, and why they do not love to think of him or speak of him.

6. The carnal mind reveals itself also in contempt for God's authority. The

Psalmist enquires --"Wherefore do the wicked condemn God?" I answer, Just because they are wicked. And their wickedness consists in this carnal-mindedness.

But, perhaps you will say--I do not condemn the authority of God.

But how much do you care for this authority? Do you, in fact, treat it as if it were of the slightest importance? You will set aside the authority of God for the most trifling indulgence. See that young man smoking that cigar. Do you think, young man, that that is right? Do you think God wants you to smoke that cigar? Do you believe he is pleased with it? You know he is not; and yet you care less for God's authority than you do for smoking that cigar. Every day you live, you gratify yourself in ways which you know to be unlawful, without the slightest regard to God's authority. What do you mean, then, by saying that you do not condemn the authority of God? Is there anything in the world that you treat as of less importance than the authority of God? Your daily conduct is equivalent to saying, "What do I care for the authority of God? Who is God that I should obey him, or what profit should I have if I should pray unto him?"

7. The carnal mind reveals itself in opposition to God's people and cause. Who does not know that unconverted sinners are always picking at God's people, and in a multitude of ways manifesting opposition to them, magnifying their faults and publishing them as widely as possible, ridiculing their piety, accusing them of hypocrisy, and in every way manifesting opposition to them. Now this is not because they have received any injury from God's people nor is it really because God's people are worse than other people; but it is because of their own enmity to God, that they oppose him in his people.

8. This carnal mind also reveals itself in a want of confidence in God. Sinners very well know that they have every reason to confide in him, but yet they do not. They have not the slightest confidence in all his professions of love for them, nor are they at all inclined to trust him.

9. This carnal mind reveals itself in a total want of sympathy with God. In every way, this state of mind shows itself the opposite of God's state of mind. His revealed will and way are an abomination to them, and their will and way are an abomination to him. As He says--"They loathe me, and I

abhor them."

10. The carnal mind reveals itself in a whole life of rebellion against God. That unconverted men are in a state of rebellion against the authority of God, is one of the plainest facts that lie on the face of society.

LECTURE IV.

March 26, 1862

MORAL DEPRAVITY--No. 2

Text.--Rom. 8:7: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be."

V. The carnal mind is a state of mortal enmity against God.

By this I mean that the human mind is so firmly entrenched against God, and so utterly opposed to him that, sooner than be governed by him, it would take his life if this were possible. Rebellion against any government always implies this.

Again, the crucifixion of Christ demonstrated this fact so far as it is possible for human beings to make such demonstration. Christ was God manifest in the flesh. They slew his human nature, and, no doubt, they would have slain his divine, if they could. It does not answer this, to say that it was only the Jews, highly prejudiced against him, that slew him; nor is it any answer to say that, if the Jews had known that he was God, they would not have crucified him; for, we see now on every side that those who acknowledge Jesus to be God, yet reject his authority and give the most unmistakable evidence that they would oppose him to the death sooner than be governed by him.

VI. The carnal mind is a state of supreme opposition to God, that is, it is more deeply set in opposition to God than to any other being in the universe.

God is infinitely holy, and the carnal mind is in a state of entire sinfulness. These two things are infinitely opposed, the one to the other. There is nothing in the universe to which the sinner is so much opposed as real holiness, and there is nothing in heaven to which he is so much opposed as to infinite holiness.

Again, it is seen that all other enmities besides this can be subdued by a change of circumstances, without the interposition of the Holy Spirit. But so intensified is the enmity of the carnal mind against God, that sinners complain that it is utterly impossible for them to love God unless the Holy Ghost induces them to do so. I do not admit that it is impossible, as they pretend; but I do admit that, without divine influence, they never will love him, whatever the consequences might be of their refusal.

REMARKS.

1. The human mind is manifestly in a physically diseased state. By this I mean that sin has deranged its developments, insomuch that there are various tendencies in the constitution that result in selfishness. But let it be remembered, this is a physical and not a moral depravity. To illustrate this: Many persons come in to being with depraved appetites--a strong natural appetite, say, for strong drink, or some other sensual enjoyment. Now, these appetites, although in a diseased state, yet being constitutional, are not in themselves sinful. It is only their unlawful indulgence that is sinful. In fact, no appetite of man can be sinful that is strictly constitutional and normal, nor can it become in itself sinful by being in an unhealthy or depraved condition. The sin must consist in its unlawful indulgence. Adam and Eve had constitutional appetites for knowledge and for food. These were not sinful, not even when strongly excited by the temptation to indulgence. It was only the consent of the mind to indulge them in a prohibited manner, that constituted their sin.

2. It has been very common to confound temptation and sin. None of the constitutional appetites or propensities can be in themselves sinful, because they are involuntary and are a part of our nature. Nevertheless, these appetites and propensities, when excited, are of course temptations to seek their indulgence. It must be their unlawful indulgence and this only that constitutes sin. But it has been very common to speak of their very existence, and especially of their excited state, as sin.

Now, unless the soul, by an act of will, indulges this excitement, there can be no sin. If the mind resists the excitement, suppresses it so far as possible, and refuses to gratify it, there can be no sin. Indeed, when the appetite is strongly excited, but yet resisted, we cannot possibly deny that the virtue is the higher, as the temptation is the greater, and the mind more strongly and perseveringly resists it.

3. It is a great mistake to confound physical depravity with moral. It is very curious to see how the Bible has been interpreted on the question of constitutional sinfulness. It seems to me that men often interpret it without the least reference to any sound principles of biblical criticism. For example, one of these principles is, that no passage is to be so interpreted as flatly to contradict human reason, unless it is so irresistibly plain that it can bear no other interpretation.

Now I have no time to examine all the passages that have been misinterpreted on this subject. But take one, generally made very prominent in the attempt to prove from Scripture that the human constitution is morally depraved, to-wit--Psalm 51:5.

"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

What is this text quoted to prove?

That the human constitution, or in other words, the very nature of all men, is morally depraved.

But this dogma is certainly contrary to human reason. If by moral depravity we mean something sinful, it is certainly inconceivable by reason that that should be morally blame-worthy over which the man never had any control--a thing that belongs to his very constitution as he came from the hand of his Maker. That any human soul should be blame-worthy for such a constitution--should be guilty of moral wrong for possessing it, is certainly as contrary as possible to human reason.

Now remember, we are never to interpret any passage of Scripture so as to make it teach a doctrine palpably contrary to human reason, if it will bear any other interpretation. I say contrary to human reason, and not merely above its reach.

Now, the doctrine that the human constitution is in itself sinful, blame-worthy, morally wrong, morally depraved--is not so much above reason as opposite to the irresistible decisions of the human reason. It cannot therefore be proved, unless from passages unequivocally clear, explicit, and incapable of any other interpretation.

Let us now apply these remarks to the passage above quoted. What does it say?

1. The thing it is quoted to prove is universal--to-wit: that moral depravity is constitutional and pertains to the entire human race. But this verse affirms no universal proposition whatever. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Surely this affirms nothing of mankind in general, and we are not to extend and torture the passage to make it teach so absurd a doctrine.

2. In this verse, the Psalmist does not even affirm his own sin. If he accused any one of sin, it was his mother. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

3. This is the language of poetry. The Psalmist was smarting bitterly, and was deeply moved under a sense of his great sin in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah. As is natural in such cases, he has expressed himself in a highly figurative and poetic manner, and undoubtedly had a strong sense of his great sinfulness, and meant to say that he had been a sinner ever since he was capable of being so. Now, surely, to make such a passage teach so monstrous a dogma as the universal sinfulness of human nature, is a flagrant perversion of God's word. It cannot be made to teach any such thing without greatly over-straining what is really said in the passage. But most surely no passage should be over-strained to make it teach an unreasonable dogma. You must not force strong poetical expressions to mean more than they really say, when this super-addition is contrary to reason.

4. The usual interpretation of this passage totally perverts the real meaning of the Psalmist. He was greatly agonized in view of his own sinfulness, and was confessing his own sin to God. He was far from being in a state to accuse anybody else, or to make any apology for his own sin. But the usual interpretation would represent him as searching for some excuse for his sin, and really charging the blame upon God, as if he had said--

"O Lord, thou hast given me a sinful nature, and how am I to blame for my sin?"

This is a gross misrepresentation of the meaning of the passage, and of the spirit of its author.

Ephesians 2:3, is another passage extensively quoted to prove that nature is itself sinful.

"Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

Upon this verse I remark,

1. The apostle represents the sinfulness of men as consisting in fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and not in the desires themselves. This is the same view of moral depravity that I have given in this discourse. Paul does not represent these desires as being in themselves wrong; it is only their sinful indulgence which makes men children of wrath.

2. Another remark is due here to show why Paul uses the words "by nature."

Suppose a child were born with a natural appetite for strong drink. This natural appetite does not make him a drunkard before he indulges it. But suppose he grows up to manhood, does indulge himself and becomes a drunkard. Now, looking to the occasion of his fall, we should naturally say, he was a drunkard "BY NATURE."

The same is true with those who have a natural propensity (as some have) to lie and steal. If they were born with a natural tendency in those directions, and we knew it, we should speak of them as liars or thieves "by nature." By this language we should not mean that they were actually guilty of any of these crimes before they had indulged these physically depraved propensities; much less should we assume that these inherited propensities were sins of their own.

There is no doubt in my mind that this is the real meaning of the apostle in this passage. The constitutional desires (Epithumiai, Greek,) were natural to man, and in this sense men are "by nature children of wrath." The appetites being constitutional to man in his physically depraved state, it is quite natural to speak of him as being by nature a sinner, when really we can mean no more than that he inherits the temptation to sin, and not that the temptation is itself sin. The desires are natural to him; the fulfilling or indulging of them is voluntary, and therefore sinful.

Now this is all that this passage can be made to mean by a fair

interpretation. I say of this and of all the passages that are quoted to prove the doctrine of constitutional sinfulness, as I have said of Psalms 51:5--that they have not been soberly interpreted. They have been made to teach a most irrational doctrine by straining them and making them mean more than they say. They naturally mean no more than that men inherit a physically depraved constitution. Certainly no one of them asserts in language that can admit no other interpretation, that human nature is itself sinful. I have quoted the two strongest passages on this point that are to be found (as I suppose) in the Bible, and surely it requires no great ingenuity to show that these passages naturally admit a very different interpretation from that which has been generally given them.

5. You can see from this subject why men need regeneration, and also what regeneration is. It is the giving up of the carnal mind, a ceasing to mind the flesh, and giving up the whole mind to obey God. It is a change from being committed to self-gratification, to the committal of the whole soul to obedience to God.

7. Physical depravity, or a diseased state of the constitution, is no doubt the occasion (not the cause) of moral depravity. The propensities are no doubt depraved. They act as a temptation, to which, as a matter of fact, mankind at first universally yield.

8. Many persons who think they are the friends of God are deceived. They have never been converted. It is a great mistake, and they need only die to know it. It were far better to learn it and correct it here.

[Back to Top](#)

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

Complacency, or Esteem: "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are

as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE VII). Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians* (LECTURE XII).

Disinterested Benevolence: "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians* (LECTURE I).

Divine Sovereignty: "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE LXXVI).

Election: "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE LXXIV).

Entire Sanctification: "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology* (LECTURE LVIII).

Moral Agency: "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Moral Depravity: "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Human Reason: "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

Retributive Justice: "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

Total Depravity: "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

Unbelief: "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

End of the 1862 Collection.